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Detectives, Inc.: A Mystery Story
for Boys, by William Heyliger**

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**DETECTIVES
INC.**

WILLIAM HEYLIGER

**DETECTIVES,
INC.**

A Mystery Story for Boys

By
WILLIAM HEYLIGER

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CHICAGO

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FOREWORD

DOGS WHO SET BLIND MEN FREE

In Morristown, New Jersey, there is what is probably the most remarkable school in the world—a school where dogs are educated to liberate physically the blind people of our country. This school is called The Seeing Eye and was founded in 1928 by a woman whose life and wealth has been devoted to this remarkable cause; her name is Mrs. Harrison Eustis.

Female German shepherd dogs are chosen for this work because they are not easily distracted from the duties entrusted to them. It takes from three to five months to complete a dog's education. The first few months are spent with her instructor: she learns to pick up whatever he drops; learns that if she walks off a curb without first stopping, he stumbles and falls; that if she passes under a low obstruction, he hits his head.

It is very hard to find men with sufficient patience to learn how to educate these dogs and it is equally as difficult to teach the blind how to rely upon and use these dogs.

HOW THE DOG WORKS

The method by which the dog and man work together is simple. The dog guide does not take her master to his destination without being told where to go. It is not generally appreciated, but blind people develop an adequate mental picture of their own communities. All they need is a means by which they may be guided around *their* picture. In a strange city they ask directions as anyone else would. It is simple to remember the blocks and to remember also when to go right or left. In familiar territory people with eyesight do not look for the name of every street. The master directs his dog by oral commands of "right," "left" or "forward." But it is the dog that guides the master. By means of the handle of the leather harness which he holds lightly in his left hand, she takes him around pedestrians, sidewalk obstructions, automobiles, anything which may interfere with his safe progress. The pace is rapid, rather faster than that of the average pedestrian. Upon arriving at street crossings the dog guides her master to the edge of the curb and stops. He finds the edge immediately with his foot or cane and then gives his guide the necessary command for the direction in which he wishes to go.

The dog can be depended upon to do her part. Her lessons have been thorough, particularly

those which teach her to think for herself. She must pass the school's rigid "blindfold" test in which her instructor's eyes are bandaged so that he is, for practical purposes, blind. She is then tested under the most difficult conditions, on streets and intersections and in the heaviest of pedestrian and auto traffic. She does not look at traffic lights but at traffic. When she passes she can be certified as ready for her blind master.

Not every blind person can use a dog guide. Some are too young, many too old. Some do not like dogs. But conservative estimates indicate that there are about 10,000 in America who would benefit through a dog guide. It is understandable that leading workers for the blind, business men and women, are urging The Seeing Eye to extend its facilities as rapidly as is consistent with the maintenance of the highest possible standards.

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THE ESSENTIALS TO SUCCESS

There are no secrets which The Seeing Eye uses to make the shepherd an effective guide, but there are several essentials to success. The first is experience. The knowledge gained by the years of work which have gone into the development of The Seeing Eye is called upon in the education of every student. A second essential is that the carefully selected dog is educated, not trained. She is taught to think for herself and in her instruction learns certain principles which she can apply to problems she will meet later. If she reacted only to commands she would be useless in guiding blind people. Another essential is the fact that she loves to work. To her, service is a pleasure and not a duty. Her master's hours are hers. Her main compensation is her master's affection and his utter reliance on her.

Blind students, men and women, come to the school in classes of eight, the maximum an instructor is able to teach at one time. While their major objective is to learn through practice and instruction how to direct the dog and follow her guidance, some of them must learn other things, too. Many of them since blindness have lost the faculty of finding their way in known surroundings. Others have fallen into the habit of shuffling feet and groping walk, with body bent forward and hands outstretched. Some never have walked down stairs unaided. These are things which must be unlearned if the dog is to bring independence. At The Seeing Eye the student is taught to free himself from these habits of helplessness, so that self-reliance and courage gradually return. Anticipation replaces despair as the dog opens a new world for her master, one he dreamed of but never hoped to have again.

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All the practice work of the student with his dog takes place on the streets of Morristown. Here, morning and afternoon each day, the student gradually assimilates his lessons. Near the end of his month's course he is able to go easily and fearlessly about the city without an instructor, just as he will in his various activities on his return home.

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THE DOG AND HER MASTER ARE

INSEPARABLE

From the time the student is assigned his dog, the two are inseparable. No one else feeds or cares for her and within a few days the two are bound together by a mutual affection—a tie which remains unbroken throughout the years of the dog's working life. Even about the house, where no guiding is necessary, dog and man are constantly together just because they want to be. She even sleeps close by her master's bed.

NOTE

For the sake of the story certain qualities have been given "Lady" which are found in individual German shepherd dogs, though never present in a blind leader.

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DETECTIVES, INC.

A Mystery Story for Boys

THEFT IN THE RAIN

Joe Morrow, very sleepy, grew conscious of voices coming up from the porch—the slow drawl of his uncle, Dr. David Stone, and a quicker, sharper voice. Abruptly the sharper tone scratched at his memory and the drowsiness was gone. What was Harley Kent doing here? So far as he knew the man had never visited the house before, and his uncle had never set foot on the Kent place a quarter of a mile down the road. A word, stark and clear, came through the bedroom window. Robbery! And suddenly he was out of bed and slipping into his clothes.

The morning was cool and fresh after the heavy rain of the night. His uncle stood at the porch railing, sightless eyes turned off across the valley, a great, tawny German shepherd dog at his side. Harley Kent crowded the top step, and Joe noticed that the dog sneezed, and grew restless, and drew back a step.

"Lady, easy." Dr. Stone's hand felt for the dog's head and rubbed a twitching ear. "When did you say it was discovered, Kent?"

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"A little after six o'clock this morning. The maid found a window open and called me. The wall safe was open, too, and the necklace was gone. Could I trouble you for a match, Doctor? I've lost my lighter."

The man stepped upon the porch, and the dog sneezed again and retreated. Dr. Stone brought forth matches, and Harley Kent had to come close to get them. Joe was vaguely conscious that his uncle's face had become intent.

Harley Kent lit a cigar. "I'm not in the habit of keeping jewels in the house. Mrs. Kent's been in

Europe; her ship docks next Monday. We're to attend a dinner that night, and I knew she'd want the necklace. I took it out of a safe deposit box a week ago and brought it home."

Dr. Stone asked a question. "Insured, of course?" "Certainly. Twenty-five thousand."

The boy sucked in his breath and wondered what twenty-five thousand dollars would look like piled up in shining half dollars. The Kent automobile gleamed in front of the house, and a uniformed chauffeur sat motionless behind the wheel.

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"You've notified the police?"

"I tried to, but the storm last night crippled our telephone line. I came over to use yours."

"Ours is out, too."

Harley Kent made an impatient gesture. "That means I'll have to run into the village." The cigar came out of his mouth. "It was an inside job, Doctor. Whoever robbed that safe knew how to get into it. It was opened by combination."

Dr. Stone said coolly, "That's putting it on your own doorstep."

Harley Kent shrugged. "Figure it out for yourself. There were only three of us in the house—Donovan, the chauffeur, the maid, and myself. Two days ago I forgot to take some papers to New York. I telephoned Donovan to bring them in. They were in the safe and I had to give him the combination. Well, I'm off for the village. I understand you were a police surgeon before——" The man coughed.

"Yes," said Dr. Stone without emotion. "Before I lost my sight."

"Well, if you'd like to run over and get the feel of a case again——"

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"It might be interesting," the doctor said slowly.

Harley Kent went down the steps, a door slammed, and the car rolled away. Joe had a glimpse of the uniformed figure at the wheel, and spoke in a hoarse whisper:

"Will Donovan be put in jail, Uncle David?"

"Perhaps." The hand came up from the dog's head and tapped the porch railing thoughtfully. "What time is it, Joe? About eight?"

"Five after."

"Two hours," Dr. Stone said as though speaking to himself. Abruptly he jerked his head. "Time we had breakfast," he added, and boy and dog followed at his heels. Here, in the home of his widowed sister that had sheltered him for five years, he knew his way perfectly, and there was nothing to mark him out as blind as he walked boldly toward the dining room. And yet at the last moment, his handicap touched him with uncertainty. He had to put out his hand to make sure of the table and then fumble for his chair.

Joe wondered about jails, and was sorry for Donovan. Twice the man had picked him up on the road and carried him into the village, and

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once he had spent a fascinating afternoon in the Kent garage holding tools while the chauffeur worked on the car. Did they lock a prisoner in a cell and keep him there night and day?

His mother's voice cut through his thoughts. "You're going over, David?"

"I have a reason for wanting to go," the man said.

Joe's heart throbbed. A reason for going. His throat was husky again. "Right away, Uncle David? A policeman has to get there while the trail is hot, doesn't he?"

"There are some trails," Dr. Stone said in his slow drawl, "that do not grow cold."

Out on the porch he filled a pipe and smoked quietly. Joe, watching that lion head topped by crisp, unruly white hair, wondered if his uncle ever became excited. He fidgeted and watched a clock; and by and by Dr. Stone knocked the ashes from his pipe, stood up, and took a dog's harness down from a nail.

The dog stretched its great body and held out its head. A stiff leash rose from either side of the harness and joined a wide, hard handle-grip at the top.

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"Lady, forward!"

Slowly, protectingly, the massive animal took Dr. Stone down the steps and along the concrete walk to the road.

"Lady, right."

Without hesitation the dog turned right, the tawny body pressed almost against the man's left leg. They were off now, and Dr. Stone's body bent slightly from the waist toward the dog, while his right hand lightly swung a cane. He might have been gifted with sight, so rapidly did he walk, so complete was his confidence in his four-footed guide. Joe had to stretch his legs to keep up with them. They went past fields and orchards, fences and tangles of wild grape. The doctor's cane, swinging along, came in contact at last, with a wall of hedge.

"Kent's place, Joe?"

"Yes, sir." Joe's throat throbbed with a twitching pulse.

A telephone repair truck was in the driveway. The dog slowed, and swung aside, pulling on the leash and changing his course. Without hesitation Dr. Stone followed the pull, and the dog led him around and past the truck. They appeared, in their movements, to be one.

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The boy said: "I like to watch him do that."

"He's my eyes, Joe. Kent's car?"

"No, sir; a telephone truck. I don't see his car."

"Not back yet," said the doctor, and whistled soundlessly. They roamed the grounds. The dog at a rapid pace, took the man along one side of the house and deftly manoeuvred him around every tree and bush. In the rear a maid hung a sodden garment on the line and, after a

frightened glance at them, disappeared into the house. The wind blew across the valley and the wet sleeve of a coat fluttered and swung toward Dr. Stone's face. He reached out a groping hand, and found the sleeve, and brought it close to his sightless eyes as though trying to pierce a veil of darkness and make out the pattern. Bees droned through a blooming lilac and they moved around to the other side of the house.

"Joe, is there a pine tree on the place?"

Pin pricks ran along the boy's spine. His uncle had never been here before—how did he know about the tree? "Yes, sir."

"A large tree, heavy-branched?"

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"Yes, sir."

"Take me there. Lady, forward."

The cane explored the trunk and then slowly tapped the ground.

"About six feet from the house, Joe?"

Joe blinked. "How do you know?"

"Sound echoes," Dr. Stone chuckled. Automobile tires ground the gravel of the driveway.

"It's Mr. Kent," said the boy.

Harley Kent hurried up to them. "Is this village supposed to have a police force?" he demanded. "Had to wait half an hour for Captain Tucker to stroll back from breakfast. There could be a dozen murders committed—" He broke off. "Just a moment, Doctor, and I'll be with you. It occurs to me I may have left that lighter in another suit—"

"The maid hung one out to dry," Dr. Stone said.

"Why, yes." Harley Kent stopped short. "That's it," he added, and was gone. Presently he was back. "Not there. I suppose it will turn up some place. Well, come in; come in. The police should be here before long."

They mounted to the porch and Lady, after the manner of her breed when trained to work with the blind, stopped with her head directly under the knob of the strange door.

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"A remarkable animal," Harley Kent said in admiration. "Well, here's where the job was done, Doctor."

Joe was conscious of strange tremors. Lady, alert, cocked her head and sniffed the air with an inquiring nose. The doctor, halting in the arched doorway leading from the hall, seemed to lose himself in thought.

"There's a door to the left of this room, Kent?"

"Yes; it leads into the dining room."

"And windows in the wall facing this way. They're open now."

Harley Kent gave a startled grunt. "Doctor, if I didn't know you were blind—"

"Air currents," Dr. Stone said laconically. "I feel them on my face. You feel them, too, but they go

unnoticed. You rely on your eyes. The wall safe, then, should be in the solid wall on the right. Correct, Kent?"

"I don't understand it," Harley Kent said, still startled.

The doctor asked an abrupt question. "How high is that safe from the floor?"

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"Six feet, eight inches."

"To work the combination without straining a short man would have to stand upon a chair."

"Exactly, Doctor. None of the chairs was disturbed; none of the cushions trampled. I checked that with the maid."

Dr. Stone's face was impassive. "I gather that means something to you?"

"What would it mean to you if I told you Donovan was a tall man?"

The doctor's sightless eyes were fixed straight ahead as though he saw something that was denied to other men. "Does Donovan know he's suspected?"

"He isn't quite a fool."

A man passed quickly through the hall. Donovan! Joe instinctively stepped closer to the dog. And suddenly, under his feet, the floor boards creaked with a loud, harsh, dry protest.

"Loose boards all over the room," Harley Kent explained. "I never bothered to have them nailed down. With the safe in this room I looked upon them as a burglar alarm. And yet, in the uproar of last night's storm, a cannon ball might have been rolled across the floor and nobody upstairs would have heard it." His hands made a resigned gesture of defeat. "No matter how sound you think your plans are, you can never be sure."

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"No," Dr. Stone said slowly, "there's always a slip."

The telephone truck was gone, and now another car came up the driveway and stopped with a squeal of brakes.

"Captain Tucker has evidently finished his breakfast at last," Harley Kent said with bitter sarcasm. "He'll want to question Donovan. If you don't mind, Doctor——"

"Of course." The doctor took an uncertain step and paused. "I seem to have lost my bearings, Kent. Would you give me your arm to the door?"

Joe followed blankly. It was the first time he had ever known his uncle to lose a sense of direction once established. Behind those blind eyes the room, in all its essentials, had been mapped. And even if its outlines had not been printed on a clear mind, the man had only to say, "Lady, out!" and the dog would have taken him to the door. Why take Harley Kent's arm?

Captain Tucker, on the porch, spoke a greeting and passed inside. The door closed. Down at the end of the gravel where the driveway met the road, Joe instinctively turned toward home. But

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Dr. Stone said, "Lady, right!" and was off toward the village at that amazingly rapid pace.

