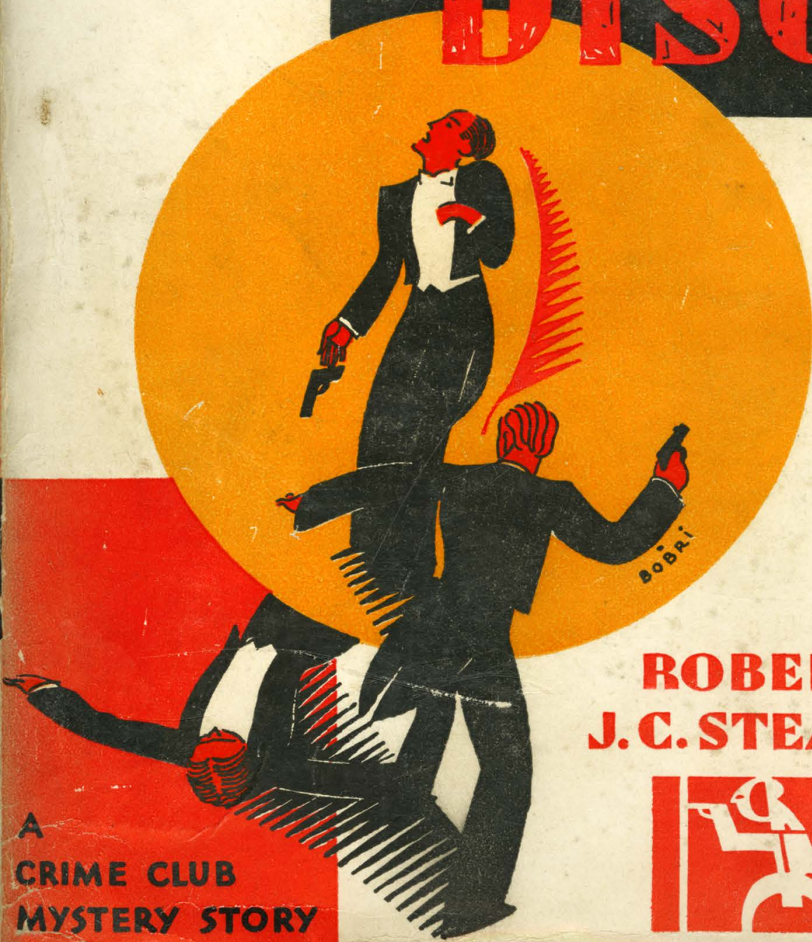


THE COPPER DISC



**ROBERT
J. C. STEAD**



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THE COPPER DISC

ROBERT J. C. STEAD

THE COPPER DISC

When Morley Kent witnessed a street accident involving a beautiful and mysterious woman his part in the terrible drama of the copper disc began.



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FIRST EDITION

THE COPPER DISC

CHAPTER ONE

MORLEY KENT, senior partner of the firm of Kent & Powers, electricians, looked up from his empty coffee cup and met the shrewd blue eyes of Vera Masters. They were understanding eyes—eyes that had followed him with sympathy and enthusiasm while he had discoursed upon the wireless transmission of power. For the hundredth time Vera had dined with Kent in the little Arcadia Restaurant, where, after the drill of a heavy day in the shop, they talked over their plans and dreams together.

Kent's dream it was, mostly—that vision of a key hidden somewhere just outside the border of established fact, a key which would unlock the secret of the transmission of power without the aid of wire or any metallic connection. The realization of that dream (properly protected, of course, by patents in all countries) meant fame and fortune beyond the wildest flight of imagination.

Working out his experiments, in the confidence only of his partner and Vera, Kent began to feel that his fingers were not far from the mystic key. Already a tiny airplane, suspended

by a string from the ceiling of his office, buzzed all day long with power from a battery concealed beneath his desk. As it tugged at its little moorings, it seemed to Kent the symbol of a new discovery, epochal in its possibilities, eager to be born into the world.

"I hope it all comes true," the girl murmured, gently, wistfully. Vera's interest in her employer embraced a bigger field than his inventions, epochal though they might prove to be.

"Come true? It can't help coming true!" he assured her, and himself. "I tell you, Vee, we are just at the edge of something big—the biggest that has ever happened! If I can drive a toy airplane ten feet away, why can't I drive a real airplane ten miles away? Ten hundred miles away? Why can't I drive the automobiles in this street with power from Niagara, from the Saguenay, from the St. Lawrence? No more fear of a shortage of coal! No more need of synthetic gasoline! It's all a question of power—properly directed power."

"And money," the girl suggested.

"And money," he repeated, more soberly. "If I had ten thousand dollars—— There'll be millions when we don't need it, but not ten thousand when we do. Well, we must find it somewhere, Vee. Who knows what Fortune may have up her sleeve?"

Kent hailed a taxi and showed his companion in. "Four six Corsigan Avenue," he told the driver, giving him the number of Vera's lodging house.

Vera dropped into her seat and they rode in silence. Kent had a sense of happy companionship as her shoulder touched his, and his arm slipped along the top of the cushion behind her. It never quite had dropped about her; he did not forget that the girl was a member of his staff—his whole staff, to be more accurate—and he imposed upon himself limits of endearment bounded on one side by an occasional pat on the hand, and on the other by the use of the brotherly pet name which he applied to her. Vera sometimes wished him a trifle less punctilious.

In a few minutes they drew up at the door of a red brick house which at one time had displayed some pretensions, but, like its neighbors along the street, had slipped down the social scale with the passage of years until it struck bottom in the status of a cheap but innocuous lodging house. The very face of Forty-six disarmed suspicion. The faded blinds and mildewed trimmings of the front windows blinked apologetically as the rays of a near-by street lamp cut through the falling rain, recalling, perhaps, memories of those brighter days before the drab force of circumstance had de-

creed for Corsigan Avenue its function of menial respectability.

Kent extended some unnecessary assistance to Vera as she got out of the taxi. For an instant he held her hand, and the girl's faith in wireless transmission was perceptibly strengthened.

"Four two six Eleventh Street," said Kent, and the taxi whirred away again. They were running through a residential district, where the traffic was light, and the rain had cleared pedestrians from the street. Kent was aroused from reverie by a glimpse of a large sand-colored roadster traveling fast toward the intersection just ahead. Suddenly the roadster lurched, skidded on the wet pavement as the driver tried to make the turn, and crashed into the curb immediately in front of Kent's taxi. There was a sound of wrenching spokes and the squeal of brakes as the taxi pulled up with a jerk to avoid collision.

The roadster sprawled partly on the pavement, partly on the grass boulevard alongside. The driver extricated himself, grinned rather sheepishly at the pair in the taxi, and began appraising the damage. The fascination of a wreck drew Kent out on the curb beside him.

"Might have been worse," Kent observed. "A

smashed wheel and crumpled fender. Your axles seem to be all right."

"Lucky enough!" the other man agreed. "She just skated 'round the corner and that wheel buckled up like a crumpled doughnut."

At that moment Kent's attention was diverted from the car to a still more interesting subject. A young girl was standing on the pavement beside him. She wore an evening gown of thin, pinkish stuff, in which the rain was making big splotches. Her arms and neck were bare to the weather; if she had cloak or umbrella she had forgotten it in the excitement of the accident. As Kent looked in her face in the lamplight he knew that Nature had done her share, even though a telltale streak of rain was furrowing the supplemental touch of Art.

The girl's eyes met his, hesitated a moment, then her hands came forward in a frank little gesture.

"Oh, I wonder if you could—if you would ——" She was plainly wrestling with her agitation. "I am in a great hurry to get home. Would it be too much——"

Kent was conscious of a pleasant emotional disturbance. He was sure that even a great deal would not be too much.

"Why, no," he assured her. "Take my taxi. Or, better still, let me drive you home."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" the girl protested. Her thin gown was clinging to her in wet corrugations, but she seemed unconscious of the rain.

"Better go, Glad," her companion advised, briefly. "I'll have to get this wreck out of the street, and you're approaching dissolution."

For his observation she returned a fascinating little grimace. "Glad," said Kent to himself. "I must remember. Glad."

She had turned to him. "Thank you very much," she said, simply. "I will accept your kindness. It is an imposition, but I am really in a very great hurry to get home, and other taxis seem to have deserted the street."

Kent swung his door open. "Jump in!" he cried. He gave her unnecessary assistance in, just as, a few minutes before, he had given Vera unnecessary assistance out.

"The address?" he asked her.

"Fifty-four Lake Boulevard, and please drive fast," she added to the driver. "Good-night, Gordon," she called back, as the taxi was already in motion. "Sorry for all the trouble I have given you."

When they had settled down in the cab, Kent introduced himself. "My name is Morley Kent, of the firm of Kent & Powers, 208 Eleventh Street." He had a feeling that references were

called for and that this information should be reassuring.

"You are very kind, Mr. Kent," she told him. "And you will believe, I hope, that I do not usually commandeer taxis and escorts in this manner. If I were not in such a hurry to get home! It was really that which led to the accident; I was urging Gordon to drive faster——"

"We will get you home without a moment's delay," Kent promised her. "Step on it, driver, but keep 'er on all fours!"

While helping the girl in, Kent had switched on the light in the cab. He hesitated now to turn it off, and under its subdued rays he made a quick study of his companion. She wore a string of pearls—real or imitation—about her neck, and diamonds blazed from her wrist and fingers. Not from her engagement finger, Kent suddenly noted, and felt his heart give a pleasant little thump at this discovery. Remarkable, it seemed to him, that his heart should thump over something in which he was not in the remotest way concerned. . . . She was young—
younger than Vera; smaller, too, and finer in her features.

Kent appraised the pearls and diamonds, and marveled that a girl so richly dressed should risk herself with a total stranger. She seemed

to read his mind, for she suddenly smiled up into his face.

"You weren't thinking of kidnaping me, were you?"

There was laughter in her voice, as though fear of Kent, or anyone, were a very amusing idea.

"To be quite frank, I was," he told her.

She seemed pleased with his answer. "Quite an adventure," she mused. "But, you see, I am in a great hurry, and my intuition told me I would be safe with you. Do you believe in intuition, Mr. Kent?"

While Kent was debating whether to answer yes or no, a slight tremor ran through her frame.

"You're cold!" he exclaimed.

"It's nothing. Just the rain. Like a silly I left all my things in Gordon's car. All but my purse. I am clutching it here as though it held millions."

"But you're cold!" he repeated. For a moment he hesitated, then suddenly switched off the light and drew his coat from his shoulders.

"Here, get into this. It's big and clumsy, but it will keep you warm."

She protested, but Kent held the coat across her shoulders, and she slipped her slim arms into the sleeves.

"There, that's better," he told her. "Draw it

together in front. If I had a pin—and I have!" He folded one side of the coat across the other, fumbling in the darkness.

"Better let me pin it," she suggested. As he complied his fingers touched hers.

They rode on for some distance in silence.

"You must think me a very selfish young woman," she remarked, at length. "First I requisition your car, then your coat. Fortunately we are near home." And again she laughed her challenging laugh.

"Unfortunately," Kent corrected.

"Fortunately," she insisted.

They were swinging up the drive to a fashionable house, set in grounds that were spacious for the high-priced Lake Boulevard district.

"Here we are!" she exclaimed, as the car stopped in front of a lighted doorway. "You have been very kind, and very generous, Mr. Kent. If you will tell me the amount of the taxi fare——"

But Kent would not hear of that. "You were my guest," he said.

"By compulsion."

"The compulsion of circumstances, which have left me very much their debtor."

"Very well." She slipped out of his coat. "At least you will take that. If I had not been in such a hurry——"

"Then I would have missed a very happy experience."

For a moment she let her hand lie in his, then darted out of sight.

As the taxi retraced the route to Eleventh Street, Kent turned over in his mind the unusual event of the last twenty minutes. The girl had evidently been in a great hurry, the cause of which she had not seen fit to reveal. Yet she had also seemed quite composed, as if the hurry were something outside of, apart from, herself. Kent, too, was conscious of that same desire for haste, which seemed also to have infected the driver, as they lurched along the slippery streets on the homeward run. . . . A faint and delicious aroma came up from the coat which she had worn. It wreathed the young man in an atmosphere of happy romance. He must see more of Miss——

It was not until that moment that he realized he did not so much as know her name!

Kent paid his driver and went up in the elevator to his room on the seventh floor.

The block in which he had his domicile was devoted to shops on the street level, business offices up to the fifth story, and bachelor apartments above. Kent's quarters consisted of two rooms, in one of which were his books, radio,

gramophone, and a miscellany of electrical apparatus. Two armchairs, with sagging upholstery, acquired at a second-hand store for a nominal consideration, and a table on which were pipes and tobacco, suggested simple comfort and companionship. A door in the partition opened into his bedroom, chaste of all trappings in its masculine severity. A clothes closet and bath completed the apartment.

Kent switched on the light, dropped his hat into one of the chairs and himself into the other. He was possessed of a singular happiness which suggested meditation and a cigar before turning in for the night. Presently he became aware that his coat was damp; he took it off, and caught again the aroma of the arms and shoulders it had so lately sheltered. For a moment he held it in his hands.

"Remarkable incident," he soliloquized. "Remarkable girl. She was carrying enough jewels, if I'm any estimator, to—to——" He stopped for a suitable figure of speech, and the need of money which was nearest his mind presented itself. "To finance my experiments—to nail down my patents—to make me rich!" This girl carried on her neck and fingers all that stood between him and fortune. "And yet she wasn't afraid; seemed to trust me just as a matter of course. She was like a sort of fairy, flitting into

my cab, my life, for a moment. And out again. I never will hear of her again, of course. Why should I?"

The conclusion seemed reasonable but not satisfactory.

He started to take off his shoes. Already the glamor was fading away. He had been magnifying an incident into an event. He merely had extended a courtesy to a strange young woman, who had thanked him and passed on out of his life. Why should she care? Why should he?

He dropped his shoe on the floor. Its solid thump was reassuring. "Heigho, Morley! Go to bed and don't be silly," he adjured himself.

At that moment his telephone rang.

"This is Gladys Hensley," said a voice which he recognized with an instantaneous thrill. "I didn't tell you my name in the cab because—well, perhaps because you didn't ask it. But I had yours, and was able to look up your number. I have troubled you so much already I hesitate——" She paused.

"Please go on," he urged. (Fancy her calling him up!) "If there is any way in which I can be of service——" (Gladys Hensley! The name touched some chord in his memory, and a million little brain cells went clamoring to identify it)—"please tell me."

"Very well, if I'm not really troubling you

too much," the voice came over the wire. "The fact is, I left my purse in your taxi. I must have laid it down while I was putting on, or taking off, your coat." A silvery laugh tinkled through the telephone. "There wasn't much in it—only a few dollars and a little gold compact, if you know what that is. I thought perhaps you would have the taxi receipt, since you wouldn't let me take it, and you could give me the number of the car."

Kent found the receipt in his pocket. "Yes, I happen to have the number right before me, Miss Hensley," he told her. "I will go down to the taxi office at once and make inquiry."

She protested that there was no occasion for that; if he would just tell her the cab number she would have Gordon call for it in the morning. The mention of Gordon's name decided Kent. He would go for it this very night. No saying what might happen if it were left there until to-morrow.

Inquiry revealed that a small silver mesh bag had been found in the cab. Kent was asked to describe the contents. He gave the necessary information, signed where he was told, and went home. "My busy night," he observed to George, the elevator man, as he went up to his rooms.

Back in his quarters, it occurred to Kent that he should call Miss Hensley at once and set her

mind at rest about the purse. Search in the telephone directory revealed one Angus Hensley as a subscriber at 54 Lake Boulevard. Kent rang the number.

"Miss Hensley has retired," a strange voice replied. "If it is of importance I will connect you with her room."

"It is of some importance."

There was a moment or two of delay; then the girl's voice sounded in his ear.

"I have your purse, Miss Hensley," Kent explained. "Hope I haven't called you out of bed?"

"Oh, we are much too modern for that. My telephone always stands within reach of my pillow. . . . It is a very comfortable way to transact one's business."

For the life of him, Kent did not know why this information should seem so significant. Already the girl was like an old acquaintance; wearing his coat, speaking to him from her bed. . . . Afterwards he reflected that her great haste must have quickly evaporated.

While he was fumbling with his thoughts the girl spoke again.

"It was very kind of you to go to so much trouble for a stranger. Perhaps you can think of some place downtown where you can leave the purse, and I will get it to-morrow."

Kent took his courage in both hands. "I hope not quite a stranger," he said. "At least, not now, and from now on. This purse contains quite a little money; at least, what seems to me like quite a little money, and I feel that I should like to place it in your own hands. I can do that to-morrow night, if you will let me."

He waited for a moment while the wire hummed empty. Evidently she was deciding whether their chance acquaintanceship was to end where it began or be allowed an opportunity to develop. It was a decision upon which all the future hung for both of them, and the young man felt his heart pounding as he waited.

Then the wire spoke again. "All right. To-morrow night at nine, if that suits you."

"Thank you. I shall be glad to come."

"And I shall be glad to see you again. Good-night."

He heard the receiver click on her telephone, and dropped back into his chair in a glow of happy experience. Why should this strange girl impress him so deeply? Why should he want to go to her house to-morrow night? Why should he care? Through the length of a cigar he could find no answer.

"But I do care," he admitted to himself, at length. "And, by Jove, so does she!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE next morning, while Kent was shaving, an imperious knock sounded on his door.

"Come in!" cried Kent, straight-lipped behind his razor blade.

The body of a policeman filled the doorway. A big round head, close-coupled to a big round body, turned slowly toward Kent. A mouth in the head opened.

"Are ye Mr. Kent?"

"Guilty," said Kent. "What's the charge?"

"Ye're to turn up at the coroner's court at tin o'clock."

Kent stuck his razor under the faucet. "Coroner's court? Who's dead?"

"That's what he'll be askin' ye, no doubt. Will ye be there, or will I sarve ye a summons?"

"The only service that would appeal to me at the moment would be ham and eggs and a cup of coffee. Have you et?"

The broad face broadened a little wider still. "Is that contimpt av coort or an invitation?" it demanded.

Kent wiped his face and reached for his shirt. "You flatter me, Captain," he said. "Only rich

men can afford contempt of court. But if we should eat together, and I should pick up both checks, there would be no *habeas corpus* about that, would there?"

A huge hand went up to the huge head and massaged it gently behind the ear. The long mouth tilted slightly upward at the ends.

"Now it's peculiar, but that's one point o' law with which I'm partic'lar conversant," said the policeman. "Where do we eat?"

Over his smoking ham and eggs, Kent learned that he was wanted in connection with a taxi accident of the night before. The cab in which he had been riding, soon after it left him, had skidded into the curb and killed a pedestrian.

"But I know nothing about it," he protested.

"Sure. That's why they want ye, I guess. And the young woman you was escoortin'; they've sent out for her, too. It will be quite a rare party."

Kent's last bite of ham narrowly escaped the wrong channel as his windpipe flopped from high into reverse.

"But she knows nothing about it, Captain; less than I do; not a thing, honest."

"Sure. That's why they want her, too. Well, must be gettin' along. Thanks, Mr. Kent. You'll be there?"

"Of course I'll be there," said Kent, for whom the inquest had suddenly taken on a vast importance.

"And say," continued the officer, "ye got a purse out o' the taxi, didn't ye? Bring it along. They may want it for Exhibit A." He leaned over Kent's shoulder and dropped his voice to a confidential note. "An' if ye're wantin' anythin', me name's Murphy, Mr. Kent," he added.

Returning to his room for the purse, Kent reflected without enthusiasm that this would remove the occasion for his evening call upon Miss Hensley. . . . Unless some other occasion could be found.

Kent went early to the inquest in the hope that he might have a word with Gladys before the proceedings commenced. Seating himself in a convenient position, he kept a surreptitious eye on the door while maintaining an air of detached contemplation. Visitors began to arrive: a little, thin, black-eyed man who darted a quick glance in Kent's direction and then seemed to forget his presence; a few friends of the taxi driver, or, perhaps, of the victim of the accident; curiosity seekers, idlers, a newspaper reporter or two.

One minute before ten the door admitted Gladys Hensley. She seemed taller and slimmer in her smart morning frock. Her brown eyes

swept the room until they fell on Kent, when they seemed to take on a brighter sparkle, and her lips parted in a smile of recognition. Kent's parted, too; partly in answer to her smile, partly in confirmation of the estimate of her beauty he had made the previous night.

By the side of the girl was another woman, whose only admission of age was in her hair, which was almost white.

Kent arose and stepped across the room to greet them. "Good-morning, Miss Hensley. This is an unexpected development. I am afraid you will not be so ready to trust yourself to my taxi another time."

"Indeed, I am quite excited over it. Poor fellow! Don't you think it is very sad? We never know what is going to happen, do we? Oh, Mother, may I present Mr. Kent, who was so kind to me last night when Gordon's car broke down?"

The elder woman bowed. "We are all indebted for any kindness shown my daughter, even though—" she paused—"even though it has had such unforeseen results. But I am sure, Mr. Kent, you were not responsible for that."

The evidence brought out that a few minutes after dropping Kent at 426 Eleventh Street the taxi, skidding on the wet pavement, had crushed a pedestrian against a lamp-post, with instantly

fatal results. The question of responsibility seemed to hinge upon the speed at which the car was traveling.

Kent was called for evidence.

"You are the gentleman who was using this car just before the accident?" he was asked. "Did you feel that the driver was proceeding with due caution, considering the state of the pavement?"

Kent hesitated. Miss Hensley's insistent demand for speed rushed in upon him, and with it a desire to protect her from any embarrassing questions.

"Your hesitancy is perhaps the most convincing answer," the coroner commented. "Did you, in view of the condition of the streets, remonstrate with the driver—request him to proceed with caution?"

Kent shot a quick glance at Miss Hensley. The girl was alert, as though ready to spring from her seat. For an instant their eyes met.

"No, I didn't caution him," the witness admitted. "You see, I was in a great hurry, and I kept telling him to step on it——"

"This is important testimony. Will you tell us more of this, Mr. Kent? It is well known that when a driver has been in what might be called a mood of high speed it takes him some time to settle down again to a more moderate

pace. Every motorist must have observed that. Please proceed."

Kent's finger was looping his watch chain with great industry. "Well, you see, it was like this," he resumed. "I was in a great hurry because——"

"Indeed, it was *I* who was in the hurry," came a sudden interruption from Gladys Hensley. "I will not sit here and let Mr. Kent take the blame. He let me have the use of his taxi, and it was I who urged the driver to greater speed——"

"Very well," the coroner interrupted. "We shall hear your evidence, Miss Hensley."

The little dark man got up and went out, quietly, as though wishing not to attract attention.

Miss Hensley told about the accident to the car she had been driving in, and how, in an emergency, Kent had placed his taxi at her disposal.

"Were you previously acquainted with Mr. Kent?"

"No, sir."

"Then he is a total stranger to you?"

"Yes, sir. That is, he was, until last night."

"Quite so. The point I am getting at is that you appealed, in an emergency, to a total stranger."

"Yes, sir."

"Which would indicate that it was quite—shall I say—a serious emergency?"

"Yes, sir."

"In short, you were in a great hurry. May we be informed as to the occasion of your haste? It may, or may not, have a bearing on this case."

Kent gnashed his teeth in silent impotence. This man was sleuthing for something with "a bearing" on the "case." Why didn't he ask her where she had been, what she wore, how old she was . . .

Miss Hensley hesitated. "That is the strange part of it," she said. "I really don't know what it was all about."

The coroner looked incredulous. "You mean you don't know why you were in a hurry?"

"That is just it. While I was with Mr. Brace I was suddenly seized with what you have described as a mood of haste. I urged him to drive me home with all possible speed. We skidded and broke a wheel. Then as Mr. Kent came along in his taxi I appealed to him, and I hurried his driver. You see, I am to blame, but I don't know why. When I reached home there was no reason for haste. I can't explain it at all."

"Very strange, very strange," the coroner mused. "Your position—your family, Miss

Hensley—preclude the supposition, which otherwise would be almost irresistible, that you are trifling with this court.”

“Oh, I assure you, I am not!” the girl exclaimed, with unquestionable sincerity. “I just can’t explain it, that’s all.”

The coroner, also, began looping his watch chain.

“Have you had any conversation with Mr. Kent on this subject since the accident?”

“No, sir. That is, I called him up about my purse. You see, I left the purse in the taxi, and he got it for me.”

“Has the purse been produced?”

Murphy, still under the beneficent effects of a second breakfast, signaled to Kent, and the purse was laid on the table.

“Do you identify the purse?”

“It looks like it.”

“You are not sure?”

“Not at this distance.”

The coroner ordered that the purse be placed in Miss Hensley’s hands. It was a dainty thing of silver mesh. She opened it gravely, took out some bank notes, a few pieces of change, and a small gold compact.

“Yes, it is my purse,” she said. “Oh, if only Mr. Kent had not come along!”

Kent hesitated to believe his ears. Was she saying, if only he had not come along?

The coroner, also, seemed nonplussed. "You led the court, a few minutes ago, to believe that this young man had done you a favor. Do you wish to change that impression?"

Kent looked up hopefully, but the girl avoided his glance. The frankness seemed to have gone out of her eyes; she was looking downward, and a strange color was mounting in her cheeks.

"It would have been better if he had not stopped," she said at length. "It was a strange thing for him to do."

"But you appealed to him, did you not?"

"Suppose I did! . . . And then, in the taxi, he turned out the light! And I was just in my evening gown, and I was cold! Oh, I can't say any more! I won't say any more! Do you hear me, I won't say any more!"

She was obviously at the point of hysteria.

"I shall overlook the tone of your last remark," said the coroner. "It does not seem that anything more is to be gained by your evidence, which, I must say, has taken a most unexpected turn. The point is established that either you, or Kent, or both, urged the driver to a high rate of speed. Anything else which may have occurred in that taxi is not under inquiry by this court."

The girl flushed under the coroner's rebuke. She stood for a moment, hesitant. Then, "May I have my purse?"

"I see no reason why you should not have the purse," the coroner answered, his tone grown suddenly cold. "But I observe that you were not too offended by Mr. Kent to ask him to do you a further service. You may go, Miss Hensley."

With burning cheeks she turned and, accompanied by her mother, without looking at Kent, brushed out of the room. Soon afterward Kent also was excused, and left the place, bewildered by the sudden turn events had taken.

In the little office behind the shop of Kent & Powers, he discussed the incident with his partner. "Now what do you make of that?" he demanded, when he had finished his story.

But Powers had jumped from his chair. "Hensley, did you say? Glad Hensley! Why, man, you've been sheltering angels unawares! Don't you know who Glad Hensley is?"

"Who—and why the sudden agitation?"

"Only daughter of old Angus Hensley, the radio king, that's all! With more millions in her line of descent than we've got washers in the tool box. Say, old man, you've just got to patch up this damage, whatever it costs. Go and apologize to her! Tell her mother it was a case of mistaken identity! Line it up some way! Get

Angus Hensley interested in you, even if you have to marry his daughter, because that's where we're going to get the money to put over our experiments!"

"Oh, are we? Well, we've made a great start!"

"No worse than I'd expect. Why in the world did fate choose you for that job, instead of me? But you're elected, and you've got to come through. You owe it to the firm—and to posterity." He was pacing about the little room, athrill with the possibilities of the situation.

But Kent failed to catch any of his partner's enthusiasm. "You don't seem to realize that she gave me an awful flop this very morning," he remarked.

"Don't worry over that. She'll give you a boost to-morrow. Women are that way. I know. I made a study of 'em. You'll see."

Kent's dejection carried him home early. In the mail box of his door he found a small envelope addressed in a woman's hand. As he held it a familiar odor touched his nostrils.

With a strange tremor running through his frame, he cut the envelope open and drew out a little note:

You must think me absolutely horrid. I'm not really. Can you possibly forgive my unaccountable

behavior? I assure you it is as unaccountable to me as it must have been to you. I shall be home all evening to receive your forgiveness. G. H.

For a moment Kent held the note before him, more puzzled than ever. Then he opened a closet door and took out his only suit of evening clothes.

CHAPTER THREE

KENT presented himself at 54 Lake Boulevard and was shown into a large room luxuriously furnished. Subdued music issued from a radio set ingeniously concealed; Kent's ear had not yet located it when Gladys entered, slim and radiant, and moved toward him.

He appraised her quickly and appreciatively as she advanced under the softly colored lights of the Hensley reception hall. If, the previous night, he had thought her overdressed, he found no ground for that criticism now. Her costume was modest to the point of severity; a single short string of pearls encircled her white neck, and the pink in her cheeks was the glow of her girlish health artfully accentuated by the shades on the electric chandeliers.

"This *is* coals of fire," she said, as she took his hand; "I hardly believed anyone could be so generous."

"I came because you asked me, and because I'm puzzled," he told her, frankly. He had decided to be firm; her behavior demanded ex-

planation; but his eyes feasted on her as he spoke.

Her lips melted into a smile. "I know you are going to be very severe," she said, contritely. "You have a right to be. Shall we sit here? This room is so large."

She led him, willing enough, into a smaller room at the rear, with windows commanding the lake, now splashed with sunset gold and copper. For a moment she paused to drink in the evening beauty.

"Don't you love the sunset?" she asked, her voice low and near, as though it expressed her reverence at the bedside of the dying day. "We chose this place partly because it opens to the sunset."

Kent felt his demand for explanations slipping away. For the moment they could wait. He was conscious of being under the spell of a very delightful presence.

"I was born in the country," he told her, "where they have sunsets every night." She laughed gently. "You have no idea how I miss them in the city."

Her quick eyes were turned to his. They were brown, he saw, but in them seemed to lie some deeper color. It might, he thought, be the glow from the lake. He must study them under other conditions of light.

"I am glad you love the sunset," she was telling him, "because people who love the sunset love beauty, or whatever it is in one's soul that cannot be understood. I am going to tell you something that cannot be understood; at least, that I cannot understand. That is why I asked you to come to-night. Perhaps you can explain it; if not, it may help you at least to make allowances."

Twilight had crept into the room. The girl pressed a button and filled it with a yellow glow. She selected a chair and indicated another near by.

"I suppose you have seen the evening papers?" she asked, when they were seated. "Dad has a good deal of influence on account of the advertising done by the Hensley Radio Corporation—you know, his company—and they let us down as light as possible. At that, it's bad enough."

Kent had not thought of the papers. He had enjoyed always the immunity of the unimportant.

"I didn't think of the papers," he said.

She smiled on him the smile of benevolent maturity upon a child.

"We always have to think of the papers—first," she explained. "So as soon as I realized the mischief I had done I got Dad on the tele-

phone to straighten it out. They gave up their juicy story grudgingly, like a dog parts with a bone. That is what they called it—'a juicy story.' You realize, Mr. Kent, I suppose, that I placed both you and myself in a rather unenviable light?"

"Yes, I am able to follow it that far," Kent admitted, rather grimly. "What I can't understand is *why*."

"That is what I cannot understand either. That is why I told you, a moment ago, there is something that cannot be understood."

He looked at her, a faint play of incredulity about his lips.

"Do you mean that you don't know why you said those things in your evidence?"

"No more than I know why I was in a hurry last night, and I don't know that. I am a puzzle, to my family, to my friends; most of all, to myself. I do things without understanding why. My mood changes without an apparent glimpse of cause. It may change to-night, in an hour, in a minute. I don't know."

She glanced at a clock on the mantelpiece. The hands were at one minute to nine.

"Before the clock strikes I may be as hostile to you as I now am friendly," she continued. She dropped her voice a little on the last word.

"Remarkable!" Kent mused.

"It is a matter of moods imposed on me from some external source," she went on, as though repeating a formula.

"Can you tell the mood from your real self?"

"Yes, always."

Kent took a plunge. "And which is your real self—toward me?" he asked.

Her eyes smiled, but she gave him no answer.

"I was telling you of the newspapers," she resumed. "You may as well know the worst."

She pressed a button, and a maid entered.

"The evening papers, Florence, please."

The woman returned in a moment and laid the papers before her. Gladys leafed them over and held out a sheet to Kent. As he took it his fingers touched hers, and again that wireless current went tingling through his veins.

There was a two-column cut of Miss Gladys Hensley, and a heading, "Society Girl at Inquest Quiz." Kent's eye ran down the half-column of reading matter, in which his own name appeared two or three times. He gathered the fact that the taxi driver had been acquitted, the dead pedestrian not being able to state his side of the case. As he read on the color rose in his cheeks. His ride with Gladys Hensley had become public property. He stopped at the sentence:

Miss Hensley's evidence intimated that Kent's gallantry in placing his taxi at her disposal had not been wholly disinterested, but the coroner did not pursue this aspect of the case.

Kent sprang to his feet. "The blackguards!" he exclaimed. "They should be prosecuted for that!"

She motioned him back to his seat. "I'm sorry," she said, contritely. "You see, it is entirely my fault. The evidence justified all they printed, and more. Indeed, they let us down easy, but even Dad's influence couldn't keep that sentence out. But it did prevent them using your photograph."

"My photograph!"

"Yes. Someone had snapped you, and they gave it up, as I said, like a surly dog gives up his bone. I'm so sorry!"

She was a picture of genuine distress. Kent let his eyes rest on her, completely puzzled. He could not doubt her sincerity. And yet——

"You are waiting for me to explain," she read his thought, when silence became oppressive. "That is the unfortunate part of it. I can't explain, except that my moods change, apparently without any reason. They are certainly beyond my control. What do you think is the cause of moods, Mr. Kent?"

"Well—I have always associated them with the liver."

She laughed. "Yes, but I have checked that."

"You have?"

"Of course. Dr. Alstice tells me my health is perfect. You see, Mr. Kent, it is a very serious matter, and I really have been trying to get to the bottom of it. I shall soon not have any friends at all if this continues."

"Oh, I assure you——"

"Don't. It was very decent of you to come to-night, but you wouldn't keep on coming if I embarrassed you many times as I did to-day. I hoped perhaps you might think of some explanation."

"I?"

"Yes. You are an inventor—an experimenter—of some sort, aren't you? Doesn't this subject seem interesting enough to warrant your investigation?"

He looked for banter in her voice, but it was evident she was quite in earnest.

"Yes, indeed, the subject does interest me," he told her. "I will be glad to help, if I can. May I ask questions?"

She nodded.

Kent had his share of the passion for scientific research, but he was conscious now of a subtle stimulus not usually associated with sci-

ence. The problem invited his mind, but the girl herself, the instrument in which the problem was expressed, drew him with a powerful attraction.

"Have you always been subject to these moods?" he asked.

"Oh, no. Just for the last month or so."

"Then the influence, wherever it comes from, is quite recent. That should help to locate it. Did anything unusual happen about the time you first came under the spell—I suppose we may call it that? Think hard."

She was resting her chin in her hands, a picture of concentration. "No, I can't place any. I just began to do things I didn't mean to do."

"You spoke of losing friends. Have you lost any friends as a result of this—this peculiar behavior?"

He sensed her hesitation. "Don't tell me unless you wish to," he added gently.

"Yes, I will tell you. I believe you are trying to help me. You know the young man I was with last night, Mr. Gordon Brace? I feel that he is so—so uncertain about me he doesn't know what to do. You see, he is not a student, like you. With Gordon things either are or they aren't, if you understand. And I am afraid I have him utterly baffled. He doesn't know what to make of me. No wonder. I don't know what to make of my-

self. Neither do my parents. They are as puzzled as any of us. After my evidence this morning Mother was hotly indignant at you, until I made her understand I was in another of my tantrums. Now she is so mortified she may not come in to meet you to-night at all."

Kent recalled Mrs. Hensley's lack of cordiality at the inquest, but he tried to be gallant.

"I hope she will not deny me that pleasure," he managed to say, although he had a feeling that the inquiry could be carried on better without her assistance.

"She may. You see, it is customary to hold one responsible for his moods, isn't it? You can't just square yourself for bad behavior by saying you were in the grip of a mood, can you? Sensible people are not supposed to give way to their moods, although everyone does, more or less. Mr. Kent, you know all about wave lengths, I suppose?"

"Not all, by any means. Something, perhaps."

"Do you believe that people have wave lengths—that each person has a different wave length?"

"It is possible, although I don't know that it has been scientifically established."

"But it is possible, isn't it? And that is why we respond so readily to some people, while

others simply rile our static. Do you think every brain is, after all, just a human radio set, gathering emotions, ideas, thoughts, out of the ether, according as it is tuned?"

"Possibly. Possibly, also, a broadcasting station, sending out emotions, thoughts, ideas."

"Or perhaps just relaying them?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

She was vivid with interest, but she wanted to be sure she was not outrunning Kent's sense of reasonableness.

"You see," she explained, "I live in an atmosphere of radio. Father is steeped in it. Our guests are usually radio people. Inventors from everywhere, with every kind of theory—some of them too wild for words—come to see my father, to interest him in their ideas; usually, too, to get him to finance their experiments. I think every crank in the world must have Dad's address. He is continually bringing them to the house, because, as he says, you never know where you will pick up an idea that's worth a million. And, again, sometimes I sing on the radio. It has become part of my life. And it opens up such possibilities that I wonder if it may not even have something to do with this problem we are discussing. But—here I am doing all the talking, and you were to ask me questions."

Kent patted a hand which had fallen into his. "I think you are suffering from extreme nervous tension," he told her. "If you had not assured me that you have already consulted your doctor, I would have known what course to advise."

Her eyelids dropped, and little crystal points began to gather at the inner corners. They filled and coursed slowly down her cheeks.

She arose suddenly, her hand still in his. "Excuse me," she begged, "I am very silly," and, withdrawing herself from him, she hurried out of the room.

While he waited for her return, Kent gazed at a symbolical painting that hung on the wall, representing the harnessing of the forces of electricity. That was part of the problem to which he was devoting his life. A partial success in the harnessing of those mysterious powers had made Angus Hensley many times a millionaire, and his only child one of the richest prizes in the matrimonial market. But there was nothing sordid in Kent's appraisal of the girl who had come so unexpectedly and so intimately into his life. She was confronted with a unique and distressing problem, and his one desire at the moment was to help her toward a solution.

"Such eyes!" he told himself, irrelevantly. "Did ever I see such eyes!"

At that moment Miss Hensley returned, again plainly mistress of her feelings. She carried the little silver mesh purse that had already played a part in their strange experience.

"Remember it?" she asked, as she held it in extended hands toward Kent. "It is my constant companion, not so much for itself as for this": she snapped it open and drew out a small gold compact. "We girls are quite lost, you know, without this piece of equipment."

She opened the compact and Kent caught again the faint and delicious aroma he had noticed the previous evening in the taxi. She pressed a touch of the delicate powder to her cheeks, and even as she did so her eyes grew wide and rounded and her face seemed to harden into an expression of acute horror. She was so obviously in distress that Kent sprang to her side and would have supported her, but she pressed him away with her hands, she beat upon his chest like a prisoner seeking escape. Along with his surprise at the sudden turn of events, Kent felt a strange sense of the eerie and inexplicable creep up his spine. He almost wondered if the girl was mad. Her eyes seemed to have entirely changed.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the tension

broke. Her features relaxed; the horror faded from her eyes. "Oh!" she cried, as one who has received a stunning blow. She swayed before him and he seized her in his arms. She had gone limp and unconscious.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOR a moment Kent stood stupidly holding the limp form of Gladys Hensley in his arms before he realized that here was a situation calling for a definite and immediate line of action. A couch occupied part of one end of the room; he carried her to it and laid her down as gently as a child. Then, with a chaste hand over her heart, he assured himself that it was still beating.

He remembered that Gladys had pressed a button near her chair when summoning a maid to bring the evening paper. He found it, and almost instantly the domestic addressed as Florence entered the room. She was a woman of about forty, so he judged, of solid and competent appearance, and yet with something in her manner or personality that stirred his distrust.

"Miss Hensley has had a turn; I think she is in a faint," said Kent. "Will you summon her mother, and perhaps a doctor?"

The woman ran out through another passage, but not before she had given Kent a look that baffled and puzzled him. It was a look, not of surprise or concern, but rather of satisfaction,

of triumph. It seemed to say she had expected just what had happened, and it was all very gratifying.

"I guess *she* is not my wave length," Kent ruminated, the suggestion which Gladys had raised still fresh in his mind. He turned to the girl, took her hands in his, rubbed them between his palms.

In another moment Mrs. Hensley entered. If the maid's face had lacked concern, the mother's did not. She hurried to her daughter's side and took from Kent the hands he had been massaging. With a quick order she sent Florence, who had followed her into the room, for spirits and smelling salts.

Kent hesitated between a sense of delicacy and a desire to be of service. "Can I help, Mrs. Hensley?" he offered.

"It's just a faint, I think," the mother returned. "You might lower her head—remove the cushion from under it."

Kent raised her head gently in one hand, the brown bobbed hair falling about his fingers, drew out the cushion, and lowered her as instructed.

"That's better, thank you," Mrs. Hensley approved. "The poor child has been overwrought. Perhaps you will wait in the other room, Mr. Kent, and we will call you if necessary."

Kent waited. The concealed radio was still humming music, but above its subdued tones he was presently able to distinguish the voice of Gladys in the adjoining room. With difficulty he resisted the desire to rush in and see with his own eyes that the girl was out of danger.

A little later Mrs. Hensley joined him alone. "We are so distressed over her," she confided. "She has not of late been her real self at all. That is, at times. At other times she is all right. I presume she made her apologies to you for the embarrassing position in which she placed you this morning? To whatever amends she may have made I must add my own regret, and that of Mr. Hensley."

Kent thought her very dignified and beautiful with her white hair, her face still youthful in its freshness, and her eyes grave with concern for her child. Her aloofness of the morning had been replaced by an unmistakable manner of friendship.

"Oh, that is all right," he assured her. "I only wish I could help."

"You are very generous. And—who knows?—perhaps you can. This is a matter for investigation from all angles. It is no ordinary illness, and no outbreak of tantrums. Naturally, we have tried to keep it from the public, even from our friends. Now that it has come to your

knowledge, I feel sure I can trust your good judgment, Mr. Kent?"

Kent was in a mood to make commitments. "I shall regard it as a most sacred confidence," he said. "You can trust me, Mrs. Hensley."

"Thank you." She extended her hand. "I believe you are an honest young man. Angus and I will be glad to have you in our home from time to time. But now, will you let me say good-night on my daughter's behalf? I thought it better that she should go at once to her room without seeing you again in her present disturbed frame of mind."

Thus dismissed, Kent found himself in the fragrant air which sweeps up from the lake and floods the fashionable district, herding the city odors back into the commercial and manufacturing sections. The night was inviting and he decided to walk home. All the way to Eleventh Street he carried with him the peculiar puzzle of Gladys Hensley. That the girl was under some strange and unwelcome influence he was fully convinced, and that she should have taken him into her confidence in a matter so intimate flattered his young masculine vanity. And now Mrs. Hensley had practically admitted him into the family! He resolved not only to respect her confidence, but to unearth, by every means at his command, the source of the strange influ-

ence which had come over her daughter. This, of course, would involve frequent visits to the Hensley home and much association with Gladys. The prospect was alluring.

It came to him with something of a start that their acquaintance dated back only twenty-four hours. Already they were as old friends. He had quite forgiven the morning incident—even the newspaper story. Indeed, there was something delectable in having his name associated with that of Gladys Hensley. He meant to clip that paper and file it away as a memento of a very pleasant experience.

Vera Masters laid the mail on Kent's desk the following morning with an air of professional detachment. Her eyes, if Kent had looked into them, were heavy with a restless night, but she had summoned all her woman's resolution to give him no hint of the concern she felt. A dozen times she had read that infamous newspaper story, and the innuendo of a single sentence had burned into her heart.

"He will tell me about it in the morning," she assured herself. "It is all a hideous mistake."

But the morning wore on, consumed in the routine duties of shop and office, and Kent volunteered no explanations. He was walking out at noon when something pathetic in her attitude

as she sat at her typewriter halted him. Vera seemed suddenly to have grown older. Kent knew very well that Vera was twenty-six—almost the same age as himself—but never before had he quite realized that her girlhood was slipping away. After all, twenty-six is very young when surveyed from the altitude of superior years, but it marks the turn of the first quarter of a century and brings to Youth a sudden and overwhelming realization that its days are numbered.

Vera knew that Kent was looking at her, and she pounded her keys industriously, but they blurred and reeled before her.

Afterwards the letter had to be rewritten.

When Kent returned to his rooms he found a letter addressed to him in a woman's handwriting. It was not the hand of Gladys, and yet his heart perceptibly speeded its beat as he cut the envelope open. The note was from Mrs. Hensley:

DEAR MR. KENT:

May we hope for the pleasure of your company at dinner to-morrow night? Mr. Hensley and I are having a few friends, and we will be glad if you can join us. My husband is interested in everything which has to do with electricity, and no doubt you will find something in common. Do come. I would

like you to know that we are not really so rude or hysterical as you would be justified in supposing.

Hopefully,

JULIA HENSLEY.

P.S. Gladys is quite well again to-day. It was another of those unaccountable occurrences.

Kent read the message a second time without moving from where he stood, but his decision was instantly taken. He wrote a brief note of acceptance and went out for a stroll in the evening air. He spoke to the elevator man as he went down, to the girl at the cigar counter in the corridor, to a newsboy at the door. He was in a cordial mood toward the world. Life seemed very much worth living, even without a solution of the great problem of wireless transmission of power. . . . Even that might come of it. Angus Hensley was a good man to know. . . .

Kent dressed for the Hensley dinner with as much care as his limited wardrobe permitted, called a taxi, and in a few minutes whirred up to the doors of the Hensley mansion. He was shown into the smoking room, where Angus Hensley, a youthful-looking gray-haired man, shook his hand warmly.

"Mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Kent; mighty

glad to meet you." The radio king held his hand with unaffected cordiality. "I know something about your experiments. Oh, don't ask me! Developments in the electrical world have a way of leaking out and winding up in the ear of Angus Hensley. We're just at the beginning of things, Mr. Kent, and I'm always glad to meet a man who is doing his bit at rolling back the map of the unknown. Besides, I understand that my daughter is indebted to you for certain courtesies, and what my daughter owes I owe—and that's true in more ways than one." Mr. Hensley laughed pleasantly over his implied liabilities, as a man with triple A rating is entitled to laugh on such subjects.

A tall young man with a small dark mustache and eyes to match detached himself from the little knot of guests.

"I think we have met before, Mr. Kent," he said, extending his hand, "but you may be excused for not recognizing me. The light was not good, and I do not remember that we were formally introduced. I am Gordon Brace."

The two young men eyed each other as they clasped hands, and both seemed to sense that they would come to grips in more ways than one.

"I am glad to meet you," Kent managed to say. "I hope your car was not much the worse."

"Just a smashed wheel. And now, when we have a moment together, I want to thank you for your courtesy to Miss Hensley and to me. You were very kind."

"Oh, it was a great pleasure," Kent assured him.

They were interrupted by Angus Hensley.

"Mr. Kent, I want you to meet Professor Martin Herzton. Professor Herzton is associated with the Hensley Radio Corporation; in fact, he is a good deal of the power behind the scenes. Whenever we want a new invention or discovery—something that will put our competitors out of the running for another year or two—we say to the professor, 'Think up something new, Herzton,' and, by George, he does it! If you've got any big ideas in the back of your head, Kent, keep 'em under cover when you're talking with Herzton." With this jocular warning Hensley turned to his other guests.

Professor Martin Herzton was a man to command attention. Tall, spare, and scholarly in appearance, he had about him a suggestion of extreme agility of both body and mind. In a razor-ridden age he had the courage to defy convention to the extent of a small, black, tapered beard, in which threads of gray were showing. It had the effect of bringing his face to a point and adding to the incisiveness of his

general appearance. His hair was black, with an occasional thread of gray; a good mat of it, carefully parted and brushed back over his long sharp ears. His nose, too, was sharp, and his eyes had a snap in them that was not unfriendly, but which suggested that here was a man in whom the head very conspicuously controlled the heart.

"I have heard something of you, Mr. Kent," Herzton was saying, in his deep, authoritative voice. "You are interested in wireless transmission of power, unless I am misinformed. A great field—a very great field! I can only regret that there are but twenty-four hours in a day, and the demands of the Hensley Radio Corporation—somewhat exacting—have kept me from dabbling in it. Fancy the time when our motor cars will be propelled by power generated at a central station with no more visible connection than there now is between the broadcasting antenna and that radio receiving set in the next room!"

"Then you think it possible, Professor Herzton? You don't count it just a fool's dream?"

"Fool's dream!" The professor laughed a robust, subterranean laugh. "The only people indulging in fool's dreams now, Mr. Kent, are those who think that *anything* is impossible. Why, a couple of centuries ago they would have

hanged a man—and probably have quartered him to boot—for even saying that the things we now do every day were possible. The telephone, the motor car, the airplane, radio—if these things had even been conceived they would have been condemned as not only immoral but atheistic. Suppose a hundred years ago I had stood on London bridge and said, ‘One hundred years from now a man will speak in London, and at that same moment another man in America will hear his words, and not only his words, but the minutest intonations of his voice,’ do you think I would have got off with a mere ducking in the Thames? Or suppose that in May, 1827, I had stood in the outskirts of Paris and said, ‘One hundred years from this day a man will rise from the solid earth in America like a bird and alight at this spot,’ would I not at least have been adjudged insane? Well, we’ve got past that, Mr. Kent, but we have still a large static public who imagine that the great inventions have all been invented; perhaps I shouldn’t put it that way; their imaginations are too constricted to project themselves forward into even the more obvious discoveries of the future.”

At that moment came a summons to the dining room, and Kent, promising himself more conversation with the professor later, turned to the business immediately in hand.

He found himself seated beside Gladys Hensley; across the table from her was Gordon Brace. As the meal and the conversation progressed, he began to identify the other guests, classify them, and get them tucked away in his memory. There was Dr. Alstice, family physician to the Hensleys, and Marion Alstice, his wife, who, being married to a doctor, was in a position to treat with contempt the somewhat obvious necessity of dieting; the Reverend Eugene Rogers, pastor of Lake Boulevard Central Church, and Mrs. Rogers; the three Hensleys, Gordon Brace, Professor Herzton, and himself. It was part of Kent's philosophy of a reasonably happy existence to guard against exaggerating his own importance, and he was well aware that no accomplishment of his offered an explanation of his admittance into this small and intimate group. The explanation must lie in Gladys Hensley, or her mother, or both; it could lie nowhere else.

Gladys gave most of her conversation to Gordon Brace, but when once Kent's hand touched hers under the edge of the table he did not immediately remove it, and she gave no sign of displeasure. Indeed, she gave no sign at all.

In and out of the room moved the maid, Florence Manners, whose expression had so puzzled Kent on the evening when Gladys had

fainted in his arms. She seemed to be a sort of chief of the Hensley staff. Instinctively he watched her movements and her gestures. This woman, he was convinced, knew more about the influences working on Gladys than did the other members of the family. When Kent suddenly found her unquestionably exchanging glances with Professor Herzton the discovery added interest, but not light, to an already baffling situation.

Discussion at the table, after flitting about like a bee tasting flowers, eventually settled down to feast upon the inexhaustible subject of radio. Compliments by Dr. Alstice on the singing of Gladys recently broadcast from one of her father's stations opened the way for a short dissertation by the doctor on his favorite theory—that every human mind is a radio receiving and broadcasting station.

“And the artists?” queried Professor Herzton.

“Ah, that is the point,” the doctor agreed. “Do we think, or do we just think we think? Does the mind generate thought, or does it merely relay it? I shall not attempt to answer that question. But I will say we know this—I think I will say we know it, Mr. Rogers”—turning to the Reverend Eugene Rogers, as though invoking the concurrence of the Church

—“I will say we know that the mind, whatever it is and wherever it is, is quite distinct from the brain. The brain is merely the mechanism for storage and reproduction, as the phonograph and the phonograph record are. The mind is something quite different. The brain, for example, dies. But the mind—what becomes of the mind, Mr. Rogers?”

The Reverend Mr. Rogers was about to make a statement on the subject when Mrs. Hensley, no doubt remembering that she already had listened to one sermon from him that week, intimated that the meal was finished.

“We generally dance after the men have smoked,” Gladys remarked to Kent in a low voice as they arose from the table. “Do you dance, or are you one of those serious young men too absorbed in a future to be interested in the present?”

Kent looked in her eyes, full now of a deep glow which strangely attracted him. “If you will be my partner,” he said, gallantly, “I hope I shall never be so foolish as to prefer anything the future may have to offer.”

She smiled agreement, and her lips parted to speak, but closed again as Professor Herzton joined them.

“I should like a little exploratory conversa-

tion with you, Mr. Kent," the professor announced, "but I know how Miss Hensley detests shop. Perhaps you would honor me by a visit to my laboratory. Any time."

Kent thanked him. It was just the invitation he wanted.

Professor Herzton bowed himself away. His movement and conduct were above criticism, and yet he impressed Kent as one working through some kind of formula—perhaps carrying out some hidden experiment.

"I am hoping for the first dance with you," Kent whispered to his companion.

"I should be glad," she answered.

Kent joined the other men in the smoking room. The conversation swung to politics, in which he had little interest, and he toyed with his cigar, thinking of Gladys and the strange turn in events which had brought her into his life. It was just seventy-two hours since he had met her. Seventy-two hours ago he did not know of her existence, and already the world seemed to rotate about her. He awaited with impatience the summons to the ballroom.

After a few minutes Professor Herzton excused himself, saying he wished to use the telephone. But down a corridor Kent was sure he caught a glimpse of him in conversation with

Florence Manners. He returned presently, his pointed face more foxlike than ever, and quickly picked up his place in the conversation.

The summons came at length. Mrs. Hensley appeared in the doorway.

"Haven't you men completed your fumigation?" she inquired. "Youth and beauty—to use a figure of speech—await your pleasure."

"A figure of speech, perhaps, but certainly no hyperbole," the Reverend Mr. Rogers gallantly rejoined, as the men filed into the ballroom.

As befitted his business, Angus Hensley insisted that orchestras were no longer a necessity in any private home. He adjusted the dials of a radio receiver and in a few minutes syncopated strains were pulsing through the room. Before Kent had realized what was happening, he saw Professor Herzton approach Gladys in his most captivating manner, and, almost with an air of proprietorship, request the honor of her company. To Herzton's surprise, and Kent's unreasonable delight, the girl excused herself. A moment later she was in Kent's arms. Discovery of the secret of wireless transmission could not have set his heart pounding with more abandon.

Gladys distributed her favors among the men of the company, but even a casual observer could not have failed to notice where her preference seemed to lie. Certainly it was obvious

to Professor Herzton, who, pleading pressure of business matters which required attention that night, took his departure at an early hour.

Kent, meanwhile, continued in high spirits. He ventured a suggestion that the last dance of the evening should be his.

"You are too gallant," she murmured.

"Not gallant. Selfish."

Her eyes met his and seemed to give consent.

But when he came to claim the dance she received him icily. "You are almost a stranger here, Mr. Kent," she said. "Older friends have a claim on me."

Had it not been for making a scene, Kent, in his chagrin, would have gone straight home. But he kept himself in hand enough to remember that other things were to be won in the Hensley home besides the favor of the fickle Gladys. The half-hour which remained he spent sharing the cigars and conversation of the president of the Hensley Radio Corporation.

As he was about to say good-night, Gladys met him with a contrite face.

"I'm sorry, Morley," she whispered. "I couldn't help it. I was under the spell."

CHAPTER FIVE

KENT rode home from the Hensley mansion in an entanglement of confused emotions. At one moment he felt that he was being trifled and played with; at the next, that he had been admitted into an intimate personal problem of the most baffling nature. If he tried to dismiss Gladys Hensley as an example of irresponsible fickleness, his intuition rebelled against such a conclusion. He found it impossible to think of Gladys in that way. Why, too, should she open to him one of the wealthiest homes in the city merely to torment him with vacillation? And was it conceivable that men and women like Mr. and Mrs. Hensley would be parties to conduct so reprehensible?

Yet the idea of blaming one's moods and misbehaviors on external, uncontrollable influences had in it elements of originality. It suggested vast possibilities.

"I believe that Professor Herzton knows more about this than is down in the books," Kent confided to himself, as the car neared his corner. He recalled the glances exchanged between the professor and the maid, Florence Manners—

surely a remarkable proceeding—and later, their meeting while Herzton pretended to be using the telephone. Manners was hardly the kind of woman the professor might be expected to select for flirtation or philandering. He recalled, too, her look of inscrutable understanding when Gladys had fainted in his arms.

“I have it!” said Kent with the suddenness of inspiration. “I have it!”

“Have what, sir?” queried the elevator man, courteously.

Kent glanced at the operator, whose eyes were twinkling at having caught the young inventor in one of his moods of absent-mindedness. They were alone in the car together.

“Not what you think, George,” he answered, as he got off at the seventh floor.

Kent dropped into his sagging chair, slipped off his shoes, and for a while was absorbed in thought. Little threads of evidence were already beginning to accumulate. Trifling in themselves, when twisted together they made a cord strong enough to carry something more than a shadow of suspicion.

“We’re getting light,” Kent complimented himself. “We’re getting light, even sooner than we had a right to expect it. If I had chosen to be a detective, rather than a trifle with the forces of nature, no doubt I would now be

ordering the Black Maria to await Professor Herzton's immediate convenience. But I can't travel so fast as that. I must feel my way."

Kent decided his next step would be to take advantage of the professor's invitation to visit his laboratory. He was impatient to go at once, but concluded it would be wiser to allow a day or two to pass, so that he might not appear to show undue eagerness. The dinner party at Hensley's was on Friday night; Monday, he decided, would be about the time to carry out his purpose.

Saturday forenoon he was busy in the shop. In the afternoon he tried to settle down to experiments in his little laboratory, but his head was filled, not with mechanical inspirations, but with visions of Gladys and country fields and a June afternoon. He wondered if she would despise a place by his side in his simple car. The thought brought home to him the fact that he had nothing to offer this girl, now living in the luxury of a millionaire's home; nothing at all but the vague prospects of an unknown inventor. Yet the logic of that fact did not assuage his desire for her company. He hummed a popular song about "Tell me why all the sunshine comes just at one time, when I'm with you," and wondered why those lines never had appealed to him before as they did to-day.

"What has got into the head of the firm?" Powers had inquired of Vera that morning in the shop. "He's mooning around like an orphaned duck."

Vera had no heart to joke about it. "I suppose he's working out some problem about wave lengths or something," she suggested.

Powers laughed. "Permanent wave lengths, I guess. He's been as sociable as a cactus ever since he smashed into that Hensley girl Tuesday night. You ought to take better care of him, Vee. Not but what old Angus Hensley might prove a pleasant godfather for the firm, but Morley is going to mess it all up by getting sentimental about the girl. When the old man gets wise to that he'll throw 'im out, and then—good-night!"

Kent's first impulse was to make an appointment with Professor Herzton by telephone, but on second thought he decided to pay his visit unannounced. That would afford no opportunity for the ingenious stage-work with which he associated the professor. Accordingly he chose the middle of a busy Monday afternoon to make his call.

The plant of the Hensley Radio Corporation occupies several acres of land just outside the city proper. The esthetic note is not missing;

green lawns, dotted with beds of sprightly colored flowers, and curving walks to the main entrance seem to intimate that here is an institution which, although devoted in the main to the god Production, still has time to spare a thought for the things of the soul. Inside the red brick wall that intimation is lost in the roar of machinery and the bustling efficiency of a great enterprise.

Kent entered a large hall, walled with glass, through which he caught a glimpse of an army of clerks and stenographers busy at their desks. He presented himself at the information counter.

"Have you an appointment with Professor Herzton?" the brisk young woman in charge inquired.

It occurred to Kent that if he waited while his card was sent up any advantage there might be in taking Herzton by surprise would be lost.

"Professor Herzton asked me to call; he is expecting me," he answered. It was poor truth that would not stretch that far on occasion.

The brisk young woman pressed a button, and a uniformed attendant appeared from nowhere. "Show the visitor to Professor Herzton's office, please," she directed.

They ascended in an elevator to the fourth floor; then followed a long passage through

busy rows of intricate machines. Bent though he was on a mission of such moment, Kent felt himself peculiarly thrilled by the magnitude of the Hensley works. His instinct for the mechanical was too strong to be denied a moment of exaltation amid such surroundings.

A wall divided the east end of the building from the large work-room. The attendant led Kent to a door in this wall, marked private, and knocked.

"Hello!" boomed a deep voice which Kent instantly recognized.

"Gentleman to see you, sir."

"Ah!" The single note was drawn sharply, with a rising inflection, as though to suggest that the information given was disappointingly incomplete.

"He says you are expecting him, sir."

Silence followed for some moments; then the knob turned and the door swung partly open. The sharp face with its pointed beard streaked with gray filled the aperture; the small dark eyes took in the uniformed attendant and the work-room beyond. A moment elapsed before they fell on Kent, standing a little to one side. When they saw him a very rapid camera might have caught a sudden hardening of the features, but the next moment the incisive face melted into a smile of welcome.

"Ah, Mr. Kent! Delighted!" the deep voice boomed again. "Come in!"

Kent entered a room furnished with the comforts of a gentleman's den. Two or three deep, easy chairs; a fireplace, not in use; bookcases; a table of magazines and technical publications; golf clubs; tobacco jars; a stand of pipes. Art reproductions on the walls, flower boxes suspended just outside the windows, continued the suggestion of the esthetic which marked the lawns and walks in front. Kent found himself wondering how far this man dictated the policy of the whole Hensley Radio Corporation.

"You should have let me know," Professor Herzton was saying, in a tone of mild reproof. "A telephone call; I would have sent a car for you—would have come myself. I have been looking forward to your visit ever since we met, under such very happy auspices, at Mr. Hensley's."

"It was to prevent that—your going to any trouble—that I called as I did," Kent explained. "I hope I have not come upon you at an inconvenient moment?"

"Oh, not at all! And pray be seated." He motioned his guest to a chair, and himself sank deeply into another, his knees rising sharply in front over his long shins.

In a moment he was up again. "A thousand

pardons! You will smoke, I hope? And perhaps a little drink? Mr. Hensley's well-known aridity, which, I trust, did not inconvenience you the other evening, is not enforced upon the members of his organization. A broad man, Mr. Hensley, entertaining strong views himself, and respecting them in others." He wheeled a little mahogany cellaret, surmounted by a glass humidor, to Kent's chair. If there had been any apparent lack of cordiality at the door it was evident Professor Herzton intended to remove that impression.

Kent declined the liqueur but accepted a cigar. Herzton snapped an electric lighter and joined him in a smoke. Behind the haze of conciliatory blue he referred to the delay in admitting Kent, as though it were preying upon his conscience as a perfect host.

"I hope you will pardon my hesitation at the door, Mr. Kent. The nature of my work is such that I have no assistant—not even a stenographer. Mr. Hensley feels that my experiments are too confidential to be intrusted to any second person, so I have to be my own doorman."

Kent again begged forgiveness if his visit was inopportune, but was assured that nothing was further from the fact. "I was just explaining the delay," the professor told him. "To you, within

the charmed circle of the Hensley family friendship, if I may put it that way, no doors are closed. Let us smoke and chat for a little, after which I must show you my shop."

In the position in which he was seated, Kent was facing away from the windows. He saw that the room was larger than he had at first supposed, and in the opposite end were a radio set, a couple of phonographs, two or three mechanical musical instruments, and even a piano.

"You are musical, Professor Herzton?" he suggested.

"Only slightly. But I have much to do with sound—with the study of wave lengths and vibrations. It is an engrossing subject, and these instruments are merely paraphernalia of my laboratory. By the way, did you have an opportunity the other evening to delve into some of the theories propounded by the Reverend Eugene Rogers? Oh, that is too bad," he continued, to Kent's negative reply. "Very interesting. Mr. Rogers has a theory that what science calls ether and what religion calls God are one and the same. Very interesting—ingenious, too, don't you think? We scientists affirm that ether fills all space and acts as the communicating medium between all bodies. Mr. Rogers goes us one better, and asserts that ether is mind—uni-

versal mind, if you like—constituting not only infinite intelligence and power, but infinite love. Get him on that subject some day; he'll interest you."

"Yes, I must go and hear him preach," Kent agreed.

Herzton laughed. "You won't hear *that* in his sermons. Mr. Rogers, like most preachers, I believe, is thinking miles ahead of his congregation. He doesn't dare tell them what he really believes; they can't grasp it. That has been the fate of thinkers, particularly of religious thinkers, always. And Rogers, whatever parroting he is doing in his sermons, is at least thinking in between. He contends, for example, that radio has demonstrated the reasonableness of prayer. If a mechanical contrivance can reproduce human speech thousands of miles from the place of its utterance, surely the infinitely finer mechanism of the mind and the soul, of which we know so little, is capable of transmitting its emotions to the very heart of the universe. Who knows?"

"Perhaps this is the line upon which you are experimenting?" Kent ventured.

The black eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly, and although a quick smile immediately followed, Kent felt that he had struck nearer

Herzton's secret than that gentleman cared to admit.

"No—no," the professor disclaimed the suggestion. "I deal with the physical, not the psychical. If the two somewhere overlap we shall find that out in time. For the present—— But you must see my laboratory, Mr. Kent."

He arose and led his guest into the next room. It had windows on two sides, flooding natural light on a maze of intricate apparatus. Herzton explained the equipment and the researches which he was conducting, often in terms too technical to be clearly understood by the young electrician. Another room adjoined to the left; they moved into it and found it similarly equipped. Still another door led again to the left. Kent noticed when he entered that it was standing slightly ajar. A few minutes later he saw it was closed. Yet no one had entered; there had been no sound save the resonant rumble of Herzton's voice and Kent's occasional higher-keyed interruption.

The closing of a door was a small thing, yet it was suggestive of the sense of mystery which, in spite of the obvious nature of Herzton's explanations, seemed to exude from the very walls and paraphernalia of the place. Feigning interest in a curious instrument, Kent edged toward the door. Then, suddenly:

"And this next room—I suppose it, too, is allotted to your experiments?" He placed his hand on the knob, but it was firm; the lock would not turn in his fingers.

Herzton, at Kent's words and action, had almost sprung toward him. It needed no camera this time to catch the sudden change in his expression. Yet it was for only an instant; his features smoothed again and a smile played on his thin lips.

"No—no," he explained. "Another officer of the company, who dislikes very much to be disturbed. I have come under his displeasure more than once, and I feared you might have to share it if the door had been unlocked."

Kent thought it strange that so grumpy a neighbor should be in the habit of leaving his door ajar, but he made no comment. He was convinced that the fourth room contained something he was not intended to see, and he made up his mind that at the very first opportunity he would see it.

Herzton led the way back to his sitting room, and Kent presently took his leave, with an invitation to call again whenever it suited his convenience.

"Sooner than you expect, Profesor Herzton," Kent confided to himself as he went down in the elevator.

CHAPTER SIX

ON THE afternoon following his visit to Professor Herzton's laboratory Kent observed Gordon Brace stop in front of the little electrical goods shop at 208 Eleventh Street. The young man glanced at the lettering on the windows, as though to make sure this was the place for which he was looking, then came briskly inside.

Kent greeted him with a cloak of cordiality covering no little curiosity. He had come for a purpose, and it was not likely he had searched out the shop of Kent & Powers to buy a flashlight or exchange a battery.

Brace returned his greeting. "May I see you alone, Mr. Kent? There are some things we might talk over together. I think they will interest you."

Kent led him into the little office at the rear, motioned his visitor to a chair, and extended cigarettes. Brace accepted one and had it going before he spoke.

"We are quite alone, Mr. Kent?"

"Quite."

"You must be surprised that I should call on

you, and more so when you learn of my mission. Under ordinary circumstances I would not have cared to put my cards on your table, but these circumstances are not ordinary."

The two young men were observing each other sharply, but Kent puffed a cigarette and waited for his guest to continue. He had not long to wait.

"You are interested in Miss Hensley?"

"Is that what you came to speak about? Then——"

Brace raised his hand. "Now, please! We may as well understand each other frankly. I have known Gladys Hensley for years; you have known her for only as many days. Your friendship has perhaps been more spontaneous than mine, but I can claim at least the virtue of priority."

"I do not know why we should discuss this subject, Mr. Brace. It is not quite the usual thing, is it?"

"But the circumstances are unusual," Brace persisted. "Can we agree on one thing—that we are both friends of Gladys Hensley?"

Kent had settled back in his chair. "Yes, you can count me in on that."

"And that when a girl is in danger it behooves her friends—her real friends—to drop their differences in her defense?"

Kent was sitting alert again. "You mean——"
"I mean that Miss Hensley is in danger. Haven't you seen that?"

Brace's small black moustache seemed to bristle with concern. "Haven't you noticed that?" he repeated.

"Yes, I have. I have been working out some theories of my own."

"I have my theories, too. But while we are working them out individually, the worst may happen. Why not check one against the other, and perhaps we can run this thing down before it is too late?"

It was impossible to doubt Brace's earnestness, and Kent made a quick decision. "All right," he said. "What do you think?"

"Herzton! Herzton's the man! Herzton knows all about it!" Brace's fist came down on the table. "I don't know how he's doing it, but he has got the girl under a spell. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, and that is just what makes it so baffling. If his system, or spell, or—whatever it is—worked every time, we should soon find a key to it. As it is—well, you have brains, Kent, and I modestly claim a few myself. Between us we should be too much for this wily professor."

"But why do you suspect Herzton?" Kent asked, feeling his way. "He is a man of reputa-

tion, apparently trusted by Miss Hensley's father. He would have everything to lose——”

“On the contrary, he has everything to gain, if his plan works. Herzton is ambitious—that much I know. He is unmarried. What would be simpler than to gain a wife, and, ultimately, control of the Hensley Radio Corporation, by marrying Gladys?”

It occurred to Kent that Brace might have similar ambitions, but he kept his suspicion to himself. Whether or not he should decide to work with Brace in this matter, it was at any rate important that he should gain all the information possible.

“You don't imagine that Miss Hensley cares for Herzton?”

“No—not really. But he is gaining a control over her that may go to any lengths. We've got to stop him, Kent. We've got to find out how he does it and blow up his little game. That's our job, and we've got to do it quick.”

Brace had risen and was walking about the room with long, nervous strides. His drawn face and set lips were proof of the concern he felt. Suddenly he turned again to Kent.

“Ever been in Herzton's laboratory?”

“Yes; accepted his invitation only yesterday.”

“Do you know about the fourth room?”

"He showed me only three."

"Of course." Brace's voice was bitter and sarcastic. "They are the blinds. The real business goes on in that fourth room. He takes no chances with his secret. You have to reach the fourth room through the other three, and the doors are all controlled by concealed switches. Without so much as appearing on the scene, Herzton could lock an intruder in any room and keep him there until he starved to death, if it pleased him to inflict that form of slow torture. Otherwise, he can flood any room at will with poisonous gas, and so close the incident quickly. My God, Kent, I just can't bear the thought of Gladys going to those rooms!"

"Gladys!" In his emotion Kent was tripped into using her Christian name. "You don't mean to say——"

Brace's expression softened; for a moment his lips relaxed in a smile. "I know now that you care," he said. "Just as I care, I suppose. Very well; we understand each other; we can settle that later. In the meantime, we must save Gladys."

"You say she goes to those rooms?" Kent repeated, as though unable to accept the significance of the words.