"I'm after pipe tobacco, Joe."

The boy's shorter legs beat a rapid tattoo on the dirt road. "I bought you some yesterday, Uncle David."

"An extra tin won't go to waste," the man said casually.

Hedge and brush were full of fascinating odors that invited sniffing examination. But the shepherd dog, as though aware that the man who gripped the handle was in her keeping, went ahead with single-minded purpose. The dirt road became a paved street and they were in the town. Lady guided her charge toward the sidewalk, came to a cautious halt at the curb and waited for her command.

A voice called: "Dr. Stone! Dr. Stone!"

Joe saw that it was Tom Bloodgood, the jeweler. They waited, and Lady sat down on her haunches, watchful and alert.

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"Heard about the robbery out your way, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"That's something I'd never expect to happen. I can't understand how a burglar could have got across that room without waking the dead. The way that floor creaked——"

"Kent says the storm drowned all other noise." The doctor's mouth had grown hard at the corners. "I didn't know you and Kent were on visiting terms."

"We're not."

"But if you knew about those floor boards——"

"Oh! That was a business call—the only time I was in the house. He sent for me last Wednesday ——"

The voice stopped, and Joe found the jeweler's eyes resting on him meaningfully. Flushing, the boy took himself out of earshot and pretended to be absorbed in a store window. Presently his uncle called to him, and they went down the street to Stevenson's shop, and Joe saw that the tight lines around the man's mouth had showed much deeper.

Back on the street the blind man was silent, and walked with quick steps beside the dog. Half way home a cloud of dust rode toward them, and Captain Tucker's car came out of the dust. The car stopped.

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"So you didn't arrest Donovan," said the doctor.

The police officer leaned across the wheel. "Joe must have told you he's not in the car."

"Nobody had to tell me," Dr. Stone said mildly. "Captain Tucker, with a jewel thief in charge, would not be likely to stop for a chat with a friend. You didn't arrest Donovan?"

"N—no. Even though you're reasonably sure a man's guilty, you can't arrest him for robbery

unless you have at least some proof. There is no proof—there’s nothing. And he has an alibi. He and the maid have their rooms in the same wing of the house. She says she couldn’t sleep last night, and sat up and read with her door partly open. She insists Donovan couldn’t pass that door without being seen or heard. If the maid’s telling the truth, Donovan couldn’t be the thief; if she isn’t telling the truth, they’re both in it. Anyway, if we do arrest Donovan, what about the necklace? If possible we want to recover that.”

“But you think Donovan did it?”

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“Well, Doctor, let’s give it a look. She admits she never sat up all night reading before. She can’t recollect ever leaving her door open before. Now, why did both those things have to happen last night when the safe was robbed?”

“It sounds rather convenient,” Dr. Stone said.

“Too convenient. Too perfect. My idea is that Donovan did the job and the maid is hiding him. I can figure it all out, but I can’t pin it on them. That girl’s too slick for me. I’m going to call in State troopers. Maybe they’ll be able to break down her story.”

The car was gone with a whine of gears, and Joe stretched his legs and followed his uncle and the dog. Harley Kent’s car stood in the driveway.

“We’re at the Kent place, Uncle David.”

“I know.”

“Are we going in?”

“Sometimes,” the doctor said cryptically, “it is best to leave a plum hang until it falls.” The cane made a brisk gesture. “Tonight, Joe.”

To the boy the night was a long way off. A crime had been committed in the neighborhood, almost under their noses, and the scene of the crime drew him with an excited, morbid curiosity. Late in the afternoon he walked back to the Kent place and loitered outside the hedge. He was there when a car drove in and two State troopers got out. Lean and trim in their belted uniforms, they looked competent and formidable; and his eyes, fascinated, clung to the bulges at their hips. An hour later they came out of the house, and Donovan was with them. The chauffeur was still with them when the car rolled away.

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Joe ran for home. “Uncle David! They’ve arrested Donovan.”

“Tucker?”

“No; State troopers. I saw them take him away.”

“I expected it,” Dr. Stone said mildly. Joe, watching him, was presently aware that he slept peacefully in the depths of the porch chair. So can the blind, shut out from the light of the world, in turn shut out the world and drop off into almost instant slumber.

But at supper time the man was vividly awake. The strong, supple hands that had made him a surgeon, were suddenly restless and nervous.

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"Joe," he said, "change those hard leather shoes to soft sneakers. Leather soles make too much noise."

The order had a sound of mystery and adventure. Joe raced upstairs to his room. When he came down the day was gone and darkness lay over the countryside. Lady was already harnessed. Out in the road the boy held to his uncle's arm and hurried along. Here, walking into a wall of night, he would by himself have to go slowly. But to his uncle the night presented no change, nor did it bring up any new handicap. For to Dr. Stone the world was always dark and black. There was no day or night.

Kent's car was gone from the driveway. Dr. Stone said: "Easy, Joe; walk on the grass. Any lights?"

"Only in the back."

It seemed to the boy that his uncle made a sound of satisfaction. The dog, as though sensing the man's desire for caution, led them slowly, silently. Dr. Stone's cane touched the tree.

"Lady!" His voice was low.

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The dog was all attention.

"Lady, search. Fetch."

Joe was conscious of the black bulk of the house, a black tower that was the tree, and a blurred shadow moving noiselessly in the grass. Minutes passed, and his heart pounded in his chest. One moment the dog was near him, and the next it was gone. And then the shadow stood motionless beside his uncle.

"Lady, again," Dr. Stone urged. "Search. Fetch."

For what? Joe racked his brain and tried to find an answer. Once he heard the soft sniff of the dog, but could not see it. Suddenly it was beside his uncle again, motionless as before. How long it had been there he did not know.

"We'll go to the house now," Dr. Stone said.

They crossed to the porch and rang the bell. The living room was all at once alight, and Harley Kent opened the door.

"I thought you might be along, Doctor. Come in; come in. It looks as though we've cleared this thing up."

"Then the necklace was recovered?" Dr. Stone asked.

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"No—not exactly. They'll sweat Donovan and make him come through. They took him away this afternoon."

"So I heard," the doctor said without emotion. "Under arrest?"

"Technically, no. They took him down for questioning, but—you know how those things are worked. Keep after him until he opens up and then book him. The maid slipped."

"The maid?"

"Yes. They dragged it out of her a little at a time. Donovan wanted her to marry him. Yesterday he

urged her to marry him and leave for the West at once. That sounded suspicious, Doctor. With so many now out of work, why should a man marry and at once throw up his job? To do this he'd have to have quite a bit of money—and Donovan didn't have any. Or else he'd have to know how he could raise money very quickly. Get it?"

"Perfectly."

"So we sent out the maid and brought in Donovan. He had a smug answer to the reason for that trip to the West. A friend owned a taxi company in a western city and wanted him to come on and take the job of manager."

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"He had this friend's letter, of course?"

Harley Kent laughed. "You're not as easily fooled as that, Doctor? Of course not. Said he had lost it. So the troopers took him away."

"That's that," Dr. Stone said after a silence.

"Exactly. And a lucky thing the girl talked. Up to that point we had nothing. No finger prints, no sign as to how the window had been forced, no sign of the necklace. Nothing but an open window and an open safe. It was as though a bird had flown in and had flown off with the jewels."

"A bird," Dr. Stone said slowly, and tapped his cane against the floor. "Nobody thought of that seriously though?"

"A bird?" Harley Kent stared.

To Joe's amazement, his uncle appeared in earnest. "Because if they had taken a bird seriously the next step——"

"The next step what?" Harley Kent demanded sharply.

The cane had ceased to tap the floor. "The next step," Dr. Stone said softly, "would be to look where a bird would naturally fly with such a bauble."

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Something electric, something unsaid, hung in the air, and Joe shook with a strange chill. Whatever that something was, it spoke to Lady. The dog grew restless and growled in its throat.

"I think we'll be going, Kent," said the doctor.

"Good night," said Harley Kent.

Joe clung to his uncle's arm and swallowed with difficulty. A hundred feet down the road the man halted.

"Can you see the house from here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me when the downstairs lights go out." The man found his pipe and struck a match to the bowl.

A whippoorwill called musically through the night, and distance softened the hoot of an owl. Frogs croaked in a meadow and a rabbit stirred in the brush. Joe shifted from foot to foot, and wondered what was to come next. Twice cars passed them going into town, and off over the

hill a dog howled. And then, without warning, the oblongs of downstairs windows disappeared and the roof was a dark patch against the sky.

"The lights are out," the boy whispered.

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Dr. Stone put away the pipe. "Joe, you'd better run home."

The boy had not expected this. "But——"

"Sorry, Joe. I can handle this better alone. You might only be in the way. Run along, and I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"But if——"

"No ifs. Lady's here, and I'll be perfectly all right. Off, now."

Without another word the boy trudged away. Once he looked back, and could just distinguish his uncle's form. Again he looked back, and man and dog were gone. His steps slowed and ceased. He stood listening.

The whippoorwill had ceased to call, and only the chorus of frogs broke the stillness of the night. By and by he moved again, back the way he had come. The sneaks made his progress almost soundless. Had Uncle David told him to wear them so that they could go unnoticed to the pine tree? Why the tree?

Man and dog were gone from where he had left them. The tree lingered in his mind. Avoiding the driveway he crept across the grass. A dark pillar, darker than the night, loomed ahead. It was the tree. He dropped to the ground and, hugging his knees, sat there and was almost afraid to breathe.

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There was no moon, and the gloom was filled with subtle alarms. Donovan was probably in a cell, caged and helpless. What would happen to the maid? And why that intangible something that had hung between Uncle David and Harley Kent? He grew cramped and shifted his position. It must be late. Where was his uncle? He strained his eyes toward the tree but could see nothing.

Suddenly every faculty was sharpened and drawn tight. He thought he had heard a sound. Slowly he relaxed. It must have been the wind. And then he heard it again. This time there could be no mistake. There had been a subdued, almost indistinct scraping.

Silence again, and darkness, and that vague alarm. The silence grew painful. A leaf, fluttering down, touched his face and a chill ran through his bones. Why should a leaf fall from a tree in early spring? And then the stillness was broken by a ringing call:

"Kent, it's no go."

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A voice strangled and strained, came down out of the tree. "Who the devil are you?"

"Dr. Stone. You can't get away with it, Kent. Tell them any story you like, but be sure you have Donovan released at once. Lady, home!"

Man and dog emerged out of the night, and Joe flattened out and hugged the ground.

"Come along, Joe," the doctor said.

The boy stood up, abashed, and took his uncle's arm. "How did you know I was there?"

"Ears—a blind man's ears. When you came in Lady remained quiet. That meant she recognized someone she trusted. There could be only one answer—you. Do you realize you might have ruined everything? That's why I sent you home. One suspicious sound from outside the house and our quarry might have taken alarm."

Joe wet his lips. "It was Mr. Kent?"

"Of course. Donovan? I had my doubts from the start. Kent told a smooth story. He had had to give Donovan the combination, and the safe had been opened by combination. It was a tall man's safe, and Donovan was a tall man. It fitted together perfectly, Joe—too perfectly. Remember when I asked Kent to lead me to the door? I wanted to learn something—and I learned it. Kent is a tall man, too. I might have asked you, but to a boy all men seem tall."

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"The maid's story was perfect, too," Joe said hesitatingly.

"Two perfect stories," Dr. Stone agreed. "It became a matter of picking the true from the false, and Kent rang false from the start."

"I don't understand, Uncle David."

"Let's analyze it. When Kent came to the house Lady sneezed and drew away. Two weeks ago I upset a bottle of bay rum; it ran into her eyes and nose. She's been shy of bay rum since. When Kent said he'd lost his lighter and asked for a match he reeked with bay rum and talcum. The maid had awakened him at six o'clock, and he reached our house at eight. Two striking facts, Joe. Does a man, finding his house robbed in the night, calmly go upstairs and make a careful toilet? Does he wait two hours before going to a telephone to call the police?"

"Well, we went to his place. He wasn't home, and we wandered about the grounds. That was pure luck. We found the wet suit. I asked you if there was a pine tree on the place."

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"Why, Uncle David?"

"Because that suit reeked with pine. We found that the tree was only six feet from the house and heavy-branched, which meant that some of the branches grew close to the house. And so now we had a robbery in the rain, a pine tree, and a dripping suit of Harley Kent's that reeked with pine. The facts were all unrelated, but I began to wonder if the tree had played a part in the robbery.

"Then Kent came back, and his first thought was to look in the wet suit for the missing lighter. When I mentioned the suit on the line he said nothing to indicate alarm. But a blind man's ears are sharp. They are quick to catch shades of sound in a voice. I knew he was disturbed because we had chanced upon that suit. Now, why should he be upset? Wet clothing is not uncommon after a wild rainstorm.

"We went to town for tobacco, and ran into Tom Bloodgood. That was another stroke of luck. For

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Bloodgood told me Kent had called him to the house to value a necklace. The jewelry market has fallen this last year, and Tom gave Kent a valuation of about \$15,000. The moment Bloodgood told me that I thought I saw the picture.

“Kent’s a market speculator. Evidently he had been hit and needed money. Apparently he didn’t want to have the necklace appraised in New York where he was fairly well known—such things leak out and sometimes affect a man’s credit. After he learned what the necklace would bring in the market he must have done some thinking. If he sold it, he’d realize \$15,000. If it were stolen he’d collect \$25,000 from the insurance company. The reason he had shaved and waited two hours to call the police took on significance. It began to look as though Kent had staged a convenient robbery. Collect for the jewels and still have them. Later he might break up the necklace and sell the pearls separately. It’s been done before.”

“Why didn’t you tell Captain Tucker, Uncle David?”

“Oh, no. Tucker would have immediately searched the tree, and Kent could have got the incriminating suit out of the way and made the charge that Donovan had hidden the necklace in the pine. There was only one way. Scare Kent. Send him out into the tree in a panic. And then catch him in the act.

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“So tonight we called upon Kent. I was searching for a way to alarm him, and he opened the door himself by mentioning birds. The moment I spoke of a search of a tree he froze. After that it was merely a matter of waiting for him to come forth to remove the proof of his guilt.”

They were almost at Joe’s house. The boy turned a puzzled thought in his mind.

“But, Uncle David—”

“Yes.”

“Even if there was pine on his coat it wouldn’t be proof he’d been in a pine tree.”

“True,” Dr. Stone agreed. “That’s what sent me searching for the absolute proof.”

Light broke upon the boy. “I see it now. You found something?”

“This.” The man held out his hand.

In the darkness the boy could not see what lay in the hand. “What is it, Uncle David?”

“The missing cigar lighter,” Dr. Stone said quietly. “It fell out of Kent’s pocket while he was hiding the jewels. Lady found it for me under the tree.”