"Yes. Herzton, as perhaps you know, is a very

gifted musician, and Gladys sings—I won't say divinely, but quite well. He has a microphone installed in the outer room, so that Gladys can broadcast from there instead of going to the main station on the top floor, and he plays her accompaniments. Oh, believe me, Herzton has all the cards in his deck, and he knows how to use them."

Gordon dropped into his chair again, and for some minutes the two young men sat in silence. Frankly rivals, they had been drawn together by a danger which threatened them both.

Meanwhile, the tiny airplane, typical of all Kent had considered important only a week ago, whirred idly overhead, straining at its anchoring string like a prisoner eager to escape.

"What do you propose?" Kent asked at length.

"We've got to explore that fourth room, no matter what the risk. We shall find something there, or my hunch is wrong. Are you game?"

"Certainly, if that is the best course. But I am wondering. If your suspicions of Herzton are well-founded, why not place the whole thing before Mr. Hensley?"

Brace smiled. "You forget that Herzton is much closer to Mr. Hensley than I am. Mr. Hensley trusts him absolutely. He gives him a

free hand so far as the laboratory and his experiments are concerned. To question Herzton's good faith before we have the complete proof to lay on the table would be to invite ridicule. It is to get that proof I intend to explore those rooms. Are you with me?"

Kent extended his hand, and their palms clasped over his desk.

"When?"

"To-morrow night?"

"Good."

Brace left as alertly as he had come, but Kent stood in his office, caught in a medley of emotions.

He was still wondering when Vera entered the office. Her cheeks had in them an unwonted color as she laid a number of typewritten sheets on her employer's desk.

"What is this, Vera?"

"The transcript of your interview."

"Why——"

"You know—your standing instructions that all interviews with strangers are to be taken?"

Then Kent remembered. He had had difficulty over a patent as a result of information which a stranger had wormed out of him during a visit to his office. In a burst of enthusiasm, Kent had outlined, in general terms, a device which he believed could be used to direct waves

of electric energy. The visitor had lost no time in filing blueprints and specifications at the patent office, and although they were too crude to be of mechanical value they served the purpose of blocking Kent's own patent. At this juncture the stranger had magnanimously offered to sell out his rights for ten thousand dollars, and there the matter stuck. Warned by this experience, Kent had installed on his desk a second telephone which was always open, although a dummy receiver hung on the hook. This telephone he connected with a transmitter in a little room allotted to Vera, and gave the girl instructions that all interviews with strangers were to be taken down. They would be good evidence, if needed.

And now he had more evidence than he wanted! Evidence that Vera knew all about his interest in Gladys Hensley and his pact with Gordon Brace; evidence, too, that he had assured Brace their conversation was entirely confidential, while every word was being taken in by a woman's ears and placed on paper!

"That was quite right, Vee;" he managed to say, "although I really had forgotten about it."

"I thought so," the girl answered, "but—what else could I do?"

A catch in her voice raised his eyes to hers

and he saw the moisture hanging like a veil over those blue orbs.

Just as Kent was about to leave the office for the night, the little dark man whom he had seen at the inquest into the death of the taxi driver entered and begged a word with him. Kent remonstrated that it was closing time, and pleaded an evening engagement.

"But the matter is of great importance," the little man insisted. "Where can we speak alone?"

Kent led him back to his office and indicated the chair but recently vacated by Gordon Brace. The little man drew it up to the desk; his fingers danced nervously on the wooden top.

"You had a visit this afternoon from Gordon Brace?" he began the interview.

"Well?"

"Friends of Angus Hensley, or any member of his family, have little to do with Gordon Brace."

Kent had an impulse to throw his visitor out. Brace had succeeded in winning his confidence that very afternoon, and it was annoying to have his judgment so speedily challenged. But he remembered that he was engaged in an investigation of an unusually mysterious nature in which every atom of information might be of

value. Even wrong information might be helpful, as a guide to the right.

"Nonsense!" he returned, in a poor attempt to curb his impatience. "Brace is a regular caller at the Hensley home."

"That is just what makes him so dangerous, Mr. Kent," said the visitor, tapping his thin fingers sharply on the desk. "We never have met, Mr. Kent——"

"I have seen you before."

"Yes? At the inquest? But we have not been introduced. My name is Galut—Peter Galut. I am connected, in a confidential capacity, with the Hensley Radio Corporation."

"In that case, if you know anything against Mr. Brace, why do you not report it to Mr. Angus Hensley, your employer?"

"It would do no good, Mr. Kent. Mr. Hensley is a very able and wonderful man, but he is strangely devoid of suspicion."

"In that he seems to differ from some members of his staff."

Kent's words were still testy, but Galut answered him patiently.

"His staff have to give him the protection he will not take for himself, Mr. Kent. Even at that, he is being continually victimized by all sorts of parasites. Every crank inventor in the country seeks him out and usually gets backing

for even the wildest schemes. Mr. Hensley goes on the principles that the field of radio discovery is as yet only scratched, that great inventors are usually half-mad, and that every avenue is worthy of being explored. He will back a hundred schemes with his money, and if one of them proves a success he counts the whole investment well spent."

"Yes—but where does Brace come into all this?"

Galut shifted his position. His black eyes were fixed intently upon the young man across the desk.

"I have to take you into my confidence, Mr. Kent. The fact that I do so shows the trust which I, and those I represent, place in you. Mr. Hensley, or, more particularly, Professor Herzton, has all but perfected a static eliminator which will be to radio what the balloon tire was to the automobile—take the shake and rattle out of it, you understand. One link in the necessary chain of patents is, however, held by an outsider, a young inventor named Miles Freeman. His invention is of no value by itself, but it is required to complete the chain."

"And is the Hensley Radio Corporation prepared to buy it?"

"Certainly. We would stop at no price at all within reason."

"And Freeman knows all this?"

"Well—no. As I have told you, his invention is of no use by itself, but we need it to complete our chain. If we go ahead with our own discoveries, spend a barrel of money on new machinery, and so on, just when we are ready to launch our eliminator on the market some competitor may buy Freeman's patent, take out an injunction against us, and tie us up. Believe me, Mr. Kent, there are plenty who would like to catch the Hensley Radio Corporation in a trap like that. It means that whoever has Freeman's patent can levy tribute, because we could better afford to pay a handsome figure than be tied up in lengthy litigation. Brace in some way has learned this and is trying to beat us to it. As for Freeman, he is an adventurer, hoping to make a fortune out of patents, gold mines, or what-not. When he failed to sell his patent to Professor Herzton, he left for somewhere in northern Ontario or Manitoba to prospect for minerals, and Brace is moving heaven and earth to find him and buy his patent before he becomes aware of its value."

Kent remained silent for a moment, weighing Galut's argument. Then he shot in the dark:

"In other words, Freeman frankly showed his device to Herzton. Herzton told him it was useless, and promptly undertook to patent the idea

himself. Then he found that Freeman's patent was water-tight, and there was nothing to do but just buy him out?"

Galut raised a deprecating hand. "You do not do Herzton justice," he said. "He is merely trying to protect the company against a young man who poses as a friend of the Hensley family and who at the same time is trying to get control of a patent with which he could launch us into an expensive lawsuit unless we accept his terms."

Kent extended his cigarette case and helped himself. He tapped the little paper cylinder thoughtfully, lighted it slowly, and let the wreaths of blue smoke toy around his head before he spoke. Then:

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"I told you we believed you could be trusted."

"Who is 'we'?"

"Well, Professor Herzton and me."

"Oh!"

"You see," Galut continued, "Herzton has become interested in you and is prepared to make an ally of you. He is seeking to protect Mr. Hensley from exploitation, and he believes he can count on your help."

"In that he is quite right," Kent answered, with decision. "I shall be glad to do anything

I can to protect Mr. Hensley or any member of his family from exploitation or injury from whatever source, Mr. Galut—from whatever source." Kent paused on the repetition, but the little man's eyes never wavered.

"You have made a serious charge against Brace," Kent continued. "Not, perhaps, from a legal point of view, but serious as indicating his attitude toward the Hensleys. How do you know that Brace is planning as you say?"

"We know that he has sent telegrams addressed to Miles Freeman at twenty-eight points in northern Ontario and Manitoba, all the way from Cochrane to The Pas, with instructions to hold until delivered."

"How did you find that out?"

"We have friends,"—significantly. "We know, too, that Brace is holding himself ready at a moment's notice to rush north and meet Freeman. He must not have an hour's lead on us."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Get his confidence. Keep in the closest possible touch with him."

"And then betray him?"

"No! Prove that you are a real friend of Angus Hensley's by crimping Brace's scheme either to hold up the company or make himself a good fellow by turning over the patent at a

nominal price—and marrying the president's daughter!"

"Ridiculous!"

"Not at all, my dear fellow. You see, she might not count it a sacrifice. There seems to be a leaning that way already," Galut added, watching the effect of his words upon his auditor.

"I have nothing but your statement for all this," Kent reminded him. "What proofs?"

"Proofs? Come with me."

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON THE street Kent and Galut were reminded that evening was setting in, and they had not yet eaten. They shared a table at the Arcadia Restaurant, after which Galut led the way through the streets to a dark factory building in the manufacturing section of the city. The building was closed for the day, but its windows were still aglow with the mauve and copper of the setting sun.

"This building," Galut explained, "is rented to a number of tenants for manufacturing purposes. The tenants know little about one another; the coming and going of a stranger would attract no attention. For that reason Brace has selected a room here where he stores documents and supplies that he considers unsafe in his office."

Galut turned down an alley and stopped at a shipping door which opened on a platform at the level of a truck. The two men clambered onto the platform, and Galut, taking a tool from his pocket, inserted it in the crack of the door

and raised a catch inside. He slid the door open and motioned Kent to follow him.

The building exuded a smell of textiles, and Kent judged that it was used mainly for the manufacture of clothing. It was quite dark inside, but Galut, taking Kent's arm, led him along a labyrinth of stairs and passages. At length they stopped at a door before which Galut listened intently. Satisfied that there was no one about, he drew a key from his pocket and stealthily turned the lock. The door opened upon a room of uncertain size, its walls and corners lost in the gloom which, shrouding the whole building, seemed to concentrate at this particular spot. A window occupied part of one wall; through its murky panes a wan light sifted, and, beyond, Kent outlined the ribs of a fire escape.

Galut moved to the window and drew down the blind, then stealthily applied his flashlight. He played it over the floor and walls, revealing an old wooden desk in one corner of the room.

"There are papers in that desk—papers that he would not intrust to any safety deposit vault in this city. He is depending on the secrecy of this old factory. But he has underestimated us, Mr. Kent, as most people do who set themselves against the Hensley Radio Corporation, or, more particularly, against Professor Martin

Herzton and Mr. Peter Galut." The little man's pride was bound to take an airing. "We are borrowing his plans from time to time to make copies, returning them here after short intervals, and trusting that he will not miss them in the meantime."

"You photograph them, I suppose?"

"Well, we copy them." Galut apparently was not prepared to explain his method.

Kent was wondering whether the fortunes of a great concern such as that headed by Angus Hensley had to be built up and protected by espionage and theft. He was wondering, too, that Galut should have taken him so much into his confidence. For the second time he mentioned the matter.

"We trust you," Galut answered, simply. "Your interests are with us. Prove your loyalty to Mr. Hensley and he will back your wireless power investigations—in which Professor Herzton is greatly interested—to the limit. Should you prove disloyal you will find, Mr. Kent, that we can take care of you, just as we can take care of Mr. Brace." Galut's words carried the threat in a matter-of-fact tone, as one who is dispassionately stating a piece of information.

"We trust you," Galut repeated, after a pause, "and I shall show you that when we trust a man we hold nothing back. See."

He selected another key and knelt before the desk. He inserted the key, turned the lock, pulled the drawer. As he did so shots rang out—one, two, three, and Galut settled to the floor like a heap of crumpled paper. The flashlight had fallen so that it poured into a face caught in the sudden agony of death. The room was filled with the smell of burnt powder.

Aghast at this sudden tragedy, Kent knelt hurriedly beside the prostrate figure. "Galut, are you killed?" he cried. The rattle in the dying man's throat was the only answer. He thrust his hand over Galut's heart. It came back warm and wet.

Kent's own heart was thumping terrifically as the situation gradually unfolded itself. Galut was dead—there was no doubt about that. An automatic revolver, cunningly built into the desk, evidently had been so arranged that it was discharged when the drawer was pulled. At the level of the desk-top, the aim was point blank into the chest of the intruder. Kent reflected grimly that ingenuity was not all on the side of Herzton and Galut; Brace also had his share. It was plain that he had discovered his papers were being molested and had taken this effective means of protecting them.

With a sickening emptiness about his belt-line, Kent gazed in fascination upon the body

of Galut, now lying flat on the floor. The flashlight, still lying where it had dropped from Galut's hand, blazed perversely into the distorted face, now gray and hardening into the rigidity of death. How small and futile the crumpled little figure looked! Boastful only a moment ago; already hastening to decomposition!

But Kent had little time for moralizing. What to do was the question. Report the matter to the police? That seemed the normal course, but was it the wise one? He would be involved in the inquiry, and his testimony would involve in turn Herzton, Brace, and, indirectly, Angus Hensley. It would bring concern, if not shame, upon the Hensley household—upon Gladys Hensley. Kent thought of her as he knelt in the musty room with this stiffening body before his knees. At the moment she seemed worlds removed from him. . . . Then as to Brace—should he be tried for murder?

Still sitting on his knees in the gloomy room, with the dead body before him, Kent turned over in his mind the various possibilities. The place seemed stiflingly hot; he felt the perspiration starting on his face and hands. He was oppressed with a sense of being trapped; the great, silent, black building seemed crushing down upon him. Suddenly a sound, as of a foot-

step on the creaking floor, caught his ear and stirred him to action. He lurched to his feet and was surprised how uncertain were his limbs beneath him.

"Well, I can't stay here," he reasoned with himself. "If I report it to the police I'll have to tell them what I know; in short, that Angus Hensley's company employ burglary in their business, and one of their burglars has been killed. After all, it's Brace's affair, not mine; let him put on it the best face he can. I am the innocent bystander, if there is any such person, and my only responsibility is not to interfere with justice, which, in this case, seems to have had its course already. Galut perhaps got more than was coming to him, but it can't be taken back now, and Brace may have some scheme of his own for disposing of the evidence. In the meantime, I'd better keep all I know under my hat; I may need it later on."

Unsatisfactory as these conclusions were, none better offered itself, and he decided to make his escape without further delay. The possibility that he might be discovered in the room with the dead body was not an inviting one. He made his way to the door, but he had paid no attention to the stairs and passages by which he had come, and to retrace his steps might result in his becoming lost amid the building's laby-

rinthine corridors. No doubt one or more night watchmen made their rounds from time to time; if one of them stumbled upon him, the association with Galut's death, when it was disclosed, would be embarrassing.

In this predicament he remembered the fire escape, its ribs spanning the window against a murky gray light which filtered up from the alley below. Turning back into the room, he released the catch on the window and found it answered to his touch. He was on the fourth or fifth story, and the iron ladder zigzagged back and forth along the wall beneath him. Feeling very much like a criminal, he slipped through the window, closed it after him, and cautiously made his way downwards. At the bottom story the ladder was suspended from the ground by a counterpoise, but it answered to his weight, and he reached the lane without difficulty. So far as he knew he had not been seen, and, with solid ground under him, he breathed more freely. Already the shooting of Galut seemed unreal, like something that had happened in a dream from which he would presently awake. He found his way along a dark alley that ended at a street, and waited for the first car to take him back to his rooms.

An unpleasant shock awaited him in the street car. Reaching into his pocket for change

to pay his fare, he suddenly noticed that his hands were stained with blood. With a closed fist he hastily dropped a coin in the farebox, without asking for change, and moved up among the passengers. He rode with his hands in his pockets, hoping they had not been observed. In the same apparently nonchalant manner he walked from the car and entered the elevator at 426 Eleventh Street. Fortunately, there was no other passenger.

George, the elevator attendant on duty, seemed disposed to talk. "A pleasant evening, Mr. Kent," he assayed, "although a little warm, as we may expect, at this time of year."

"It is warm," Kent agreed.

But the elevator man was staring at him. He had brought the car to a stop at the seventh floor.

"You didn't hurt yourself, Mr. Kent?" he asked, anxiously.

"Why, no, I don't think so."

"There's blood on your forehead, Mr. Kent. Thought you looked pale when you came in, and now I see a little blood there, when you turn to the light."

Involuntarily Kent's hand went to his head, exposing the much heavier smear on his palm. "Must have scratched myself, some way. It's nothing; I didn't feel it," he stammered, and

hurried to his room. There, before his mirror, he saw a face pale with mental shock. There was a small spot of blood on the forehead.

"Must have touched myself there," he soliloquized. "Suppose everybody on the street car saw it. And George—well, he won't say anything, but he can't help wondering. Silence may get me in wrong in this business. I've half a notion to call the police."

But he washed his hands and face, and, when they were quite clean, he was less disposed to carry out that purpose. He argued with himself that it wasn't his affair, and he was much better out of it. Speciously, he convinced himself that he might even serve Mr. Hensley and Gladys better by keeping silence for the present, and confiding in them at the proper time.

Kent went to bed, but slept poorly. Desks, dark rooms, and automatic revolvers—the latter wielded by a little dark man—invaded his consciousness at all hours of the night.

He arose early and, still in his pajamas, slipped out to the elevator and bribed the boy to bring him a morning paper. George's shift was over, so there were no further complications in that connection. Eagerly his eyes seized upon the headlines, but they carried no reference to the tragedy of Peter Galut. Evidently newspapers and police were still blissfully un-

aware of the happenings in the old factory building the night before.

At the shop he found Powers in a talkative mood, but he had little stomach for conversation. He wished he could go away into the country, to his boyhood home, perhaps, and sit down by the water and think until all this musty haze cleared away and the air was bright and pure again.

"Can't make out what's got into Morley," Powers confided to Vera. "He's about as responsive these days as a blown-out fuse."

Vera had her own opinions, but she refrained from giving them expression. "Perhaps he is wrapped up in some idea for his invention," she again suggested.

Powers scoffed that explanation. "Nothing further from his mind," he retorted. "He has scarcely looked at our experiments for a week. He's gone loony over that Hensley girl; that's what is the matter with him. Instead of using her as a means to an end, as I playfully suggested, she has become the end itself—the end of everything. Until he wakes up. Then it will be a cold gray morning after."

Powers had been unpacking and mechanically testing light bulbs as he talked, slipping them deftly into an open circuit, holding them

a fraction of a second until the filaments glowed white against his hand. Now he looked up, straight into the eyes of Vera, and a bulb fell smashing to the floor, for in that unguarded instant he read something so obvious that he had been blind to it for many months. For a moment he stood wordless as he made his mental adjustments; then a realization of how he had been torturing her almost overcame him. Every word of his thoughtless levity must have pierced her like a steel barb.

He seized her hands in his. "Hang it, Vee, I'm sorry! I hadn't an idea—— Wouldn't hurt you for the world. Don't take what I said too seriously; it'll all come right."

Her eyes had dropped from his; bravely though she fought for self-control, her lips trembled traitorously. Then, because there was no one in the shop, and because she needed so tremendously someone to lean upon, she drew a little nearer to his arms.

"It's all right, Harry," she managed to say. "You didn't know, and he doesn't know. I have no right—— Oh, what's the use of explanations, where nothing can be explained?" She drew from him again, plunging violently into the work which he had dropped.

For the time nothing more was said about it,

but a new understanding was established between them.

Kent, unaware of the diagnosis and confessions that were taking place in the outer shop, tried in vain to concentrate on the sheets of blueprints lying on his desk. Before ten o'clock his ears were alert for the newsboys calling the noon editions. It was, therefore, something of a relief, as well as a shock, when Gordon Brace burst into his office.

Brace was obviously excited. "I say, Kent," he plunged into his subject, "do you know a man named Galut? A wizened up, black little thing, but quick as a spider. A good deal of a spider he is, too, always spinning his webs?"

"Met him yesterday," Kent answered. "I had the honor of a call from him soon after you left."

Brace flung himself into a chair. "I had heard as much," he said. "And no good reports did he carry about me, I'll wager. Ever meet him before?"

"I had seen him, but I did not know who he was. He was at the inquest—you remember?"

"Yes—there as Herzton's spy! A moment ago I called him a spider. The first syllable was right, anyway—spy; Herzton's spy, and black-hander upon occasion!"

"But, at least, Herzton had nothing to do

with the taxi driver's accident," Kent reminded his visitor. "What interest could he have in that?"

"He has an interest in everything in which Gladys Hensley is concerned," Brace retorted, impatiently. "Kent, that girl and what she represents is the prize Herzton is chasing to earth, and he's too thorough to leave any exits unguarded."

Kent was too much concerned to note the confusion in Brace's metaphors. His sympathies had been pendulating back and forth until he scarcely knew where he stood or what to believe. Yesterday afternoon Brace had won his confidence; last night he had found himself leaning toward Galut and Herzton; to-day, Brace's sincerity and concern were too obvious to be questioned. He was trying to find a balance between these conflicting emotions when Gordon spoke again:

"Galut visited you last night. That seems to have been the last seen of him. Tell me, Kent, do you know where he is now?"

Kent felt that, technically at least, he could answer no.

Brace opened and shared a new package of cigarettes.

"This is no time for half measures," he said at length. "And that means no time for half

confidences. If we hold back on each other they're going to beat us. I went a long way with you yesterday. I'm going further today. Ever hear of an inventor named Miles Freeman?"

"Galut mentioned him last night."

Brace sprang from his chair. "He did, eh? Then I'm right. That's the tack they're working on. What did he say about Freeman?"

"Said that Freeman had an invention which was very important to the Hensley Radio Corporation, and that you were trying to get control of it, so that you could dictate terms to Angus Hensley. Said also that Freeman is now somewhere in northern Ontario or Manitoba, prospecting for minerals, and that you are trying to locate him by telegraph so that you can buy out his rights before the Hensley Radio Corporation has an opportunity to bid on them."

"So? Then there's a leak in the telegraphs. I must send my messages from some other city. What else?"

"You remarked a moment ago, Mr. Brace, that this is no time for half confidences. He added that part of your scheme is to capture the hand of Gladys Hensley in marriage."

Brace colored, but burst into loud laughter. "You didn't believe that? I mean—that I would make it a matter of business? That's too silly for words!"

"I am only telling you what he said."

"Yes, and it's very interesting. That last touch was intended to enlist your sympathies against me. So far as Glad is concerned, we know where we stand. Our job at present is to protect her from this menace, whatever it is, and for that purpose we must combine our forces. Afterwards—let the best man win! But I give you my word, Morley, that for the present my concern is for her, and her father, and mother, rather than myself."

It was the first time he had used Kent's Christian name, and with the new familiarity he extended his hand. Kent seized it warmly. "I believe you—Gordon," he said.

Their friendship so cemented, Brace plunged into Galut's revelations. "Galut was partly right. I *am* trying to get in touch with Freeman so that I can secure his patent for Mr. Hensley. Galut and Herzton are trying to get it in order to hold up their chief. Remember, the manufacturer who controls a complete static eliminator can force every competitor into bankruptcy. Herzton will state his price—the presidency of the company, and Gladys for his wife. Rather than see her father humiliated in business, Gladys would probably make the sacrifice."

Kent reflected how closely Brace's accusations paralleled Galut's. "Oh, I have proof,"

Gordon continued, in answer to Kent's up-raised eyebrows. "Herzton has been filing patents in *his own* name, not the name of the Hensley Radio Corporation. Isn't that evidence enough? Also I have a few inventions of my own, not yet in the patentable stage, which they have been trying to steal. For safety I had them in a desk in an old factory building, but they traced me down. I found my papers were being removed and replaced. I had stuck them together with tiny particles of wax, and the wax was broken. So I arranged a revolver in the desk in such a way that it would be discharged if the drawer was opened without disconnecting it by means of a secret key. Last night the revolver was discharged. Three cartridges were empty, and there was blood on the floor."

Brace's face had gone white. Kent was trying to appear appropriately shocked, and his heart was pounding treacherously. Should he tell Brace everything or keep his secret?

"But the body?" he asked.

"Ah, that is the mystery," Brace returned, his face grown whiter still. "*There was no body.*"

Kent's agitation did not need to be feigned. No body! Then someone had visited that room after he had left. He was quite sure Galut was dead. Should he tell Brace now? No—better keep it in reserve.

"Have you reported the matter to the police?"

"Not yet. You see, I must find Freeman, and every moment counts. After what you have told me, I know that Herzton will not rest an hour until he has set machinery on foot to reach him first. So you see, Kent, I can't be tied up now in inquests and trials and court proceedings of one kind and another. Apparently the marauder was only wounded. The window had been opened; there are blood stains on it, and there is evidence that someone went down the fire escape. I never have been anxious to kill anyone, Morley, and it is just as well he got away. My hunch is it was Galut. I must leave at once to find Freeman, but I wanted to give you these facts before I left."

He arose to go, and the two young men shook hands warmly. Kent found himself now unreservedly on the side of Gordon Brace. If he still kept silence about his experience of the night before it was because he had decided in this matter to keep his own counsel, at least until some of the haze surrounding Gladys Hensley had been cleared away. At the proper time he would be prepared to speak.

Early in the afternoon Vera laid on Kent's desk a transcript of the morning's conversation. "Heavens!" thought Kent. Aloud:

"I don't know that it is worth your while

taking these conversations, Vee. They don't involve any patent rights belonging to the firm."

Vera's eyes faced him squarely. "No, they don't, Morley," she said, "but they involve something more important than patent rights. They involve you. You are becoming involved in plots and counter-plots. These transcripts may be just what you need to prove someone's guilt—or your own innocence—before the thing is over."

Kent wondered that he had not thought of that before. "By George, Vera, you're right! Take everything you can get. Even this."

He would have drawn her to him, but she held away. "No, Morley," she said. "I can't accept—just kindness."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE evening papers had the story. Kent seized a copy from a newsboy and hurried into his own back office to learn what the press and the police had so far discovered.

The news was slim enough, although with headings, boxes, and elaborations, it was spattered over several columns. The body of a man identified as Peter Galut had been found on a ledge of an old factory building two stories above the ground, where it was first seen by a stenographer looking out of a window higher up across the street. In its fall from a higher level the body apparently had hit the fire escape and had been flung into a little recess which hid it from general view. Three bullet holes were found in the chest, precluding the theory of suicide, as, if the wounds had been self-inflicted, it would have been impossible for the victim to fire the second and third shots. Also, it was evident the body had been handled; the shirt was smeared, and fingerprints found were not those of the dead man. Powder marks showed that the shots had been fired at very close range.

The six o'clock edition had further details. The room in which the murder was committed had been located; blood stains were found on the floor, but no sign of a struggle. Evidently the body had been thrown out of the window. Footprints and fingerprints, not of the dead man, had been found on the fire escape.

Kent felt as though his heart suddenly stood still as the consciousness dawned upon him that the police had his fingerprints. If suspicion ever should be directed toward him that evidence would be damning. Feverishly he read on:

The police were now convinced that two assailants had taken part in the crime, as fingerprints of two different men had been found on the window, and on the body, neither of which corresponded to those of the victim. One of these men apparently had gone down the fire escape; the other one had not.

As he read Kent found the mystery somewhat disentangling before him. Another man had entered the room, perhaps soon after the shooting of Galut. Who? Not Brace, or he would have known what became of the body. Who then? Someone who was interested in preventing the discovery of the crime, or at any rate, association of it with Brace's room. Herzton! It was clear as a book! Herzton either had followed Galut, or, missing him, had sought him in the

old factory building. Kent felt the hair twitch about the back of his neck as a new thought struck him. Perhaps Herzton had been in the building all the time! Perhaps Galut had been sent to decoy Kent—and then, when neither Galut nor Kent returned, Herzton had come to Brace's room, found his confederate dead upon the floor, and Kent gone. Evidence like that, and fingerprints! Kent began to wish he had reported the whole matter to the police at once, or at least had made a clean breast of it to Gordon Brace.

The shooting had taken place in a room rented for storage purposes by Gordon Brace, well-known young financier and sportsman, the paper went on to say. An old desk had been fitted with a revolver, which was discharged when the drawer was pulled. Just who was responsible for this infernal machine had not yet been determined. Brace was apparently out of town; he had not been located by the police.

Yes, Brace was gone. Kent could understand that. He evidently had left that very morning on his search for Freeman. His sudden flight upon the discovery of the crime committed in his room—what interpretation would be placed upon that?

Kent was still sitting in his office, turning these matters over in his head, long after Vera

and Powers had left for the day. It seemed certain that suspicion would attach itself to Brace. Eventually he would be run down and brought back for trial. Then what? Was it a crime to set a gun in one's own room to catch a burglar or a thief? Kent's knowledge of law was limited mainly to the field of patents, but it seemed reasonable that Brace's offense, if any, was one for which a clever lawyer could construct much justification. The point of most importance was that the inquiry would involve the Hensley Radio Corporation, and Angus Hensley would be held at least to some extent responsible for the misdeeds of his minions. Kent had already formed an attachment for the good-natured, open-handed radio magnate which, he told himself, was quite distinct from any emotion he felt for the magnate's daughter.

Suddenly he found himself caught in a gust of loneliness for the entrancing girl who, in such an inexplicable manner, was involved in all these mystifying events—about whom, indeed, they seemed to rotate. He tried to remember how long it was since he first had seen her, and was surprised to find it only a week and one day. He had an impulse to drive to her home that night; to enjoy for an hour or two the stimulus of her company; to divulge, perhaps, some of the information which had come to him, and to

review the whole situation in the light of such confidences as she might extend.

While he was turning this course over in his mind he fancied he heard a tap on the outer door of the shop, now locked for the night. A moment later it was unmistakably repeated. He arose and walked to the door, expecting to find some belated customer wanting a fuse plug or other such trifle.

On the step he met Gladys Hensley. The girl's clear cheeks seemed paler than usual; her lips were straight and set; the glow in her eyes shone from the depths of troubled pools.

"Oh, Mr. Kent—Morley!" she exclaimed. "Can you forgive my troubling you again? I saw a light shining from the office behind, and took a chance on your being in. Of course, you have heard the terrible news?"

"I have seen the papers. Won't you come in?"

"No, please. I have my car; won't you drive me home and tell me what you know?"

Kent joined her in her car, and, at her bidding, took the steering wheel. Even the joy of having Gladys at his side, full though it filled his heart, left room for a thrill of pure delight as the great eight-cylinder car bounded at his touch. The purr of the beautiful engine was heavenly music in which, for the moment, he forgot all the world beside.

For a few blocks he followed the course to Lake Boulevard. Then, obeying a sudden impulse, he turned onto a highway leading into the country.

"You are in no great hurry?" he asked.

"I can spare an hour."

For some distance they spun on together in silence, Kent mentally and physically conscious of the girl at his side, caught again in the wonderful magnetism with which she attracted him; Gladys, too, not without consciousness of her companion, but with a mind oppressed by the tragic series of events in which Gordon Brace was so obviously a factor. She sat without speaking, her eyes fixed on the highway rolling like a long black belt beneath the car, while Kent guided the machine through the thinning traffic.

Suddenly she placed her hand upon his arm. It was the touch of a feather, but it sent Kent's blood dancing. He noticed, too, the nervous tremble of her fingers, and that they held to him as if for support.

"You don't believe Gordon did it, do you?" Concern, appeal, entreaty were in her voice. It brought him back from a silvery little heaven into the stern realities of the day.

"No, I don't; I certainly do not," he answered, with the emphasis of conviction. He could feel, rather than see, the expression of

gratitude and relief which ran across her cheeks, pale but glowing in the evening sunlight.

"But where can he be?" she cried, alarm again upon her. "I have tried everywhere. Why doesn't he come out—why doesn't he tell them he didn't do it?"

"No one has accused him, dear," Kent reminded her. The term of endearment slipped out quite naturally and without premeditation. If she heard it at all she gave no sign.

"Have you seen him recently?"

"Yes—to-day."

"To-day? Did he say anything about the—about what has happened?"

Kent thought it as well to tell her. "Yes, all he knew about it. It seemed he had some valuable papers in that desk, and he found they were being examined by someone without authority. So he set a gun to catch the thief. That is how the shooting happened, but I don't see that it is a crime for a man to protect his own property."

She was intensely interested, and, he thought, relieved. "But why doesn't he tell them—why doesn't he tell the police all about it?" she insisted. "He could clear the matter up in ten minutes. Surely it is folly to keep anything like that from the police! They will find it out, and his silence will place him under suspicion."

Her words drilled into Kent as though they

had been intended for his special benefit. Perhaps it was folly, but——

“He can’t tell them,” he tried to explain. “People for whom he has a high regard—close friends of his—would be involved, at least indirectly. Besides, he has a very important business engagement away from the city which demands immediate attention. He cannot afford to be delayed by police investigations and red tape.”

“Then he has left the city? When the police learn that they will bring him back like a criminal!”

Kent had thought of that, too. It seemed the inevitable result of Brace’s action. But he tried to set her mind at rest as they returned by another route to Hensley House.

Kent stopped the car, and for a few minutes Gladys remained seated by his side, as though loath to leave. In the dusk and silence their hands had met. She must be conscious of it now, for Kent’s slight pressure was returned with a firm quick grip.

She was summoning courage for a confession. “You know those moods of mine?” she burst out at length. “Usually they make me do something I don’t want to, but to-night—it is the strangest thing!—it was quite the opposite. About six o’clock I felt a sudden and impetuous desire to—to take you out motoring with me.”

He knew she was blushing modestly, although only the outline of her face was visible in the shaded seclusion of the car. A little apologetic laugh rippled from her lips. "And so I just came along," she added. "If they were all as pleasant as that we wouldn't need to do anything about it, would we?"

Kent felt that she was traveling fast, but he was eager to keep pace. "I should say not!" he assured her. "The oftener the better!"

She again lapsed into silence, and the moments, precious for the intoxication of her presence, slipped by. Then:

"I don't think I will ask you to come in to-night, Morley," she said. She had picked up his Christian name as though it belonged to her. "We're all so upset. You see, Gordon is an old friend of Daddy's; of all of us, don't you understand? I'm sure if it's money he needs, for defense or anything, he needn't worry about that. But you are always welcome, and you will come out again one of these nights, won't you? And bring me good news, as soon as you can?"

"I shall rush out the very moment I get it," he told her. Then, as he stepped from the car, "Thank you so much," she said. "You have given me a great deal of comfort. I would like to drive you home, but I must already be delaying dinner. You don't mind, do you?"

Even in the distress which agitated her, she had a friendly flourish of her hand for him as he disappeared down the drive which leads to Lake Boulevard.

Kent stopped at a restaurant, and, in washing for dinner, was surprised to note how soiled were his hands. The palms and fingers almost seemed to have been sprinkled with a black dust or powder. He washed them carefully and, for the moment, gave no further thought to the matter.

At dinner everyone seemed to be talking about the Galut shooting. Different terms were used to name the tragedy, varying all the way from murder to an act of public service. It was evident that a partisanship for and against Brace's method of property protection was quickly crystallizing.

"You wait till that fellow Brace turns up," a loud-voiced diner at a neighboring table was telling the world. "He'll give the police an earful, see if he don't."

"Yes, and they'll give him an earful, and about ten years to digest it," another patron predicted.

Kent's mind was divided between such observations and an insistent appraisal of the interest of Gladys Hensley in Gordon Brace. He tried to assure himself it was natural enough that the

girl should be concerned about Brace; as she had said, he was an old friend of hers and of the family. Nothing remarkable about that. And he extracted no little comfort from the thought that in her distress she had come to him—direct to him—even at the cost of some conventionality. The recollection of her presence by his side still thrilled him more acutely than any sense of the tragedy with which he had been so strangely and secretly connected. The whole affair of the shooting of Galut was already assuming proportions of unreality in his mind like some dream rehearsed in that strange borderland between sleep and waking when it seems to belong to the sphere of both and neither.

It was late when Kent reached his lodgings, but from force of habit he glanced at his mail box. It contained a letter which he opened after he had thrown his coat on a chair and removed his collar, for the night was warm:

DEAR KENT:

Come to my office at once when you receive this note. Never mind how late. Go to the first side entrance; you will find a watchman there who will bring you up in the elevator. It is about Galut.

MARTIN HERZTON.

“Herzton! What does he want with me, and does he think I must run at his call, like a faith-

ful dog, or an employee of the Hensley Radio Corporation? And why does he link me up with Galut?"

Kent felt a surge of resentment go over him at the almost dictatorial tone of the note. His first impulse was to ignore the request, or at least to postpone compliance with it. Why should Herzton wish to discuss this affair with him? He had little doubt that the professor knew of his presence with Galut in that fatal chamber, and the thought came to him that this urgent invitation might have sinister significance. Did Herzton wish to close his mouth? And, if so, what means would he adopt? Argument, bribery, or force? Not without a realization that his visit might involve physical danger, Kent resumed his collar and coat, and surprised his friend George of the elevator by going out again at so late an hour.

"A warm night, Mr. Kent," he suggested. "Too warm for sleep?"

"It is warm," Kent agreed. "A little fresh air may not go amiss." He wondered whether George was thinking of the bloodstains of the night before.

A taxi whirred him to the great red brick pile which housed the activities of the Hensley Radio Corporation. The buildings were now in

darkness, save for lights which marked the elevator tubes and main corridors. The grass of the lawn showed richly green where the headlights of the taxi swept across it as they turned up the drive leading to the side entrance; beds of peonies reflected white and pink combinations of color against the dull gray of stone foundations beyond.

Kent was about to pay his driver and send him home when a sudden premonition seized him. He handed the man his business card.

"That's my firm—Kent & Powers. I am Kent," he explained. "I want you to go to my office at ten in the morning and ask for me. If I'm not there hand this letter to my partner and tell him about our trip here to-night."

He took from his pocket the letter of Professor Herzton, stuffed an extra tip in the envelope, and placed it in the driver's hand. "You understand? Just a check-up in case I should be missing in the morning," he explained. And the taxi man, accustomed though he was to strange commissions, gave a second glance at Kent before he turned his car toward the street.

"Morley, I wonder if your nerves are getting jumpy?" Kent asked himself, as he pushed the night bell. "Well, it was a good precaution. That letter, with Vera's transcripts, will make evidence enough if it should be needed."

A night watchman answered the bell. "I am to see Professor Herzton," Kent explained.

The man nodded, as though he had been waiting for him, and led him through the great building, now silent save for the tap of hammers where workmen repaired a machine. They went up in an elevator and along many passages until they stood before the door of Herzton's office. The watchman tapped and called through the panels, "Here is your visitor, Mr. Herzton."

While Kent was summing up in his mind the precautions which had been taken in connection with his nocturnal call, the door opened and the incisive face of Professor Herzton appeared in the aperture. The smile which played about his thin lips did not entirely mask the sinister glitter in his eyes, but there was no apparent lack of cordiality in his greeting.

"Ah, Mr. Kent, I felt sure you would not disappoint me. Nothing short of a matter of the gravest importance could have induced me to trouble you at so late an hour."

He ushered Kent into his reception room, indicated a chair, and produced cigars.

"I can best repay your courtesy in responding to my call at this time of night by coming to the point as quickly as possible. You know something of the tragedy which has cost the life of

a faithful servant of the Hensley Radio Corporation, Mr. Peter Galut?"

"I have seen the papers," Kent admitted, "but I do not recall that they associated Galut with this company."

"Quite so. Every large concern such as ours, with its great ramification of interests, finds it necessary to employ a number of trusted men who do not openly appear to be connected with it."

"Spies?" There was challenge in the tone in which Kent uttered the query. He was annoyed at his own brusqueness in a case where infinite tact would best serve his purpose.

Herzton smiled patiently. "A nasty name, applied only to the enemy," he observed. "Persons having the same function, when employed by our own country, are called intelligence officers, or by some such euphemistic title. Galut was an intelligence officer of the Hensley Radio Corporation."

"Spies—or intelligence officers—are frequently shot in the discharge of their duties," Kent rejoined, still unable to subdue his instinct of antagonism.

"Ah, that is the fortune of war. But the enemy does not escape reprisals, when they can be applied."

Herzton's attitude and demeanor were suave

and respectful, but his keen eyes bored Kent's with disconcerting intensity. "When they can be applied," he repeated. "Fortunately, in the present instance, that is not only possible; it is easy; it is inevitable."

Kent summoned his composure, although he had a feeling that the color was surging to and from his face in sudden floods. "I have no doubt you have much information on this subject which has not appeared in the papers," he said, with steady voice, allowing Herzton to infer as much as he liked. "And if there is any way in which I can be of service, either to the ends of justice, or to Mr. Hensley—well, it was some such hope that brought me here."

"Yes, I believe I have some information which has not appeared in the papers," Herzton agreed, and, taking up the thread, he traced the incidents which led to Galut's death almost as accurately as Kent himself could have recounted them.

"You were in the room with Galut when he was shot," Herzton's deep voice boomed out like a judge pronouncing sentence, his long forefinger aimed at Kent like a prosecuting attorney's. "You were with Galut, but you were not in any way a contributor to the crime. There is no shred of suspicion against you—at present."

Kent found it impossible to bridle entirely a

note of sarcasm. "That is reassuring, Professor Herzton," he said, "but why the limitation as to time?"

"Because suspicion is now, or immediately will be, directed toward Gordon Brace. It was unfortunate for him that his pursuit of Miles Freeman at this moment should place him in the light of a fugitive. He must not be allowed to find Freeman first; the whole future of this corporation will be jeopardized if those patents fall into hostile hands. That is where I want your help, Kent; you must find Freeman—and find him first."

Herzton was speaking as a man who can dictate terms, and Kent bristled with resentment. "And the alternative?" he demanded.

Herzton drew on his cigar gently for a moment or two, and emitted clouds of smoke which hung caressingly about his head.

"I did not suppose there would be any question of an alternative where the interests of Angus Hensley are at stake," he continued, his serenity quite undisturbed. "But from a considerable experience with men—and women, Mr. Kent—I have formed the habit of providing for the unexpected. Now it happens that on the body of the dead man, and on the fire escape, there were fingerprints. They were not the fingerprints of Gordon Brace, Mr. Kent."

"More likely they were those of Professor Herzton," Kent shot in the dark.

"A fairly good guess, but I can make a better," the professor returned, still unruffled. "Do you recognize this?"

From behind a chair he lifted the steering wheel of an automobile.

"Don't know that I do."

"Well, the acquaintance can be established. It happens that this wheel was recently sprayed with sufficient lampblack to cover the grease that adheres to all steering wheels. When you so kindly consented to drive Miss Hensley's car for her, you supplied all the evidence necessary to connect you very directly with the shooting of Peter Galut."

For a moment Kent was held immobile in his chair, his tongue stuck in his mouth. Then he sprang toward Herzton and seized the wheel. But he was astonished at the strength with which the wiry professor held it. There was a short scuffle, which ended in Kent being shot back into his chair.

"Don't be foolish, Kent. It would do you no good to destroy the wheel. The prints are already photographed, and correspond exactly with those on the fire escape."

Kent's muscles went limp. The strength seemed suddenly to have seeped out of him.

"And Gladys Hensley!" he said, in a strange voice, as one who talks in his sleep. "Do you tell me that Gladys Hensley was a party to this treachery?"

"I wouldn't call it treachery, Kent. Miss Hensley would do more than that, much more than that, if her father's interests demanded it."

For some minutes Kent sat in silence, too utterly stunned for words. Then Herzton resumed:

"I would have spared you this, Kent, if you hadn't insisted on knowing the alternative. You see the position you are in. You know you are innocent, and I know you are innocent, but how would you convince a judge and jury if I should care to disclose the evidence I hold? You, too, are an inventor—an experimenter with the secret forces of nature. The motive for your presence in Brace's room will not be hard to supply. It will be presumed that you were outside the range of the hidden revolver. Finding your associate in theft killed, you heroically threw him out of the window and made your exit by the fire escape. It isn't a capital offense, Kent, and you would probably get off with three or four years in prison, and the contempt of all classes of society.

"Well, that is the alternative, Kent. Can I count on you to find Freeman?"

But while Herzton was delivering his ultimatum, Kent's mind, stunned for the moment, again began to function with sudden alertness. It was as though the strength which had seeped out of him came surging back in a tidal wave. At a climacteric moment in his life, nature, by some skillful alchemy, tapped for him unsuspected depths of resource and daring. He had an answer for Professor Herzton.

"One thing I must know," he said, "before this matter goes any further. That is, whether or not Gladys Hensley was a conscious partner to the trickery by which you obtained my fingerprints. This is a time for frankness, Herzton, and in order that we may understand each other I may as well confess to you that my highest hopes are associated with Miss Hensley. If those hopes are unfounded I have no further interest in life, and you can do your worst. I shall take the first opportunity to find out just where I stand. If Miss Hensley convinces me that she knew nothing of this steering-wheel treachery I shall ask her hand in marriage. If she gives it I will be at her service, and her father's, though it should take me to the end of the world. If she refuses, nothing that you can do will be of the slightest concern to me. Carry your evidence to the police, but be prepared for the fact that I also will have some evidence to submit. The

fingerprints of two men were found on Galut's body. One set of those fingerprints corresponds to mine. I will be able to suggest to the police where they will find the originals of the other. Good-night, Professor Herzton!"

On his way home Kent tried to turn over in his mind dispassionately the events of the evening. The sense of exultation which he had felt in meeting Herzton's challenge faded out as his blood cooled in the commonplace associations of his rooms at 426 Eleventh Street, and at the end of an hour he was undecided whether his words had been inspired by genius or folly. He never had admitted to himself that he was in love with Gladys Hensley, and nothing had been further from his intention than that he should make such a declaration to Professor Herzton, of all persons! But the declaration was made, and he now had to go through with it or stand abashed before Herzton for making a boast, involving Miss Hensley's name, which he was unable to put into effect.

Just what it meant he tried to realize. It was almost outside the range of possibilities that Gladys would accept him. They were acquaintances of but a few days, and he had little to offer; nothing, it seemed to him, that could be attractive to a girl in her position. The little

shop at 208 Eleventh Street netted barely enough to keep his head and Harry's above water. There was just the possibility that they would strike something rich as a result of their inventions, but it would be time enough to ask any girl to share that prospect when it was on a fair way to being realized; at least, such a girl as Gladys Hensley, who was accustomed to wealth and luxury and would expect them as a matter of course.

On the other hand, there was the possibility—just the possibility—that Gladys would accept. Her attitude toward him certainly had not been that of ordinary friendship. She had seemed peculiarly eager to develop his acquaintanceship, and even with this last revelation so fresh upon him he found it hard to think evil of her. His pulses had not ceased tingling from contact, from communion, with her before she was presented to him in this rôle of treachery. The incident about the steering wheel must have some explanation, just as the incident at the coroner's inquest—— He stopped short with a realization that that affair never had been explained, except upon some strange theory about sinister outside influences over which she had no control. Taking her at her word, was a woman, who admitted that she was subject to influences over which she had no control, likely

to prove an amiable and satisfying wife? The prospect was fraught with the gravest kind of possibilities.

"Yet I believe what she told me," Kent said to himself, with decision, as he arose to prepare for bed. "She is under an outside influence, and that influence is Professor Herzton." Suddenly he remembered that Galut had been present at the inquest; Galut, Herzton's minion, had gone out of the room just before Gladys's sudden change of attitude. And now the steering wheel—at Herzton's. Always Herzton!

Bit by bit he pieced the evidence together. Had not Gladys told him, that very night, that she had gone to take him for the drive while under the influence of one of her "moods"? And if Herzton was the power behind these strange involuntary doings, what could better suit his purpose than the estrangement of Kent and Gladys? There were a hundred simpler ways to get his fingerprints than resort to the clumsy device of a steering wheel. And how had Herzton got possession of the wheel? That was a question still to be answered, but out of the bewildering haze one fact emerged with definite form: every occasion upon which the conduct of Gladys seemed to warrant the loss of his friendship had been when she was under the spell. Was it not, therefore, plain that the influ-

ence, wherever it came from, was trying desperately to cause a breach between himself and the daughter of Angus Hensley?

Kent found a great happiness in this conclusion. The efforts being made against him were evidence of how greatly he was feared, and that fear could be based on only one assumption—the assumption that Gladys, if left to her own preferences, would gravitate toward him. Kent stamped about the room in an exuberation of happiness. His challenge to Herzton had been a stroke of genius after all! He had called the old fox's bluff by stipulating conditions and an alternative neither of which he could accept. The joint conclusions that Gladys was trying to reach him through a barrier of resistance artificially set up about her, and that he had matched Herzton at his own game, afforded ground for immeasurable satisfaction.

Kent went to business next morning with the intention of calling on Gladys that night, hearing her explanations, assuring her of his undying confidence, and pledging himself to the complete uprooting of this mysterious external influence if she would place herself entirely in his care. There was but one way in which that could be done, and he almost trembled at his temerity in thinking she would accept such a course. It meant marriage, a condition under

which he could protect her in the most personal and intimate way. With the advantages of such protection he was sure he could discover the method of the interference—he already was convinced as to its source—and either destroy it or build up such a powerful counter-influence that it would be ineffective. In addition to protecting Gladys there was the possibility of discoveries of inestimable value. He could hardly wait until evening to put his intentions into effect.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN the oaken doors of the Hensley mansion closed behind Gladys on that memorable evening when Kent had driven her home, her heart was still aflutter with a strange sense of happy adventure. She had found his companionship distinctly agreeable. Whether or not the impulse to go driving with him had come from sources outside herself, the hour spent in his presence had filled her with a tingle of happiness that was a new experience. Had there been any to observe, he must have marked the color in her cheeks, the glow in her eyes, as with springing footstep she made her way to her own room.

Once inside its sanctuary she dropped into a chair and for a few moments allowed the happiness welling in her heart to suffuse her whole being. She could no more explain it than the rose could explain the sun, but her mind ran back over those delicious minutes together when she had made familiar use of Kent's name and some unspoken understanding seemed cemented between them. He would come again, she knew,

at the earliest opportunity, and already it seemed too long to wait even until to-morrow evening. The world had suddenly become very sweet and beautiful, but all its sweetness and beauty were of him. Without him it would be unspeakably desolate.

She was still in this mood of ecstasy when her eyes, dreaming about the familiar contents of the room, became aware of the photograph of Gordon Brace which stood in its silver mountings in a place of honor on her dressing table. Gordon's gaze was straight upon her; his aggressive little mustache seemed bristling with hurt concern. The sight of his familiar, silent face, which for the moment had been banished from her consciousness, thrust her sternly back into the world of harsh realities.

With a sudden sympathetic cry, as of one who has done an unintended injury, she darted to the table and took the photograph in her hands. As she held it her eyes grew misty; the face in the silver frame swam in an accusing blur.

"Dear boy! What does it all mean?" she cried. "Had I really forgotten you already? No! No! But this other—it's different, something totally unlike——"

She did not complete the thought, for at that moment she noticed that her hands, holding the frame before her, were heavily soiled with a

thick black powder. It was creased into the joints and about the finger-tips; the smudge of it showed on the silver frame.

“Well where in the world?—I wonder if I was like that when I was riding with *him!*” She darted to her bathroom. The plate mirror on the wall caught the warm reflection of her arms, her neck, her breast, as she dashed the disgraceful hands into fragrant water. The source of the powder, unexplained though it was, gave her less concern than the fear that Kent might have seen her hands in such condition. Yet she had a moment for appraisal of the face that glowed back into her own. It was a comely face. She knew that was fair judgment, and not conceit. And she remembered that when Kent had looked her face had been the magnet that drew his eyes.

A tap on the door. “Dinner is ready, miss.” It was the maid Manners. Gladys hurriedly made herself presentable and went downstairs to join the waiting and mildly aggrieved company.

Later in the evening came a message from Williams, the chauffeur, craving a word with her. Williams frequently consulted her about the car, and the request occasioned no surprise. He was admitted into her presence.

“Excuse me, Miss Hensley, it seems impossi-

ble—but did you find anything—ah—funny about the car when you had it out?”

“How do you mean? No, it was all right. Mr. Kent drove it most of the time. Is anything wrong?”

Williams, usually keen and alert, was obviously sheepish. “Perhaps I shouldn’t have bothered you about it,” he continued, apologetically. “But just now, coming through the garage, I happened to look at it, and the steering wheel was gone.”

“The steering wheel gone!” A ripple of laughter escaped the girl’s lips. “You don’t imagine that we lost it, somewhere on the street, do you?” Afterwards she wondered why she had said “we.”

Williams smiled respectfully. “No, that would hardly be possible,” he admitted. “But I just wondered——”

“It’ll turn up,” she assured him. “Maybe you took it off yourself and have forgotten about it.”

“I’ve had everything from spark plugs to hub caps stolen from a car,” the perplexed Williams complained, as he returned to his quarters over the garage, “but this is the first time they’ve taken the steering wheel. Glad thought it a kind of joke, didn’t she, but what I want to know is, how did they get it, with the garage locked every minute I wasn’t inside?”

The company that night seemed exceptionally tiresome, and it was with a sense of relief that Gladys at last escaped to her own room. The photograph of Gordon Brace, staring at her from the dressing table, brought down again the cloud of apprehension which her communion with Kent had momentarily dispelled. Where was Gordon, and why did he not come out into the light? Not for a moment did she doubt his honesty or his ability to give satisfactory explanations, but his absence, which could be interpreted only as flight, annoyed and shamed her.

"Morley wouldn't have done that," she said to herself, as she slipped under the light coverlet. Yet even as she breathed the thought she had a pang of compunction lest she was doing Gordon less than justice. These two men, who seemed to insist upon occupying in her mind a place large enough for only one, were continually being presented in contrasts in which her older friend appeared to the lesser advantage.

As she was about to turn out her light, the telephone, on its stand beside the bed, caught her attention. By means of it Morley was only an arm's length distant. Why not call him? For a moment she hesitated, but the impulse was irresistible. By this time he might have news of Gordon. But as she gave his number, which now

she knew by heart, something honest within her clamored that it was Kent's voice, rather than news of Brace, she really longed to hear.

There was no answer. She glanced at her bedroom clock. Twelve-thirty. Half an hour past midnight, and Morley not in? An altogether different pang, one that she resented, abhorred, caught her in a self-revealing grip. Suspicion, jealousy, something she never had known before; did these two go with—with whatever it was she felt toward Morley?

She tried to reason with herself. He might be in his workshop; he might be at the newspapers, seeking news of Gordon; he might be detained in a hundred legitimate ways. All very logical, but through the logic crept a little cold chill of fear that there might be someone else. He never had told her; she never had asked. She could only trust. And, trusting, she fell asleep.

The next day she came upon Williams in the garden.

"Strangest thing, Miss Hensley," he volunteered. "The wheel was back this morning; back in its place, safe as a nut."

She gave him the smile that had captured Kent, and against which even chauffeurs have no special armor. "I think you're seeing things," she said. "Or, rather, not seeing them. I'll wager it was there all the time."

Puzzled but unconvinced, Williams returned to his work at the garage, while the girl selected a shaded garden seat and settled down to read. But her mind refused to follow the printed lines. Strange, blended pictures of Brace and Kent intervened, and with them emotions as contradictory as any of those blind moods which came upon her at such unsuspected moments. Concern for Gordon, joy in her new friendship and understanding with Morley, stirred in her soul like the mottled shadows from the leaves overhead and the bright June sunshine which filtered through.

Slowly the day dragged by. The papers had no news; Morley did not telephone; there was no word from Brace. She resisted an impulse to motor downtown and, on some pretext, call at the little electric shop on Eleventh Street. When the heat of afternoon drove her to the wide verandas of the house she sat for hours with eyes half-closed watching the light shimmer on the lake while her emotions slowly crystallized within her.

But if the day proved uneventful, the evening made amends. She was just finishing dinner when Florence Manners, bowing respectfully behind her chair, whispered a message that Professor Herzton was waiting in the drawing room, and wished to see her immediately.

"My dear Miss Hensley," the professor burst upon her, extending his hands as she approached, "I owe you a thousand apologies for this untimely intrusion, but I'm in a devil of a difficulty. Madame Sardeau, who was to be the star performer on our programme to-night, has failed me. A quarrel with her husband—one of her husbands—I never can keep track of them! At any rate, a temperamental explosion, ignited by some untimely domestic friction, has incapacitated her. For violence, for vituperation—I have had a bad hour with her, Miss Hensley—but for to-night she is out of the question."

Gladys never had seen Professor Herzton quite so excited. His little eyes snapped; his little beard bristled; his aquiline face seemed more incisive than ever. He was still holding her hands, and his deep voice boomed on her point blank like a barrage of artillery.

She motioned him to a seat. "Do sit down, Professor Herzton. It certainly is most annoying."

"Annoying! Why do people who sing and play feel at liberty to work themselves into a temper and out of a job at the slightest provocation? But fortunately there are exceptions," he hurried on in a gentler voice, and without waiting for an answer to his question. "You are an exception. In my dilemma I can turn to you."

"To me?" She had not yet perceived his purpose.

"To you. Of course, it's utterly unfair, but you must sing to-night in Madame Sardeau's place. You alone can carry it off. And the idea of the daughter of the president stepping into the breach—think of the publicity value in that!"

"But I've nothing ready!" she protested. "I haven't practised a thing, and I am sure there are many experienced singers who would be glad of the chance——"

"They won't get it. I want you on our programme to-night. Sing anything. Without special preparation you are better than any of these others with it."

"Oh, now you are flattering."

"No, I assure you. Come; I know you won't fail me. We have only half an hour to reach the studio."

He arose as he spoke, taking her acquiescence for granted.

"Well, if I really can help——"

"You can, tremendously." Herzton was looking into her face with admiring eyes, and she returned his admiration. The professor prided himself upon the quality of the artists he engaged for the Hensley radio programme, and that she should be asked to substitute for the

famous Madame Sardeau was a compliment which could not be treated lightly.

"All right," she answered. "Fortunately my audience will not see me; I can go almost as I am. I'll be ready in a minute."

"Any audience might be charmed to see you, just as you are," he told her as, with a happy mounting of color, she turned to gather wraps and music.

They went straight to Herzton's rooms in the Radio Corporation building. He showed her in, deferentially, touching, as he entered, a switch which struck to life mild, shaded lamps and filled the place with a roseate twilight.

"We have ten minutes," he said, glancing at a clock on the mantelpiece. "Compose yourself."

He indicated a chair and, without speaking to her again, moved over to the piano at the far end of the room. Here, with all of an artist's intuition, he began strumming gentle chords. Gladys, relaxed in her chair, felt a strange sense of peace and power stealing over her. Her mind reacted to his nimble fingers, responding to the touch of the master, but responding also, perhaps, to something which was neither of the piano nor the music, but of the player himself, powerful, self-confident, dominating.

When the clock reached one minute of the ap-

pointed time she crossed to his side and laid her music before him. "I will sing the 'Song of Love,' " she said.

He nodded and smiled, and instantly struck into the opening bars of Schubert's melody, as though her choice was no surprise to him, but rather a confirmation of his own purpose. She hummed the bars with him, and he knew that her voice was in tune with the piano and her mood with that of the composer.

"Good!" he said, stopping suddenly. "You're going to sing into their very souls to-night, Gladys." He did not often call her Gladys. "You understand? Into their very souls!"

Her face was alight, her eyes glowing. She knew that, as he said, she would sing into their very souls to-night.

A light flashed at the end of the piano. It was his direct-line telephone connecting with the broadcasting studio.

"All ready, Professor Herzton?" a voice inquired.

"Announce our deep regret that Madame Sardeau is confined to her apartments with a slight cold, which, while not serious, compelled her to cancel her engagement this evening. Then say that Miss Gladys Hensley, daughter of Mr. Angus Hensley, president of the Hensley Radio

Corporation, has, at much personal inconvenience, et cetera, et cetera."

Herzton rose from the piano and set the microphone in just the position it required. His hand fell lightly on the girl's arm, guiding her into a slightly changed posture. "Now, my dear," he whispered, "you are going to excel yourself!"

He switched on the microphone and turned again to the piano. At that moment came the flash indicating that the circuit was open, and his fingers rippled up the introductory notes.

Gladys sang. From the first bar she sang with a sense of power that she never had known before, and when she reached the sublime notes, "You are my song of love," she poured them forth in an exaltation of spirit that left her exhausted but ecstatic.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" Herzton exclaimed, when he had snapped off the microphone. He sprang to her side, took her hands in his. "Gladys, you never sang like that before! You have set ears tingling all over America—and beyond!"

She smiled, amused, in spite of herself, at the intensity of his appreciation. The color, which had fled from her as she sang, mounted again in her cheeks. Herzton was no mean critic, and

it was not his habit to give unwarranted praise. Never before had he been so extravagant in his approval. And from somewhere within herself she knew that his commendation had been well earned; that she had touched to-night heights of self-expression never before within her reach. Her sense of power was almost limitless.

"Shall I sing again?" she asked.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, as though she were in danger of destroying something rare and beautiful. "It would be sacrilege—even for you. Let it sink in. There will be armfuls of applause messages; see if there aren't. Oh, my dear, you have made a name for yourself—for all of us—to-night!"

Herzton's ecstasy was as wonderful as her own. He held her at arm's length, his eyes glowing upon her, in a silence more vocal than speech.

A telephone bell tinkled. "You are wanted, Gladys," said Herzton, when he had answered the call. "It's your mother."

Mrs. Hensley hardly could speak. "My child, it was wonderful!" she managed at length to say. "Whatever has happened you?"

"I don't know, Mother. Nothing, I guess. I didn't even have time to run over it first. I just sang out of myself."

"That's it. You sang right out of yourself.

And there was something there that never was there before."

"Something that never was there before?" Gladys repeated as she turned from the telephone, and the color in her cheeks, the joy in her heart, mounted higher still. She knew. Herzton had seen only the metal disc of the microphone. But she had sung to the face, the soul, of her lover, Morley Kent!

She sank into a chair, oblivious to her surroundings; oblivious, even, to the presence of Professor Herzton. It was a moment in which she came near to some realization of the infinite. If Mr. Rogers were right, if the whole universe were really God, vibrating to every note, every thought, establishing instant connection with millions of stations everywhere—that might be some explanation of this strange sense of happiness and power. In tune with the infinite? Perhaps!

She was recalled from her reverie by Herzton's hand upon her shoulder. Herzton had been to her always as a part of the Hensley Radio Corporation machinery, as intricate, as unexplainable, as the mysterious forces with which he dealt. She never had quite thought of him as a human being. But now, when his hand fell on her shoulder, her own fingers went up and rested gently on his. She felt that she was in

love with all the world, even with this highly sensitized, intricate, technical machine which people called Professor Herzton.

The innocent gesture, speaking the comradeship of the human family, carried to Herzton a message far from anything the girl had intended. It gave courage to his purpose. This was his hour. Not for nothing had he bribed Madame Sardeau to relinquish her place on the evening's programme with promise of a double fee and the glory of contrast with her immature substitute.

"Gladys," he began, his deep voice modulated into a surprising tenderness, "I have known you since you were a child. It seems but yesterday that you were a little girl playing about your home. Do you remember how you used to call at the office on your way from school? That was before fortune had smiled on the Hensley Radio Corporation, but even then fortune had smiled on me. It smiled on me from those brown eyes of yours, Gladys. You were a child and I was a man, but even then I knew that some day—some night—I would say to you the words that will no longer remain silent within me."

She stirred and let her hand fall to her lap. Whatever did the man mean?

"I take that as a gesture of modest embar-

rassment, of retirement within yourself, but not of displeasure," he continued, bending low until his lips were almost beside her ear. "The words must be said to-night. I love you, Gladys. I have loved you since you were a child; I love you now: I shall love you always. For years I have kept this love within my heart, but now it will be confined no longer. I love you, Gladys; I ask you to be my wife."

Utterly surprised, the girl sat for a moment, motionless, speechless. Reading consent in her silence, Herzton bent beside her chair.

"Beautiful one!" he exclaimed. "You are worth all these years of waiting. And to-night, as you sang, you touched something within me that made longer silence impossible. Gladys, you must be mine! You must! You must!"

With a sudden realization that she must act at once or be swept away by his masterful presence, she sprang to her feet. "Professor Herzton, I appreciate the compliment you have paid me, but—I cannot say more. Please take me home."

Although the treasure which had seemed so near a moment ago was slipping from his grasp, Professor Herzton was much too wise to press his suit after he had sensed her resistance. For a moment his eyes held her, and when he spoke

the rich timbre of his voice suggested the depth of his passion.

"If I have offended you, Gladys, it was because my love for you compelled me at last to speak. That must be my plea for forgiveness. It was inconsiderate of me to speak to-night, when you have already drained your soul in the greatest effort of your career. But the confession had to be made and I am not sorry you know. I do not press for an immediate answer. Take time to think it over. I am prepared to await your answer. But tell me to-night, if you can, that I may have hope. Gladys, there is no one else? You are not committed to someone else?"

His earnestness touched her. "No, I am not committed to anyone," she said.

He reached for her hands, and for a moment she gave them. "Thank you. Now I will drive you home."

CHAPTER TEN

THE evening after Kent's visit to Herzton's laboratory he telephoned Gladys, bent upon having some explanation of her part in the steering-wheel incident. He was answered by the maid Manners, who told him Miss Hensley was out, but did not volunteer the information that she was broadcasting. Obviously nothing could be done immediately, so Kent attempted to apply himself to the neglected experiments in his own work-shop. Although he bent over it until after midnight he had to put away his equipment with the feeling that nothing had been accomplished. In his present frame of mind it was impossible to concentrate.

He spent a semi-wakeful night and went about his routine business the next day as usual, but the steering-wheel incident kept crowding in upon his consciousness, demanding explanation. The threat, or boast, which he had made to Herzton must be carried out. If Gladys accepted him, he was committed to the search for Miles Freeman. And if Gladys did not accept, what? Would Herzton place his fingerprints in

the hands of the police? Would they lock him up and demand a confession? Would they try him for the shooting of Galut? Perhaps convict him? Perhaps show that he had lured Galut to that lonely room to do him to death under circumstances that would throw suspicion upon his rival, Brace? He smiled as he thought of such absurd conclusions. And yet he supposed that Justice, blindly heaping in her balance disconnected atoms of fact, sometimes tipped the scale that cost an innocent man his liberty or even his life.

He sincerely wished he had taken the police into his confidence when he could have done so voluntarily. Even if it did involve the Hensley Radio Corporation, the main blow would have fallen on Herzton, where it belonged. But it was now too late. His sixty hours of silence were themselves incriminating.

It all came back to Gladys and the steering wheel. That had first to be cleaned up.

He telephoned her during the day. Would she see him that evening?

Delighted! If the weather continued fine perhaps they might drive into the country.

Her voice disarmed him, if, indeed, he were not disarmed already. But he tried a chance shot before capitulation.

"No danger of the steering wheel coming off again?" he inquired, innocently.

"Oh, did you know about that? The strangest thing! Williams missed it that night, but it was back on the car in the morning. Have you been playing tricks?"

"Tricks were being played, but I didn't play them. That is what I want to talk to you about to-night."

She laughed, as though he were having some kind of joke with her. "It's strange that you know about that," she murmured. "Who told you?"

But that was a subject too big to discuss at the moment. "When shall I meet you?" he asked.

"I could drive downtown and call for you at the office," she suggested, "if you don't mind being unconventional. Shall we say six o'clock?"

Six o'clock? Powers and Vera would be leaving just then, and although he was proud of his friendship with Gladys he had no desire to parade it before these two people.

"There are often things which have to be done after the shop closes," he explained, rather lamely. "How about six-thirty?"

"All right. Six-thirty."

It was six-twenty-five before Powers and Vera left the shop. Kent almost was convinced

that they were loitering on his account. He pretended to be busy with his correspondence.

"Not ready yet?" Powers inquired, thrusting his head into the little office where Kent pored over a typewritten letter two days old. "Your industry excites suspicion."

"I've been getting behind," he temporized. "Think I'll clean up a few things before I go."

"All right, Vee," Harry called, cheerfully accepting his dismissal. "The boss has a work-wave."

They went out together, and Kent felt suddenly very much alone. As the shop door closed there was something ominous about the way in which it seemed to shut him from Powers and Vera. They were passing into a world different from his, or perhaps it was he who had penetrated a sphere into which they could not come.

The reflection gave him momentary discomfort, but as soon as silence settled upon the shop he began to listen for the tap which would announce the arrival of Gladys. He tried to arrange his thoughts, to rehearse the way in which he would lay the steering-wheel mystery before her, but the clamor of his heart was too insistent for coherent thinking.

He watched the time drag by. Six-thirty; six-forty-five. Still no sign of Gladys. She probably had been caught in a six o'clock traffic tie-up.

But when seven o'clock brought no word he could restrain his impatience no longer. He took up his telephone and called the now familiar number at Fifty-four Lake Boulevard.

A woman's voice answered. "Is Miss Hensley in?" Kent inquired.

"Who is speaking, please?"

"Mr. Kent—Mr. Morley Kent."

"Oh, yes. Miss Hensley left instructions that if you called she was not to be interrupted."

"What!" Kent's astonishment expressed itself in the involuntary rudeness of a single word.

"Miss Hensley does not wish to be disturbed," the voice repeated.

"Now may *I* know who is speaking?" Kent demanded.

"That is not material. I am delivering Miss Hensley's message."

For a moment he held the telephone, too perplexed to answer. As he was still rallying his thoughts he heard the receiver click at the other end of the line.

"There's funny work in this," was his conclusion, "and I'm going to run the joker to earth." He hurried outside and hailed a taxi.

When he pressed the bell at Hensley House he was surprised that it should be answered by the maid Manners. She held the door only

partly ajar while he stated the purpose of his call.

"Miss Hensley has given instructions that she is not to be disturbed," the maid told him, in a voice which instantly established the identity of the person who had answered his telephone call.

"Yes, you told me that over the telephone," he answered brusquely, "but I am quite sure there is some mistake. Please let Miss Hensley know I have called."

He made as though he would step inside, but the sturdy figure of the woman blocked the way. Her eyes met his, and he knew that he was fighting, not Florence Manners, but Professor Herzton. The sardonic smile on her hard lips seemed to say that at last he had met more than his equal.

"Gentlemen know when they are dismissed," she said, and closed the door in his face.

He seized the handle, but realized at once that any resort to force would be both futile and ridiculous. But he was not to be so easily defeated. Once before he had definitely associated the maid Manners with Herzton and the peculiar influences to which Gladys was from time to time subjected; now he had no doubt whatever. He must, in some way, beat them at their game.

He went slowly down the walk, and, before

he reached the gate, turned into a path which threaded the shrubbery of the lawn. The sun of the long summer day hung low over the city, and the imposing pile of Hensley House cut its sharp silhouette against the amber rays. Lights were on inside; he wondered if, from some one of those window-eyes, Gladys, at that moment, a prisoner of unseen but relentless forces, might be looking out upon him.

The path joined the drive, and a little ahead lay the garage, its cavernous depths yawning behind a brick and stucco front. He walked toward it in unconscious response to the attraction of machinery. At the door he met the chauffeur Williams.

"Good-evening, sir," said Williams, recognizing the occasional guest at Hensley House. "Would you like to look at the cars, sir?" Williams's voice was cultured and carried an unmistakably English accent.