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VOICES IN THE NIGHT

“Go on ahead, Joe,” Dr. David Stone said. “The

boat will probably need bailing. I'll have Jerry fix your rod. Won't take ten minutes."

Joe Morrow gripped the can of worms and was gone. Dr. Stone said, "Right, Lady," and, gripping the harness-handle, followed the dog toward Jerry Moore's garage.

Sound came to the doctor's ears—the rasp of a tool and, abruptly, the sharp tapping of a finger against glass. The dog deftly steered him around an automobile. Jerry's voice came from under the car.

"That you, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"Thought those were Lady's paws. With you in a few minutes."

Dr. Stone moved toward the little office. A voice said, "He's blind, Rog." The tapping had stopped.

But well able to hear, the doctor thought with grim humor, and listened from the doorway. Voices came from the garage floor—Jerry Moore's, the nervous voice that had said, "He's blind, Rog," and the mellow, genial tones of a third man.

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"This brake-rod"—grunt—"sure was loose." That was Jerry. "Quite a contraption you've got under here."

"My own idea," the genial voice said. "Why smear up a car when you can pack them where they're out of the way?"

The job was done, and presently the car backed out of the garage. Jerry came to the office.

"What won't folks think up next?" he demanded. "Fishing fellows, those two who just went out. Stopping off to try Horseshoe Lake. Got a long metal box bolted in under the floor boards. Out of sight and out of the way. Got room in that box for a hundred pounds along with ice."

"Fish?" Dr. Stone asked a trifle sharply.

The garageman cackled. "Sure; a regular ice-box on wheels. How come they pick here for fishing? Nobody's taken a bass out of Horseshoe in years, and danged few pickerel. Want that rod mended?"

A horn blew at the pumps. Jerry put the rod down and hurried outside, and Dr. Stone walked to the door. A hoarse voice said: "Two quarts of medium." A moment later the voice rasped harshly: "Get away from that hood. Can't you see I've brought a can for the oil?"

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"Easy, brother," Jerry soothed. "No harm done."

"Keep away from the hood, that's all."

The car rolled away, and filled the night with the low, smooth thunder of its exhaust. The doctor's ears registered and catalogued sounds. Only a high-priced motor could sound like that—and only a piece of tin could rattle as the car rattled. A queer intentness twitched at the corners of the blind man's mouth.

"That's queer," Jerry observed. "Two cars in a row, and they both had something hidden. This last boiler was all of seven-eight years old, and shabby as a beggar's coat. Had something under that hood, though, he was powerful anxious for no one to see. What do you make of it, Doctor?"

"Coincidence," the doctor said mildly. Two cars, and each with something hidden. Lady's tail thumped the floor, and Joe Morrow came into the office and stood around. The doctor's ears, registering an unseen world by sound, caught the tempo of the boy's restless feet. Bursting with something, the blind man decided. The rod mended at last, man and boy and dog came out to the street, and Lady led them toward the lake.

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Joe's voice trembled. "A car pulled out just as I came back, Uncle David. You know that cobbled road that runs off from Main street, and goes down into the hollow behind the cottonwoods and rises to the back door of the bank?"

"The road the express wagon uses when it takes money to and from the bank?"

"Yes, sir." The boy swallowed with a gulp. "I saw that car in there twice today, just sort of hanging around."

An automobile, making speed, went up the street with a low drone of power.

"There she goes now," Joe cried, excited.

"A wonderful motor," said Dr. Stone.

"That's just it, Uncle David. A shabby old car with a pip of a motor. What for? A quick getaway?"

The doctor whistled softly under his breath, and said nothing. Through the black, moonless night Lady led them at her fast pace to an opening in the reeds and out upon planking that led to the boats. Joe got in first, steadied the craft, and helped in his uncle. The boy rowed with an almost soundless stroke, and presently shipped the oars and dropped anchor. And then they waited for the catfish to bite.

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Joe marked Main street by a reflected ribbon of radiance thrown against the night sky. Water lapped against the boat, and moving lights crawled across the distant toll-bridge. Dr. Stone said, "Not much action, Joe," and the headlights of a car swept toward the lake. They stopped near the planking and snapped out. By and by oars creaked and splashed loudly, a dark shape moved toward the toll-bridge, and voices came across the water.

"Why the toll-bridge, Rog?" the sharp voice asked.

"Use your head," the genial voice answered. "There's plenty of light down there. Somebody may see us trying to haul in a big one."

"You're sure of the time?"

"We got the word, didn't we?"

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"Fast work," the sharp voice said dubiously.

"Well, why not?" A genial chuckle came across the water. "Everybody knows you couldn't get a

decent fish out of this lake with a dragnet. So we pull out."

The oars splashed and creaked, and the sharp voice was lost. And then the genial voice came again:

"We'll pull out about five, roll up and get in line, step on the gas, and make Baltimore in time for breakfast. After that, let John try to find us."

Joe got a bite and missed his fish. So these two men, whoever they were, planned to play hide and seek with somebody named John. But his mind, presently, came back to the shabby car with the powerful motor that had hidden itself twice in the cobbled road behind the cottonwoods where it could not be seen from Main street.

"What do you think that car was doing there, Uncle David?" the boy asked.

"If I knew," Dr. Stone said dryly, "I'd be able to give more attention to this fishing-line."

A tingling tremor ran along the boy's spine. So Uncle David thought that strange car worth worrying about! Lady moved in the boat, and the flat-bottomed craft pitched and wobbled. The fish weren't biting, and the dog was probably cramped. The boy pulled up the anchor. A steady, rhythmic splashing came through the night.

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"They're rowing back," Dr. Stone said.

Joe's oars made scarcely a ripple. Tied up at the planking, he shipped the oars before helping his uncle from the boat. "No fish and a million mosquito bites," the doctor drawled, and they went up the soggy path through the reeds. Oars rattled behind them and somebody stamped on the planking. A car was parked in the high grass above the rutted road that paralleled the lake; even in the darkness there was a lustrous sheen of paint and of shining metal. One of Lady's harness straps had loosened. The doctor bent down to draw it tight, and footsteps came up the planking.

"Rog!" The sharp voice snapped. "There's somebody at the car."

"Don't move!" The genial voice was all at once icy and deadly. "If you've been monkeying—"

Joe shivered. Lady, as though recognizing the threat in that voice, had become stiff and taut. The boy's hand, feeling for her, met the bristling hairs along her spine.

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Dr. Stone stood up. "No threats, if you please," he said coolly.

Joe marveled that, blind, his uncle could face this unknown hazard with unruffled calm. But then, of course, there was Lady. The dog was like a tempered spring, wound.

The man called Rog flew into a rage. "None of your soft talk. What are you doing at that car? By God, if—"

Lady gave an ominous, warning growl. The threat stopped as though a gag had been rammed down the speaker's throat.

"It's the blind man, Rog," the sharp voice said; "the blind man and a boy."

Lady continued to growl a deep warning. A form backed away quickly, and the deadly chill went out of Rog's voice, and he was genial and mellow.

"A thousand apologies, sir. The business of jacking up a car and stealing the tires has become so widespread—. You understand, sir?"

"Perfectly," Dr. Stone said blandly, and quieted the dog. The car backed around and lurched through the ruts, but not until it was well on its way were the lights turned on.

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"What did they look like?" Dr. Stone asked.

"I couldn't see their faces," the boy answered; "it was too dark."

"What make of car?"

"I'm not sure."

"No matter." The doctor spoke to Lady and the dog, sure-footed, led them through the night. Jerry Moore was closing the garage and Ike Boles, the station agent, gave them a toothless grin.

"Hear about the telegram that came this afternoon, Doctor? Fellow named John's glad to hear the fishing's good and aims to come up tomorrow on the 8:11 from New York."

Memory jingled the wires in Joe's brain. Was this the same John Rog and his companion were anxious to avoid?

"Somebody," Dr. Stone said mildly, "is evidently playing a little joke on John. Who was the telegram for, Ike?"

"Fellow named Carl Metz. Can't find hide or hair of him hereabouts. Telegram's lying undelivered at the station. Anybody hear tell of a Carl Metz?"

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The intent look that Joe knew so well had come to the corners of the doctor's mouth. "Jerry, remember the man with the husky voice who wouldn't let you lift the hood? He had a faint accent. What would you call it?"

"German," Jerry said promptly.

And Carl Metz was a German name. A slow excitement twitched through Joe's nerves, and he followed his blind uncle and the dog up the quiet street.

"Who's the man with the husky voice, Uncle David?"

"You've seen him."

"Where?"

"Hiding a shabby car in the cobbled road."

"But—" Heat throbbed in the boy's pulse. "But if he's the one who's expecting John, what about Rog and the other fellow? Why are *they* running away from this John?"

"I don't know—yet," the doctor said.

Until late that night he smoked his pipe and paced the porch; and Lady, who read the signs of his unrest, gave the short whine of a worried dog and watched him narrowly. In the morning, when he awoke, Joe had already gone to school. Mrs. Morrow said: "Joe seemed frightfully excited about something, David." Tight lines formed about the sightless eyes. Bringing the lawn-mower from the side of the house, he began to cut the grass. The lawn was a map in his mind—so many paces to every walk and shrub. He was running the mower near the front gate when a droning throb of power roared up the road and stopped with a squeal of brakes.

"Stranger," said a husky voice, "they tell me there's a bad, little-traveled hill around here."

Seconds passed. "Why, yes," the doctor said slowly. "Three miles on there's a fork to the right; it takes you to Kill Horse Hill."

"Pretty steep?"

"It's downright wicked."

"Any chance," the hoarse voice asked, "of running into other cars out there?"

"None," the doctor assured him; and abruptly the car, rattling loosely, was gone.

The blind man pushed the mower aside and walked thoughtfully to the porch. At noon Joe arrived, breathless.

"Uncle David! I took a look into the cobbled road before school this morning. That car was there again, hidden behind the cottonwoods."

"I think," Dr. Stone said, "I'll walk into town this afternoon."

Something dark and sinister was going on under cover, and it was time somebody spoke to Police Captain Tucker and the bank. Lady, as though sensing a need for speed, led him toward the village at a pace faster than the pace of a man with sight. Suddenly heavy, rapid footfalls grew loud and clear. Somebody was running with mad haste. Somebody—? The doctor's ears, sharp as only a blind man's are sharp, picked a familiar rhythm from the furious stride.

"Joe! Why aren't you at school?"

The boy panted. "Wanted—to tell you—the bank ——" Breath failed him.

"Robbed?" Dr. Stone demanded sharply.

"The—express wagon. Had money—for the bank —that came in—on No. 5."

"The cobbled road?"

"Yes, sir." The boy's breath was easier. "In that hollow behind the cottonwoods that you can't see from Main street. Captain Tucker was in the wagon with the driver. When they got into the hollow there was a man lying in a pool of blood. They jumped out, and it was only a stuffed figure, and the blood was red paint. Somebody they couldn't see said to put up their hands, and Captain Tucker started to spin around and a shot knocked off his cap."

"And after that he kept his hands up?"

"Yes, sir. Next thing a bag was over his head and one over the driver's, and they were tied up and chucked into the truck. By and by somebody found them and the money was gone."

"Much?"

"Twenty-two thousand dollars. They're looking for that shabby car."

"I don't think they'll have to look far," Dr. Stone said grimly. "Lady, forward." Again the rapid pace that ate up distance. "What time did the hold-up happen, Joe?"

"Twenty of twelve."

"Twenty—You're positive of that?"

"That's what everybody says. No. 5 got in at half-past eleven. Gosh, Uncle David, if we had told Captain Tucker last night about that car —"

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"I don't think it would have made any difference," the doctor said slowly. The blind eyes had puckered again with a queer expression of baffled uncertainty. Opposite the garage he spoke to Lady, and the dog, obedient, led him in toward the pumps.

"Jerry about?"

The mechanic answered. "No, Doctor; had to go up-country with the wrecker to bring down a busted car. Hear about the hold-up?"

"Yes. Any talk about the getaway?"

"Nobody saw a car come up out of that road, Doctor. Tucker doesn't know. He had a bag over his head, and the express engine was running, and, lying on the floor, all he could hear was his own motor. Looks like whoever planned it, planned it neat."

"About twenty-two thousand dollars?"

"Twenty-eight thousand. Everybody had it twenty-two thousand at first, but it was twenty-eight thousand. Twenty thousand in paper money, and eight thousand in silver."

"In silver?" The doctor stood very still and broke into an almost soundless whistle. Joe's heart hammered against his ribs. He knew the sign—his uncle's mind, back in its shroud of darkness, had touched something tangible and significant. Quietly, after a long minute of thought, the blind man walked into the office, groped about the desk for the telephone, and called the railroad station.

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"Ike, this is Dr. Stone. Did you find Carl Metz and deliver the telegram?"

"I did not. I can't find a man of the name."

"Did this man John arrive?"

"If he did he's a ghost. I watched the train for a look at who it might be was coming to Horseshoe for good fishing, and not a stranger got off."

"What time did his train get in?"

"Eleven-thirty."

Dr. Stone's voice snapped into the transmitter.
"Is that the train that leaves New York at 8:11?"

"The same," said Ike; "No. 5 on the train-sheet,
and the money that was stolen in the baggage
car."

The receiver went back upon the hook. The blind
man was on his feet.

"What time is it, Joe?"

"Half-past two."

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"If we hurry——" The doctor was out the door,
following Lady at an amazingly fast pace. Joe
had to half run.

"Where are we going, Uncle David?"

"To the toll-bridge."

Horseshoe Lake rippled with golden sun. Sid
Malloy, the bridge-tender, collected toll and
Captain Tucker, grim and dour, with a ghastly
black hole in the top of his cap, inspected the
inside of every car. He frowned at sight of Dr.
Stone, the boy and the dog.

"Doctor," he said bluntly, "this is no place for a
blind man; and as for a boy——"

"Go inside, Joe," the doctor said mildly. "Keep
out of the way. If trouble starts, duck low and
hug the floor. Is your gun handy, Captain?"

"I always have my gun," Captain Tucker
growled.

"Presently I may speak to one of the cars that
stops to pay toll. Never mind questions. Have
your gun out and cover that car."

The captain had had a bad day and was nettled.
"Wild west stuff?" he asked.

"You wouldn't want the next bullet to go a little
lower than your cap, would you, Captain?"

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Joe sucked in a gasping breath. If there was
shooting, what chance would a blind man stand?
The question had a sobering effect, and the
police captain's voice shed some of its bad wire.

"You're waiting for a car, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know."

"Can you describe whoever'll be in it?"

"No."

Temper flamed suddenly in the harassed man.
"Look here, Doctor, if you don't know what car it
is, or what whoever's in it looks like, you'd
better leave this business for those——"

"Who can see?" Doctor Stone asked mildly.
"Sometimes the blindest persons have eyes."