"Why, yes, I'm always interested in cars." He followed Williams into the garage, and had a sudden inspiration that he could trust this honest chap. If Herzton must have his accomplice under the Hensley roof, perhaps a friend in the garage was not to be despised.

Kent pretended to inspect the roadster, and tempered the chauffeur's heart toward him with a word or two of praise.

"Yes, it's a pretty smooth machine, and runs like a watch, if I say it," Williams admitted. Then he added, incidentally, "Miss Gladys said she would want it at six to-night, but she hasn't called for it."

Kent noted the information and passed on. "Ever have any trouble with the steering wheel?" he inquired.

The casual light in the chauffeur's eyes took on a quick point of interest. "You know about that? The strangest thing!" (The very words of Gladys.)

"I know a little," Kent admitted, "but not very much. Indeed, I'm quite mystified."

"No more than I. The other night—it would be the night before last—the night Miss Gladys was out with the roadster—I suddenly noticed, as I was prowling about the garage for something, that the steering wheel was missing. Well, sir, it seemed too absurd, but I reported the matter at once to Miss Gladys. She just laughed; seemed to think I was a bit off, if you know what I mean. Well, sir, in the morning there it was, back in its place. I begin to wonder if I really was a bit off, but I could have sworn it was gone——"

He left the sentence in the air. "Well, you weren't off, and the wheel was," Kent assured him. "I saw it later that night."

"You did? Where?"

"You know Professor Herzton?"

Williams nodded.

"The wheel was in Herzton's rooms at the plant that same night."

"But Herzton—what did he want with it?"

"That's your question. And how did he get it? That's mine. Were you here all evening?"

"Well, 'round about. And if I wasn't in the garage I had it locked. I'm careful about that; have been losing too many tools of late."

"It seems to me we have a good deal in common in this matter," Kent remarked. "I'm with you if you're with me."

"Well, sir, I'm glad to hear you say that, for really I was beginning to wonder if my eyes were playing tricks on me. *You* can convince Miss Gladys."

"You think she'd believe me?"

The chauffeur grinned. "You know it," he said.

Kent's heart warmed to this understanding ally. It might prove to be an exceptional bit of luck that he had fallen in with Williams.

"Now, if that's understood, let us get down to business," he suggested. "The garage was locked. How many keys are there? Of course, you have one."

"And Miss Gladys."

"We can rule that out."

"And Mr. Hensley."

"I think we can rule that out, too."

"Then there's one in the house, just in case no other is handy."

"Now we're getting warm," said Kent. "Who has access to it?"

"I suppose everybody about the house."

"The woman Manners, for example?"

The chauffeur slapped his hands together. "By all the toots of Klaxon!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of her? I've seen her and Herzton talking, quiet like, more than once, as though they had some deviltry on foot together."

"Well, that's pretty good for one night," said Kent. "Now, to change the subject: You have a telephone here?"

"Two of 'em. An outside line, and a private wire into the house."

"Connecting with Miss Hensley's room?"

"Yes, if she's there."

"Would you mind calling and saying I'm here?"

"Very good, sir. She may be at dinner, but I'll try."

Williams lifted a receiver, pressed a button, and waited. "That you, Miss Hensley? Mr.

Kent is here, at the garage. He would like to speak to you."

A moment later Kent was in conversation with her. "Oh, Morley," she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you've come! I have had an awful fight. You're at the garage? I'll be right out—through the door of the conservatory."

A minute or two later she came running down a path from a side entrance. As she approached she held out her arms, and for a moment he thought she would seize him in them. But she brought herself under control, although her flushed face told of a struggle the source of which Kent could only surmise.

"I'm so glad! I'll tell you about it on the road," was all she could say to him. "The car is in order, Williams?"

"Yes, Miss Hensley."

She motioned Kent to the seat at the wheel, and without speech they threaded their way toward the open country. The sun was just setting, its great disc cut in two by the distant horizon, its light playing in mauve and copper against a fringe of clouds that laced the western sky. As they drove headlong into the face of that splendor Kent waited for her to speak. He cared not how far nor how fast he went so long as she was by his side.

When she spoke it was to bring him to earth. "Have you eaten?" she asked.

"Not yet."

"Nor I. There's a tea room—the Crescent Moon, I think they call it—perhaps you have been there?—where they serve a good enough meal."

"Yes, I think I know." The Crescent Moon was a popular rendezvous of young lovers.

In half an hour they pulled up at the tea room, and the girl led the way inside. "Let me be host to-night," she whispered. "I know the place."

It was evident, too, that she was known. The deference with which she was received was appropriate to a millionaire's daughter. They followed the head waiter along a passage which skirted a dining room shaped like a crescent moon to an alcove opening to the outer air. Almost beneath them a silent lake mirrored the colors still burning overhead; in the distance wooded hills faded into the purple blue of night. A pink light, lending a subtle depth and glow to the cheeks of the girl, fell upon the little table for two, and from somewhere behind and above, the strains of an orchestra breathed gently through the embowered seclusion of the spot.

Whatever confusion had possessed the girl at

the beginning of the drive had wholly disappeared. In Kent's eyes she was the charming hostess carried to the *n*th degree of perfection. Her vivacity was spontaneous and infectious; before the meal was finished he hardly remembered that there were such things as fingerprints and mysterious influences.

It was she who first alluded to them.

"You are wondering why I did not keep my appointment with you to-night," she opened the subject, "although you have been too polite to ask questions. Well, they, or he, or it, did its best to stop me. I had all arrangements made; had spoken to Williams to be sure and have the car ready, when suddenly I felt it coming on."

"You mean one of those—ah—moods?"

"Yes, whatever it is. Morley, I could feel it, just as one might feel a magnet drawing him powerfully in some direction against his will. I fought it—oh, how I fought it!—but it seemed to sweep me irresistibly on. I felt that if I could get you, you would save me; I clutched at you as my one hope."

She was intensely in earnest, her face alight as with deep passion, her slender hands stretched out on the table before her. Kent folded them in his own. They were warm, pulsating; they set his nerves atingle. She pretended not to notice, and went on:

"I knew if I could get you it would be all right. You would be stronger than they, or it. I was just about to call you on the telephone when I—I went under, like one going under ether. So instead of telephoning you, I called Manners and ordered her not to admit you into the house. Can you believe that, and can you forgive it?"

He felt the pressure of her hands tighten in his. "I can believe it," he said, "because she stopped me at the door. She seemed rather to enjoy her errand. That is why I went to the garage. And I can forgive it because it wasn't you who did that thing, but Herzton."

She looked up curiously. He never had known that eyes can draw one so.

"You think it's Professor Herzton?" she asked.

"I am sure of it. Listen."

He told her the whole story of his visit to Brace's room in the old factory building. She sat motionless; surprise, concern, alarm, alternately pictured in her face. He knew as he spoke that this confidence was drawing them very close together, and he omitted no detail from the events of that tragic night. When he had told her of his flight down the fire escape he paused as though to intimate there was nothing more to say.

It was some minutes before she spoke. "I am so concerned," she said at length. "This puts both you and Gordon in a pretty awkward position. Of course, I don't believe he was trying to defraud Father; he is too honest for that. As for Professor Herzton, it shocks me to think our confidence in him has been misplaced. Father trusts him implicitly, and I have always felt—well, I am sure you understand. Oh, why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"What good would it have done?" he asked, with a gesture of helplessness. "I am not sure that I am right in telling you now. And there are so many things still unexplained. I had hoped to get to the bottom of the mystery, and then lay it all before you, or your father, at once."

"But why shouldn't I help you? Surely it would be better to work from two directions! Besides, I know some things that you don't. I could have helped you a great deal. But I don't understand; you say you left Galut's body on the floor. The police found it on a ledge of the building. How do you account for that?"

He approached her questions obliquely. "Gladys, did you ever know something you couldn't prove? Experience a sort of knowledge that doesn't come from the senses?"

She nodded.

"Well, that is the point we have reached. When I left Galut's body lying on the floor I parted company with facts that can be proven. The rest, I suppose, would be called conjecture, but to me it is much more definite than that. Shall I tell you? When Galut failed to come back, Herzton, who had been waiting—perhaps in his laboratory, perhaps in the old building itself—went in search of him. Upon finding the body, he at once saw the disadvantage of having the shooting associated with Brace. It might unearth the whole plot to get control of Brace's blueprints, and of Freeman's patents. So he unceremoniously dumped his late fellow-conspirator out of the window. You remember the police investigation showed the body had been handled by two men. They have the fingerprints."

He paused, awaiting her reaction. But the look she gave him was full of innocent inquiry.

"That is where the steering wheel comes in," he continued.

"The steering wheel? I don't understand."

"Herzton in some way learned that you were going to take me out in your car. He took a chance that you would let me drive. Then——"

"Oh!" she interrupted. "I wonder if he sent me? Do you see what I mean? Perhaps you remember I told you I had a sudden impulse, just like one of my moods, to take you driving. I

think I joked about it, wishing all my moods would be so pleasant. And it was all part of a deep-laid plan! Of course, I can't guess how Herzton could do it, or why——" At the instant, recollection of Herzton's proposal flashed across her mind. "Oh!" she cried. "Could it be that?"

"Could it be what?"

She steadied herself. "I don't know. I was thinking. Go on."

"Well, in some way he caused lampblack to be sprinkled on the steering wheel. I suppose he was afraid of the microscopic film of oil which always adheres to it. And in some way, still unexplained, he got the wheel to his laboratory."

"Is it possible? How do you know that?"

"Because I saw it there. He sent for me, and produced it as Exhibit A."

Her eyes were almost incredulous. "But that proved nothing!" she exclaimed.

"Only that he had my fingerprints. He had already photographed them. Don't you see, dear? Herzton has my fingerprints. The police have the fingerprints found on Galut, and on the fire escape. Herzton can, at any moment, combine these two pieces of evidence. The conclusion would be inevitable."

"Then he has you in a—in a trap?"

"It would look that way. But I am not worrying over that. What worried me was the part you seemed to have had in it."

She recoiled as though he had struck her. "You didn't think I would—I could—be capable of *that*?"

"No, not really. I felt he had used you. And now I know why. There were a thousand simpler ways of getting my fingerprints than the one he chose, but, don't you see? he wanted to involve you in it. He wanted me to think I couldn't trust you."

"But you do, don't you?"

The waiter looked in, courteously impatient to clear his table. A red moon, rising, thrust a shaft of copper across the lake.

"I believe there are seats down by the water," he suggested.

She arose, acquiescent, without speaking. A path, dimly lighted by green globes hung among the trees, led down to the shore. As they walked she slipped her arm in his, and he held it close against him.

They found a seat, limned only by the red glow from the rising moon, and sat down together. For the moment he had no words, and he thought she must hear the beating of his heart. The touch of her shoulder against him

sent his senses spinning with unspeakable desires.

"You do, don't you?" she resumed their conversation.

"Yes, dear, I do. Perhaps I have no right to call you dear, but you are. Shall I tell you what happened at Herzton's?"

For all her interest in the Herzton case, there were other words she would have preferred just then. But she encouraged him to go on.

"He tried to dictate terms to me. I was to leave at once in search of Freeman. I must beat Brace to it; I must secure the precious patents for him. Of course, he represented it all adroitly as being for the Hensley Radio Corporation, and for your father. But he was going to pit me against Brace, and, incidentally, get rid of both of us for the time being."

He felt her body stir slightly against him. "But you didn't agree?" he heard her whisper.

"No. I did a little dictating myself. Shall I repeat to you what I told him?"

"If it concerns me, yes."

"It does concern you. I told him I was going to find out what part you had in that steering-wheel treachery. Treachery—that is what I called it. Then, if I found you were innocent—and I was always sure of that—I would ask you to be my wife." She stirred again, but did not

draw away from him. "If you refused, he could hand the fingerprint photographs to the police. It would make no difference to me. If you agreed, then I would go to the ends of the earth to serve you, or your father. Gladys, I don't need to tell you I love you. You know. And I think you love me."

She turned toward him. Silently, gently, her lips met his, and their spirits fused in a sudden release of passion. His arms linked about her little body, crushing her, holding her as though he never would let her go.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT WAS late when Kent left Gladys at Hensley House that night. On the drive home, still floating in a current of ecstatic emotions, they had discussed their immediate plans. Kent must set out at once to find Freeman, and, if possible, Brace; it was likely the search which discovered one would also locate the other. To this extent he would carry out his pact with Herzton.

"When must you leave?" Gladys asked him, when their farewells could be prolonged no further.

"The sooner the better. I want to get there, and get it over with, and then—back to you. We shall outwit our foxy friend at every turn. What will he say when he hears of our engagement?"

A wave of color in the girl's cheeks made her, in the eyes of Kent, irresistibly adorable. She was too bewitching to let go. He drew her to him again.

"One thing troubles me," she said at length, and her eyes were sober now. "It is a little hard to mention, but I know you will understand.

Your journey will cost money. You must not be hampered for means. And it is our job—not yours. Don't you see?"

"I see that you are a very thoughtful little girl. Really, I haven't had time to think of money; my mind has been filled with something else so much more precious. I have some, of course, and I can raise more, but it might take a few days——"

"And those days must not be lost," she interrupted. "Leave that part of it to me. It's for us, and we have a right to supply the capital. I'll see Dad in the morning, and tell him—enough to get his name on the dotted line."

"Then I'll leave at noon." They parted on that understanding.

He had scarce reached the street when a car pulled up beside him. It was Gladys in the roadster.

"How crazy I am, letting you walk home, or take a street car, when I can perfectly well drive you!" And so they had a few more minutes together, and another parting at 426 Eleventh Street.

George, the night elevator man, was disposed to be talkative. "You haven't been doing any crimes, I hope, Mr. Kent," he observed, as they went up in the car together.

"I hope not, too," Kent answered, with a smile. But in his blue heaven loomed suddenly an ominous cloud, a cloud that the wonderful events of the night, which were to culminate in making Gladys Hensley his wife, had for the moment driven out of his consciousness. "Why?" he asked, trying still to keep the smile alight.

"Well, there was a policeman here asking for you; a big bruiser, with a head like a quarter o' beef. Maybe it was just an automobile summons, or something; he said he'd be back in the morning."

"He's evidently not afraid I will clear out, anyway, or he wouldn't have given that notice," Kent laughed, as he got off at his floor. But a chill had touched the warmth of his heart. On a night when he had thought to be supremely happy a vague sense of impending danger began to told him in its grip. He tried to throw it off with the thought of his amazing good fortune, but he realized that Herzton still had cards up his sleeve, and it was impossible to guess when or where he would play them.

He was shaving next morning when a thump came on the door.

"Come in!" he called. "This will be our policeman friend, and we soon shall know the worst," he commented to himself.

A big round head, close-coupled to a big, round body, filled the doorway.

"Why, it's my friend Murphy!" Kent exclaimed. "Come in."

"I was just doin' that," Murphy remarked. "It seems to me it's always shavin' ye are!"

"Just a coincidence. I hear you were looking for me last night?"

"I was down this way when I was off duty, and I just dropped in to have a word with ye. This mornin' I haven't so much time." His hand went to his head, massaging it gently.

"It was good of you to come at all," Kent rejoined. "What's on your mind?"

The big policeman seemed to be struggling with something in his short neck. "My boy, ye're not in any kind o' trouble?" he managed, at length.

"Not in particular. Just managed to get myself engaged last night to the most wonderful girl in the world, if that's trouble."

"Well, it's the beginnin' of it," said Murphy, taking his errand for the moment less seriously. "Would an old rough-neck like me be likely to know the unfortunate young woman?"

"I believe you do. Remember Miss Hensley, who was at the inquest—the one you drummed me up to, when I had the honor of first meeting you?" The sudden relief Kent found in Mur-

phy's call sent him spinning again into a world of rainbow hues.

"What, Millionaire Hensley's daughter? In-dade I do! It's a lucky man ye are, Mr. Kent, and it makes me feel the more there can be nothin' in me misgivin's, but I want a word wi' ye anyway. Ye were kind o' civil to me when I called on ye a couple o' weeks ago, an' I said to myself, 'If I can do that young divil a good turn some day I'll do it, or me name's not Murphy'—which it is. Now I may be all wrong, Mr. Kent, an' I'll sure be all wrong if it's ever found out that I've come tattlin' to ye about it, but I heard some talk in the station last night that made me oneasy, about fingerprints bein' turned in o' a young fellow named Kent, which it seems were oidintical wi' those found on the body of the man Galut that was shot the other day. Of coorse, Kent's a common name, an' it couldn't be you, especially with you engaged to ould Hensley's daughter, but I thought I'd tip ye off, jus' the same. They're jus' waitin' the word, I believe, to round him up. But I'm glad ye're not mixed up with it, Mr. Kent. The law's a bad thing to get into."

Herzton! He had played his hand already!

Kent assorted these facts instantly in his mind, but he held his composure. "It was good of you to let me know, anyway," he said. "There is

always the danger of mistaken identities, and forewarned is forearmed. Now how about some ham and eggs?"

"I'd like to, fine, but I'm overlong already. Good-day, Mr. Kent, and I hope ye'll excuse me meddlin' in yer affairs, an' it's wishin' ye much happiness wi' yer young lady I am." With as much dignity as his figure would permit, Murphy saluted and withdrew.

Kent lost no time in getting down to his office, where he told Powers of his engagement to Gladys, and with the knight's errand upon which he proposed to embark with the noon train northward.

"Well, you work fast," Powers commented. "If you were to put as much horsepower into your inventing as you do into your love-making Edison and Marconi would both be also-rans. But I congratulate you, Morley." He seized his partner's hand and wrung it warmly. "It isn't every day a fellow gets engaged to a million dollars."

"Thanks, old man. But, believe me, the million dollars has nothing to do with it."

"We'll take that as read," Powers agreed. "But, just the same, don't throw it overboard. We may need it to keep you out of jail, since you insist upon getting tangled up in a mess that doesn't concern you."

"It concerns Gladys, and that's enough for me, and I'm not figuring on accepting any free board from a public institution in connection with it either," Kent laughed. "Now I must get along. Sorry to leave all the work to you and Vee, but it can't be helped."

A moment later voices were heard in the shop. Through a small pane of glass which commanded a view of the mercantile part of the establishment Kent saw two policemen in conversation with Powers. Harry seemed to have raised his voice unnecessarily high.

"If you're so sure Kent's here, find him!" he shouted. "Go to it! The shop is yours!"

The next moment Kent was out through a rear door which opened on a lane. He ran along the lane to its intersection with the street and whistled for a taxi. As luck would have it there was none in sight. Glancing back he saw the two policemen in the lane, already hurrying toward him.

To run through the streets, hotly pursued by two officers of the law, was to invite derision as well as capture. For an instant Kent hesitated, and in that instant a lean roadster pulled up beside him.

"Ready?" It was Gladys speaking.

Kent sprang into the car just as the policeman

reached the sidewalk. "Step on it!" he commanded. "They're after me!"

The girl's toe went down on the accelerator, and the car, tuned to perfection by the trusty Williams, sprang forward like a greyhound. Disregarding all traffic signals, Gladys raced it into the more open thoroughfare of an adjoining street.

"What's up?" she asked, when she had time to breathe.

"Herzton has turned in my fingerprints," he told her, as she threaded her way, still at a pace which evoked angry epithets from other drivers, fortunately drowned from the girl's ears in the din of traffic behind them. "I got a tip this morning, but I didn't expect action so soon. You arrived right in the nick of time."

She laughed. "It is a good omen," she said. "It means that you are going to be lucky all the way through."

"Racing through these streets with all the city police after me isn't just my idea of good luck," he demurred.

Presently he began to take note of the route she was following. "We'll never get to the station this way," he challenged. "And it's there I will run my greatest risk."

"I'm not taking you to the station, and you're not going to run any risk," she answered.

By this time she had swung onto Lake Boulevard and was humming along in the direction of Hensley House. "Whatever is she planning?" Kent wondered. "Going to take me to her home until the hunt blows over?"

But she did not turn in at the Hensley gate. Instead she continued her course along the lake. The residences thinned out; the lighter traffic made the drive like country going, and the roadster writhed as Gladys sent the speed up to its limit.

Presently they rounded a headland. In the water of the bay in front, close by the shore, lay a hydroplane. Gladys pulled up as close as the beach would permit, and a young man in aviator's togs appeared from among the trees.

"She's all set, Miss Hensley."

"Well, get her spinning! The police are after us, and there's not a minute to waste!"

With something of a start Kent had recognized in the aviator the chauffeur Williams.

"Williams will pilot you," Gladys answered the query in his eyes. "He's thoroughly competent; war experience and everything, and he's a friend of the family, which may count before you're through. Now you had better be on your way. Oh, I almost forgot!"

She drew a thick envelope from one of the pockets of the car.

"Money," she said, simply. "Wire for more if you need it."

The plane was humming. Around the headland behind them came a car traveling at high speed.

"Hurry!" she exclaimed. Then, for an impetuous moment, she caught him in her arms. For an instant they clung together, his lips on hers. Suddenly she thrust him away. The car was bearing down rapidly upon them.

"Do hurry!" she pleaded.

"But what will they do to you?"

"Nothing! Nothing! Oh, you are risking everything!"

The car had stopped beside the roadster. Policemen were springing out of it. Even as they rushed down to the beach Kent splashed through the water and swung into the seat in front of Williams. He turned to throw a kiss to Gladys and to wave a farewell to the discomfited officers. The plane was already gaining speed. Like a wild fowl of the air it skimmed along the surface of the lake, then gradually felt its wings and lifted into its own element.

Gladys and her ample escort watched it as it rose, circled, turned northward, and quickly faded out of view.

CHAPTER TWELVE

EVERYTHING had happened so quickly it was some minutes before Kent could realize he actually was in the air, speeding northward in the search for Miles Freeman and a contract covering patents so highly prized that one life had been lost over them already and a mystery created which was baffling the police. He watched the familiar landscape drop away below him; the glimmer of the lake die out to the southeast; the smoke of the city fade like a cloud carried in the teeth of a gale.

Presently he began to be aware that he was cold. His straw hat had blown off before they left the water, and the wind was piercing his summer clothing like a blast of arrows. His hand still clutched the package which Gladys had thrust into it as they left the car. He placed it inside his shirt for safer keeping and tightened his coat about him.

Williams, at the controls, seemed to have no thought for his passenger. His attention was focused upon the operation of his plane. But the machine was behaving splendidly; the sky

was clear, the air was steady, and they sped on, mile after mile, without incident.

Suddenly Williams seemed to recall something which for the moment had slipped his mind. Reaching down beside his seat he drew out an aviator's cap and handed it forward to Kent. This was followed by a heavy jacket. When Kent had arrayed himself in this additional clothing the prospect of freezing to death on a hot June day seemed more remote.

The noise of the motor and the rush of air made conversation impracticable, and in any case Kent felt that he had nothing to communicate which would justify taking Williams's undivided attention from his job. No doubt, the worthy chauffeur had received full instructions for at least the first lap of the journey and knew what he was doing. Accepting this assumption Kent settled back in his seat and began to feel more comfortable and at ease.

The occasion afforded opportunity for reflection, and his mind went back over the incidents of the past two weeks. It was now Saturday noon; a week ago Tuesday—less than eleven days, to be exact—he first had seen Gladys Hensley. He recalled her now, bejeweled as she had come from some fashionable gathering, standing in the rain beside the wreck of Gordon Brace's car. It was hard to realize that less than

eleven days ago Gladys and he had been utter strangers. When he thought of his avowal to her by the lake below the Crescent Moon, of their parting on the beach an hour ago, the realization seemed impossible.

Gradually he linked events together. The inquest over the taxi victim; the visit to the Hensley home when Gladys had fainted with the sudden recoil of her emotions; the dinner party, with the peculiar behavior of Gladys, and the ominous Manners flitting in and out behind the scenes; the visit to Herzton's laboratory; the interviews with Brace and Galut; the tragedy in the old factory building; the motor ride with Gladys and the episode of the missing steering wheel; the second visit to Herzton—like parts of a puzzle he tried to fit them into some coherent sequence. At first he saw them only as a confused mass behind the amazing fact that Gladys Hensley had promised to be his wife, but gradually another fact insistently emerged—the fact that the sinister influence to which Gladys was subject was as far from explanation as ever. Kent's suspicion that Herzton was the power behind that influence had deepened into certainty, but of proof or explanation he had not a shred.

He recalled the occasions upon which he had known her to be under that influence: the de-

mand for speed in Brace's car, and later in the taxi; the peculiar behavior at the inquest; the rebuff to him at the dinner party; the part played in the steering-wheel incident; the refusal to admit him into Hensley House only last night. Here were at least five occasions within eleven days. Five to his knowledge; how many without? That was a disquieting thought. He preferred to dismiss it, and to remember how she had trusted in him for protection. She had said, only last night, that she knew if she could reach him he would save her. His presence seemed to be a sort of insulation about her.

Then came a still more disquieting thought. For days, weeks, perhaps months, she would be deprived of his presence. Could it be doubted that so astute a rival as Herzton would turn that fact to his own advantage?

Kent almost sprang from his seat as his mind grasped a new interpretation of the day's events. Was it possible Herzton had engineered the whole thing to insure Kent's absence and clear the field for his own designs? . . . Instantly it was as clear as day! The turning in of the fingerprints—that meant imprisonment or flight, either of which would suit Herzton's purposes equally well.

Like a caged thing Kent gnashed his teeth. He had fallen into the trap. He was being

spirited away into the northern wilds. That Gladys and Williams were innocent parties to the tragedy made it no less overwhelming. And there was no going back—to go back meant arrest. He was now in the same boat with Gordon Brace. By one master stroke of strategy, Herzton had got rid of both his rivals. Even of Williams, who might have been a faithful watchdog about Hensley House. Herzton and Manners were now assured uninterrupted opportunity for whatever diabolical schemes they were capable of hatching.

Kent had uneventful hours in which to think the situation over, and his first chagrin gradually made way for a reasoned course of action. He must carry out his mission, find Brace and Freeman, and the three must go back together, piece out the facts they knew, and lay the whole thing before the police. In the meantime, he must trust that Gladys's love for him would be proof against every influence that could be brought to bear. In that confidence he became content and began to take notice of the landscape floating by a mile below him.

"Our driver seems to know where he is going, at any rate," Kent commented to himself. Williams had not consulted a chart or map since he took the air. He seemed to be flying by the compass and his knowledge of the country

underneath. At length his attention seemed to centre on one of the many verdure-clad lakes, as like to its neighbors, in Kent's untrained eyes, as two silver dollars. Williams crossed the lake, then banked, circled, and began to descend.

The lake was not more than two or three miles in circumference. Gradually the plane drew down to its bosom, as still and silent as a sheet of glass, and took the water like a bird. It came to a stop in front of a boat-house, which, partly hidden by the forest, had escaped Kent's attention until that moment.

Williams maneuvered his craft against a little wharf that jutted into the water, and clambered out over the wing. Kent, his limbs numb with their long inactivity, clumsily followed his example.

"Well, here we are!" said Williams, drawing off his cap and gauntlets. "How did you enjoy your trip?"

"Couldn't have been better, once I saw that you were onto your job and knew where you were going. I hadn't heard that you were a flyer."

"Oh, I did my stuff in the war, along with the rest of 'em, and I still fly a bit, just to keep my hand in. It proved useful this time. What were the police after?"

"Are you to stay with me?" Kent queried, dis- regarding the question.

"As long as you need me. That's my orders."

"Good! I think we shall get along well to- gether. And I'll tell you the whole story at the first opportunity. But where are we, and why?"

"We happen to be at the summer home of Mr. Angus Hensley. There are a few odd million lakes up in this country which are being grad- ually picked up by those who can afford to get away from the rush of business for a few weeks in the summer. I've flown this course before, and on a clear day like this it is as easy as cross- ing the street. We'll just anchor the machine and look over the premises."

Williams produced a key and unlocked the boat-house; the warm, imprisoned air, heavy with the smell of tar and paint, caught their nostrils. There were two slips with motor boats, a skiff pulled up on the floor alongside, and three or four canoes on a rack. From a tool- house at the back Williams produced a coil of rope, and they made the hydroplane safe to the wharf.

Through the trees, at a little higher level, Kent had caught a glimpse of a building which he supposed to be the Hensley summer home. They followed a winding path up from the

beach, and presently the building, sitting back in a small open space, came full into view. It was modest enough in its exterior appearance; a two-story frame house, stained a cedar-brown that harmonized with its background of spruce and hemlock, with wide verandas overlooking the lake, and windows secured with wooden shutters locked on the inner side. But the lawn had been recently cut; flower beds were blooming within little ramparts of whitewashed stones, and up the hillside behind stretched a kitchen garden with vegetable growth.

"There is a caretaker, of course?" Kent inquired.

"No one in residence, but a Frenchman who lives on the next lake over the ridge keeps the lawns in order and plants the garden. No doubt he'll be here if he sees us, to oust the intruders. In the meantime—perhaps you're not hungry?"

"Perhaps I am!" Kent had been remembering for some time that he had not eaten since morning, and the sun was now pouring in orange-colored strips through a fringe of trees on the hilltops to the west. The lake, already in the shadows, lay like a turquoise gem set in a frame of solid green.

They went inside, unlocked a number of shutters, and let a gentle evening breeze which was stirring on the hillside blow through. The in-

terior consisted of a large room with a great fireplace of boulder stone in one wall, a hall, and a kitchen. A stairway led to rooms above. The furnishings suggested the frontier and the wilderness, the craftsmanship of French-Canadian handy men hidden away in the valleys between these majestic hills. The Hensley luxury was evidently confined to their city home on Lake Boulevard; here was simplicity, but, with simplicity, comfort and rest.

Williams had dragged up a bundle from the plane. He now opened out bacon, beans, bread, molasses. A store-room in the basement disclosed a stock of tea, coffee, sugar, canned goods, left over from the previous season and still as good as ever. Kent started a fire in the great kitchen range and brought water from a spring down by the lake. The crackle of the wood fire and the drip of water from a tin pail took him back to his boyhood on the farm.

When the kettle was steaming Kent looked about for Williams, who was nowhere to be seen, but in a few minutes he came rushing in with a three-pound trout dangling from a line.

They cooked trout and bacon and spread their meal on a table covered with clean, white oil-cloth.

After supper they cleared their dishes and Williams found a box of good cigars that were

not too dry to be smoked with relish. Then they sat on the wide veranda and watched the slow twilight of the north enwrap lake and mountain in its shadowy folds.

For a whole cigar they sat in silence. It was hard to realize that they were only half a day from hustle and hurry and noise. Here was the world as God made it, and they were not sure that man had accomplished as much improvement as he likes to think.

Kent turned to a consideration of his companion. A man to whom he had taken a liking from the first. A man who had proven his skill that day beyond all question. A man with a war record; perhaps a very creditable war record.

"Some of my friends call me Morley," he said. "It's not a very handy name, but I'm not to blame for that. I suppose you were christened, too?"

"Frank," said Williams, simply.

Then they sat on again, while the shadows deepened, enveloped in a silence so acute they almost could feel it. Stars, amazingly brilliant, were coming out overhead, and the faintest flicker of aurora played in the northern sky.

"I was wondering," Williams said at last, "how long it would have been in the city before you would have wanted to call me by my first name."

"Never," Kent admitted, candidly.

A cold air stirred across the veranda, and Williams got to his feet.

"Even in summer it's cool here at night—always cool enough to sleep. It isn't the latitude so much as the altitude," he explained. "Let us build a fire in the fireplace and then we can talk over those matters you have in your mind."

It was midnight or later, and the birch logs had burned down to a ruddy glow, when the two men got up from before the fire.

"I'm with you, all the way, Morley," said Williams, as he extended his hand. "I believe your suspicions are right, and I'm going to help you prove them. But the first thing is to get Freeman and Brace. We'll make another lap to-morrow with the plane, but after that we'll have to lay her up—hide her away in one of these million lakes. The police up here will have a description of the machine and be all set to welcome us."

Williams found candles, pushed the coals well back into the chimney, and led the way upstairs. He stopped at a linen closet.

"Ever sleep in a millionaire's pajamas?"

"Not yet."

"Well, this is your big night. This looks like a pair of Mr. Hensley's. You'll fill them in one direction, if not the other. I can probably scare

up a razor and toothbrush for you in the morning. Here are sheets and blankets."

He showed Kent into a large room, with plain pine flooring, a bed with naked mattress against one wall, a pine washstand opposite.

He threw the sheets on the bed. "You'll have to be your own chambermaid. Grab a good sleep when you have the chance. To-morrow's Sunday, so we can lie in; five o'clock will be early enough."

Kent was no amateur at making his bed, and in a few minutes had it in readiness. As he undressed a package slipped from his clothing. He picked it up and held it somewhat gingerly in his hand, as thought it might have explosive qualities.

"I had forgotten all about you," he confessed. "Better see how Gladys has provided for us."

The thought of Gladys wafted him to another planet. Amid the peace and quiet of this forest home the world of ambition and intrigue seemed unreal and impossible.

The package was securely tied with a strong string. He undid it carefully and opened it out on the bed. It contained one hundred sheets of brown wrapping paper cut the size of a dollar bill!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOR a full minute Kent sat too amazed for speech or motion. Then he began to fumble slowly the mocking little sheets in his fingers. At length reason returned, and he shouted for Williams.

That worthy came scurrying down the passage. "Heavens!" he cried. "I thought a bear must be climbing in at your window!" Then, noticing the package spread on the blanket, "What have you there?"

"Until two minutes ago I thought I had a pocketful of money. This is what I find." He explained briefly about the package Gladys had handed him.

Williams sat down on the bed and they started to think it out together.

"I know about the package," Williams said, "because I went down to the bank for it. The arrangements were made by telephone. Miss Gladys handed me the check. 'Williams,' she said, 'go to the bank and get that money and bring it up at once. It will be ready for you.' Ten thousand dollars it was."

"Ten thousand dollars!"

"Yes. I saw it on the check. They know me at the bank, as I often do confidential errands of that kind for the family, and they handed me the package. I hurried back and gave it to Miss Gladys."

"Well, somebody tapped it, either at the bank, or somewhere in between," Kent summarized the situation, ruefully. "Ten thousand dollars!"

Suddenly Williams sprang from the bed. "I have it!" he shouted. "I have it! It's as plain as printing!"

"If you have it, hand it over," Kent ordered, ironically. "It was intended for me."

"I don't mean I've got the money. I've got the secret."

"That won't buy much gasoline."

"It may be mighty valuable, just the same. Mannie, that's the little bird! You know, Manners—we call her Mannie about the house. No doubt she heard the telephoning and managed to get her fingers on the package long enough to substitute the brown paper. She would have it all cut and ready. It could be done in a minute."

Kent pondered that possibility. "I believe Manners is an accomplice of Herzton's," he said at length, "but I didn't put her down for a thief."

"Nor I," Williams agreed. "But there's more

than thievery in this. Of course, ten thousand dollars isn't to be whisked off with a clothes brush. Lots of people's honesty doesn't reach the ten-thousand-dollar mark. Besides, this little trick was destined to leave you stranded in the wilderness. And—by Jove! don't you see?"—Williams's tanned face was flushed with sudden excitement—"it was going to put you in wrong! The police after you; ten thousand dollars delivered to your care; you fly up here to this lonely place; disappear from civilization for a month or two; then suddenly turn up with a fine story about the package being stuffed with brown paper! Who would believe that? The bank would swear they put the money in the package; I would swear I delivered it to Miss Hensley; she would have to swear she gave it to you—and it would be prison bars for little Morley! Herzton and Mannie will bank on your having intelligence enough to think it through to the end, and, when you see the trap in which you are caught, discreetly staying out of the reach of the police."

"It sounds reasonable," Kent agreed. "Now, what is the next move?"