A car stopped at the toll-house and, while Sid
Malloy collected the toll, Captain Tucker opened
the doors and inspected the inside. A clock in a

village church tower struck three, and the midafternoon traffic thickened and converged upon the bridge. Cars rolled upon the bridge approach, and stopped, and rolled on again, and the sound was like the beat of some large machine.

Forgotten by Captain Tucker, for there was much work to be done and the police officer was busy probing into automobiles, Dr. Stone and Lady stood just outside the toll-house door. The smoke of a seasoned pipe drifted blue and fragrant with the breeze. Joe, trembling inside the toll-house, could see his uncle's face. It was stamped with the calm, bland, inscrutable patience of the blind.

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Automobiles shuttled past, and there was a delay as each car was scrutinized. A line formed, and horns began to honk impatiently. Joe, twisting his head to see how far back the line extended, was frozen by the cold crack of his uncle's voice.

"I'm ready for you, Tucker."

The boy wrenched himself around. The movement had changed his position; the sun, slanting in through the doorway, was in his eyes. The blurred outline of a car was in front of the house, and he was conscious of his uncle moving toward the car. Fire burned in his throat, and the world hung in a stark silence. And out of that silence came his uncle's voice.

"Rog," Dr. Stone drawled, "I'm afraid you're going to miss your breakfast in Baltimore tomorrow."

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There was an oath and a movement in the car. Joe, frozen, forgot to crouch and hug the floor. When would the shooting start? And then another form was beside his uncle, and the sun glinted menacingly on cold, blue steel.

"Keep your hands up where I can see them," Captain Tucker ordered.

Joe, sick with relief, felt his knees begin to buckle and bend.

Two hours later he sat in a room in the red-bricked Town Hall with his uncle and Captain Tucker. The captain, putting down a telephone, leaned far back in his chair and gave a sigh.

"That was New York calling," he announced. "They've picked up John. He worked for the New York bank that shipped the money. The bank here has counted the shipment and it's all there down to the last nickel." His eyes went slowly from the boy to the dog and to the blind man. "Doctor, I don't know how you did it. We were all looking for that shabby car—"

"That car had me fooled for a while," Dr. Stone admitted. "Joe had me convinced it was motored for a quick getaway. This morning the car stopped at our place and the driver asked for directions. He wanted a bad hill, and I sent him to Kill Horse. When Joe came along with news of the hold-up, I started here to tell you where that car could be found; but when I learned that the hold-up took place at twenty minutes of twelve the shabby car was washed right out of the picture."

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"Why?" Captain Tucker demanded.

"Because within a minute or two of 11:40 the driver of that car was asking me for directions. He couldn't have been in two places at once."

"Why were you sure it was the shabby car?"

"A blind man's ears, Captain—the sound of the motor and the driver's husky voice. And all at once I knew why he had surrounded himself with so much mystery—afraid to have Jerry Moore look under the hood, hiding down behind the cottonwoods when he did lift the hood, anxious to find a steep hill little used by other cars. The man was, without question, experimenting with a carburetor of his own design, and afraid somebody would get a slant at it before he was ready to have it patented."

Captain Tucker pursed his lips and rocked in his chair. "I follow you that far, Doctor, but how did you pick up Rog?"

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"I didn't," Dr. Stone said mildly; "he dropped into my lap. Let's begin at the beginning. I met Rog and his companion at Jerry's garage, and Jerry had seen that storage-box under the car. It struck me as strange that a fisherman should try to keep fish fresh by placing them under a car and next to a red-hot exhaust pipe. Later, while Joe and I were on the lake——"

"That was last night?" the captain interrupted.

"Yes. A boat passed us; I recognized the voices of Rog and his friend. I learned that they knew there were few fish in the lake. Now, why had these men come prepared to pack fish in ice if they knew there were no fish? I found they planned to leave today—roll into line about three o'clock, they said—and that they wanted to avoid somebody named John. Coming ashore, Ike Boles told us of a telegram that had come from John. Now, if this was their John, why should they tell him the fishing was good if they knew it wasn't? On the other hand, the telegram was directed to a Carl Metz, and nobody knew a Carl Metz. Who was Carl Metz? The driver of the shabby car spoke with a German accent. Was he Carl Metz? If so, why was he never seen fishing? The thing was rather complicated."

"I don't see yet how you figured it out," Captain Tucker complained.

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"I didn't," Dr. Stone chuckled. "It burst upon me. After the elimination of the shabby car, Rog lingered in my mind. I stopped at Jerry's garage; talking to Jerry might bring forth some overlooked fact that might prove illuminating. But Jerry was not there, and his mechanic dropped a bomb-shell—there was eight thousand dollars in silver in the stolen money. I began to wonder if there might be two Johns: the John who sent a telegram from New York, and the John whom Rog mentioned, an entirely different John——"

"You mean——" Captain Tucker broke in suddenly.

"Yes; John Law. The crook's name for the police. Why should they run from the police? Was it this hold-up? Eight thousand dollars in silver is something you cannot hide in your vest pocket

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or under your hat. They wouldn't ride with it thrown into a car; a police drag-net would probably be searching cars. That silver would have to be carried where it would defy search. Where better than a storage-box hidden away under a car, particularly if we remember two things: First, these men had said it was an ice-box for fish. Second, they knew they weren't going to get any fish. It held together except for one weak link."

"What was that?"

"Had they received word from New York that this money was coming? That stuffed figure lying in the cobbled road meant just one thing—the highwaymen not only knew that money was coming but they knew it was coming on No. 5. In order to know that they must have received a message. That telegram came into the puzzle again. I called Ike Boles. He had not found Carl Metz; he had watched the train that should have brought John and no stranger had got off. John had said he would leave New York on the 8:11. The 8:11 was No. 5."

Captain Tucker scratched a puzzled head. "But if nobody got that message——"

"Captain, let's suppose they know whatever message was sent would be filed in New York at a certain time. What better safeguard than to send it to a name unknown here? What's to prevent the one to whom that message is really intended loitering about the station and listening for it to click into the office?"

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"You're assuming they know telegraphy?"

"I wasn't assuming, captain; I knew. Last night, when I walked into Jerry's while he was looking over that storage-box, fingers began to tap a window. It was a message. It said: 'Too much attention; let's scram.' I knew those men could read Morse."

Captain Tucker stood up. "Doctor, any time you'd like a job as a detective——" He broke off short. "What made you so sure they wouldn't make their getaway up-country?"

"I heard Rog say they'd roll into line. There's only one spot in this village where a car has to roll into line. That's at the toll-bridge."

Out in the village street Dr. Stone filled his pipe and puffed contentedly. Rog's car stood in the police driveway beside the Town Hall; and the steel storage-box, wrenched loose by crowbar and hammer, lay upon the ground.

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"You took a chance, Uncle David," Joe said hoarsely. "If that car had slipped past——"

"Rog threatened us on the lake path last night," the blind doctor said mildly. "If I had released the harness-grip Lady would have torn him down. I knew only two persons in town who had met the car, or Rog: Jerry, and he was up-country. You; but it was dark last night and you wouldn't have recognized the car. That put it up to Lady."

Joe blinked.

"If you owned a dog," Dr. Stone went on, "it would be your dog. I'm blind. Lady knows it."

Lady believes she owns me, and she never forgets. To her Rog will always mean danger—to me.”

“Oh!” Light broke upon the boy. “Then Lady —”

“Yes,” said Dr. Stone. “I knew when Rog’s car stopped at the toll-house. Lady growled.”

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THE UNKNOWN FOUR

Dr. David Stone, walking rapidly beside Lady, seemed unaware of the penetrating chill of the pale, thin dawn. His broad shoulders swung with his stride, his coat was open, and no hat covered the white hair of his magnificently-formed head. But Joe Morrow, his nephew, huddled down into a turtle-neck sweater and shivered.

“Joe,” said Dr. Stone, “I shouldn’t have let you come along on this. You’ve never seen a dead man before.”

Chill shook the boy’s teeth. “A dead man can’t hurt anybody.”

“True; but this may be nasty business. Captain Tucker says old Anthony was murdered.”

The boy sucked in his breath and was momentarily sorry the telephone that had called his uncle had awakened him. Crows, cawing faintly, loomed against the early light of the cold sky. The grass was wet, and saturated the bottoms of his trousers.

“They—they don’t know who did it?”

“That’s the trouble, Joe. So many persons might have wanted to.” Since turning into Meadow Road the doctor had been counting paces, and now his voice changed abruptly. “We should be near there.”

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“It’s right ahead, Uncle David.”

Dr. Stone said, “Lady, left,” and the great, tawny dog turned obediently. They went up a weed-bordered path to a house that had once been noble, but which now lay in peeled-paint neglect.

Captain Tucker let them in. Four men sat in a room off the hall, and they watched the doorway in silence as Dr. Stone and the dog appeared. Joe, crowding at his uncle’s heels, was conscious of a studied ease and a cautious wariness in all of them. He identified them as Police Captain Tucker made them known to the blind man—Ted Lawton, marked by a certain furtiveness; Ran Freeman, cool and self-contained; Fred Waring, silently grim, and Otis King, dapper and assured. Lady, restless on her leash, suddenly gave an eerie, dismal whine.

Waring flared. “Stop that confounded dog.”

“She knows,” Dr. Stone said quietly, “that there has been death here—by violence.”

Ice ran in Joe’s veins. Otis King lit a cigarette and calmly meditated the glowing end. The

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doctor said, "Lady, chair," and the dog led him to a seat. Freeman, sitting on a stool in front of a piano, dropped one arm and the elbow awoke a crashing, jangling chord.

Lawton jumped. "Did you have to do that?"

"Better take something for your nerves," Freeman said mildly, and ran one hand soundlessly over the keys of the piano.

Captain Tucker's voice bit into the silence. "One of you four has every right to be nervous." He turned to Dr. Stone. "I sent for you, Doctor, because I am baffled. All four of these men came here late yesterday. Cagge says——"

"Who's Cagge?" the doctor broke in.

"Old Anthony Fitch's servant. He says all four quarreled violently with Anthony last night, and that the old man cackled at them, and goaded them, and invited them to remain so that today the comedy could be resumed. About eleven o'clock he went off to bed, holding to Cagge's arm, after telling the servant to show the visitors to rooms."

"And then?" the doctor asked.

"Cagge says he awoke about three o'clock this morning and heard groans. He went to Anthony's room, and there he found the old man crumpled on his bed. He had been struck on the temple by a heavy brass candlestick that lay on the floor. Cagge says he tried to speak, and muttered one word several times before he died."

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"That word was?"

"Four. Over and over again. 'Four, four, four.' What do you make of it?"

Slowly Doctor Stone filled a pipe, struck a match, and puffed in unhurried contemplation. "It may be, Tucker, he meant that all four were concerned in his murder."

Otis King laughed. "Doctor," he said easily, "that shot misses the target. There isn't one of us trusts any of the other three. You couldn't get us into a combine."

"You must know each other," the doctor observed.

Fred Waring jumped angrily to his feet. "Look here, Doctor——"

Lady growled deep in her throat, and Waring slumped into a chair and watched the dog.

"Then," Dr. Stone said slowly, "if all of you are not concerned, one man's hand is stained with blood."

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Freeman still continued to run his hand soundlessly across the keys. Lawton gave the doctor a quick, sidelong glance, and stared down at the floor.

"Which one?" King asked coolly; and now, for the first time Joe noticed that he alone, of the four in the room, was fully dressed.

Dr. Stone's hand touched the dog's head. "I may

tell you—later. First, I should like to know how all of you happened to arrive here yesterday. Did the old man invite you?”

“No,” Otis King drawled; “but I rather fancy he expected us. Did you know he was writing a book? It was to be one of those brutally frank things—fire the gun and let the shots hit whom they may. Anthony dropped each of us a letter. We were to be in the book. So, knowing Anthony, we all raced for the Grand Central and met on the same train.”

“And killed him,” Dr. Stone said.

“Some one did,” King admitted blandly. “And I’m not denying that any of the four of us had reason to do the job.”

Fred Waring spoke bitterly. “You always did talk too much, Otis.” He lapsed into silence, and presently spoke to the doctor. “If you knew Anthony Fitch—”

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“Perhaps I do,” the doctor said mildly. “For several years he was mixed up in shady transactions, but managed to stay just inside the law. Slippery, and clever, and unscrupulous.”

“That was Anthony on the outside,” Waring said passionately. “Inside he was vindictive, and cold, and merciless. Those claw-like hands of his were the talons of a hawk. He took a pleasure in refined torture. Years ago we were all tied up with him, and—”

“You don’t have to go into that,” Ted Lawton cried warningly.

“I’m not going to. Anyway, we broke away, and one of his schemes failed. He told us then that some day he’d pay the score. Lately he set out to write a book. It was to be called ‘Confessions of a Rascal.’”

“I see.” The doctor’s face was expressionless. “Naturally, you gentlemen objected to being included in the book.”

Waring ripped out an oath. “He had gone back fifteen years to rake open old sores. God, man, do you know what that meant? We thought we had lived down those old mistakes. We had established ourselves. I am cashier at a manufacturing plant. King is manager of a branch brokerage house. Lawton is in business for himself. Ran Freeman is engaged to marry Lilly Panner—”

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Dr. Stone sat up straight. “The Calico Heiress?”

Freeman’s fingers still played imaginary music. “Exactly, Doctor,” he said quietly. “The newspapers have made the family fairly well known. Fine old traditions—that sort of thing. Let this book of Anthony’s appear and my marriage to Miss Panner would be overboard.”

“And with it the Panner fortune,” the doctor observed dryly.

“That, too,” Ran Freeman admitted without emotion.

The pipe had gone out. The blind man ran the bowl absently along one sleeve. Dishes clattered in the kitchen.

"It seems," the doctor said, "you've given yourself sufficient motive for murder, Freeman."

"We all have sufficient motive," Freeman said frankly. "How long could Waring remain a cashier if his past were dug out? How long would King be manager of a brokerage house? How long would Lawton have enough credit left to stay on in his business?"

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The room fell into silence, and Joe felt sweat on the palms of his hands. These men discussed murder as other men might have talked of the loss of a button from a coat. Dr. Stone put the pipe away and turned his sightless eyes toward the spot from which Waring's voice had sounded.

"You say Anthony wrote you?"

"All of us. A devilish letter telling what was going into the book concerning us. Do you get that? Paying off, after all these years, the old score; ramming in the knife and turning it around. Giving us the prospect of months of anticipation and worry waiting for the book to appear. So we came up here——"

"And threatened him?" the doctor asked.

"Yes," Waring answered after a momentary hesitation. "He laughed at us. He said the only way to stop that book was to kill him, and invited us to do it. He said there was a blind man in the village with the very devil of a dog and that the man who killed him would be tracked down." Waring's voice rose. "But, for once, Anthony was wrong. He forgot——" The passionate flow of words stopped with startling suddenness.