Williams was standing by the window, looking across the lake, over which the moon was just rising. Kent came to him, and for a minute or two they stood together, watching the silent

scene. . . . Only last night, under that same moon, he had held Gladys in his arms. . . .

"I think I know," Williams said at length. "There were a hundred slips in that package. That would indicate that there had been a hundred bills. At that rate each bill was for a hundred dollars. Now is it likely a bank would make up a package of one hundred hundred-dollar bills without taking note of the numbers?"

"By George, you're right! We'll wire Gladys to get the numbers, and have detectives put on the trail! How far is it to the nearest telegraph office?"

"No, I don't think we'd better wire Gladys. Mannie would be likely to see the wire."

"Frank, I take off my hat to you—figuratively speaking. You're a genius. Go ahead."

"My suggestion is that I should wire the bank. They know me, you see. There's a telegraph office six miles from here, at the end of the next lake. There's a short portage, but we can carry a canoe over. It may not be open on Sunday, but if we go early we'll catch the operator before he leaves for his day's fishing. Fortunately we're not quite broke. I have a couple of hundred in my jeans, tucked away for emergency."

"I have about fifty."

"Good! That makes two hundred and fifty. Up in this country they float a gold mine on less cash than that."

On the side of the bed, using one of the brown paper slips, they drafted a telegram. Then, his mind at ease, Kent slipped under the covers, bade his friend good-night, and the next moment—so it seemed—Williams was again at the door.

"It's good form to take a plunge in the lake," he suggested. "There are no ladies about, and bathing suits are unnecessarily formal."

Kent followed him down the path. The still air was full of the scents of early morning and the songs of birds. The deep green of the lake lay below them like a glassy meadow.

After a brisk swim and a quick breakfast they launched one of the canoes and set out for the telegraph office. They made the trip without difficulty, but found the place locked.

"Operator sleeps upstairs," Williams explained. "Better await his pleasure. He isn't obliged to take messages on Sunday, and it doesn't put anybody in good humor to be wakened when he wants to sleep."

For an hour or more they sat on the station platform, drinking in the silence of that golden

Sunday morning. Cities and civilization seemed very far away, but Nature, with her finer wisdom, was all about them. In spite of the strain of baffling problems, their souls were strangely at peace.

They were disturbed from their reverie by the swinging of the station door. The operator, a young fellow of twenty-three or so, came out on the platform, dressed in shirt, trousers, and boots; his hair ruffled about his head, his eyes blinking in the bright sunshine.

"Hello, George!" said Williams, as though they had parted the night before. "Hope we didn't disturb your sleep."

"Hello, Frank! Didn't know you were up in these parts. How did you get in?"

"Flew in yesterday."

"Heard a machine," the operator remarked, "but supposed it was a fire ranger." His eyes were on Kent.

"This is Morley Kent," Williams explained. "Friend of the Hensleys. Came in with me yesterday."

The two strangers shook hands, and the operator offered his cigarettes.

"Wondered if you'd mind putting a wire over for us to-day," Williams suggested, when they had smoked for a minute or two. "Sorry to trouble you, but it's rather urgent."

Kent handed George the slip of brown paper and his eyes opened wider as he followed the penciled lines.

"An operator isn't supposed to know what's in the wires he handles," he remarked, "but this sounds interesting. Sure I'll send it for you."

Inside the little station office it was cool and dark. George wakened his silent key and in a few moments was being picked up at the other end of the line. Kent and Williams listened intently as the clatter gave evidence of contact with the outside world.

"There, that's gone," the operator said, when the message was finished. But the key clattered out again. "Hold on, he wants me." He reached for a telegraph blank and began taking the incoming message.

For a moment he held it quizzically in his hand. "Well, this is for me, I suppose. It's addressed to the chief of police here, and as I'm the only resident, I must be that, as well as mayor and chief of the fire brigade. Listen; it may interest you:

"HOLD TWO MEN KENT AND WILLIAMS TRAVELING BY AIRPLANE. REWARD."

Kent broke the silence which followed. "Well, are you going to hold us?" he asked.

The operator's puzzled face broadened into a smile. "How can I?" he asked. "Anyway, I'm not a policeman, so if you want to be on your way it goes with me."

"We planned to move along at once," Williams explained, "and this may just speed us up a little. The fact is they've got the whole dope wrong—you can believe that, George—but for the moment we've important business and no time to make explanations to the police. The theft of that money cripples us a bit, but we'll make it go."

They thanked him and, crossing the warm rails of the silent track, plunged into the forest on a path leading down to the lake.

"They're pretty hot on our trail," Williams said, when they had found their gait. "We'll fly as far as we can to-day, then hide our ship in one of these million lakes and work our passage some other way. Fortunately there's plenty of gasoline at the boathouse. Mr. Hensley gets in a season's supply at a time, and this year's shipment is now in the tanks."

Kent's words of agreement were cut short by a shout from the operator. Through a gap in the trees they saw him running down the path.

"Here's another message," he said, when he came up with them. "Came in just as you left.

It's for you, Kent, and seems to be pretty personal."

He had sealed it. Kent tore open the envelope, and read:

PLEASE FORGET MY FOOLISHNESS FRIDAY NIGHT AND ALL I SAID AND PROMISED THEN. YOU MUST REALIZE THAT WOULD BE ABSURD AND IMPOSSIBLE. GLADYS.

For a moment Kent stood as one in a dream. Then he handed the yellow sheet to Williams.

"That's Herzton again," Williams exclaimed, when he had read the message. "Gladys never did that of her own free will."

"No, I'm quite sure she didn't, but if Herzton can do that in twenty-four hours, what will he do before we get back?"

The three men faced each other in silence, none venturing an answer to that question. George was the first to speak.

"Sorry, Kent. I take it the message is from Miss Hensley, and is, as I supposed, very personal. Is there any answer?"

"Yes!" Kent exclaimed. "I'll send an answer that will waken that whole household to what is going on under its roof. I'll——"

"I think you're wrong, Morley," Williams interrupted. "A message is almost sure to be

intercepted by Mannie and turned over to Herztton. It will just give him the satisfaction of knowing his shot has gone home."

Kent sat down on a stump to think it over. "I guess you're right," he agreed at length, "as far as any direct message to Glad is concerned. But I have another plan. Let us go back to the office."

In the cool little room he wrote and rewrote a long message. At length he handed it to the operator. It was addressed to Miss Vera Masters. . . .

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE sun hung well to the westward against a lemon-colored sky when Kent and Williams caught sight of the thin dark gash of a railway line underneath. Infinitely long and lonely it looked as it wound its way through the interminable forest.

All afternoon they had flown above that forest, its mottled colors of spruce, pine, poplar, and birch stretching beneath them like a carpet thousands of square miles in extent. On the carpet lay prodigal coins; nickels and quarters and big round dollars, linked together by silken threads of stream or tossed into eternal isolation in the treasury of God. There were worn patches, too; ragged blotches of charred trunks or naked rock, bearing their sad witness to the "civilizing" hand of man. Once or twice there had been evidence of settlement; green meadows and growing crops. A power plant had straddled a river and a paper mill lay at its flank, but at all signs of habitation Williams had veered his machine away again over the untracked and the unknown.

"They would take us for fire rangers, of course," he shouted, "but there is no use leaving any clues. That's one thing about an airplane; it may be easy to see, but it's hard to track."

But after crossing the railway he was plainly looking for a good place to alight. He was not long in finding it, for the country, although impossible for a land plane, seemed especially designed by nature for its nautical brother. Selecting a long, narrow lake, Williams circled it, banked, and came down.

The upper end of the lake closed into the mouth of a small river, encased in forest so rank that the trees almost joined overhead. This was the sort of refuge Williams had been seeking. He drove the plane well up into the river's mouth, so that it was quite hidden from the lake, and never would be detected from overhead. They climbed out over the wings onto a tree that had fallen into the stream and made a dry landing.

"Well, that's not so bad," Williams observed, when they had stretched their cramped muscles and accustomed themselves to the feel of terra firma underfoot. "A hawk couldn't find it here. We'll tie her up and settle down for the night."

They had brought blankets and a silk tent from the Hensley camp, and soon they were in comfortable quarters on a sand spit which lay

high and dry near the mouth of the stream. They boiled coffee and cooked their meal. Afterwards they sat and smoked while the shadows deepened across the lake.

Williams was the first to break the silence. He tapped the ashes from his pipe and put it away. "I was thinking this afternoon," he remarked, "that we are up in the air in more ways than one. Do you know Freeman?"

"Never saw him in my life."

"Well, I've seen him, and could place him in a bunch—if it wasn't too big. But how to get our eyes on him—that's the problem. This country's as big as all outdoors, and he may be anywhere within a thousand miles, or farther."

"You have been working out a plan?" Kent suggested.

Williams smiled apologetically.

"I don't know whether you would dignify it by calling it a plan," he said, "but it's something. There are just two railways in the part of the country where Freeman was understood to be prospecting. They are the National, from Quebec to Winnipeg, and the T. & N. O., from North Bay to Cochrane. That was the T. & N. O. we crossed. If he's farther south, on the C. P. R., we're out of luck; if he's farther east we're out of luck. I'm betting that he's somewhere north and west. Well, he would have to

use the railway as a base, and by working along the line, making discreet inquiries, we have a chance of running him down. It isn't much of a chance," he concluded, lamely, "but it's all I see."

"The job is bigger than I figured," Kent admitted. "I jumped into it as though all I had to do was run up north somewhere and lay my hands on him."

"If we could use the plane it wouldn't be so bad, but that telegram gave us a pretty straight tip to cover our tracks," William soliloquized. "They're sure to get us if we stay with the plane. It's a case of the next best—and a run of luck. In the morning—if you agree—we'll hit across country until we come to the railway, follow it to the first settlement, and begin our inquiries. After all, it may not be as impossible as it looks. The country is enormous, but the population is small, and at any outfitting post they may remember Freeman."

"I'm uneasy about the police," Kent admitted. "They have the reputation of being uncomfortably efficient in this part of the world. And here are we, two perfectly harmless chaps, maneuvered into a position where we are afraid of the police! Old Herzton knows his job."

Rose-colored, the setting sun glowed across the lake, drenching the rocky shores with

lavender and purple. Here and there a circle formed in the glassy water as a fish flipped upward from its cool, inviting depths.

"I've been thinking of that," Williams resumed. "No doubt all the facts which Herzton has, and which it suits his purpose to reveal, have been placed at the disposal of the police. They will know that, although we're supposed to be flying from justice, literally"—he laughed at his unpremeditated pun—"we're really up here to find Freeman. And about the surest way to fall into their hands is to go about this country inquiring for Freeman."

"That's how I have it sized up, too."

"So we'll have to finesse a little. I suggest that you take the name of Freeman."

"I?"

"Yes. You look somewhat like him, and would pass for his brother. You see, you must have a new name, anyway; you can't go around announcing that you're Morley Kent, a gentleman wanted by the police, and you might as well call yourself Freeman. That will save inquiries. Whenever you say your name's Freeman, if the real Freeman is known thereabouts someone is sure to remark it, and you will get all the information you want without appearing to ask for it."

Kent arose with deliberation, strode across

the two yards of sand that separated them, and slapped his companion soundly on the shoulder.

"By George, you are a wizard!" he exclaimed. "How do you get it? Do you know, you've never told me anything about yourself, and of course you don't need to now, but when a man is likely to see only one face, day after day, he gets either interested or fed up—and I feel that I'm going to be interested. Of course, I knew the first time I heard your voice that you're English—that's one thing your countrymen never can conceal——"

"We don't try. Why should we?"

"Yes, I believe that's right. You don't try—and why should you? And you've been through the war," Kent went on, when the Englishman showed no further disposition to speak, "but what else? You seem to know this country. Where did you learn it?"

There was a minute's silence before Williams answered.

"Not much to tell—that would interest you," he began. "The war shattered a good many family fortunes in England. Ours among them. And I gradually and painfully discovered that I had been educated for everything except making a living. The only training that seemed likely to pay a cash return was what I got in the war, flying a plane. I came to Canada and got a

job on the forest patrol of one of the big timber companies. It was an interesting business, flying over the forests, watching for fire. Sometimes we caught it at the first wreath of smoke. Then we came down at the nearest lake and put it out ourselves. At other times it had already got its teeth in, and we had to fly back and notify the land forces. It is a bit like war, but the kind of war that builds up, instead of tearing down. That's what they are using the planes for up in this country. No world's records, but a wonderful lot of world's service.

"One day after a particularly heavy cruise I found myself running short of gasoline. I saw a lake, a motor launch, a boat-house, and I came down. It turned out that I had stopped at Mr. Hensley's summer camp. I took Mr. Hensley for a flight as a return for his courtesies. For some reason he became interested in me, and before I left he offered me a job. It offered less social standing, but more money, than piloting a plane, and I wasn't long in deciding. I have been with them ever since.

"What you suspect of Herzton helps to explain a number of things which have been puzzling me, too. He has spun an evil magic of some kind around that girl. He will play all his wiles in our absence, but I don't think he can beat her. On that point we'll have to trust."

"Then you knew of it, too; the magic I mean?"

"I knew there was something; I didn't know what. But I am sure now that Herzton is at the bottom of it. And our job is to beat him; beat him at every turn of the game. First, to find Freeman; the other Freeman, you know." He smiled gently through the gathering night.

"You, too, will need a *nom de plume*," Kent suggested.

"Yes, I'd thought of that. I'd thought of Hunt. You see, it's all a hunt. We're hunting Freeman, and the police are hunting for us. So why not Hunt? Besides, Freeman and Hunt go together rather well."

"I hope we always shall," Kent answered, solemnly.

Late into the night he lay, wondering at all the strange turns of fate; wondering, as he had not wondered since a child, whether it is all a jumble of chance, or whether in and around and about it all is a directing intelligence. As he lay in this mood it seemed that Gladys Hensley drew very near. Not all body, and not all spirit, but something compounded of each. It banished from his mind the lurking ache sown by the morning's telegram, and in its caress he fell asleep.

They were about with the sun in the morn-

ing. After a dip in the lake they ate breakfast beside a little fire on their sandy beach. They saw to it that the plane was securely fastened, providing even against the contingency of a sudden flood, packed such essentials as they could reasonably carry, and started up the water course which, Williams was sure, would lead them to the railway.

As they made their way along the rocks which bordered the stream and afforded a narrow strip free of trees and underbrush, Williams spoke of the wealth of the country through which they were traveling.

"It isn't so long ago that all this country was considered sheer worthless wilderness," he said, with a sweep of his arm indicating the rocky hillsides all about them. "Gold—the country's full of it! At any moment you may stub your foot against a fortune. And power! It's the world's store-house of power."

So they tramped on, Williams enthusiastic, informative, and apparently undisturbed by the heavy going; Kent saying little. The heat of a mid-summer sun was beginning to pour down upon them, and the valley was breathless.

At length they caught sight of a scar on the hillside and the glimmer of a steel rail.

"The railway!" Williams exclaimed. "I was right!"

"Yes, but on the other side of the river," Kent pointed out.

"Never mind; it will cross—or we will."

True enough, sooner than they dared to hope, the railway bridged the stream. They clambered up and found their feet on its level, easy road-bed.

Toward noon they found evidence of settlement, and before nightfall reached a little town in the centre of an agricultural community being wrested from the wilderness. The buzz of motor cars and the glare of electric light came down upon them again as from another world. Along a single earthen street was strewn a double row of wooden buildings housing stores, shops, implements, automobiles. On the plank sidewalk they jostled with townsmen, commercial travellers, farmers, smartly dressed women, river drivers, prospectors, and noted with some relief that their appearance occasioned not the slightest interest or curiosity.

Huge black letters painted on the bare wall of one of the larger buildings announced the King's Hotel. "What's good enough for the king should do for us," Williams observed, and they turned in.

"Mr. Freeman, Mr. Hunt," the clerk read their names from the register. "Two rooms with bath, gentlemen?"

They were shown upstairs to adjoining rooms; square commodious boxes, comfortable but far from luxurious.

"That 'rooms with bath' stuff rather worries me," Williams said, when they were alone.

"What of it? Do people not take baths in this country?"

"Not at so much per, unless they're from the city. That's the point. In spite of our packs and our gruelling day on the road, that clerk put us down for city people the moment he clapped eye on us."

Kent returned his gaze with something near dismay.

"That's a fact. Still, if I go through my clothes and boots for a week as I've done to-day my disguise will be complete."

They washed and went down to get something to eat. At the desk, they were stopped by the clerk.

"I've a telegram here for you, Mr. Freeman. Have been holding it for a week or more." He handed over a yellow envelope.

Williams, glancing over Kent's shoulder, saw the address, Miles Freeman.

"That must be for your brother," he remarked. Then, to the clerk, "Haven't seen anything of the other Freeman, recently, have you?"

“Didn’t know there were two,” the clerk answered. “But, come to think of it, we had a Freeman registered here a month or two ago. About your build, he was,” indicating Kent.

“You’re sure he didn’t leave a forwarding address?” Williams was hot on the trail of information.

“No. Don’t think he knew himself. Prospector.” So dismissing the subject, the clerk turned to other business.

“We slipped up on one thing,” Williams said, when they had sat down to supper. “We should have found what is in that telegram.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FOR a week they worked northward and westward, tramping the railway track or helping themselves to occasional lifts on freight trains. At the second important town at which they stopped another telegram to Miles Freeman was handed them, and on this occasion Kent accepted it without argument or explanation. It was what he expected—a wire from Gordon Brace urging Freeman to meet him at some point to be agreed upon to discuss the sale of his radio patent. It confirmed Galut's report that Brace had wired to many points in the north country in the hope of establishing contact with Freeman, but gave no additional information.

On the evening of their seventh day on the road they stopped at a sidetrack and embryo town of two buildings—the railway station and a house for the foreman of the "section" gang engaged in maintenance of the right-of-way. They had been traveling at low expense, sleeping and eating in the open, but their supplies were running low and they inquired of the station agent whether there was a chance of getting lodgings and meals for the night.

"I board at Ole's," the agent explained, indicating the red-painted section house with his thumb, "but he's full to the roof. You can pay your way?" he asked, pointedly.

They assured him they still enjoyed a state of solvency.

"I asked because I didn't want to see Ole's wife stuck with a pair of dead beats," he continued, frankly. "Perhaps you can get meals from her, and you can sleep here on the seats, if you like."

They thanked him and waited, hesitant.

"Stick around until the Limited goes through and I'll go over with you," the agent said. "The Swedes fill the first table, anyway."

They found a wedge of shade cast by the station building and sat down on the wooden platform, their feet hanging over the edge. A gasoline car, loaded with railway workers, pulled up and disgorged its human freight into the section house. Except for this the whole land lay in utter silence, washed with intense sunshine, the distant forests and hilltops shimmering in the heat. Two interminable lines of steel stretched east and west, linking the wilderness with the world at Quebec and Winnipeg.

They were too tired for speech, and the minutes droned on.

Presently a speck appeared in the distance,

flying a plume of black cloud. For a time it seemed almost stationary; then it grew with amazing acceleration. The rails began to ring, and the Limited roared by, its couplers clanking, its brake shoes purring gently against the flying wheels. Girls in traveling costumes sat on the observation platform and waved impartial hands to them as they faded quickly out of sight.

The agent saw to his semaphores, locked the office, and joined them in their shady corner. "All right," he said. "We'll see what Olga can do for us."

The section men were filing out for their after-supper smoke, and Olga and her two daughters, sixteen and twelve, were clearing the wreckage from a long table, oilcloth-covered, in the middle of the principal room.

"Paying boarders for you to-night, Mrs. Hansen," the agent announced. "They sleep in the station."

The perspiring woman regarded them doubtfully and without speech. But she set places for them and fed them simply but well.

After supper they sat and smoked until they heard Ole at his radio. The Swede manipulated the dials, and presently a jazz band was flooding the room.

“Clear out the dishes, Olga; maybe we have a dance,” Hansen suggested to his wife.

“Maybe we wash the dishes first, an’ maybe Ay dance enough for a hot day alretty,” the woman retorted. But when the work was finished and the big table had been carried out of the house the girls were ready enough to dance, and as they floated about the room in their partners’ arms they spoke a universal language which needs no interpretation.

After a while Ole, like a true radio fan, tired of the station he was getting and twirled the dials for something else. A few bars of grand opera came surging in, but Ole choked them into instant silence. Then someone giving a speech met a similar fate. A persuasive argument featuring the value of a certain kind of fertilizer lasted for a paragraph, and the ruthless Ole rolled on.

Suddenly, as clearly as though speaking in that very room, came a voice which shot Kent and Williams through and through with a thrill of something almost supernatural. It was the well-known announcer of the Hensley Radio Corporation.

“In response to a tremendous volume of requests Miss Gladys Hensley——”

But Ole had turned on.

“Oh, do pick that up again, won’t you, please,

Mr. Hansen?" Kent begged of him. "We—I—that is, we have heard that singer before."

"You like her? Sure. Ay catch her if she ain't gone."

The obliging Ole retraced his course, and in a moment the radio cut in again.

" . . . Professor Herzton at the piano."

Kent pictured Herzton's elegant room; the wiry, alert, fox-faced man at the piano; Gladys in front of the microphone. Every note of the piano introduction sounded like a bell, and every bell wrung his heart. Then, out of a gap of infinite silence, came a clear soprano voice:

*"Once on a time, in a kingdom by the sea,
Lived a young prince, sad and lonely . . ."*

"Sad and lonely." It seemed to Kent the words might have been intended for him. He saw Gladys Hensley standing in Herzton's room, her figure erect, tense with the emotion she was throwing into her song, her head back, her throat full and quivering, her cheeks softly pink under the gentle light which Herzton would temper to such a scene. For a moment he lost the thread of the song and was caught back only when the singer's full-throated low E opened that marvelous refrain—

"You are my song of love, melody immortal—"

The low, slow chords released an infinite yearning within him which gathered intensity until the voice died away in the final vibrations of Schubert's masterpiece. Seated beside the elder Hansen girl, Kent was unaware that her hand was clasped in his, the two linked together in a mystic receiving set, vibrating with the ether about them. Could it be, as the Reverend Mr. Rogers had suggested, that there is a thing of spirit, unexplained by science, a universal medium through which all hearts in tune respond to one another? The body of Gladys Hensley was far away, but her voice still rang in his ears. If a mechanical device could do that, what limit could be placed upon the soul itself?

Kent had an overwhelming sense of her presence about him, enveloping him. Notwithstanding her telegram of rejection, he felt that she had been reaching out to him, and that more than words had come surging through space. Unconsciously he withdrew his hand from his companion's and extended his arms. Ole's look of curiosity brought him back to material things, and, blushing furiously, he hurried out of the room.

Half an hour later he found the station agent, and together they walked twice the length of the platform without speaking. Bright star-

points shone down from a cool, cloudless sky, and the blue-green lights of the switch signals glowed steadily from the ends of the sidetrack.

"Great singer, that," the agent ventured at length, wondering what lay behind Kent's strange behavior. "You've heard her before?"

"Yes. Fact is, I know her—very well."

"Oh!" Light, not from the stars, was dawning upon the servant of the Canadian National.

Suddenly Kent turned upon him. Even in the darkness the agent was conscious of his tense, strained features.

"Look here, you're a good fellow. Will you do me a service?"

"If I can."

"Send her a wire, to-night, now! Let me into the station. I'll write it there. Will you send it?"

"Of course," the agent agreed, wondering that there should be so much ado over a very ordinary request.

Inside, on the ledge of the ticket window, by the yellow light of an oil lamp, Kent scrawled his message. "Your Song of Love came in fine. Congratulations," was all he could trust the wire to say. He signed it "Morley."

The agent raised an operator at the nearest divisional point and in a few minutes had rattled the message off to its destination.

"Thanks, awfully," said Kent, paying the

small fee involved. "You don't know what that means to me."

"Perhaps not, but I can do my own guessing. Well, you can bunk on the seats in the waiting room. You have your blankets. Make yourself comfortable. This is not a night office, and nothing will disturb you until morning except, perhaps, a freight or two rolling by."

Kent thanked him and sat down on the platform to wait for Williams. His mind was too full for coherent thinking. For a week Gladys had been a thing out of an unreal past which never was. To-night, under these silent stars, she had touched him, held him, surrounded him.

It was late when Williams came. "Hello, old man!" he greeted, sitting down alongside. His arm touched Kent's. "Mooning—a little?" he asked, gently.

"A little—perhaps."

"I know. You won't mind me saying, will you, that it gets me a bit, too?"

"I know."

They were silent for a while, when Williams suddenly broke in again in his most businesslike voice:

"Got great news to-night. Word—definite word—of Freeman!"

Kent came back to earth. "Yes? How?"

"Mrs. Ole, and Ole himself. They were won-

dering why you made the sudden get-away, and I told them about a sister you had who used to sing that song before she died in a sanitarium. Had to cover up some way, you know. Then it came out that your name is Freeman, and Mrs. Ole remembered she had fed a man of that name about a month ago. She never could forget him, because he gave her two dollars for staying overnight. So we got talking about the other Freeman, and Ole remembered having quite a chat with him. He had struck the railway here after an abortive plunge toward Hudson's Bay, in a quandary whether to work east, toward the Rouyn district, or west, to Red Lake. He settled it by tossing a quarter and leaving Ole to call the winner. 'Heads for west,' said Ole, 'and by Yove it was, and he yump up and start for Red Lake.' Well, that's that. No more tie travel for the moment. We've still enough money to pay our fare, and we'll take the next train."

Under the prospect of definite action, with success in view, Gladys again faded from their immediate aura. The benches of the waiting room, intolerable as they would have seemed a week ago, were gentle to-night under bodies toughened by their tramp through the wilderness. Toward morning came a soft patter of rain on the windows, and Kent, awakened by the un-

usual sound, lay and listened to its soothing monotone. The peace of the north country came again upon him, as it had come that night at the Hensley camp. All was well. All . . . was . . . well. . . .

In the morning they learned that they would not be able to take a train from that point, as no stops were made there except by special order. "Twelve miles west there's a regular stop," the agent explained. "You can hoof it up there through the day and catch the Limited when she goes west this evening."

They thanked him, and were on the point of leaving when he was called to his key. Curiosity caused them to wait while he took his message.

He came to Kent with the yellow slip in his hand. "Your name is Morley Kent?" he asked. "Yes."

"Thought they were saying at the house your name was Freeman. But I guess it's for you, all right. It listens like good news." There was broad humor in his eye as he handed over the message.

Kent took the few typewritten lines at a gulp.

SO GLAD YOU PICKED UP MY SONG I TOOK A
CHANCE AND SANG FOR YOU WHY DONT YOU
KEEP ME POSTED ON YOUR MOVEMENTS SOME-
TIMES VERY LONELY. GLADYS.

He could hardly keep his delight within bounds. "That means Herzton hasn't won out yet, anyway!" he remarked, as he handed the message to Williams.

Williams read it, and his face darkened. "You didn't tell me you had wired her," he said, and there was a note of accusation in his voice under which Kent visibly bridled.

"Did I have to?" he demanded.

"Oh, no. You're your own boss. But suppose Herzton had got your wire?"

Kent's resentment softened to concern. "By George, you're right! I never thought of that. But he didn't get it, and there's no harm done, and a lot of good. Still, I guess I'd better not answer at once. Too risky."

"I think so," Williams agreed, soberly.

They shouldered their bundles and started again their long trudge westward, while the agent settled to work at his desk in the little glass-walled alcove which commanded a view up and down the track. From time to time he glanced after the diminishing forms until they faded out of sight in the distance. The touch of romance of which he had been a witness had revived a little flame in his heart. He must write a letter. . . .

When the Limited came roaring up that evening he noticed with surprise that the engineer

had cut off the steam as he passed the eastern end of the switch. Sure enough, he was stopping! The brakes ground hard on the wheels as they went sputtering by. A uniform flashed in a vestibule, swung out over the steps, and dropped off. Instantly the power was again applied, and the Limited rolled onward on its course across the continent.

"Well, Anderson, what's new?" the policeman asked, as the two watched the speck vanishing in the distance.

"You are, Morton. Haven't been honored with a call from you for months. What's in the wind? Bootleggers again?"

The policeman extended a cigarette case, and both men helped themselves.

"No," he answered. "A little variety this time. By the way, you had a message this morning for a man named Morley Kent?"

"Well?" Notwithstanding his acquaintance with Morton, the agent was instantly on his guard.

"Telegrams are confidential, and their contents may be disclosed only by order of the Court."

"You needn't rush for cover," Morton chaffed him. "I'm not going to ask you what was in it. I happen to know that already. What I am interested in is—did you deliver it?"

"You know the contents? How?"

"It's quite a story, and I may regale you with it presently, if you're disposed to be amiable. You've helped me once or twice before, and I suggest that we sit in together on as neat a little problem as has been under my attention for some time. Kent was here. He sent a message to Miss Gladys Hensley last night and received a reply this morning. You delivered it."

"Why trouble to call on me, since you know all about it already?"

Morton refused to be annoyed. "Let us sit down inside, while I a tale unfold," he suggested.

When they were comfortable in Anderson's cool office Morton continued:

"Two men named Morley Kent and Frank Williams have been evading us for a week. Kent is wanted for murder——"

"Then let me tell you at once you are on the wrong track. I know men a little, and if that fellow is a murderer I'm an assassin and you're a Bolshevik."

"Glad to have you confirm the fact that he got the message, anyway. Now in our job we don't go by appearances—we go by evidence. There was a rather unique killing down in one of our manufacturing cities. Kent's fingerprints were found on the scene. With the assistance of a

Miss Hensley, rich and pretty, of course, he escaped in a seaplane piloted by Williams. There's nothing against Williams except aiding a fugitive to escape from justice. Kent is the real quarry.

"Well, they cached their machine somewhere and took to the woods. Of course, there was the hypothesis that they had crashed and saved us all a lot of trouble, but we couldn't bank on that, so one of our plain-clothes men went down to get at the facts. He found, as anyone might have concluded, that there was a case on between Kent and the Hensley girl. Her father is in the radio business, and she sings for the 'mike' from time to time. It was one of his men, a Professor Herzton, who identified the fingerprints. Herzton is playing up to the girl, too, so the plot thickens.

"Here's where a little psychology enters in. Kent has been in the wilderness for a week, cut off from all communication with the beautiful Gladys. He'll be about ripe to do something foolish. So Herzton puts the girl on last night's programme. Sure enough, Kent picks her up and falls for the trap. Through an accomplice in the Hensley home we get copies of the messages, both going and coming. So now all that remains is for me to lead him to the sacrifice."

Anderson threw the butt of his cigarette on the floor.

"It looks smooth enough, but I'll bet a hundred to one you're wrong. Those boys were here last night, and I put them down for being as white as they make 'em. I've helped you once or twice, Morton, and I'd do it again, but I'm not with you this time, because I believe you're all wrong."

"Don't worry over that. I'm neither judge nor jury. They'll get a fair trial."

"But first you've got to catch them."

"That's it."

"Well, let's see you do it. Sorry, Morton, but I must lock up for the night."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN Gladys Hensley turned from the seaplane bearing Kent and Williams out of the immediate reach of the law, it was into the ample arms of a bodyguard of four policemen.

For a moment all of them stood too nonplussed for words.

"Well, young woman," the officer in charge blurted out at length, "what's all this about?"

"Tell us, won't you?" Gladys retorted. "It's your party."

"That won't get you far."

"Then suppose one of you drive home with me, and I'll tell you what I know."

"That's reasonable."

"The facts are these," she began, when she was seated. "Mr. Kent has important business up north for my father. It was arranged that he should leave at noon, but Father decided the business was so urgent he should travel by plane. A machine was engaged, and our chauffeur, Williams, who is an expert aviator, was placed in charge. Meanwhile I drove down to Mr. Kent's office to deliver a package of money for

expenses, when I discovered that through some silly blunder the police were trying to detain him. So I gave them the high sign, and here we are!"

"Don't you know that it is a very serious matter to assist a criminal to escape from justice?" the officer demanded with an attempt at severity which failed rather lamentably. The proximity of the girl at the wheel excited emotions inconsistent with official austerity.

"I don't know that he's a criminal, and I don't always call escaping from the police escaping from justice," she retorted.

They had reached Hensley House. "Won't you come in?" Gladys invited, in her best society manner. "Perhaps you would like to talk the matter over with Father?"

The officer hesitated. It might be to his advantage to meet Angus Hensley. And then, again, it might not. Perhaps this was not the auspicious occasion.

"Well, no, I think I'd better report to the chief first," he answered, and the four departed.

The Hensley family lunched alone that day, and Gladys took advantage of the opportunity to lay the situation, from her point of view, before her father and mother.

Mr. Hensley's round, youthful face, under its benevolent gray hair, looked serious enough

when Gladys had recounted the morning's adventure.

"This is going further than I expected," he told his daughter, soberly. "I agreed, at your request, to supply the money and the plane, but a clash with the police was not in the bargain."

Gladys faced him with upturned hands. "I didn't want that either, Daddy, but they just insisted. And we have to get the Freeman patents, don't we?"

"I am trusting Herzton to attend to that."

"You trust Herzton too much. After what I told you this morning about the steering wheel I should think you would want to have him arrested!"

Mrs. Hensley took up the discussion. "Professor Herzton is an old friend of ours, and has been of great service to your father. And yet, without any reason that I can see, you put all the blame on him, and this new friend of yours, who seems to have been mixed up in all sorts of things, goes flying off like a war hero."

The girl sprang to Kent's defense. "That's hardly fair, Mother. Mr. Kent has put himself about tremendously on our account, and is doing so at this minute. You ought to be very grateful to him, and kind, too, because when he comes back he is going to be your son-in-law!"

For a moment Mrs. Hensley was too stricken

for speech. "Gladys, do you know what you are saying!" she managed, at length. "Who ever heard of such a thing? Angus, did you hear what the child said?"

Mr. Hensley's appearance was that of a conspirator in crime. "Yes, she told me that this morning," he admitted.

"I had to tell him, Mother, before he would let me have the money. You know what men are——"

"The money? What money?"

"The money for the trip—for Morley's expenses. We hardly could expect——"

"Oh! So we are paying his expenses! How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

Mrs. Hensley's soft round arms flew up to her breast. "Ten thousand dollars! Heavens, Angus, what are you thinking of? You'll never see man or money again. Even if you must pay his expenses—I suppose he has nothing of his own—you need not have treated him like a prince. Mark my words, you'll never see man or money again. He'll send Williams back on some pretext——"

"I had thought of that," her husband returned, undisturbed, "and it seemed a very good arrangement. If he doesn't come back, ten thousand dollars is not too much to pay in sav-

ing our daughter from such a mistake. If he does come back—well, he's proved his mettle."

"He'll never come back." Mrs. Hensley had already mentally written off a ten-thousand-dollar loss.

Gladys, angry and defiant, was on her feet. "He will come back!" she cried. "He'll come back and account for every dollar. If he doesn't"—she searched for words that would express her confidence in Kent—"if he doesn't, our engagement is off, and I'll say you're right about Professor Herzton; marry him, if you want me to!"

The meal broke up unhappily. Although it was Saturday afternoon, Mr. Hensley decided to go back to the works. Gladys elected to drive alone into the country, where she could consult her soul and steady herself after these tumultuous events.

Mrs. Hensley took advantage of the absence of her husband and daughter to summon Professor Herzton for a conference on matters near to her heart. Responding in post haste, he found her ready to pour tea in a sun room on the eastern wing of Hensley House, where the rays of the hot afternoon no longer invaded, and tall open windows wooed the shyest of zephyrs. She greeted him with effusion.

"It is so good of you to come, and the day so

warm! Really, Professor Herzton, I am in distress! In my perplexity I turn to you. You are so clever, and I really know so little of the world! Angus is the best soul that ever lived, but so unconcerned about family matters. He always says everything will come out all right in time, if you let it alone, but I expect just the opposite will happen."