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"What did he forget?" Dr. Stone asked.

Waring said nothing.

"Did he forget that there was such a thing as the manuscript being stolen?"

Captain Tucker spoke. "What good would that do? The old man could write it again."

"Could he?" Dr. Stone mused. "I'm not so sure. A man who has to lean on a servant's arm is a sick man—perhaps a dying man. By the way, Tucker, did you look for the manuscript?"

"Yes. He kept it in his bedroom."

"And?"

"It's gone."

"Waring," Dr. Stone said slowly, "you checked yourself too late. So Anthony forgot—and the manuscript *is* stolen. That unfinished sentence could convict you."

"Of what?" Waring snapped.

"Of murder. The man who stole that manuscript killed Anthony Fitch."

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Lady whimpered uneasily, and, in the hard silence, the sound was like the wail of a ghost. Joe's temples throbbed, and he was conscious of Lawton watching his uncle in a sort of bleak dread. Slowly he came to the realization that the blind man, sitting there in a handicap of

darkness was the dominating figure in the room.

Softly, almost soundlessly, a man wearing an apron appeared from the kitchen. This, the boy guessed, was Cagge.

"I've made coffee," the servant announced in a nasal monotone. "Anybody want some?"

Freeman's hand came away from the piano. "What's the matter with the bacon and eggs?"

Lawton gave a grunt of distaste. "Ugh! Who could eat food now?"

"Is Anthony's death supposed to fill any of us with sorrow?" Freeman asked blandly.

"Fry mine on both sides," said Otis King. He stretched his legs and smoothed his trousers. "Cagge, you were with Anthony how long?"

"Three years."

"Any trouble collecting your wages?"

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Joe saw the servant's face flame. "Trouble? Why, the tight-fisted, old skin-flint——. Do you know how much he's paid me this last year? A couple of dollars here and there when I could wring it out of him. And now he's dead, and where am I going to collect the four hundred dollars he owes me?"

"Did you say four hundred dollars, Cagge?" King asked softly.

"I said four hundred dollars and I mean four hundred dollars." Like a shadow, almost without sound, the man was gone. The clatter of a pan came from the kitchen.

Otis King tapped a cigarette against a silver case. Joe's hands had gone dry. Somewhere in the house a clock struck seven.

"Four!" King said thoughtfully. "What would you call that, Doctor, coincidence or—something else? Many a man has killed for less than four hundred dollars."

Dr. Stone stood up. Holding to the harness-handle of the dog's leash he spoke to the four men who watched him intently. "Would a murderer first tell that his victim kept muttering 'Four, four,' and then add that the slain man owed him four hundred dollars? Lady, upstairs." The shepherd dog guided him across the room skillfully preventing him from bumping into chairs and furniture. With his feet on the first tread he spoke again. "It wasn't Cagge, gentlemen."

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"Do you always leap at conclusions?" Otis King asked insolently.

"I usually keep off paths other men mark for me," the doctor said quietly.

Joe followed his uncle up the staircase. He kept close to the dog, afraid, in this house of terror, of he knew not what. In the upper hall Captain Tucker halted and clutched his arm.

"Doctor," he said rapidly, "there was something I did not want to tell you downstairs in front of them. I found something in the room."

"Finger prints?"

"No; the candle-stick had been wiped clean. A plain, silk handkerchief. It had evidently been used to cover the lower part of the murderer's face. I found it in the center of the floor."

Joe saw the familiar tense lines form around his uncle's mouth, and a soundless whistle came from the blind man's lips. "So! I hadn't expected that. King was right. They had reason not to trust one another."

"What's that, Doctor?"

"Nothing, Captain; nothing. Lead me in."

A huddled figure was twisted grotesquely upon the bed. Joe, with a sudden spot of ice in the pit of his stomach, backed out into the hall. Presently there were leisurely footsteps on the stairs, and from inside the room his uncle's voice said, "Lady, trail." The footsteps came on. But the boy's ears were held by the softer pad-pad-pad of the shepherd dog's feet.

Lady came out into the hall, ears back and nose close to the floor. Sniffing, she veered this way and that, but went steadily along the passage. And then, suddenly, Joe's heart gave a choked throb, for the tawny shepherd had swung in and came to a stop before a closed door. True to her training, she stopped with her head below the lock; and Dr. Stone, reaching out a groping hand, touched the knob.

"Who's room is this?" he asked.

"Mine," came Otis King's voice from down the hall.

The tense lines were back around the doctor's mouth. "The trail clouds again, Tucker," he said; but Captain Tucker, triumphant, held out the silk handkerchief.

"Ever see this before, King?"

"No."

"It was found near Anthony's body. The dog, taking a scent from it, followed a trail to your door. How you explain that?"

"Seeing that this is the first time I've been upstairs, I can't explain it. Cagge brought my bag to this room, but I did not follow. When Anthony went tottering off to bed I went outdoors and tramped the roads for hours."

"What for?" Captain Tucker barked.

"I was trying," King said, "to hatch a plan by which I might get my hands on that manuscript."

"And then you came back, and came up here —"

"I came back, but did not come upstairs. I went out again at once."

"Still plotting, I suppose?" Captain Tucker said in sarcasm.

"No," King said coolly; "the second time I acted. I destroyed Anthony's book."

Joe found it hard to swallow. Uncle David said

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the man who stole the manuscript was the man who had killed! Dr. Stone's face was expressionless:

"I thought so."

"Look here," King burst out angrily. "I told you I went out. When I came back the house was dark. As I opened the front door I heard someone run up the stairs. I snapped on the light, and a bundle of typed papers lay on the floor. I had to read only half a page to know it was Anthony's manuscript. Would I be apt to tell voluntarily that I destroyed the book if the fact would link me to the murder?"

Captain Tucker seemed a bit taken back. Lawton's voice came from downstairs:

"Breakfast, Otis."

"You might have built this up," Captain Tucker said suspiciously.

"I might," King agreed. He was once more dapper and assured.

But when he came down stairs to the table, Joe saw that he had hardened into cold watchfulness. Freeman said, "Sorry you won't eat with us, Doctor." Lady, walking restlessly around the table, stopped at Freeman's place and the man offered her a strip of bacon.

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"Quite a dog, Doctor."

"Quite," Dr. Stone agreed; and Joe, reading something in the word, gave his uncle a sharp, expectant glance.

Cagge came in from the kitchen with more coffee. His hand shook as he refilled the cups, and the spout of the pot chattered against the china.

"Cagge," Dr. Stone said suddenly, "how did you sleep last night?"

"I didn't—much," Cagge answered in his nasal monotone. "I didn't like the look of things."

"Did you hear anybody go out?"

"Yes." The servant put down the pot. "It was blasted queer. I heard somebody go out twice, and I heard somebody come back three times."

"That doesn't make sense," Captain Tucker said irritably.

"Everything makes sense when you understand it," the blind man observed. Joe, catching a movement of the hand that held Lady's leash, followed his uncle into the living-room.

"Joe, was the window of King's room open?"

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"Yes, sir."

The meal was over, and the four men came back through the doorway. Dr. Stone found his chair. Ran Freeman dropped down upon the piano stool, but Lawton seemed to seek a seat far from the blind man and the dog. Waring paced the room, and Otis King was still cold and watchful.

Freeman's fingers, once more running soundlessly over the keys, struck a faint note. As

though the sound had broken a barrier, he banged a chord. The next instant, swinging about on the stool, he faced the instrument and began to play, freely and without restraint.

Joe found it hard to swallow. Music, in this house of death, sounded ghastly, almost sacrilegious. He looked at his uncle. The calmness was gone from Dr. Stone's face. Around the sightless eyes, around the serene mouth, strange, intense lines he knew well had suddenly formed.

Captain Tucker had gone out into the kitchen to talk to Cagge. Freeman ended with a crash of sound. Seconds passed, and nobody spoke. The silence seemed no more ghastly than the music.

"Ran," Otis King drawled, dangerously quiet, "your veins must be filled with ice."

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"Why be hypocrites?" Freeman demanded. "We're not mourning Anthony, are we?"

"We can be decent about it," King told him.

Dr. Stone's voice was again a calm stream. "There was one part, Freeman—Tum, te-tum-tum, tum-tum-te-tum. Toward the end. The execution was fast. Tum, te-tum—"

"Oh, this." Freeman faced the key-board again and began to play. "This what you mean?"

"Play it," said the blind man.

Ran Freeman played. He was an artist, and he knew it. But Joe no longer gave ear to the music. Something quiet—something too quiet—had been in his uncle's voice. Something that suggested a cocked trigger about to be fired. He shivered, and gripped the ends of his sweater, and held them tight.

For the second time the music ended in a crash of chords. Freeman, swung about on the stool.

"Like it, Doctor?"

"Beautifully done," the blind man said. He lay back against the cushions of the chair, loose and relaxed. "In fact, it would have been perfect if —"

Freeman chuckled. "Are you a music critic, too, Doctor? If what?"

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"If," Dr. Stone said quietly, "if many of those rapid notes had been struck by a living touch."

Joe screamed, "Look out, Uncle David." For Freeman, no longer self-contained, had leaped from the stool and one hand had gone toward a pocket.

The blind man did not move. "Lady, get him."

A tawny form hurtled through the air. There was the sound of a falling body, a scream of terror. Captain Tucker came running in from the kitchen.

"What—"

"It's all right, Tucker." Dr. Stone's voice was once more a calm stream. "Lady will merely hold him. He's your man."

Ten minutes later Lawton, King and Waring were gone, glad to be free and away. Ran Freeman, white and sullen, sat handcuffed in one of the big chairs. Captain Tucker, having telephoned for a policeman to relieve him until the Coroner arrived, came back to the living-room.

"I still don't get it, Doctor," he said ruefully. "After Lady trailed to King's room——"

"That was a laid trail," Dr. Stone told him. "Anthony had warned them there was a dog that could track. Would a man deliberately invite detection by leaving a trail right to his door? However, some one of the four had been in the room. Which one? Probably the one with most at stake. Lawton stood to suffer in a small business. Waring and King would have lost their jobs. But Freeman stood to lose the Panner fortune.

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"King told us he had not been in the room, or unpacked his bag, or been to bed. So far as the bed and the bag were concerned it had to be the truth, for it was a story too easily disproved if he had lied. By the same reasoning, knowing that there was a dog in the neighborhood that could follow scent, he would not have made a trail to his own room if he had committed murder. Therefore, when the trail led to a room in which there was a rumpled bed and a bag partly unpacked, one fact was obvious. King was not the man.

"He said he had gone out twice. But Cagge said somebody had come in three times. Did you notice the open window in King's room? The ceilings down here are low—a blind man can feel these things. The second floor wouldn't be far from the ground. Whoever killed Anthony knew King was out of the house. Therefore, after the crime, he purposely left the silk handkerchief to give the dog a scent. Then, going to King's room, he mussed the bed, dragged clothing out of the bag, and dropped out the window. No doubt you'll find deep footprints where he dropped. Going into the room and out the window, he probably reasoned, brought the trail to King's room and ended it there.

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"He was the third man Cagge heard come in. He must have brought Anthony's manuscript back into the house with him intending to dispose of it later. But King must have come back almost on his heels. Not wanting to be found with the manuscript he dropped it and fled. Perhaps he reasoned that King, finding it, would destroy it, anyway. If I had any doubts at all they were gone when we came downstairs. The four men were eating. Lady, circling the table, stopped at Freeman's chair. She had found the scent again. I don't think Freeman meant to kill. His idea was to steal the book. But Anthony awoke. Am I right?"

Freeman had recovered some of his nerve. "Do you expect any jury to convict on the testimony of a dog?" he demanded.

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"Tucker," said Dr. Stone, "will you look at his right hand?"

Joe shrank away from the prisoner's violent struggle to free himself of the handcuffs. Captain Tucker, holding Freeman in the chair, turned a startled face toward the blind man.

"Why, Doctor?—"

"Exactly, Tucker. I had the testimony of Lady, but I needed greater proof. Freeman gave it to me when he played the piano. All through the music something kept recurring. Perhaps, were I not blind, did I not have to depend so much on hearing, I would not have noticed it. A hesitation on certain notes, an almost imperceptible break in the rhythm, a faint click upon the ivory of the keys that could only be made by something foreign, something that was not living flesh. Freeman has an artificial finger."

Freeman had slumped in the chair. Captain Tucker straightened up.

"Doctor," he said curiously, "your brain travels too fast for me.... Much too fast. Just what does that prove?"

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"Everything," Dr. Stone said quietly. "Modern surgery does miracles these days. Freeman has an artificial finger that can be taken off. Do you remember Cagge's story? Old Anthony kept muttering 'Four, four.' That's what he had seen. Four! Four fingers on the hand of his murderer."

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BLIND MAN'S TOUCH

Dr. Stone, reaching into the closet, found the gray suit that needed pressing. He knew it was gray because his fingers felt the three sharply-ridged lines of thread sewed on the inside of the collar. So, to the blind man, was every suit, shirt, tie and sock in his wardrobe marked for exact identification. One raised ridge of thread for blue, two for brown, and three for gray.

He came down the stairs with the suit. Joe Morrow had put a leash on Lady, and she whined eagerly.

"Ready to go, old girl?" The blind man patted the dog's head and took the leash. "All set, Joe? Got your money?"

"Yes, sir." The boy felt for the two dollars he had earned weeding a neighbor's garden. "I'll have fourteen dollars saved," he boasted.

"Wealth," the doctor chuckled, and snapped open his watch and touched the exposed hands with a finger. "We'll be back in time for dinner."

But that was a dinner they were destined never to eat.

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Roses bloomed in the summer heat, fields of corn tasseled in the sun, and a dog ran out of a yard and barked at them furiously. Lady, intent only on the blind man in her keeping, pricked up her ears but did not change her rapid pace. The village was busy with its Saturday morning trade, and the tawny brute carefully maneuvered the doctor through the crowds. Joe clutched his two dollars and his bank-book. They left the gray suit at the tailor's and came out to the street. And at that moment a man, coatless and hatless, ran out of the Pelle Canning Company building and went past them, panting.

Dr. Stone said: "Did you hear that man's breathing, Joe? He's frightened. Who is he?"

"Mr. Pelle," the boy told him.

"Where did he go?"

"Into the bank."

The doctor said: "Lady, right," and followed the dog across the roadway to the bank side of the street. A small door in one of the two-story brick buildings opened suddenly, and a girl hurried out. The door was marked: "OFFICE, MIDSTATE TEL. CO. UPSTAIRS," and the girl was Tessie Rich, one of the telephone operators. In her haste she almost ran into the blind man.