From behind his pointed face and bristling eyebrows Professor Herzton observed her keenly. "If I can serve you, that will be my greatest pleasure," he assured her, wondering meanwhile the occasion of his summons.

She touched a bell, and a maid brought ices.

"I was sure you would help," she sighed, already soothed by his presence. "You are an old friend of the family, Professor Herzton, and it is a matter which touches the family very closely that I want to discuss with you to-day. Tell me, what is this I hear about a man called Freeman, and some patents?"

For an instant Professor Herzton was almost taken off his guard, the subject was so far from that which had been engaging his mind at the moment. But before he had time to answer her question, Mrs. Hensley, apparently reassured by the mere fact of having asked it, rattled on:

"It is about Gladys I am concerned, Professor Herzton. You know these strange moods

she has been having of late? Well, in some such madness she has set her heart on young Mr. Kent, whom you have met, I believe, in this house. The match is quite impossible, but the child, of course, cannot see it in its true light, and Angus, as usual, is unconcerned. He has even despatched this Mr. Kent on a business errand and has intrusted him with ten thousand dollars! In cash, if you please! As I told him at luncheon, that is the last he will ever see of man or money." Mrs. Hensley, warm with the weather and her indignation, raised a tiny perfumed handkerchief to her pretty face.

"I am quite sure you are right," Herzton agreed. Even as he spoke he was thinking rapidly to himself—"Ten thousand dollars! The old man is lining up with Kent." Then, to Mrs. Hensley: "I recall Kent clearly enough. A rather pleasant fellow, but without depth. To men like him ten thousand dollars is a considerable sum—quite enough to silence the still small voice of conscience. Besides, he is, I understand, in some difficulty with the police. Be assured, Mrs. Hensley, you have seen the last of Kent. The loss of the money is not to be regarded so philosophically."

"Oh, it is well spent if we are really rid of him! Angus, I think, expects him back. He is but a child in dealing with sharpers, in spite of

all his experience. And Gladys, of course, has no doubt whatever. Time will disillusionize her, and then it is my hope—may I say it, Professor Herzton—Martin?—that our long and happy relations with you may be—may become even closer.” Mrs. Hensley revealed what lay in her heart more by a confusion which daintily painted a blush across her cheeks than by her words.

The professor jerked his mind back to the immediate situation. He allowed a becoming period to pass in silence before he spoke.

“You cannot measure, Mrs. Hensley, how greatly I am honored by what you have just intimated. It is surely not unknown to you that my hope has lain in that direction for many years. If I have not spoken in words, my eyes—my heart—must have revealed it many times. I hesitated to take what would appear to be the advantage of my friendship with you to press my case, at least until Gladys herself should indicate her preference. It seems, however, that the time has come to act. The child must not be allowed to throw herself away upon an adventurer. That is, if by some miracle the man should come back,” the professor added, remembering his prediction that the last had been seen of Kent.

Mrs. Hensley almost gushed. “I am so glad

I have not embarrassed you, Martin. Now we must lay our plans. What do you suggest?"

Professor Herzton recalled his last interview with Gladys. But a smile lit up his sharp eyes as he thought of a card still up his sleeve. The moods!

"I think you can leave it to me," he answered, calmly.

"Oh, I am sure I can. Gladys is driving this afternoon. Perhaps you would like to call this evening?"

"No, I think it would be a mistake to hurry matters. We must give her time to think. Her own good sense will soon point out the error she is making. And love, Mrs. Hensley, is a very beautiful thing, but very painful when misplaced. We must give her time."

Mrs. Hensley beamed. "You are so wise, Martin. I know I can trust you." She arose to her feet.

For a moment he held her outstretched hand, then raised it to his lips. "You have made me very happy, Mrs. Hensley," he breathed. "I hope I shall justify the honor you have done me."

He left at once, walking with his rapid, agile stride to his car parked on the drive, and in a moment Mrs. Hensley saw him cut from view by a high hedge which bounded the grounds to

the right. Here, where he knew he was out of her sight, he stopped his car and walked quietly in the shelter of the hedge to a little gate giving entrance to the Hensley gardens. Inside the gate was a summer house, a secluded spot, little used by the family, but apparently well known to Professor Herzton.

He entered the summer house and sat down upon a bench. Reaching under the bench his practised fingers found a concealed button. He pressed a signal on it. Then he nonchalantly lighted a cigar and settled down as though to enjoy in private the hospitality of his friend and employer.

Not long had he to wait. A quick step came down the secluded path, and Florence Manners entered the summer house.

The professor remained seated, pulling gently on his cigar.

"Well," the woman challenged at length. "You called me. What's the idea?"

Herzton looked up as though he had not been aware of her presence. "Oh, sit down, please. I have a little fairy tale I wish to tell you."

"I am not interested in fairy tales."

"You will be in this one. Listen: Once upon a time there was a poor young man of no particular merit who fell in love with the daughter of a rich family. That is, we will say he fell in love

with the daughter, but it may have been her father's money. And with that strange lack of perspicuity which is part of the feminine character, Miss Manners, the young woman returned his passion. Now the course of true love seldom runs smooth, and the poor young man became involved with the officers of the law. In this predicament the girl went to her father, who, you will remember, was very rich, and begged the sum of ten thousand dollars with which to send the poor young man to a far country. The father, realizing his daughter was in love, felt that ten thousand dollars was not too much to pay for the permanent disappearance of the young man from her immediate vicinity. The money was paid and the young man disappeared. Now I ask you to finish the story. Did the young man come back or did he stay away?"

"There's a chapter comes in before that," the woman replied. She had seated herself and was holding Herzton in a steady, distrustful gaze.

"Oh? I should be glad to hear it. Proceed."

"Well. This young woman had a maid who had become involved—well, we needn't go into that. At any rate, she knew the arrangements that had been made to get the ten thousand dollars from the bank. The chauffeur, a trusted employee, brought it up from the bank and placed it in the hands of the young girl, who carried it

to her room for safe keeping. While she was engaged with her toilet, her maid found opportunity to cut the package open at one end, extract the bills, and fill the space with strips of wrapping paper which she had provided for the purpose——”

Professor Herzton was on his feet. “Good heavens, Pauline, is this true?” he demanded.

“Do you think I am making it up?”

For a moment he studied her intently, his lynx eyes glittering. Then he burst into laughter, deep, subterranean laughter, subdued that their tryst might not be betrayed.

The woman apparently failed to share his mirth. She gave him no answering smile. “You seem much amused,” she remarked, in the hard, unemotional voice in which, from the beginning, she had conducted her part of the conversation.

“Immensely! Why, my girl, you have no idea how this works into our hands. Kent——”

“Your hands, you mean.”

“As you like. Let us not quibble over details. But you see how it places Kent. He has brains enough to realize that no one will believe such a dime-movie story as that the package from the bank was stuffed with wrapping paper. So when his natural annoyance gives place to reason, he will decide that the wisest thing for him is to

stay where no explanations can be demanded. I think, Pauline, we have seen the last of Mr. Kent."

The woman's face pictured unconcealed contempt. "You are very clever, Professor Herzton. You can manipulate your wave lengths, or whatever it is—with my help—but you can see no farther than that pointed fox-whisker of yours. You have forgotten, of course, that Williams is along. The Hensleys may not believe Kent, but they will believe Williams. Now, Mr. Herzton?"

Herzton was pacing quickly back and forth across the floor of the little pavilion. "You're right, Pauline," he admitted at length. "We may have to dispose of Williams, too."

"What difference does one more make?" she asked.

"At any rate," he continued, "you have the money?"

"No. You have it."

"I?"

"Yes. I sent it to you to-day at the office, by registered mail."

His narrow face became sharper than ever. "What in the world made you do such a fool thing as that?" he thrust at her.

"Because, Professor Herzton, I may be your tool by force of circumstances, but I am not a

thief. What I did I did as your agent. It occurred to me that some day it might come handy if I could call upon the Post Office Department to prove that they had delivered a certain package to you."

He glared at her. "So you still distrust me, eh? After all I have done for you? How would you like——"

She interrupted him with a voice like a knife. "I know just what you are going to say, Professor Herzton. I have heard it from you so often. How would I like if you were to reveal my existence to my husband? He, poor fool, thinks I have been at the bottom of the river for three years. Oh, yes, I know he swore he would get me after that discovery in which you played so gallant a part. He thinks I closed the chapter by jumping in the river, whereas you concealed me, provided me with an alias, and, through your influence, placed me as your spy in the Hensley household. Well—it's my medicine, and I'm taking it. I've done your bidding, Professor Herzton, and will continue to do it. When I steal, I steal as your agent. My score is growing, and some day it will balance yours. How would you like it if I were to tell Mr. Hensley all I know?"

"I should feel obliged to reveal your name and whereabouts to a certain gentleman who

would be much interested in that information.”

“I know it. So each of us closes the mouth of the other—for the present. Whatever I did, and I am not excusing myself, I was within the law. But if you accept that money and keep it, knowing it to be the property of Angus Hensley, you are a thief. That is the information with which I propose to buy my liberty and your silence.”

She had risen and the two faced each other. It was steel against steel.

Herzton was the first to call for truce. “No use us quarreling about it, Pauline. We’ve got along so far, and there is no reason why we shouldn’t continue to get along. You’ve done a good day’s work to-day, and I’ll send you something extra to show my appreciation. Meanwhile, carry on. I’m trusting you not to miss any bets.”

“I never do, Professor Herzton,” she said.

“Then see that the disc is under her pillow to-night, and leave the rest to me.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SICK at heart, Gladys Hensley retired early. She suffered her maid's attentions in silence and dismissed her as soon as possible. Then for hours she lay thinking, trying to find some clear course through the complexities which surrounded her.

Suddenly she became aware that her mind was acting apparently from a volition outside of herself. She had a distinct feeling that the mind was separate from the body, functioning as a separate entity. It was as though the works of a watch had been taken out of a case and set on a table near by. The works ticked on, but the case was empty.

She wondered if she was dreaming; she even wondered if, by any possibility, she was dead. She recalled speculations she had heard Dr. Alstice and Mr. Rogers discuss concerning the mind as an entity distinct from the body, but she could not follow the thought coherently. With something like panic she realized that her mind was getting out of control, that it seemed to be passing under the will of another. She had

experienced this before, but never had she followed the process so clearly, tracing it step by step, as she did to-night.

Her mind seemed like a kite flying about the room, attached to her body by a slender elastic ribbon. Sometimes it would fly to a far corner; again, it would be drawn back almost to her. The magic ribbon seemed to stretch indefinitely. She was sure now she was alive, because she could feel her heart beating, but she wondered, if the ribbon should break, would that be death?

Presently she had a sense that the ribbon was tightening. She could feel its uncanny, irresistible strength. Her body, light as a feather, arose in response. She felt her bare feet on the floor, and she knew she was walking across the room. Then she was seated at a little writing table. She had turned the light on; she was making words on a sheet of paper; she was pressing a bell for her maid.

Manners entered, blinking.

“Get the telegraph office on the phone, please, and send that message. Thank you. Sorry to disturb you. It had to be done to-night.”

Manners retired into her own room to carry out the instructions. As she unfolded the single sheet of note paper she saw it was addressed to Morley Kent at the summer home of the Hensleys. She read:

PLEASE FORGET MY FOOLISHNESS FRIDAY NIGHT AND ALL I SAID AND PROMISED THEN. YOU MUST REALIZE THAT WOULD BE ABSURD AND IMPOSSIBLE. GLADYS.

“Herzton wasn’t long in getting in his work,” Manners soliloquized, as she called the telegraph office. “How ever does he do it?”

When her errand was done she slipped into the room occupied by Gladys. The light was out, but the moon poured through the window, limning the slight form of the girl as it lay on the bed. Stealing silently across the room, Manners laid her hand on the girl’s wrist and bent over a face ivory-white in the moonlight. The pulse was beating regularly, the breath came in the steady diapason of sleep.

Manners slipped a hand under the pillow and drew forth a gold compact which she laid with the girl’s trinkets on a dressing table near by. Then, as silently as she had come, she returned to her room. When she had got into bed again her eyes found the outline of a club bag sitting on the floor. She raised her head on one hand and watched it intently, shaking herself from time to time to keep from falling asleep.

After a long while her patience was rewarded. An apparently innocent brass stud in the lock of the bag shone with a faint glow, like

an inflamed eye peering at her through the thin moonlight.

Again she slipped silently from her bed, opened the bag, and took out a small telephone receiver and transmitter. In a moment she was in conversation, her voice subdued to a whisper.

"Yes," she murmured. "She called me about an hour ago, and ordered me to send a telegram. . . . Of course, I saw it. I had to phone it to the office. . . . It was to Kent. . . . At the Hensley summer-home. . . . She said to please forget all she said and promised Friday night, and that he must realize it would be absurd and impossible."

To further questions she answered merely "yes" and "no," and presently replaced the instrument in its innocent-looking container. Then for the third time that night she returned to her bed, this time to sleep.

Sunday found Gladys in the condition of one recovering from an overdose of a powerful narcotic. She slept long and heavily, and after she arose moved about for hours in a partial stupor. Gradually the events of the night took shape out of a mist of hazy recollections. Foremost among those shapes was the outline of a telegram sent to Kent, charged with destructive and reprehensible content. As the fog cleared, she realized that she had sent such a message, and that Man-

ners was the medium through whom the telegram had been transmitted.

She questioned the woman, who was disposed to give no information. "You seemed disturbed through the night," Manners guardedly admitted.

But Gladys was after facts. "I want the truth," she demanded. "If I sent a message to Mr. Kent I want to know it. If you will not tell me I can get the information from the telegraph office—and another maid to-morrow."

So confronted, Manners gave her the story of the message, and even produced the copy which Gladys had handed her. As the girl read the words in her own handwriting her face hardened into an expression of resentful amazement.

"I must have been mad!" she cried. "And you were mad to send it! You know these troubles I have. Herzton is at the bottom of this! Fools, both of us! I can't explain why I wrote it, but really I must expect you in future to use some judgment. You may go. I want to think."

The result of her thinking was a long telegram, delivered with her own hand to the nearest telegraph office, imploring Kent's forgiveness and assuring him that the previous message was sent while she was "under the spell." Then, able to do nothing more, she settled down to await a reply.

Monday forenoon Manners announced a visitor. "A young woman, miss; looks like a business woman. She didn't give her name; said it would mean nothing to you, but held it is very important she should have a private interview."

"I suppose she is selling something?"

"I don't think so, miss."

"Or begging for some hobby. . . . Oh, well, I'll see her. I will be right down."

It was in the spacious living room that Gladys and Vera stood face to face. Something about her visitor's appearance softened the armor which Gladys, as a rich man's daughter, found necessary to throw about herself as a protection from impostors.

She greeted her guest with a welcoming smile. "You wanted to see me?"

Vera, although openly nervous, had her voice in command. "May I speak with you alone?"

"We are alone here. If I might know who honors me——"

"I am Vera Masters. I work in the office of Kent & Powers."

"Oh!" The flush which sprang to Gladys's cheeks betrayed that which she would not, at the moment, have revealed for worlds, but no other key could have unlocked two hearts so quickly.

She flung out her hands. "I am glad you came.

We will not sit here—it is too formal. I have a little bower——” Already she was leading her through the corridors of Hensley House. “You have word from M—— from Mr. Kent?”

“Yes. A telegram.”

Gladys led her to a sun porch screened with ivy, and drew her to a seat by her side. She wondered why her fingers thrilled so at the touch of this strange girl.

“I have a telegram from Mr. Kent,” said Vera, summoning her composure, “but first there are many things I must tell you.”

“Yes? Do go on, Miss Masters.”

And there, while Gladys sat in mingled surprise, dismay, and anger, Vera told the story of the transcripts. “So you see,” she concluded, “I have the background, or at least much of the background, of the tragedy in which Mr. Kent is involved, and which, I believe, even threatens his life. I would not be doing justice to your intuition, or my own, if I pretended not to know why he has so gladly undertaken this mission.”

Their eyes met, and this time the color rose in both faces.

“And you will not be doing justice to my intuition, Miss Masters,” Gladys answered, “if you pretend that I do not understand the interest you feel in Mr. Kent. You call him Morley, do you not?”

"Yes—at times. I have known him for three years."

"Have you any claim on him?"

Vera rose to her feet. "I hope you do not think I came to bicker——"

"Please sit down, Miss Masters. I apologize. I really do, very humbly. My words sounded harsher than I intended. I meant that if you really had a claim—it would break my heart, but—I would try to respect it."

"It is just the claim of friendship and of loyalty to one with whom I have worked for years," Vera told her. "As for anything more—that is the fortune of war." She tried to smile but her lips were dry.

"At any rate," she continued, when Gladys found no words, "you can count on me as Morley's friend. That is what brought me here with this telegram." She produced the yellow sheet. Gladys took it and read:

PLEASE SEE MISS HENSLEY AND TELL HER THE MONEY WAS REMOVED FROM THE PACKAGE SHE GAVE ME AND WRAPPING PAPER SUBSTITUTED STOP I DID NOT WIRE HER DIRECT FOR FEAR THE MESSAGE WOULD BE INTERCEPTED BY MANNERS AND DELIVERED TO HERZTON STOP GIVE HER THE TRANSCRIPTS AND GET DETECTIVES AT WORK STOP THE BANK MAY HAVE SERIAL NUMBERS OF

THE BILLS WHICH WILL HELP IN TRACING STOP GOING AHEAD WITH OUR MISSION HERE BEST REGARDS MORLEY.

Gladys read the telegram a second time before her mind, numbed by such startling news, could accept its contents. But the short, staccato sentences left no room for misunderstanding.

"Gone!" she exclaimed. "The money gone! How could that be possible?"

"That, I suspect, is what Morley is asking, too," Vera observed, watching her closely. "It is a serious matter for him."

"Of course it is. He cannot do much without money. I will see Father at once and send him more."

Vera, trembling, came close and laid a hand on her shoulder. "Now it is my turn to apologize," she said, in a strained voice. "I thought you might suspect him——"

"Suspect Morley? Of what?"

"Of removing the money——"

Gladys recoiled as though she had been struck.

"Are you capable of that?"

"No, but I thought perhaps you were. You see, I did not know you. So now it is my turn to apologize. Please forgive me."

Gladys's hand went up and clutched Vera's

on her shoulder. Together, for a moment, they hung upon each other.

"But who could have taken it?" Gladys demanded, returning to the problem that was pressing upon them. "I gave him the package myself. Williams is out of the question."

"Did anyone else handle it?"

"Williams, the chauffeur, who is flying the plane for Morley, brought the money from the bank and placed it in my own hands. I placed it in Morley's."

"And no one else between?"

"No one. Wait! It was lying in my room while I was getting ready to meet Morley at his office. Aha! A great light! Manners—that is my maid—was in and out. You see by his message he apparently suspects her—that is why he sent it to you. Forgive me! You understand. It was a necessary precaution. Now the thing is to set our machinery in motion. We must advise the bank, and have a dragnet out for the bills as soon as they begin to appear in circulation. We must get detectives on the scent—we must be detectives ourselves!"

She had sprung to her feet, her languor and indecision gone. The joy of conflict was upon her.

"I want you to meet my father," she resumed, suddenly. "We will lunch with him downtown.

It is wiser not to take Mother into the council at the moment. Can you spare us your luncheon hour?"

"I am sure it is what my employer, Mr. Kent, would wish me to do," Vera answered, forcing a little smile with her whimsical speech.

The luncheon hour stretched out to two, and three. Before it was finished a plan of campaign had been mapped out, with Mr. Hensley, Gladys, and Vera each playing important parts.

When Gladys reached home she found a notice from the telegraph company that they were unable to deliver her message addressed to Mr. Morley Kent. The agent at point of delivery had reported that Mr. Kent had moved on, leaving no address. "So he is carrying with him, through all that northern wilderness, the belief that I have jilted him for Herzton," Gladys reflected bitterly. "And I can't reach him—until he wires again."

Despite the heavy heart she carried on Kent's account, Gladys found the days that followed among the most thrilling of her young life. There were conferences with her father and Vera, with bank officials and with chiefs of the detective bureau which Mr. Hensley had engaged.

One of the first pieces of information disclosed by the detective bureau was that Miss

Manners had sent a registered parcel through the mails to Professor Herzton on the very day the money was supposed to have been delivered to Morley Kent.

Somewhat to the surprise of Gladys, the professor during this period showed no disposition to take advantage of the absence of his rival to press his suit. His gallant explanation to Mrs. Hensley that the child must be given time to recover from the blow was, of course, unknown to her, and his silence was more disturbing than any open attack could have been. She suspected he was laying some very subtle trap which he would spring at what he considered the proper moment. And she was right.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DAYS dragged on for a week or more without other important developments, without a word from Kent or Williams, or any break of the ominous silence of Professor Herzton. When at last he again appeared at Hensley House he was as shrewd, as incisive, and as genial as ever.

"I am begging favors again," he told Gladys. "I am here to beg that you sing for us again tomorrow night. In urging this duty upon you, I know I am expressing the wish of a few million radio fans who cannot speak for themselves."

Gladys demurred. "I am afraid I do not feel much like singing, these days," she begged, rather weakly.

The professor's face mirrored his concern and sympathy. "I am sorry to hear that," he said. "But something like this—to serve the public and your father by your marvelous voice—is just what will draw you out of yourself. Believe me, we all have our dark days. I know." He paused to be sure his words carried the full meaning he intended. "And the quickest way to

find the sunshine again is to get to work. You will not disappoint me, I am sure."

Again the professor paused; then, dropping into a still more confidential note, continued: "If you have any misgivings over my—shall I say?—indiscretion on a previous occasion, let me assure you that my heart is now well in hand. You will excuse, I am sure, the physical absurdity of my figure of speech. I shall be glad to have your mother, or father, or any friend, come with you to the studio."

Clever Professor Herzton! It was just the word needed to put the girl on her mettle.

"I will be glad to come," she said. "And I don't think I will burden myself with a body-guard."

The night upon which Gladys was to sing again from Herzton's studio arrived. The professor, careful not to overplay his hand, telephoned his regret that he could not call for her personally with his car, as he was detained by an unexpected visitor. Detained by a visitor he was, but not an unexpected one.

Even through his plain tweed suit the stranger who tapped at Herzton's door betrayed in the set of his figure and his long, deliberate stride, the city police.

"Come in, Inspector," the professor wel-

comed him. "You are right on the stroke of eight."

The inspector returned his greeting. "Time is the essence of the contract, or words to that effect," he remarked. "Your performer is to be here at eight-thirty, is she not?"

"We can count on her to the minute. But half an hour will allow enough time for the preliminaries. Sorry I cannot ask you to smoke; it might affect her voice. But we can go into my laboratory."

"Are there still women whose throats are affected by tobacco smoke?" the inspector inquired in mild cynicism as his host led him into one of the rooms opening from the studio. "Well, this is quite a shop you have," he continued, as his eye took in the array of paraphernalia.

"Yes—we need it in our business. Sit down." The professor indicated a chair and produced cigarettes.

"Try my lighter, Professor," the inspector invited, extending a little silver device. "It is quite a novel machine. It sometimes works."

Herzton manipulated the lighter successfully, and the inspector dropped it back into his pocket.

"This is a wild bet of yours, Herzton," the inspector began, when he had made himself com-

fortable, "but wild bets are sometimes winners. You think there is no doubt Kent will stumble into the trap?"

"Not a doubt in the world, if he hears her. That is where the uncertainty comes in. But I've done everything possible. The programme has been wired to every daily paper in Canada, and also a special story that Miss Hensley will sing to-night. Of course, Kent may be miles from either newspapers or radios. We have to take a chance on that."

They discussed their plans until Miss Hensley's knock on the outer door disturbed them.

"You had better remain here, Inspector," Herzton urged, hurriedly. "Your presence in the studio would disturb my temperamental artist."

"Oh, very well."

Indeed, Inspector Malcolm was not averse to a few minutes by himself in Herzton's laboratory. In his study of the case he had not overlooked one significant circumstance—the alacrity with which Herzton had submitted evidence likely to be damaging to Kent. He was too experienced an investigator not to know that the wily crook's first line of defense is to throw suspicion on someone else. And he had been more impressed than he would admit by a visit from Patrolman Murphy that morning.

"Mr. Malcolm," Murphy had said, "it's not for the likes o' me to be givin' advice to such as ye, but things ain't always what they seem, praise the Lord, or I'd be a bigger fool than I am. But you're on that Kent case, an' my word fer it, look further in. Look further in, Mr. Malcolm; it's not in the young man Kent ye'll find the criminal, but further in. There were two sets o' fingerprints on that body o' Galut's; get the man with the other set, Mr. Malcolm."

Those other fingerprints had been bothering the inspector ever since he was put on the case. Every clue had run to earth because it would not produce the telltale prints. Then suddenly, like a flame from the darkness, leapt the one word—Herzton!

He scarcely could wait until he got back to headquarters to develop the prints on his cigarette lighter.

He heard the birdlike voice of Gladys Hensley soaring in the next room as he tiptoed about among Herzton's apparatus. "I must put a man on this who knows something about this kind of junk," he commented to himself.

The song ended. There was a period of silence, unnecessarily long, it seemed to the inspector, before he heard the other door open and close. A moment later Professor Herzton was again by his side.

"Sorry to have kept you here like a prisoner, Inspector," Herzton apologized. "There seemed no way out of it."

But Malcolm was not without a sense of humor. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "One of these days I may do as much for you."

With the fingerprint photographs developed, and matching exactly the unidentified prints on Galut's body, the inspector felt that the occasion for returning Herzton's compliment was nearer at hand than he had dared to hope. But in his zeal for the new clue he was not neglecting the old ones. True enough, the ruse of having the girl sing over the radio brought a wire from the incautious Kent, and a reply from the equally unsuspecting Gladys. The ink on the messages was scarcely dry before copies were in the hands of the police.

Although he was now in possession of evidence to warrant the immediate arrest of Herzton, Malcolm elected to play a waiting game. He was convinced that Herzton knew more than ever would be dragged out of him in court, and his plan was to capitalize the relations which had been, outwardly at least, established between them. He called at the laboratory almost daily, smoked Herzton's good cigars, and discussed with him the development of the case. Herzton was consistently cordial and talkative,

but, as Malcolm ruefully admitted to himself after each interview, the talk disclosed nothing. Nothing, that is, except a growing impatience on the part of Herzton that the police had so far failed to arrest Kent, a fact which puzzled and annoyed the inspector no less than it did the professor. The conviction was deepening within him that, notwithstanding the ruse which had betrayed Kent into an incautious telegram, the fugitive had in some way taken fright and successfully covered his tracks.

Malcolm would have liked very much in those days to be able to read the mind of Gladys Hensley, but she completely baffled him. At one moment she seemed submissive to the will of Professor Herzton; an hour later she was in open revolt against him. Upon occasion she would talk freely of Kent; it was from her own lips that Malcolm knew no further telegrams had been received; again, the whole subject seemed repugnant to her. The girl was plainly distressed; her paling cheeks suggested the load she was carrying, but whether on account of Kent or Herzton or herself Malcolm was unable to learn.

Meanwhile the detective bureau engaged by Mr. Hensley was following another line of leads, and as the days dragged on with no definite disclosures Detective Kane's curiosity over

the contents of Herzton's laboratory developed to a point where it could no longer be resisted.

"We'll have to go through that shop of his," he explained to Mr. Hensley, "and we won't need any help from Herzton. Can't you find imperative business for him somewhere else?"

"That's easy," Mr. Hensley agreed. "I'll have one of the branch houses wire in for him tomorrow."

The telegram was to call Herzton out of town at four o'clock the following day. At five a conference of the various investigators on the case would be held in the Hensley home, and immediately following the conference an investigation of the laboratories would be made.

It was a strangely assorted group which gathered in Mr. Hensley's smoking room at the appointed hour. Kane, of the detective bureau; Malcolm, of police headquarters, accompanied by Murphy, who, for services rendered, had also been assigned to the case; Vera Masters and Harry Powers; Dr. Alstice and the Reverend Mr. Rogers, who, as friends of the family, had been taken into confidence; Mr. and Mrs. Hensley, and Gladys. In suppressed excitement they sat in Mr. Hensley's luxurious room and awaited developments.

"We are here," Mr. Hensley announced, "to exchange notes and conduct further investiga-

tions into the very baffling case with which we are all so much concerned. A number of developments, I believe, are about to be disclosed. I want to thank you all for the deep interest you are taking in our problem, and for any contribution you may make toward its solution. It goes without saying, of course, that our discussion will be regarded by all present as being in the strictest confidence."

The situation was then briefly reviewed. The registered package, supposed to contain the missing money, had been traced to Herzton, but had not been located. This was Kane's contribution. The other set of fingerprints on Galut's body had been positively identified as Herzton's. This from Malcolm, who announced his intention of placing Herzton under arrest as soon as he returned to the city. The wily inspector felt sure enough of his case to divulge that much, but he kept to himself the scheme by which Gladys had been made a party to tricking Kent into an indiscreet telegram, and the fact that Kent was probably by this time a prisoner.

"Well, that's that," Kane summed matters up, "and we are not likely to get much more light until we look for it in the proper place—that is, Herzton's laboratory. Mr. Hensley has sent him out of town to give us a chance to do a

little investigating, and I suggest that my professional friend, Inspector Malcolm, and myself, should go down to the works."

"Murphy will come along," Malcolm amended.

"And of course I will go," Mr. Hensley said.

"And I," said Gladys.

Her father sought to dissuade her. "No saying what we may run into," he suggested.

"That is just what I want to find out," she answered. "I am the cause of all this trouble, anyway. If Professor Herzton has any way of creating these moods of mine, perhaps I am the one who could detect it."

"That's good reasoning," Malcolm agreed. "Let us be going."

"But we must have you, Doctor," Mr. Hensley suggested to Dr. Alstice. "You are something of an expert in brain waves, or whatever it is, and we may need your scientific mind before the evening is over."

"As a more or less qualified electrician, perhaps I might be of service," Harry Powers proposed.

With Murphy at the wheel of the police car, the little expedition whirred out to the plant. The impressive building lay back from the street in the warm gloom of a midsummer's night. A seasonal lull in the business of the cor-

poration had dispensed with night work, and the only lights were those which marked the general entrance and picked out, story by story, the elevator shaft and stairways.

A surprised watchman admitted Mr. Hensley and his party.

"You can run us up in the elevator, I suppose?" the president inquired.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir, Mr. Hensley, I certainly can do that." It was not every day a watchman had the privilege of engaging in conversation the head of the corporation. "Yes, sir, I began as an elevator boy, Mr. Hensley, right with this here corporation that you have the honor to be the head of. That was back when you were in the musical instrument business, an' maybe you wasn't as rich an' maybe I wasn't any poorer than we both are now, Mr. Hensley—sir."

The president herded the loquacious watchman to the elevator and gave him his instructions. But at that moment a telegraph boy appeared from somewhere and picked Gladys out from the company.

"A message for you," he said, in a low voice. "Very personal, and to be read at once."

She dropped back unnoticed, and the car shot up without her.

She was tearing the envelope open, wondering if at last Kent had wired her again. As she

stood there the door of the other elevator—two of them ran side by side in adjoining shafts—opened and she stepped inside, her eyes still on the yellow missive.

The car started, then suddenly stopped between landings.

“I think you had better read your message.”

It was the voice of Herzton. Gladys turned terrified eyes up to his fox-like face. She had no words with which to address him.

“A rather clever ruse, wasn’t it, my dear? But don’t blame the poor telegraph boy. He merely followed instructions. He had no idea anything sinister was connected with it. Had he suspected that he was playing into the hands of the terrible Professor Herzton no doubt he, too, would have turned against me.” There was bitterness as well as cunning in his voice.

But Gladys had recovered speech. “Professor Herzton, what does this outrage mean? I should think you have enough trouble on your hands without inviting more! Take me up at once and let me join my party!”

“You had better read your telegram first. Perhaps it is from Mr. Kent.”

“Now you are merely insulting.”

“Read it.”

She glanced at the lines on the yellow slip in her fingers. She read:

YOU ARE COMPLETELY IN MY POWER. UPON YOUR BEHAVIOR DEPENDS YOUR OWN LIFE AND THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ARE DEAR TO YOU.

She crumpled the paper in her hand, dropped it to the floor. Her wits and courage had returned to her. She drew herself up in womanly dignity, and her eyes met the fox's with no sign of fear.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Is that surrender?" he asked.

"I shall have to know your terms—and your guarantee."

"You talk of guarantee? You have no alternative."

But his mood suddenly changed. He was again the suave, courteous Professor Herzton.

"You are a beautiful creature," he smiled down upon her. "You are worth all you have cost me. But first, I have a little entertainment for you." He moved the control, and the elevator sped upward.

At the landing of his floor the professor stopped the car. He looked keenly along the passages before opening the door.

"Ah! I see they are now bringing their united wits to bear upon an investigation of my laboratory," he mocked. "While they pursue their in-

quiry you will come with me." He took her arm in the strong grip of his talon-like fingers.

"Professor Herzton!" the girl protested, trying to free herself. He merely tightened his hold upon her.

"You will do as you are told," he said. "Now, and henceforth. I once offered you terms, and you refused; now I dictate them."

He hurried her toward his rooms, but, when nearing them, swung her along a paneled passage to the left. A small electric light glowed from a bracket on the wall. Herzton reached up to the switch and turned it. The light glowed on, but the panel in front of them silently swung inwards.

"Rather clever, don't you think?" he inquired, as though casually asking her commendation. "When one stands on a certain plug in the floor and turns the switch, a little motor, concealed in the wall, swings the door open. Go in."

She hesitated, and his grip tightened until she thought it would crush her arm.

"Go in," he repeated, and she obeyed, he following at her heels.

The chamber in which she found herself was a tiny room not more than six by twelve feet. The walls were bare except for some electrical instruments which she did not understand.

There was no window, and, apparently, no door; the panel behind them had already closed, burying itself in the bare wall. At one end of the little room was a table topped with a glass mirror set at a slight incline; at the other a stand supported an instrument somewhat like a small telescope mounted on a frame.

"I promised you some entertainment," said Herzton. "What do you see in the glass?"

For the moment, at least, nothing was to be gained by resisting him. She bent over the inclined mirror. "Myself," she answered.

"Ah, what more beautiful sight!" He brought his head close to hers and his reflection leered back upon her. The triumph of possession was in his eyes. "How often I have thought of you, my beautiful one, and awaited the moment when our lives should blend as now our reflections do!" His cheek touched hers.

"Please do not mock me, Professor Herzton," she begged. "If this is your idea of entertainment it is a very cruel one indeed."

"Cruel? Nothing to what I shall show you presently!"

He pressed a switch in the wall. Instantly a new reflection appeared in the glass. She saw a larger room filled with much mysterious apparatus. There were two doors, both closed, but no window.

"They are slow," he grumbled. "Ah, here they come!"

One of the doors swung open and the generous form of Inspector Malcolm filled the space. He surveyed the paraphernalia for a moment in apparent mystification, then moved inside, making way for Kane, Angus Hensley, and the other members of the party.

"They are investigating the secret room," Herzton explained.

Gladys watched the scene before her, fascinated. She knew she was observing a drama—a drama of life and death. Before this greater tragedy her own fate seemed an impersonal matter of little moment.

"But how do you do it?" she found her lips saying. She could not help admiring the diabolical genius of the man.

"Rather clever, isn't it?" It was apparent that the professor enjoyed compliments to his ability. She noted the fact; that way might lie some hope. "But quite simple," he went on. "The periscope principle. That is the famous secret room of the mysterious Professor Herzton. These men you see are investigators. Look at Kane handling that instrument! He expects it to explode. For all he knows it may be used for inflating tires. Now the great Inspector Malcolm comes to his assistance. They converse, no

doubt in highly technical terms. See, they are concentrating their massive minds upon it—a truly Herculean experience.”