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"Oh! I'm sorry, Doctor."

"No harm done, Tessie," Dr. Stone said, and chuckled slyly. "We're on our way to the bank. Any message you'd like me to give Albert Wall?"

The girl colored rosily. "I usually give him my own messages."

The wail of a siren filled the street and a police car went past them, traveling fast. Instantly the girl was across the sidewalk and through the telephone company door. The car stopped at the bank, and Joe saw a figure in blue uniform and brass buttons get out.

"Captain Tucker?" the blind man asked.

"Yes, Uncle David."

"The bank?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tessie gone? I see. And Tucker and Pelle both in a hurry." The doctor whistled an almost soundless whistle. "We'd better get on, Joe."

Something had gone wrong at the bank. The boy saw that at once. A score of depositors clung together in knots on the main floor, uneasy bank clerks stood behind the bronze grille of the teller's windows, and from some inner room came a roaring, bull voice shouting in anger. Bryan Smith, the president of the bank, agitated and flushed, appeared in the doorway of the little room, saw the blind man and cried out:

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"Doctor! Doctor Stone! This way, please."

Joe Morrow, still clutching his two dollars and his pass-book, went with his uncle and the dog, and the door closed upon them. Inside the room three men stood about the bank president's desk. The veins in Mr. Pelle's neck were swollen with rage; Albert Wall, the cashier, tapped his fingers against the desk and frowned, and a third man, who looked lost and bewildered, held on to the back of a chair near the window. This third man, whom Joe had never seen before, smelled of antiseptics and carried his right arm in a sling.

"Doctor," Bryan Smith sputtered, "this bank has been robbed of five thousand dollars. Robbed right under our noses. Not fifteen minutes ago."

"By whom?" the doctor asked quietly.

"We don't know. Somebody put a forged check

through the window. At least Pelle says he signed only one check and——”

“What do you mean I say I signed only one check?” the canner roared. “I tell you I signed only one. I should know! If you were fools enough to pay——”

“But I telephoned you, Mr. Pelle,” Albert Wall broke in. “You said——”

“I know what I said. I told you I had given a check to Fred Hessel for five thousand dollars. If you paid five thousand dollars to another man on a forged check that’s your funeral. The real Hessel is here.” Mr. Pelle pointed to the man with bandaged arm. “Pay him.”

“Not so fast,” Bryan Smith fumed. “One check has been paid already. Now we have another and you say you signed only one. Which one?” The bank president held out two slips of paper.

Joe had a glimpse of them. Both were dated that day, both were made out to Fred Hessel, both were for five thousand dollars, both were signed “Paul Pelle.” The canner stared at them for a long minute.

“This one,” he said, and pushed one of the checks across the desk.

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“How do you know?”

“Because this one is number 1046. I gave Hessel check No. 1046.”

“How about your signature on this other check?”

“I tell you that isn’t my signature.”

With a quick movement the banker scrambled the checks and then laid them side by side partly covered by a blotter so that only the signatures showed.

“Now, Pelle,” he snapped, “which one did you sign?”

The canner’s neck swelled again. “What is this,” he roared; “a trap? I can’t tell them apart. That’s what you’re supposed to be able to do. I tell you ——”

“Gentlemen.” Dr. Stone’s voice was mild. “Let’s stay with facts. As I understand it Pelle gave a man named Hessel a check for five thousand dollars this morning. What for?”

“Damages,” Mr. Pelle snapped. “Hessel owns a butcher shop at Arlington. One of my trucks got out of control and skidded into the front of the shop. Hessel was caught in the wreckage; broken arm and broken collarbone. I don’t carry liability insurance. I settled with him and gave him a check at eleven o’clock this morning.”

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Captain Tucker said: “Where does this second check come in?”

“Tell them, Albert,” Bryan Smith ordered.

The cashier’s fingers ceased to tap the desk. “At 11:13—I happened to glance at the clock—a man pushed a check through the window. It was a five thousand dollar check, made out to Fred Hessel and signed by Mr. Pelle. The man

couldn't identify himself, so I called Mr. Pelle and was told he had given the check a few minutes before. I cashed it. Ten minutes later another Hessel check for five thousand dollars came through the window. It looked queer. I called Mr. Pelle again." Albert Wall made a gesture with his hands. "Then I telephoned for Captain Tucker."

The captain cleared his throat. "That first check was the forged check?"

Again the cashier's hands moved. "So Mr. Pelle says."

The canner's face was livid. But before he could roar his wrath Dr. Stone's voice sounded quietly in the breathless tension of the room.

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"May I see those checks?"

"Why—" The idea of sightless eyes trying to examine handwriting staggered Bryan Smith. "Why—why, of course, Doctor," he said weakly.

The checks crinkled faintly in the blind man's hands. Joe, watching his uncle's face, suddenly saw a sign that sent a hot needle through his spine. Tight, puckered lines had gathered around the sightless eyes.

"How many persons knew this check was to be paid today?" Dr. Stone asked.

"No one," Mr. Pelle answered shortly. "Things not connected directly with the buying and selling I keep to myself."

"But if you wrote Hessel surely your stenographer—"

"I didn't write. I telephoned."

"When?"

"Last Monday evening—seven o'clock. I was alone in the office. I told him to be here promptly at eleven this morning."

Albert Wall said: "If you'll excuse me a moment —" and was gone. Joe felt the warning pressure of his uncle's foot upon his toe. The door of the inner room had not been tightly closed. Craning his neck, the boy saw the cashier at a telephone. Presently Albert Wall came back still with that slight frown upon his face.

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"This thing was planned ahead," Captain Tucker said slowly.

"Forgery is always planned ahead," Dr. Stone agreed. "Somebody knew that at eleven this morning Pelle was to give Hessel a check. By the way, Pelle, when you telephoned Monday evening did you tell Hessel what the amount of the check would be?"

"Certainly. No man settles a damage claim without knowing what he's going to get. I offered five thousand dollars; he accepted."

"So somebody knew three important facts—that you were going to pay a check at a certain time, the exact amount of the check and to whom it was to be made payable."

"Nobody knew it," the canner insisted.

"Except you and Hessel," the blind man said mildly.

The bandaged man, holding to the back of the chair, seemed to grow even more bewildered. Mr. Pelle's face was thrust across the desk.

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"Doctor," he rasped, "are you insinuating—"

Lady gave a low, deep-throated growl. One of the blind man's hands touched the tawny head.

"Pelle," he asked, "how did you come to pick a Saturday morning to settle with Hessel?"

"Any law against it?" Mr. Pelle demanded.

"No." The doctor's voice was bland. "This is a small bank. It has only two really busy hours in the week. There is a rush from eleven to noon on Saturday just before the week-end closing; another rush from eight to nine Monday morning with business men coming in with their Saturday cash. During the week there would be leisure for a cashier to scrutinize a man; perhaps to telephone and ask, among other things, for a description. But on Saturday, after eleven, there is pressure and haste. And in this hour of pressure a check went through."

Mr. Pelle wet his lips nervously. Captain Tucker stood very still.

"Anything else, Doctor?" he asked.

"Why, yes." The blind man took a pipe from his pocket and filled it slowly. "Why did Hessel bring his check here to be cashed? Why didn't he take it back to Arlington and deposit it in his own bank?"

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"Well, Hessel?" the police captain barked.

Joe saw the bandaged man grip the back of the chair with his good hand. "I know nothing about two checks, Captain. I saw only one check. I wanted the money in my pocket. Cash is cash. Sometimes a check you think is good—"

Mr. Pelle's roar filled the room. "You dare say that to me, Hessel?" Captain Tucker sprang between the two men, and Joe shrank out of the way. Dr. Stone said: "I had better take the dog out of here. Come, Joe." It was long past noon, and the bank was closed. Albert Wall went with them down the long, deserted floor to open the front door and let them out.

"What do you make of this?" he asked in an undertone.

"Pelle?" the doctor asked mildly.

The cashier hesitated. "Well—yes. Five thousand dollars is a lot of money. I know the condition of Pelle's account; business hasn't been any too good of late and five thousand dollars might hit him hard. If he could pay five thousand dollars with one hand and manipulate a forged check with the other and get five thousand dollars back from the bank—. For that, though, he'd need a confederate, somebody to go to the window with the first check. It doesn't seem probable."

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"A possibility though," the blind man said. "A great many possibilities," he added. "Let's not

forget Hessel. Either Hessel or Pelle could have worked this with a confederate. Or some person, unknown and unsuspected, might be the criminal. Good day, Albert." He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Doctor." Their hands met. The heavy door of the bank closed.

The puckered lines had come back to the sightless eyes. Man, boy and dog came down the stone steps of the old-fashioned building. On the sidewalk the doctor spoke.

"Joe, you could see them. How did Pelle strike you?"

"He was wild," the boy answered.

"A man may protest too much or too little," the blind man observed dryly. "Hessel?"

"He was scared."

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"So! That leaves Albert Wall. Could you see him when he left the room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did he go?"

"To a telephone."

"Good lad!" The doctor knocked the ashes from his pipe and walked beside the dog in silence. "The telephone office," he said suddenly.

Joe wondered what unseen tangent of the case could bring them there. They went up a narrow mountain of a stairway. Lady, leading, slowed and swung her Master to the left, stopping him at the counter.

"Can you tell me," Dr. Stone asked, "what operators were on duty at seven o'clock last Monday night?"

"We have only one girl on duty after 6:45," the manager told him, and consulted a record. "That was Tessie Rich's night. Any complaint, Doctor?"

"Merely a matter of information," the doctor smiled. Back in the sunlight Joe saw that the smile was gone and that the puckers around the sightless eyes had become intent. Dr. Stone said absently: "You must be hungry, Joe," and they went toward a restaurant. But before they reached it there was a rush of feet and a woman's breathless voice.

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"Doctor!" It was Tessie Rich. "Why did you want to know if I was on duty last Monday night?"

"I didn't."

"Oh!" The girl was nonplused. "But—but you asked—"

"I asked who was on duty," the doctor said gently. "Did you have any reason to think I was asking about you?"

Subtle, hidden undertones filled the question, and the hot needle was again in Joe's spine. The girl raised a handkerchief to her lips.

"Why—why, of course not, Doctor? Why should I?" There was something of hysterical panic in

her voice.

"Why?" the blind man asked, blandly.

In the restaurant Joe Morrow chewed on food that all at once stuck in his throat. Why had his uncle gone to the telephone office? What hidden spring had that visit touched and what had frightened Tessie Rich? Were Mr. Pelle and the girl both involved? Had the canner actually signed two checks? What about Mr. Hessel? Who had gone to the bank with the first check and walked out with five thousand dollars in cash?

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"Do you know who did it, Uncle David?"

A pipe came out of a pocket; blue smoke spiraled fragrantly about a face that had become placid and bland.

"Joe, the bank is built on a corner—at an angle to the corner. How far up the street can you see?"

"Quite a distance."

"As far as Pelle's factory?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know who didn't do it," the blind man said, and stood up. "And," he added quietly, "I think I know who did."

Joe hoped it wasn't Tessie Rich. They walked out of the village and up along the dirt road. The doctor said aloud: "If I could pick one more link—" and left the sentence unfinished and said no more. Tree toads made metallic clamor in the afternoon heat, and the earth smelled as though it were baked.

A clock struck three as they entered the house. Dr. Stone paced the porch and Lady stretched off in a patch of sun and watched him steadily. Joe brought up a tool from the cellar and prepared to trim the hedge.

A light delivery truck stopped in the road and a young man carried a suit up to the house.

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"You're prompt," Dr. Stone said. The suit was on a hanger; the coat brushed against his knee with a soft crinkle. He ran one hand into a pocket and pulled out a paper. Strange! There had been nothing in the pockets of the suit he had carried away. His hand went up quickly to feel inside the collar. The three sharply ridged lines of thread were not there.

"Joe!" he called. "Stop that tailor's boy—" But the driver had already discovered his mistake. He came up the walk with the suit of gray. Joe laid down the clippers and followed him in.

"I'll carry that up to your room, Uncle Da— What's Lady got?"

The dog had found a paper on the floor. Now she carried it to the doctor. It crinkled in his hand.

It was a small paper, no larger than half a sheet from a note-book. Joe watched those hands move, gently exploring, over every inch of surface. And as the hands moved, Dr. Stone's face changed. Joe had seen that sharp, alert

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expression before. It was a silent sign that, some place in the eternal darkness of his world, the blind man had found light.

"Joe, there is writing on this paper?"

"Yes, sir." The boy looked closer and drew in a hot, throbbing breath. "Uncle David! The same thing's written all over it. Paul Pelle, Paul Pelle, Paul Pelle."

Dr. Stone said a soft: "Ah!" and folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "The criminal always slips," he observed; "there's always something forgotten." He stood for a moment whistling softly. "Care to stretch your legs? I want a word with the tailor."

Joe's eyes, fascinated, were on the writing. That paper had fallen from the suit delivered by mistake, and now his uncle wanted to know to whom the suit belonged.

"Couldn't you telephone him, Uncle David?"

The blind man's mouth twitched. "The call might pass through Tessie's switchboard," he said dryly.

The boy groped, and stumbled, and sought to find the meaning. The afternoon sun was low; the first cool breath of evening breeze blew over the dirt road. He waited outside while his uncle talked with the tailor; when the man came out he was whistling.

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"Police station," he said.

Captain Tucker was at his desk. "Doctor," he burst out, "this thing is baffling. Lay those two checks side by side and you can't tell the signatures apart. I've talked to New York. There isn't a forger known to the police in this part of the country."

Dr. Stone asked: "Did Albert Wall give you a description?"

"Of the man who cashed that first check? A lot of good that does. Five feet eight, about 155 pounds, dark, clean-shaven, blue suit. It fits a million men."

"It would," the doctor said blandly. His face was inscrutable. "You heard Pelle's story and Albert Wall's. Get statements prepared."

"For what?"

"For them to sign." His hands felt along the desk for the telephone and he called Bryan Smith's house. "Bryan? Dr. Stone. Do you know where you can find Albert at this hour? He's with you now? Can you have him at the bank in an hour? I'll be along with Captain Tucker and Pelle." He put down the telephone. "You have an hour, Tucker, in which to get those statements ready and dig up Pelle. He's probably at the factory."

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"But why signed statements?" Captain Tucker demanded impatiently.

"Bait," the blind man said casually. "Sometimes you use cheese in a trap; sometimes you use printed words." He settled into a chair and closed his eyes, and appeared to doze. The dog, ever watchful, lay at his feet.

Captain Tucker left the room, and presently, in another part of the police station, a typewriter began to click. The captain came back grumbling and out-of-sorts. The doctor's devious, subtle methods always provoked him to a show of ill-humor. The telephone rang sharply—there had been an automobile crash near the bridge. A minute later a motor roared into life in the alley beside the station and a motorcycle patrolmen sped away. The blind man did not stir.

Joe Morrow squirmed restlessly and watched the clock. Mr. Pelle arrived in a chastened, subdued mood; a uniformed man brought Captain Tucker several typewritten sheets; the wall clock struck the hour, and Dr. Stone opened his eyes.

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"Ready, Tucker?"

They drove to the bank in the police car. Bryan Smith let them in. Dusk had begun to gather in the corners farthest from the windows, a guardlight burned in front of the steel safe, and a burst of ceiling lights shone from the inner room. Captain Tucker and Mr. Pelle went on ahead while the bank president saw to it that the door was securely locked. The doctor lingered.

"Bryan," he said softly, "are there pens and ink on your desk?"

"Certainly."

"Remove them; Lady, forward." And before the man could reply the doctor was on his way past the teller's cages, one hand holding the harness-grip, his body bent a little toward the guiding dog.

Bryan Smith, saying that they might need room, cleared the desk. Mr. Pelle's eyes shifted from side to side and missed nothing. Albert Wall seemed to wait patiently the outcome of this strange gathering. But what held Joe's attention and sent the blood pounding in his veins was a something that lay behind the passive placidity of his uncle's face.

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"Captain Tucker," Dr. Stone said, "has prepared statements for Pelle and Albert to sign. You have pens, gentlemen? Now, if you will sign them ___"

Albert Wall read rapidly and, taking a fountain pen from his pocket, signed at once. Mr. Pelle read his paper through and then read it again. He wrote his name slowly.

"Albert's paper, Captain." The doctor laid it on the desk at his right hand. "Pelle's." It went upon the left. "Now, Bryan, if I may have those checks. First the one Pelle says he didn't sign." It went upon the right with Albert Wall's statement.

The bank president's nerves had been under a long strain. "What's the meaning of this, Doctor?" he snapped. "If you have your suspicions, let us know them. If you have anything to say, say it. Don't waste time."

"Presently," the doctor said mildly. His hands had moved, mysteriously explored, and had come to rest. That vague something in his face was no longer there; he was serene. When he spoke again his voice was almost confidential.

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"Had that fountain pen long, Albert?"

The cashier was surprised. "Four or five years."

"You kept it too long. It tripped you."

"Tripped? Look here, Doctor, what are you driving at?"

"Money," the blind man said. "Five thousand dollars. What did you do with it?"

In the appalled silence of the room Joe heard clearly the sound of someone breathing with an effort. The cashier had not moved.

"Do you know what you're saying, Doctor?"

"Quite," the doctor said pleasantly. From his pocket he drew out a paper. "Did you ever see this?"

It was the paper Lady had picked from the floor. Albert Wall's eyes widened.

"A dangerous business, handling money," Dr. Stone mused. "Thousands upon thousands of dollars pouring through one's hands every day. Other people's money. If a man has a weak spot some place inside it may get him—a fever to have some of this money for his own. If the right moment comes, or the right scheme presents itself—"

"You heard about the settlement Pelle was to make with Hessel, didn't you, Albert? The weak spot took control. You saw a chance to put your hands on five thousand dollars so cleverly that it would never be traced to you. You must have spent hour upon hour practicing Pelle's signature. And finally you had a check that you thought was perfect.

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"You could see Pelle's factory. Saturday morning you saw Hessel go in. You may have gone to Arlington so you'd know what he looked like; you may have figured you'd know him because he would be bandaged. You saw him come out; you waited a minute or two. Then you telephoned Pelle that a man was at the window with a five thousand dollar check. Naturally Pelle said it was all right. You knew he'd say that. Hadn't he just given the check? So you stamped 'paid' on the check you had forged, and placed it with the checks the bank had cashed that morning. Shortly thereafter the real Hessel appeared and you telephoned Pelle again. Oh, it was a sweet scheme, Albert. Apparently there was no come-back. Hadn't Pelle told you to pay the first check? Could the bank be held responsible for paying a check Pelle told it to pay? In its simplicity the plan was almost genius. But—" The doctor paused. "You slipped."

The cashier had not moved. "Doctor," he said evenly, "your story is preposterous. You heard Pelle say he was alone in the office when he telephoned Hessel. To put a scheme like this through I would have to know in advance that a settlement had been made, when a check was to be given, and for how much. How could I know it?"

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"Bryan," the blind man said, "will you call the telephone office and ask them can they send Tessie Rich over here for a moment?"

The bank president reached for the telephone.

"Don't do that," Albert Wall called sharply. In a moment all the self-control had gone out of him. There was a chair behind him; he reached back and sank into it heavily. "Keep her out of it," he said in a whisper. "I—I did it. I alone."

Mr. Pelle wiped beads of sweat from his forehead. "I thought you suspected me, Doctor?"

"It is wise, sometimes, to appear to suspect the innocent. Do you remember I asked for the checks this morning? A moment later I knew you were not the man. As soon as you said you had telephoned Hessel a significant thing happened. Albert left the room. He went to a telephone. My guess is he went there to warn Tessie not to tell anybody she had spoken to him about the Hessel settlement."

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The cashier lifted a white face. "How did you know that?"

"Deduction. One person could have heard what Pelle said to Hessel—the central operator through whom the call passed. When I left here Albert took me to the door. I made a point of shaking hands with him. A cashier who had just paid a forged check, it is only natural to suppose, would be nervous and upset. Albert's hand was hard and strained, his grip that of a man steeled to see something through.... What?"

"I stopped at the telephone office and asked what girls had been on duty at seven o'clock Monday evening. Tessie had been on duty alone. I did not mention her name; and yet, before I had gone one hundred feet, she was out in the street after me, badly shaken, demanding to know why I had inquired about her. That end of the picture was complete. Tessie and Albert were sweethearts; she had told him of the Pelle call in confidential gossip. I knew then who the guilty man was, but I could not prove it.

"This afternoon the tailor delivered me another man's suit by mistake. I found it was Albert's. This was in one of the pockets." The doctor pushed across the desk the paper covered with the canner's signature. "Probably every other paper on which Albert had practiced the signature had been destroyed—this one had been overlooked. As he could not have practiced forgery at the bank he must have done it at home. And as the same pen had written the signatures on this paper and the signature on the forged check, they must have been written, not with a bank pen, but with a pen that Albert carried with him. I wanted to have him use that pen before witnesses.

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"So I had Captain Tucker prepare statements and bring you here. I had Bryan clear the desk so that Albert would have no other pen to use but his own. Once he signed that statement he had damned himself."

Bryan Smith, examining the two checks, shook his head. "Doctor, you cannot see. How could you tell that?"

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"Have you a magnifying glass?" the blind man asked.

The bank president took one from a drawer.

"Examine the check Pelle signed and the statement he signed. Both signatures are smooth. Look at the forged check. There are three l's in Paul Pelle. On each of the three upstrokes on the l's the pen gouged the paper a bit. Here's the paper that was in the suit. The same gouge on the upstrokes. Now the statement Albert Wall signed. There are also three l's in his name, and the same gouge on the upstrokes. All made by the same pen."

Joe Morrow was filled with a sense of pride and wonder. Bryan Smith said slowly:

"Doctor, I fail to see how you, sightless, could detect that."

"Eyes," Dr. Stone said. "Auxiliary eyes. When sight goes, other senses quicken." He laid his hands upon the table, palms up, and the light shone upon the delicate, sensitive finger tips.

"You mean you could feel these grooves?" Captain Tucker demanded.

"Yes."

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The captain ran his own fingers across the signatures. "I don't see how," he complained. "I don't feel a thing."

Dr. Stone filled his pipe with expert care. "You are not blind," he said mildly. "You lack a blind man's touch."

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BIRTHDAY WARNING

Even though his eyes could not tell the difference between light and darkness, Dr. Stone knew that day had broken. The air had an early morning smell. Reaching out, he felt for the clock from which the glass face had been removed; his sensitive fingers, touching the exposed hands lightly, recorded the time. Five minutes of six. He sat up in bed.

He had gone to sleep thinking of Allan Robb, and now, awake, the thought returned. Tomorrow would be Allan's birthday. Twenty-one years old; the master, in his own right, of a fortune. The doctor chuckled, and wondered just how much of a master Allan would really be—for a while, anyway. For Alec Landry was Allan's guardian and had lived at the Robb homestead these six years since old Jamie Robb's death. A straightforward man, Alec Landry, who had obeyed old Jamie's dying command to "bring up my boy right." A loud, hearty man, with a love of having his own way and a habit of roaring down any who opposed him. Tomorrow, then, Allan Robb would become master in name; but it would be several years, probably, before the young man got out from under Alec Landry's hand.

A good thing, Dr. Stone thought dryly. Already there were signs of attentions that might turn the head of a young man suddenly independent. Tomorrow there was to be a great party. That was all right—a lad comes of age only once. Bruce Robb had sent up a blooded mare from

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New York. That was all right, too—Bruce was Allan’s cousin. But all yesterday afternoon cars had come in through the village, traveling fast. Cars that blew imperative horns too obviously. That was the danger to Allen—rich young friends with time on their hands and nothing to do. Ah, well; leave that to Alec Landry. He was a stout man when it came to calling halt.

Dr. Stone swung his legs to the floor. Lady arose from where she had slept, stretched her great muscles, and came toward him.

“Lady,” the doctor said, “suppose we take to the road. There aren’t many good days left. Once winter comes you and I will be more or less chained to the house.”

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The deep eyes of the dog clung to his face. Presently, his hand holding the hard handle-grip of Lady’s harness, he listened at Joe Morrow’s bedroom door. His nephew was still asleep. Out on the dirt road Dr. Stone said, “Lady, away,” and they turned north to where Indian summer lingered late in the hills and the valleys were a brown haze. By and by there was wood smoke in the man’s nostrils, and the distant babble of many alien tongues. And, while he wondered about this a woman’s voice, old and weak, quavered at him from the roadside.

“Your fortune, kind master, if it’s safe near the beast and you blind. Cross my palm with silver, and—”

Gypsies! The doctor laughed and shook his gray, lion head. His left hand held to the harness; his right hand swung a light cane. Abruptly the cane lost contact with a field fence and touched nothing. The man said, “Lady, right,” and passed through a pasture gate onto Allan Robb’s land as unerringly as though he could see the gate itself. And the thought that lay in his mind had to do with the gypsy encampment and how long it would be before Alec Landry discovered the trespass and roared the intruders off.

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And now, suddenly, the stillness that seemed part of the smoky haze was broken, and the morning was filled with the far-off echoes of a sledge or a pick swung against rock and dirt. The sound, the doctor decided, came from the deep ravine that divided the Robb estate. But when man and dog came to the wooden bridge that spanned the ravine, there was no sound save the gurgle of water running among the sharp rocks far below.

“Hello, down there!” Dr. Stone called.

Silence! Lady stood rigid and a low growl rumbled in her throat. The man, sharpened by an intangible something, touched the alert ears, and the dog was quiet. A wind sighed through the bare branches of the trees, and all at once there was dust and grit in his face. The grit burned like fire. He put up a quick hand and rubbed hot, harsh particles between his fingers. For a time he stood there motionless, startled; and then, slowly, he moved off the bridge with the dog.

An hour later he was back on the dirt road. Horses’ hoofs raced and pounded, and voices shouted and halloed. Lady pulled him out of the way, toward the safety of a hedge, and the

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young people who had come for Allan's party thundered past. One pair of hoofs pranced, and one of the riders rode back.

"The new mare, Allan?" Dr. Stone asked.

"No, sir. Skipper thinks it's more in keeping not to ride her until tomorrow." Skipper had always been Allan Robb's name for his guardian. "Did you run into the gypsies?"

The doctor was surprised. "You know they're there?"

"Of course. I think we all know they're there."

The doctor's surprise increased. "Alec, too?"

"Skipper?" Allan's laugh rang. "Doctor, I think Skipper's softening. Of course he knows they're there—he must. Cousin Bruce, too. You remember Bruce—forever chasing boys out of the orchard when he came on vacation? Last night I saw him talking pleasantly to one of the gypsy men."

"Where was Bruce? At their camp?"

"No; down at the ravine bridge." Spurs touched the horse. "You and Joe will be over this afternoon?"

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"Nothing could keep me away," Dr. Stone said quietly. The horse was gone in a crescendo of hoof-beats, and the blind man again stood thinking for a time before moving on.

Joe Morrow met him at the house gate. "Allan stopped and said we were to go over, Uncle David. He's going to show me the mare. And there's a story in the *Herald* about Bruce Robb. He's being sued—." The boy found the story in the paper. "For eight thousand five hundred dollars." He spoke the sum in a tone of awe.

Dr. Stone whistled soundlessly. How much would a good horse cost today? Five hundred dollars? If a man who couldn't pay his bills spent five hundred dollars for a birthday present—

"Joe, do you think you could get into that ravine on Allan's land without being seen?"

"I—I think so."

"Somebody was there this morning hiding under the planking of the bridge."

Joe stared. "How did you know?"

"Lady warned me. Then, whoever was under there, had a pipe. The hot grains of tobacco blew into my face."

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The boy's heart missed a beat. "You think the gypsies—"

The blind man shrugged. "I'd like to know what story the ravine could tell. Give it a look, Joe, and keep out of sight."

Lady, out of her harness, drowsed in a patch of sun, but Dr. Stone sat with a perplexed pucker between his sightless eyes. By and by familiar footsteps came hurriedly along the dirt road, and he arose and went to the porch door.

"Somebody's been messing under the bridge,"

Joe reported. "A lot of rock's been knocked out and a lot of dirt dug away. Does it mean anything, Uncle David?"

"Perhaps," the blind man said, and took the dog's harness down from a peg. "It's time we looked in at the party."

Allan Robb's house was gay with noise and with laughter. Young people seemed to be everywhere—on the porch, on the lawn, back toward the stables. Joe, walking with his uncle and the dog, was conscious of curious glances and voices that flattened out and became silent. And so they went up to the porch to be met by Allan in the great hall.

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"Glad you came, Doctor. Joe, I'll show you the mare—" His voice broke off. "Bruce, here's an old friend."

Joe edged back a step. Bruce Robb, proud and imperious, had often driven him from Allan's acres, and he was still a little in awe of the man. But the Bruce he met today was morose and restless, and given to a habit of gnawing on a clipped, black mustache.

Alec Landry surged down the hall. "Hi, Doctor. A party to be remembered. Well, why not? It isn't every day a man comes of age."

"Aren't you a day early?" Dr. Stone asked mildly.

"Why wait for the day to arrive. Meet it; greet it; welcome it on the threshold. The old Indian tribes had the right idea."

Joe wondered what Indians had to do with Allan's birthday.