So Herzton gloated on, mocking, while the girl was held in a fascination which for the moment displaced alarm for herself and those silent figures moving before her in the glass.

“What are you going to do to them, Professor Herzton?” It was an entreaty rather than a question, born out of the depth of her concern.

“My dear, the performance has scarcely started. You may have observed—what they have not—that the door through which they entered is closed. Evidently, too, they have not as yet noted your absence. It is an innocent-looking door, but lined with steel. Their combined strength would not move it the thickness of a razor blade. They are my prisoners, and that is my death dungeon. Whether they come out alive depends on you.”

“On me?”

“On you. It is a position of some responsibility in which you find yourself. But see! They have discovered the other door. They are going to open it. Watch closely; this will be of special interest to you.”

The menace under his mocking tones chilled her to the heart. The door to which they had come apparently led into another room, hidden

still deeper in the recesses of the building. It was bolted, but Malcolm drew the bolts. He and Kane were peering inside. They started back as though hurled out by an unseen force; then, with gestures of great excitement, rushed through the open door.

"Watch closely," Herzton whispered in her ear. "This is going to be good."

Malcolm and Kane were dragging something out of the other room. As it came into the range of the glass Gladys saw that it was a human form, the form of a man, apparently in a semi-conscious condition. The face turned upward, and she reeled back into the arms of her captor.

"It's Gordon Brace!" she gasped.

"You're right!" Herzton returned, like a master commending a pupil for a clever answer. "What a memory you have! Now, look again. This, too, is going to be good!"

Another form was dragged out among the thoroughly excited and mystified group. They crowded around so that for some moments she was unable to see the face. When at last they parted enough to give her a view, it was the face of a stranger.

"I do not know him," she breathed.

"Not personally, I think, but by reputation. You have heard of Miles Freeman?"

Her memory shot back to the transcripts of

Vera Masters and the immediate purpose of Kent's flight into the north.

"But Miles Freeman!" she exclaimed. "How can he be here?"

"I am a man of mystery, Miss Hensley," he replied, with mocking deference. "But see! They are bringing out another!"

It was true. A third form was half-dragged, half-assisted into the range of her vision. It was Williams, the chauffeur.

She turned to Herzton. "Tell me, please, am I really seeing these things, or are you tormenting me with some clever illusion?"

He was pleased with her mystification and with her growing respect for his powers. "Would an illusion be as clever as this?" he asked. "And would an illusionary Williams walk about the room, albeit a little shakily?"

But a fourth form made its appearance. This, even before she saw the face, she knew to be Morley Kent.

For some minutes she remained speechless, watching the excited hubbub reflected in the glass as though she had been some gentle bird transfixed by the eyes of a serpent. Then she turned to Professor Herzton. She was calm, collected, and her eyes met his fearlessly.

"What is your price?" she asked.

"It is early to speak of that," he answered.

"Are you not interested in these visitors? I arranged their presence as a special treat for you."

"Indeed I am interested," she said, taking the cue that he hungered for flattery. "You amaze me, Professor Herzton, even while you frighten me."

"Frighten you? My dear!" He laid a hand caressingly upon her arm. "I would not frighten you. But I am just giving you a glimpse of my power. Do you not think it is very wonderful?" He was eager to feast upon her approbation.

"More wonderful than anything in the world," she breathed, in all sincerity. "Tell me—how do you do it?"

"All in good time, all in good time," he answered. "For the present—here they are."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HERE they were—there could be no doubt of it. The glass showed them now, the centre of an excited knot; by their gesticulations the nature of their explanations could be guessed. Suddenly all eyes turned to the door of the larger room in which they were now standing, as though one dread question had presented itself to each mind simultaneously. Mr. Hensley tried the door with his hand, but it did not respond. Then Malcolm threw his great bulk against it. As Herzton had predicted, it gave not the thickness of a razor blade. Blanched faces turned to one another as the realization of their position came home to them.

For some moments Herzton watched the glass with undiluted satisfaction. Then, "It is time for the final act," he said. He pressed a button in the wall.

"What did that do?" she asked. She was prepared for anything now; for any surprise and for any sacrifice. It seemed indeed that she had already made the sacrifice, and that she observed these diabolical doings from a detached posi-

tion, as some disembodied spirit might have done. Only when she looked again upon the form of Morley Kent was she conscious of the beating of her heart.

"That," he explained, "is just a little expression of my consideration for them. I might allow them to suffocate there slowly; the room, as you may have observed, has no ventilation. But I am now admitting a gentle flow of gas; a very distressing gas, it is true, but one which will do its work within half an hour. Is not that very considerate?"

"Again I ask you, Professor Herzton, what is your price? I will pay anything I have for the lives of the people in that room."

He seemed to consider. "That is magnanimous on your part, Gladys, but why should I bargain, seeing that you are in my power quite as much as they? I may set my price without making their release a condition of it. Indeed, I would be foolish to let them out now at all. They would repay my generosity by combining to hound me to death."

"But if you murder them—and it is murder—you will be hounded to death anyway. The thing could not long remain a secret," she argued.

"No one would connect me with it," he answered, confidently. "All who could give evi-

dence against me, except you, are already in that death trap."

Doubting no longer that she was in the hands of a genius who had gone mad in his prying into invisible forces, Gladys herself turned to invisible sources of power. Fragments of Mr. Rogers's theory—religion, philosophy, or science, it mattered not—that every human mind is a radio set capable of establishing, if it will, contact with the Central Station, arose in her memory at that moment. Silently but desperately, she flung her soul out in an effort to establish that contact. . . .

Suddenly it became apparent that the presence of the deadly gas had been discovered by the prisoners in that mystery room. The paralysis of a moment gave place to a paroxysm of action. The men seized the instruments and apparatus with which the room was equipped and dashed them in futile fury against the door, the walls, even the ceiling.

In different manners, reaching down to the bed-rock of their natures, the different prisoners looked into the eyes of Death. Malcolm and Kane were still impotently flinging themselves and whatever they could lay their hands upon against the unyielding door. Kent and his three companions stoically awaited whatever must be. Dr. Alstice, Mr. Hensley, and Powers were

seen in grave discussion, as though they explored all reason for some avenue of escape.

"Death is necessarily a distressing experience, Gladys," Herzton remarked, with the utmost detachment. "But it is purely physical. Everything is physical. Even the love I have for you, and the love you presently will have for me, are but chemical reactions."

"The love I presently will have for you?" she repeated. "Professor Herzton, for you I never can have anything but hate and contempt!"

He smiled, as one who can take his time. "But that is part of the price, Gladys. You asked me to name the price. You need not offer me your physical self; it already is in my power. I can take it. But your love—that is something you must give. Also you must give it with your whole heart, utterly, without reservation."

"That cannot be done. It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. See, I will help. Where is your compact?"

"My compact?" she asked, in surprise. "What do you want it for? I didn't bring it with me."

"That is unfortunate. I have duplicate discs, but they are in that room, at present occupied by our visitors. But if mechanical appliances fail us we can always come back to first principles. I am interested in making you the subject of an experiment." With his tiger agility, he was be-

hind the peculiar instrument at the end of the room, training it upon her. Rays of a violet color, like toy lightning, played over her body.

She was conscious of something drawing her toward him, something sinister, deadly.

"Professor Herzton, what are you doing?" she demanded.

"My child, I am demonstrating to you the greatest invention of all ages, the invention which is to make me master of the world! I am defeated for the moment by a combination of fools and circumstances. Another month—another week—and I should have perfected it. Then the whole world would be mine. Gladys, can you picture that? The whole world mine! I have found a secret of which the greatest inventors, before me, have not even dreamed. I can make you think what I want you to think; do what I want you to do. I can make you love me! I can make the world obey me! I can set nations at war; I can dictate terms of peace; I can make myself king, emperor, of the world!"

The attraction he played upon her drew her in spite of herself. Suddenly she thrust by the machine and flung her arms about him. "Martin, I love you! I am yours, utterly. But save those poor souls! Remember, I love them, too."

Her hands were on his face, about his neck. At the touch of her warm flesh, the man of

science was routed; even delight in his experiment could hold him no longer. He seized her; drew her to him savagely; smothered her with kisses.

"Turn off the gas, Martin," she pleaded, as he held her in his arms. "You will do that much for me?"

"For you what would I refuse to do?" He operated certain switches. "That will give them a supply of oxygen."

She rewarded him with an answering caress. "Now set them free," she begged.

But on that he was firm. "No, I cannot do that. They will not suffer with a good current of fresh air coming in; let them stay until they are found. Meanwhile we shall be far away."

"We, Martin? Where?"

"I have acted quickly, as I always do. A boat sails for England to-morrow. We can reach it by airplane to-night. A suite on that boat is reserved for Mr. and Mrs. Herzton."

"When are we to be married, Martin?" she asked.

"That is a formality which the captain of the boat could perform—only we won't be there."

"Not there, Martin? Where, then?"

He laughed gently, enjoying her mystification and the respect it implied for his commanding will. "I am not so simple as that, my child.

We would step off the boat at Liverpool into the hands of two British policemen. Oh, I am much too clever for that! I have found a young man and his bride who, for the sake of a free honeymoon, have agreed to travel as Mr. and Mrs. Herzton. That is all I asked of them, and all I explained. They can do the explaining when they are arrested."

He had abandoned the machine to hold her in his arms, and already the sudden, violent attraction she had felt for him was subsiding. Even as he held her in his arms she shuddered at his ingenuity and utter disregard for others.

"And we?" she repeated.

"We board a tramp steamer for South America. Professor Herzton can be trusted to put its wireless out of business. We shall travel simply as Mr. and Mrs. Martin, and no suspicion will attach to us. Buenos Aires is a beautiful city. There we shall establish ourselves. There I will complete my invention. When I come back it will be as master!"

"It will take money," she said.

He held her close until she felt the outline of a stout package in the inner pocket of his coat. "Ten thousand dollars, my dear!" he chuckled. "The ten thousand that was to finance our friends Kent and Williams. I owe that to you, and it is very fair that you should help to

spend it. I have other securities, too, which can be cashed later on."

"Then it is settled. I am to go with you, and these people are to be free."

"It is a bargain, although I give them more mercy than they deserve. I do it for your sake, because——"

She was standing with her back toward the panel which served as the only door to the little cell, her head held close to him, when suddenly she felt his body grow tense, and his sentence remained unfinished. Looking up, she saw wild eyes gazing past her toward the panel. His hold on her loosened, and she turned her head. The panel was moving! Slowly, certainly, the little motor was grinding it open. A moment later the burly figure of the policeman Murphy appeared in the aperture.

Not until that moment did Gladys recall that she had not seen Murphy among those trapped in the gas chamber.

Her mind, flying from conjecture to conjecture, was suddenly arrested by a scream from Herzton. It was the scream of a wild animal, of a beast of the jungle. With amazing strength he tore his precious instrument from the stand on which it stood and hurled it at the policeman. Murphy, with equally amazing dexterity,

dodged the missile and it went crashing to the floor. The next moment both Herzton and Gladys were looking up the barrel of Murphy's revolver.

"All right, fire!" Herzton defied, holding the girl as a shield before him.

"Come out wid ye, and get arrested dacently," the policeman commanded.

"You may as well come," said a voice which, to Gladys's amazement, she recognized as that of the maid Manners. "The jig is up, and you're up with it. You are a very clever man, Professor Herzton, but the cleverest crook sometimes makes a mistake. You made yours when you forgot that I knew about this secret cell, and how to open it. Remember the time it suited your convenience to lock me in it, and it pleased your vanity to show me how the door was operated? Men learn many new things, Herzton; women never forget old things. He is your prisoner, Murphy, but take no chances. Put the bracelets on him at once."

A gulf of a million years separated Herzton from the wild animal he was a moment before. Again he was the suave, cultured gentleman.

"You are making a grave mistake," he said to the policeman. "You have listened to this crazy woman and intruded very rudely upon the privacy of myself and my fiancée. But that

will be excused even now if you apologize and retire."

"Apologize, is it? Retire? Not till I've seen ye to yer bed! Come out now, an' get arrested dacently!"

Herzton had released his hold of Gladys. "Excuse me, dear," he said, with great apparent tenderness. "I suppose I had better humor him."

He stepped through the panel, but as Murphy made way for him he seized the policeman's revolver. There was a fight for the weapon, during which it flew from Murphy's hand and slid along the floor. Breaking free, Herzton rushed for it, but not before Manners had swooped down upon it. Pursued by Herzton, the woman fled down the corridor toward the elevator shaft, Murphy and Gladys following close behind.

Manners reached the elevator, but the doors were locked. She turned, and Herzton was upon her like a wild animal. There was a flash, a cry, and two forms writhed on the floor.

They drew the woman from the groaning heap, and found that, save for the shock of Herzton's frame against her, she was uninjured. . . . The groaning ceased, the body twitched prodigiously, drew up into a contorted mass, then slowly settled down in a lifeless heap.

For some moments the three survivors looked on this piece of sudden wreckage, this blown-out fuse, in silence. Astonishment at the turn of events robbed them of speech.

Murphy was the first to find words. "My evidence will be 'killed in self-defense,'" he said.

"And mine will be the same," Gladys agreed. Then, without warning, the world began to swim in circles, and she collapsed into the arms of the policeman.

The astonished watchman answered Manners's frantic ringing of the elevator bell. "Get us down, and get a taxi," she ordered. "Miss Hensley has fainted."

Having given what help he could, Murphy turned his attention to the other members of the party. Herzton's trap door, although impregnable from the inside, opened readily to his hand and Murphy's big countenance beamed in through the aperture. The little group surged about him, exultant over their own release and clamoring with concern for Gladys, who had been missed just as they began to discover the presence of the poison gas.

"Miss Hensley has gone home with Manners," Murphy explained. "A little upset, she was, at seein' a man killed before her eyes."

"Killed? Who?"

"Prepare yerself for a shock, Mr. Hensley, but ye've lost an ould an' disrespected employee. Professor Herzton collided with the wrong end of a police revolver. He'll take a bit of on-twistin' to get him into his box."

They surveyed all that was left of Herzton, and Inspector Malcolm, in making a quick inventory of the effects on the body, exhibited to the astonished onlookers a thick parcel of money.

"This seems to be yours, Mr. Hensley," he said, "but with your permission I will place it in safe keeping until the legal formalities are discharged. He was all primed for a get-away, wasn't he?"

They covered the body with a canvas from one of the machines to await the coroner, Murphy meanwhile giving such light on the event as he could. His report of the timely and unexpected arrival of Manners, and the tragic part she had played in the last half hour, was received with astonishment amounting almost to incredulity.

"Let us return at once to the house," Dr. Alstice suggested, when they were able to think clearly again. "Miss Gladys may need my attention."

Upon arrival at Hensley House Dr. Alstice

immediately devoted himself to Gladys, while Manners and Mrs. Hensley, now thoroughly concerned for her daughter, hovered about him. Meanwhile, in the smoking room, an excited group were exchanging facts and deductions.

"But how in the world—where did you all come from?" Mr. Hensley wanted to know, addressing himself in particular to Kent. "We thought you were away in the north——"

"Probably under arrest," Malcolm added.

"And no doubt we should have been, but for an extraordinary piece of good luck," Kent returned. "After a hunt through the wilderness which I will not stop to tell you of just now, we all came up together. Gordon had found Freeman, and Frank and I had found Gordon. Piecing together what we knew and what we suspected, we figured that we had more combined evidence than Herzton would be willing to face, so we decided to come back unexpectedly, beard him in his den, and force him to show his hand."

"But how did you get through the police?" Malcolm interrupted, still secretly worried over the failure of his confreres to run them down.

"A bit of luck, as I said. We were making across country on our way out, taking a chance.

One day we got hopelessly lost, and wound up in the evening at our starting point. There we learned that the police had passed through on our trail during the day. By getting ourselves lost in a maze of rivers and lakes, we had thrown them off the scent. We hired a guide, traveled all night, and in the morning reached a point where we could hire an airplane. In it we flew right down without mishap, landed a short distance outside of the city, hired a car and drove straight to the works. There we called on Professor Herzton."

"And wasn't he cool?" said Gordon Brace, taking up the thread. "Received us as though we were long-lost brothers. When we charged him with working some kind of deviltry from that citadel of his he was positively pained that we could think such a thing. Offered to show us all over—show us everything. We went through the rooms you all know, and then through one which he keeps for his secret experiments. There was a lot of apparatus which he talked about plausibly, and then invited us to inspect a room still farther in. Standing back courteously to let us pass, he manipulated something which silently closed the door and locked us in. There we were, like rats in a trap, and beginning to go under from suffocation, when you let us out."

Kent had just time for a word with Powers and Vera when Dr. Alstice returned from the sick room.

"Gladys will be all right," he said, "but it may take time. She has been under phenomenal strain—a strain which perhaps even she did not fully realize, running back over a period of weeks. She is in good hands, and I have left word to be called instantly if required."

There was a sigh of relief, and then eagerly again they fell to discussion of the events of the day, each advancing his own theories or deductions, but without arriving at any conclusion. It was long past the dinner hour, but no one seemed to think of eating.

"I must confess it is beyond me," Mr. Hensley declared at length. "But we should make some arrangement to follow up the various clues that have been presented. The investigation cannot stop now."

"I was going to suggest that," Kent replied. "Just now, perhaps, we are all too keyed up to do our best thinking. If you would give me authority to go through Herzton's rooms I might find something that might throw light upon it. I am a bit of an investigator into natural forces, and I would be glad to put my time and service at your disposal."

"A good idea," Mr. Hensley agreed. "How long will you want?"

"I might be able to report progress by to-morrow night."

"Good! Then let us meet here again after dinner to-morrow."

"There's just one little difficulty," Inspector Malcolm interrupted. "There are warrants out for three of these men. It is my duty to take them into custody."

Kent, Williams, and Brace looked at each other. There was no doubt as to the technical soundness of Malcolm's position.

"I think you might accept their parole for twenty-four hours," Mr. Hensley suggested. "I will add my personal guarantee. First thing in the morning my lawyers will take the matter up with the authorities, and any bonds that may be required will be forthcoming."

Malcolm was apologetic. "Of course you understand, Mr. Hensley, I only want to do my duty."

"Of course. But remember, you did not capture these men. They came back of their own will. With everything in their favor to stay, they are not likely to slip away on you again."

So assured, but still shaking his head, the inspector agreed.

Kent sidled Dr. Alstice into a corner. "Any chance of seeing Gladys?" he whispered.

"Not a chance," the doctor ordered, "until I say so."

Brace, too, had a whispered conversation, with no more success.

CHAPTER TWENTY

KENT went straight to his lodgings to snatch a little sleep. In the morning, rested, bathed, and shaved, he looked out upon a world familiar yet strange. It seemed ages since he had gone on his flight into the northland. The problems before him were baffling, but his body was hard-knit; his muscles like iron. Health tingled in his veins. And fate was playing into his hands. Herzton was out of the way, the missing money had been found, and Mr. Hensley had singled him out for attention and confidence. It was good, too, to look again on Vera and Powers; they seemed to give him anchorage at a time when the course of events was running so swiftly it might well carry him off his feet.

His one concern was for Gladys. He telephoned the house at an unseasonable hour, and a watchful nurse assured him that Miss Hensley seemed to be doing all right, but was still unconscious. With that he would have to be content until Dr. Alstice called later in the morning.

After breakfast he visited Hensley House, but there was nothing new to report concerning

her condition. He had a long and earnest conversation with Mr. Hensley, and they drove together to the plant. There, armed with *carte blanche* authority, he began his investigations. During the day he had interviews with Manners, with Kane and Malcolm, with Brace and Freeman, and with officials at the works, and before night he was able to piece together a most remarkable chain of facts and deductions.

Not one of the interested group of the night before was absent when, at the stipulated time, Kent joined them again at Hensley House.

"Well, Kent, have you got to the bottom of it?" was Mr. Hensley's greeting. "But to begin with, perhaps I had better set your mind at rest on a personal matter. My lawyers have been very active to-day with the authorities, and I am able to assure you and our friend Williams here that the charges against you will be dropped. As for you, Gordon, a man has been killed, and it is not so easy to dispose of the case. There will be some formalities to observe, but you need have no misgivings as to the outcome. The situation is thoroughly understood, and, while I am not saying that your planting of a gun was altogether justified, there will at least be no occasion for your making your will or putting your affairs in shape for a long absence. Now, Kent, tell us what you know."

The young inventor rose to his feet, and all eyes were turned intently upon him.

"To begin," he said, "I must thank all those who have so wonderfully coöperated with me during the last few hours. Particularly Miss Manners. She had placed before me information which otherwise could not have been unearthed in months, if ever.

"Miss Manners—I will continue to speak of her in that way, although that is not her name—is, in reality, a married woman. Through some situation which does not concern us, she came under the hatred of her husband. To cover her tracks she committed a fake suicide by drowning. In some way Herzton learned her secret, and has used it to maintain control over her, threatening to disclose her whereabouts to her husband if she did not do his bidding. It is for that reason I continue to speak of her as Miss Manners, and I ask you all to do the same."

There was a murmur of assent, and Kent continued:

"Herzton placed Manners in your household, Mr. Hensley, because he wanted a spy inside the fortress, so to speak. He arranged a secret telephone connection with her room, by means of which they kept each other informed. Also he concealed a very ingenious dictaphone in this

desk in your smoking room. The wire runs down the leg to a brass plate which has been substituted for the usual glider, and which in turn connects with another brass plate inserted in the floor. It was part of Manners' duty to see that this desk was kept in the exact position which would enable Herzton to listen in on your conversation whenever he found it of interest to do so."

Examination of the desk disclosed the truth of what Kent had said. With a rising tide of interest and astonishment, the little company hung on his words.

"But these are only minor matters. They might be called the recreations of a great inventor. In his radio researches Herzton had stumbled on the thought that just as sound and light are transmitted by vibrations, so possibly the very emotions of the mind may be transmitted. After all, sound, in the form of speech, is only an artificial way of transmitting what is in the mind. The vocal cords, the lips, the ears—are, in a sense, merely mechanical contrivances for that purpose. Words are not thoughts; they are merely expressions of thought. The thing is to transmit the thought itself. We all know that that occasionally happens. We 'sense' the presence of another person in a dark room, although we may not hear a sound. We meet a stranger,

and before a word is spoken we have a favorable or unfavorable reaction. Your dog knows your mood before you speak to him. Beyond question, the lower animals are able to exchange mental suggestions without speech. Probably we humans once had the gift in high degree, but, having learned to speak, we allowed it to fall into disuse.

“Herzton conceived the idea that it is possible to invent a machine which will transmit thoughts or moods from the operator to a second person unaware of the operation. He went on the theory that every brain is a radio receiving and broadcasting station. Some stations are, of course, immensely more powerful than others, but no station is so powerful that, of itself, it can establish complete mastery. His idea was to aid it by mechanical means.

“As you know, Mr. Hensley, you gave him a free hand in the arrangement of his laboratory. He divided the floor space allotted to him into rooms according to his own whims. There is not even a blueprint of them at the plant. Partly as a precaution, and partly as an exercise in invention, and partly to humor a feeling of being some new kind of lord enthroned in a new kind of castle, he equipped these rooms with such things as gas tanks, electrically operated doors, periscope communication, and so on. This was

his base, but his real field of action was within your family circle, Mr. Hensley.

“Now about the machine itself. Unfortunately, in our efforts to break out of the room in which we were trapped last night, the delicate machinery was so smashed that nothing remains complete. I have pieced together what I can, but the result is inadequate. However, it is apparent that he had invented a highly sensitive diaphragm which, hanging close to his head in a room specially treated to exclude sound waves and radio waves, responded to the vibrations of his mind. This was only achieved by intense concentration, so it was physically impossible for him to remain at the machine for any great length of time, or to use it very frequently. Communicating with this diaphragm was a device for amplifying or ‘stepping up’ the vibrations. By an adaptation of the beam principle of wireless telegraphy, these amplified vibrations were projected in the desired direction through an instrument something like a telescope.

“Aside from the rooms used for his laboratory, Herzton had partitioned off a little cell in which were controls governing the poison gas tanks, the movements of doors, and so on, and, I am also glad to record, the supplying of fresh air. In this spot were, so to speak, the throttles by means of which he could operate his deadly

machine, and reflectors by means of which he could see what was going on in any of the rooms. On one occasion his vanity tripped him into showing this room to Miss Manners and into boasting how it could be used in emergency. I can only account for this by his desire to impress her with his power and his genius, and his utter confidence that she would be afraid to betray him.

“Well, he began his experiments, using Miss Manners at first as the receiving depot. This was not satisfactory. She was partly in the secret, and Herztou felt that a demonstration, in order to prove anything, would have to be on some person who knew nothing about it. He selected Miss Hensley. At first he got no results, and he concluded that the vibrations he was able to send out were not sufficiently powerful to be effective unless he could find some way to focus them on the person toward whom they were directed. As this juncture he either invented, or discovered, a formula for treating an alloy so that it had the effect of attracting the vibrations, concentrating them much as a telescope concentrates light waves. He employed some form of magnetism, but what it was we shall never know, because we may be sure he was much too shrewd to leave his formula on record.”

Kent took a small object from his pocket. It

had the appearance of copper, and was about the size of a one-cent piece.

"This is what he produced. It has the appearance of copper, but has been treated in such a way that it attracts the emotion waves passing near it. It attracted his emotion vibrations, as a magnet attracts steel. Roughly, it serves the same purpose as the aërial for your radio set. I found this concealed behind a false back in Miss Hensley's vanity case."

There was exclamations of surprise and much examination of the copper disc.

"Yes. Miss Manners knew it was there, and, as I said, she has been of great service to me. It was her business to see that the disc was in the proximity of Gladys when Herzton was ready for an experiment. When this disc came within her aura her mind was directly affected by the emotion impulses sent out from Herzton's machine."

"But why," Mr. Hensley interrupted, after a silence in which the significance of this revelation settled home upon them—"why should he have selected my daughter, of all people, for such purposes?"

"I think his course was logical enough," Kent answered. "In the first place, he was able, through Miss Manners, to check the results accurately. And if he could bring Gladys under

his influence it would not only prove that he had discovered a great new natural law, but it would open the way for his marriage into the family. The next step would be your retirement, with Herzton as president of the company. Then, with all the equipment and resources of the Hensley Radio Corporation at his command, he would be ready for his real adventure."

"His real adventure?"

"Yes. But I must come to that later. Well, he began his experiments, and had a measure of success. When Gordon was out one evening with Gladys, he, desiring to break up the party, transmitted to her a mood of haste. That was where I came into the picture. The mood persisted while we were in the taxi together. She left her purse with the compact in the taxi, and it seems to have affected the driver, at least to some extent, on his return journey. The next day he sent Galut as his representative to the coroner's inquest. When Miss Hensley's testimony was favorable to me, Galut slipped out, telephoned his chief, who immediately subjected her to the influence and reversed her attitude. In the same way he influenced her at other times. But one thing balked him. Obviously, without disclosing the machine, he could not operate it while in her presence. He was

powerless at the very times when he most wanted power."

Kent paused and a murmur ran through the little group. They waited for him to continue.

"You spoke of Herzton's real adventure," Dr. Alstice reminded him.

"Yes. As his invention developed, its almost infinite significance became more and more apparent. This was but the tiny stream which would grow into a river that would flood the world. It was at the same relative stage as the telephone was when it was first demonstrated that sound could be transmitted half a mile. Herzton's mind was able to conceive its ultimate possibilities. Given the correct principle, it was only necessary to multiply sufficiently the power in order to dispense with the discs and bring everyone under the influence. The necessity for secrecy made it impossible for him to establish a high-powered plant. This he hoped to do after he had gained control of the corporation. Then, by charging the ether with a certain type of vibration, he could bring about the desired mental reaction in millions, in hundreds of millions, of his fellow men. Each human station would in turn re-broadcast its emotions, so that they would sweep around the world as a patriotic fervor sweeps through a nation at the outbreak of war. The phenomenon of war

patriotism, or mob violence, or religious mania, for example, can be explained only on the theory that otherwise normal minds have come under the control of a dominating influence. Herzton dreamed of himself creating and applying that influence. Don't you see? It would make him master of human thought, or, rather, it would replace rational action by emotional impulses, and that, in turn, could be used to make him master of the world.

"For a time all went well, but the very immensity of such possibilities began to unbalance his mind. He became incredibly suspicious. No miser ever hoarded his gold as Herzton hoarded his secret, and in everyone he met he began to see a potential enemy. He became suspicious of Gordon Brace, who was working out some perfectly legitimate experiments of his own, and set Galut to spy upon him. Although confident of his ultimate success, he began protecting his discovery by basic patents, disguising their purpose so that not even the Patent Office would know what he was aiming at. It was in this connection that he ran into a conflict with Freeman's patent, and fell into a panic to get control of it. The talk about needing it for a static eliminator was just a blind. He honored me, also, with his suspicion, and was devising means to put me out of the way.

“His undoing dated from the killing of Galut. Having now no outside agent except Miss Manners, who was showing signs of revolt, his suspicions were redoubled, and he began to feel that his enemies were closing in upon him. By a ruse which was designed to place Miss Hensley in a wrong light, he obtained my fingerprints and turned them over to the police, thus connecting me with the shooting of Galut, as I had happened to be with the unfortunate man at the time of his death. Yes,” he added, answering a note of surprise from his auditors, “I was with Galut when he was shot. I will not go into details here, but Gordon knows the story, and my evidence will be at his disposal when he needs it. Herzton took advantage of the situation to present me with the alternative of imprisonment or flight. Manners, as his agent, removed the money that was to have financed our search for Brace. I said ‘as his agent’; she reaped no profit from it herself, and, as you know, the money was found on Herzton’s body.

“Herzton had now reached such a frame of mind that, when he was asked to go to one of the branch houses, he suspected a trap. A few miles out of the city he left his train, hired a car, and drove back, arriving just in time to greet Freeman, Brace, Williams, and me upon our return from the North. Having locked us

up, by means of his dictaphone connection he learned of your plans to raid his laboratory. He was quite willing to offer all of you up as a sacrifice to his genius, but Gladys he wanted for himself. He was able in some way to detach her from the company and get her into the little cell where she was found. But at this point Miss Manners' smoldering disaffection burst into open revolt. She followed you to the works, where she ran into Murphy in one of the corridors hunting for Gladys. She led him straight to the secret cell, where Herzton had a miniature machine and was apparently using it for his own purposes. Either by design or a freak of chance, the first thing he did, when discovered, was to ruin the machine. And the rest you know."

Kent sat down, trembling. He had not suspected that his day of highly concentrated activity, and his explanation of the result, had drawn so heavily upon his nervous energy.

Mr. Hensley was the first to speak. "We all owe you a great debt of gratitude, Mr. Kent. I shall wish to speak to you in that connection a little later. Meanwhile I take it Herzton's secret, the greatest secret this inventive age has yet disclosed, has been lost?"

Kent moistened his lips. "Yes, sir, the secret has been lost, and perhaps it is just as well. It

is too powerful a thing to be trusted to any human being."

"Nevertheless," Mr. Hensley continued, "that way lies progress. Every invention is charged with danger unless, with the invention, comes a corresponding sense of responsibility. Herztou lacked that. Nevertheless, he was a new Columbus, sailing a new, uncharted sea. It engulfed him. That is the fate of many explorers. But that way lies progress."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WHEN Gladys opened her eyes they looked into the familiar blue-tinted ceiling of her bedroom at Hensley House. Birds were singing in the trees outside, and a gentle summer breeze pushed forward and back through the open lattice. For some minutes she lay quite still, her brows slightly contracted in the effort of her mind to link the present with the past.

Presently she stirred, and at that sign a bright face leaned over her.

"Don't exert yourself, dear," the nurse cautioned her. "You have given us three anxious days, but you are going to be all right now, aren't you?"

"I feel all right, but I don't remember. Have I been here for three days? What has happened?"

"Don't worry about that. You will remember presently. Now I must call Dr. Alstice; he left orders that he was to be called the moment you regained consciousness."

The doctor found her rational and with a normal pulse. She was eager for explanations,

but he was firm. "Not until this evening, when I call again. Your mother may see you, if she promises not to talk."

The girl's lips parted in a gentle smile. "That will be hard for Mother," she said.

"Tell me everything," the girl pleaded, when he came again. "You see, I am quite strong." She elevated two white arms in evidence of her recuperation.

"Yes, I believe you can hear it," the doctor agreed. "And it will set your mind at rest. After we had gone to the laboratory that night, Miss Manners, believing that she might be of service, hurriedly followed us. In the main corridor she came upon Murphy, the policeman, searching for you. It seems that Murphy missed you before we entered the fatal room and immediately went to hunt for you. Manners put two and two together and her conclusions led her straight to the little cell in which you were held captive. You remember the fight that followed?"

She nodded. "Herzton was killed, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Shot by Manners in self-defense. They found the missing package of money in his coat pocket."

"I know. He told me of it. I think it was to pay for our honeymoon."

"You poor child! It isn't only the police who give the third degree. Well, after you collapsed, Murphy quickly released us from our trap, as the door opened readily from the outer side. I followed you home with as little delay as possible, and here we are!"

She lay for some moments in silence. Then, "Is that all?" She was waiting for him to mention someone who seemed to be very near her in those days of adventuring in the unknown.

"No, not all. There has been much research and investigation, with some astonishing conclusions. But these things are much too complicated for you to hear or to worry your little head over just at present. For the moment you must take my word for it that everything has come out all right."

She sighed. "Very well; I suppose I must wait. But is there nothing you *can* tell me?"

"Oh, plenty. Murphy is promoted."

She brightened. "I am glad of that."

"Yes, Malcolm gave him great credit. And it seems likely that the charge against Gordon Brace will be dropped. At any rate, we have inside information that nothing will come of it."

"I am glad of that, too." Gordon Brace! She was startled to find how impersonal that name had become. Yet, she could tell herself in truth

that he never had been more than a friend, and a friend he would remain.

"And your father, I think, is taking Freeman into his organization. He regards him as a bright young man."

"That is interesting." She was trying not to appear impatient.

"And—let me see. Oh, yes. Manners stays on. With Herzton out of the way she will give us no more trouble."

"I am sure of that. She was the victim of circumstances."

"Well, aren't we all, if not the victims, at least the products of circumstances? Sometimes the coin falls one way, sometimes the other. Heads for success, tails for failure."

"Perhaps. What else?"

"Williams has gone north to bring back the plane, if he can find it in that million-mile flying field where he parked it."

"Good old Williams!" Something about him always had appealed to her.

The doctor paused, maliciously. "Now, is there anything else?"

Her heart would no longer be denied. "There *is* something else. You must not tantalize me, Dr. Alstice!"

Strenuously the doctor clung to his professional attitude. "Why, yes! I had almost for-

gotten. Your father has already appointed a successor to Professor Herzton."

"Dr. Alstice, if you don't stop teasing me I will ring for Mother. She will tell me everything."

"At least. But you interrupted me, my child. I was saying your father had appointed a successor to Professor Herzton, but perhaps I had better let him speak for himself."

"Dear Dad! I haven't seen him yet."

Quietly the doctor slipped from the room, holding the door ajar for an impatient visitor waiting outside. "Not more than five minutes," he whispered.

Gladys heard feet moving across the floor and waited for the cheery voice of her father. When it did not come she raised her eyes. They looked straight into those of Morley Kent.

For a moment the blood receded from her face. Then it came back with a rush. "Morley!" she breathed, and held out her arms.

He knelt on the floor by her bedside while her fingers fondled his hair and found their way about his neck. Within his strong arms she felt herself lifted gently toward him. Then her eyes drew him downward, and her lips met his.

THE END

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