"Symbolism," Alec Landry roared heartily. "At midnight Allan becomes of age, and immediately he begins to exercise the prerogatives of a man. At a minute past the hour he walks into the library with two witnesses and signs his will. At four tomorrow morning he'll saddle the mare Bruce gave him and ride it for the first time. Ride it, Doctor, in the dark of the night and on his own land. Ride it through the woodland to the bridge, and over the ravine, and up East Hill. And then, alone on the hilltop, he'll meet his manhood in the dawn."

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"Quite an idea," the blind man said. And then: "Might I trouble either of you gentlemen for a pipeful of tobacco?"

Joe thought they must all hear the breath that rattled in his throat. A man, smoking a pipe, had hidden—. Did his uncle suspect somebody here? His hot eyes watched to see who would bring forth tobacco.

"All the pipefuls you want, Doctor," Alec Landry roared, "and welcome. Bruce and I smoke the same brand. Take your pick of either pouch."

The doctor filled his pipe, and a merry group came through the hall and Alec was swept away.

"Skipper's certainly putting on a show for the golden crown," Bruce said tartly.

The blind face was a tranquil mask. "Aren't you?"

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Bruce gave a bitter laugh. "You've seen the *Herald*, I suppose, and you're wondering about the mare. You've never been a half-soled cousin, have you? When you become the poor end of a rich relative you play to keep in his good graces. You heard Skipper mention the will? When Allan dies I'll inherit wealth. Something to look forward to, isn't it? And yet, at this minute, I'm as poor—." He bit off the sentence, and in that instant the noisy gayety from the lawn fell away to a startled murmur and then became a hushed silence.

"Probably some more of Skipper's symbolism," Bruce Robb jeered.

Dr. Stone said, "Lady, out," and they reached the porch. The silence remained unbroken.

"It's a gypsy woman, Uncle David," Joe said breathlessly.

The woman was painfully old, and gnarled, and advanced toward the porch with the aid of a stout stick of twisted wood. Even in the voluminous folds of her faded, bedraggled, once gayly-colored garments she seemed a fragile framework of bones and of brown, wrinkled flesh. Beads were strung around her scrawny neck; brass rings hung from her ears. And as Joe watched, fascinated, she hobbled slowly up the walk with the slowness of great age.

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"Where did she come from?" Bruce demanded.

"Don't you know?" Dr. Stone asked mildly.

The morose man flared. "Of course not. Why should I?"

Joe had the feeling that, in that short dialogue, something had been charged, something denied. Strange premonitions grew and throbbed. And yet his eyes were glued to the old crone, leaning like a bundle of rags on her stick at the foot of the porch.

"Your fortunes, kind masters," she cried in a weak quaver. "It is well to know the future, for a cloud hangs over this house. I see danger where no danger should be, and a bud dying as it blooms."

Joe went cold to his spine. Feet shifted restlessly in the grass, and Alec Landry burst through the crowd.

"What's this vagabond doing here?" he demanded roughly.

Bruce gave a thin smile. "A different sort of symbolism, Skipper. Making prophecy. Danger, and death, and doom. Pleasant old hag."

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Joe saw the Landry face go red with rage. Pushing past Bruce he went down the steps, burly in his strength, and towered above the bent, shrunken form.

"You're not wanted here," he said. "Clear out before I call the police."

The bent bundle did not stir.

"Do you hear me?" Alec roared. "Go!"

Slowly a clawlike hand lifted itself above the

parchment face. For seconds she stood there, and in those seconds no one moved or spoke.

"The blind man," she croaked. "Hark to me. The blind man shall see, and the wolf shall find a thorn in the rose."

The hand dropped. Slowly that bundle of rags turned, slowly it tottered on its way, slowly it disappeared among the trees. A shuddering voice said, "Gosh, Allan; that was creepy."

Alec Landry fumed. "Mark me, Doctor, if there's mischief abroad in this neighborhood it will be the gypsies behind it."

"What mischief, Alec?"

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"Why—." Joe was startled to find the man suddenly uneasy. "How should I know?"

"How?" the doctor admitted blandly. Pinched lines had formed around the sightless eyes. Lady moved restlessly against his left leg, and Allan strove to rout the depression of the old woman's visit.

"Your fortune, kind masters," he mimicked; "a roof lies over this house—." He went off into a gale of laughter. "What a lot of rot! I said I'd show you the mare, Joe. Coming, Doctor?" and the party, recovering its voice and its holiday mood, milled toward the stable-yard.

The mare, Joe saw with a thrill of admiration, was superb. A groom had brought her out roaring and plunging. Suddenly she was on her hind legs, pawing the air, whistling and snorting. A girl screamed.

The blind man's ears had etched the picture. "A spirited animal, Bruce."

"Spirited, yes."

"Too much spirit, perhaps."

Bruce shrugged. "Allan wouldn't thank you for a cream-puff. He knows how to ride—he's proud of it—he warms to a horse with plenty of fire."

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"And yet—." The cane in the right hand swished gently against a trouser leg. "Even a skilled rider might find it dangerous to ride a strange, fiery horse in the dark."

"Why don't you tell that to Skipper, Doctor? It's his show. Anyhow, the mare isn't a killer. I know horses."

"And gypsies?" the doctor asked softly.

Joe was conscious of those strange premonitions twitching at his nerves. Bruce gnawed at his mustache.

"I might as well tell you," he flung out suddenly. "Of course I knew that the gypsies had made camp; I talked to some of them. When you've had your own taste of being harried and pressed you shrink from hounding others. The truth is, Doctor, I've lost practically all of what money I had a year ago. Skipper had a hot tip on a deal and let me in. It wiped me out."

Joe saw that the right hand no longer swished the cane. The groom took the mare back to the

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stable, and the crowd went off shouting in search of some new interest. Dr. Stone said, "Lady, house," and returned to the porch. The house seemed to be momentarily deserted; but suddenly a voice came from one of the rooms off the wide, center hall.

"I tell you I can't—not now. Give me time. A week—two at the most. I'll make good. I—"

The blind man's feet rang hard against the floor. The voice stopped short, and a receiver snapped back upon a hook. Alec Landry came out into the hall.

"Oh! It's you, Doctor. You'll pardon me; I have an errand that won't wait." Abruptly, on his way to the door, he turned and came back. "What do you think of the mare?"

It was Joe who answered. "Isn't she a beauty?"

"A devil. You've talked to Bruce, Doctor. What do you make of him?"

"Was I supposed to make something?"

The man shook his head impatiently. "Allan should not have told him how much he was to inherit. He's in a black mood and penniless."

"You're letting Allan ride the mare," Dr. Stone pointed out.

"Yes." There was a moment of silence. "What else could I do? He believes in himself. Could I risk shaking his courage and turning him into a coward? See you later."

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The blind man stood whistling his soundless whistle. Presently he touched the dog. "Lady, outside." The revelry of Allan's guests was subdued in the distance.

"Are we going home, Uncle David?" Joe asked.

"We're going to the bridge," said Dr. Stone.

Dusk crept out of the sky and darkness gathered in the hollows. They skirted a field of stubble and plunged into woodland, and Joe could feel the hard pumping of his heart. The bridge again! Did his uncle expect to find something there? The murmur of water came to them, and he lengthened his stride and struck out ahead.

"Behind me, Joe," Dr. Stone called sharply.

The boy drew back. From the rear he saw his uncle urge Lady forward until both walked at an extraordinary fast pace. The sound of running water was stronger now, clear and distinct in the evening quiet. Fearlessly, without hesitation, the blind man went ahead into the unknown, trusting himself to the guidance of the beast.

Lady reached the bridge. And then, in one swift movement, she seemed to half leap and turn. Her powerful body blocked the man's path, found his legs and pressed him back.

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"Joe!" There was no change in the serene self-control of the voice.

"Yes, Uncle David."

"Give me your hand. Step out upon the bridge—one foot only, one foot lightly. And hold on to my

hand with all your strength.”

The boy put a trembling foot upon the wooden planking. The next instant, with a strangled cry, he leaped toward the man and, even as he leaped, found himself pulled back violently.

“It moved, Uncle David.”

“I thought so.”

“What does it mean?”

“It means murder,” the blind man said grimly.

Joe wiped cold sweat from his forehead. Who was to die? Allan? Who planned it?

“The gypsies, Uncle David?”

“No.” Quietly, without haste, the man filled his pipe. “Remember, they are a clan. The old woman would not have spoken of death if the men of her tribe were concerned in this. Besides, who would hire them for this sort of work and risk paying blackmail all the days of his life? I am concerned with something else. Alec Landry called me to witness their presence should there be mischief. Bruce took pains to explain why he had not driven them off. Both men may have spoken the truth, but it is not likely. One or both of them lied.”

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Night had fallen. In the darkness Dr. Stone smoked as placidly as though death and horror were not at his elbow. Lady still kept her body between him and the ravine.

“Two men,” he said, “one with a fortune to gain, one with a crime to cover. Do they work together, or do they work alone? Is one innocent? If so, which one?”

Joe spoke in a whisper. “What crime, Uncle David?”

“Embezzlement. You heard that telephone talk of Landry’s? He’s lost heavily in the deal that wrecked Bruce. He’s probably lost money that didn’t belong to him—Allan’s money. Somebody has planned that Allan shall die. Is it the man who would be sure to become wealthy, or the man who might save himself from jail? Who undermined this bridge?” Without haste he knocked the ashes from his pipe. “Come, Joe; we’re going back.”

Once clear of the woodland Joe saw the house across the fields brilliant with lights. Sounds of merriment came from inside, and a dozen voices laughed and talked at once.

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Dr. Stone spoke softly. “What are they doing, Joe? Eating?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Bruce and Mr. Landry?”

“I can’t see them. They’re not at the tab—I see them now. They’re coming this way toward the porch.”

“We’ll soon know,” the blind man said calmly. When Bruce and Alec Landry stepped from the house he sat in placid contentment, and the tawny shepherd dog lay at his feet.

"Allan's holding places for you and Joe," Alec Landry said.

The doctor shook his head. "I think I'll stay here. This is a night when youth has a right to question the presence of gray hairs."

"I'm in no mood for it myself," Bruce Robb said curtly, and dropped into a chair to the left of Dr. Stone. Landry sat on his right. The blind man stretched his arms lazily, as one does who takes his rest gratefully, and his hands fell on an arm of the chair of the man on either side.

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"And so Allan rides at dawn," he said casually.

Joe had almost ceased to breathe.

"At dawn," Alec Landry repeated heartily. "By George, there's a picture. Sir Galahad with the sunrise in his face. Get it, Doctor?"

"Plainly, Alec; very plainly. That's what worries me."

"What worries you?"

"The picture. It's incomplete. First he rides out. So far, so good. But—is he supposed to come back?"

For the space of a heart-beat it was as though neither man had heard; then Bruce leaped to his feet.

"Dr. Stone, that's a ghastly thing to say."

"It's a ghastly business," the blind man said without emotion.

"That mumbling gypsy has addled your brain. You're mad. I think I can find pleasanter company."

He was gone, and Joe grew conscious of a collar that had become too tight. Would Uncle David let him go, or would Lady be sent to bring him back? A burst of laughter rolled from the festive dining-room. Dr. Stone's voice, brooding, came out of the darkness.

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"You were desperate, Alec, weren't you?"

"Desperate?" The word was snapped.

"Yes; desperate. The deal that had plunged Bruce to ruin had sucked you down, too. You didn't know which way to turn. Until Bruce sent up the mare there seemed no escape; but when the mare arrived it opened the doors to salvation. It brought a plan. Let the lad ride out alone. Blame the mare when his body was found—a runaway crash through the bridge. Hadn't they all seen the mare's wild prancings? You tried to cover yourself from every angle. You even insinuated that Bruce might have a reason for sending such a horse—you even called her a devil—and whispered of Bruce's black mood, and his penniless condition, and the will. You tried to work the gypsies into the pattern. If some sharp eye should notice something queer about the way the bridge had collapsed hadn't there been gypsies encamped nearby? You were too pointed in calling my attention to the gypsies and their possible relation to the future events. That was when I began to suspect you. It was inconceivable that you hadn't known they were

on the land. Never before had you permitted trespass. Why this time?

"The answer was simple. It was the will that Allan was to sign at midnight. Without question he was to name you executor. It takes a year to close an estate. With Allan dead the estate, instead of passing out of your charge, would remain in your control for another twelve months. A year in which to save yourself from going to prison as a thief. A year in which to put back the money you used to finance your own personal business deals. How deeply did you dip your hands into Allan's funds? How much did you lose? How much are you short?"

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There was a stark, sick silence. Joe pulled at his collar and wet his lips.

"Eighty thousand dollars," Alec Landry said hoarsely.

"And you planned to hide it under a murder," Dr. Stone said in a voice that was flat, and level, and as cold as ice.

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They were singing in the house. Allan, flushed and happy, came out to the porch.

"Skipper, they want you inside. That bass voice of yours is needed."

Joe held to the porch rail and waited for what might come next.

Alec Landry did not rise. "Allan," he said heavily, "when you ride at dawn, don't go by the bridge. I've just had word that it's in bad shape—the weight of a horse would crash it down. It might be a good idea to run your party over and block the approaches. Some luckless devil might wander out on it."

Presently the young men were gone with lanterns, and lights, and axes to build a barricade; and he who had been great on Allan Robb's land waited in the house for the just punishment that would come; and a boy, and a dog and a blind man went toward home along the dirt road.

"Conscience, Joe," Dr. Stone said quietly. "You'll remember, I sat between them. One, or both, were behind the cold-blooded plan. If, out of a clear sky, knowledge of the plot were exploded, there would have to be a reaction. I counted on that. Conscience can steel itself to brazenly meet the expected, but against the unexpected it is unprepared. And so, when I asked if Allan were expected to return from that ride——"

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"Yes?" Joe Morrow asked breathlessly.

"Conscience spoke," Dr. Stone told him quietly. "Alec Landry's chair trembled as his guilty soul cowered in fear."

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THE HOUSE OF BEATING HEARTS

In the short dusk of a Friday afternoon in March Joe Morrow came toward home from the village school pleasantly concerned with plans for the

week-end holiday. There was a hint of spring in the air, and the hard crust of the winter's snow had begun to soften. At the top of the last rise out of the village he passed Roscoe Sweetman's farm, and it seemed to the boy that the burly Mr. Sweetman, busy outside the barn, turned and looked after him as he passed. From there a section of the road spread out before him—the deserted, abandoned Farley place and, beyond that, the rock-and-timber house which Frederick Wingate had built and in which he painted pictures that were sent to art dealers in New York. Queer pictures, the village said—pictures of queer blurs and shadows, pictures in which men did not look like men nor did horses look like horses. Frederick Wingate, according to village suspicion, was slightly mad.

But Joe Morrow's thoughts were far removed from men who might be mad. Sometimes, if you were lucky, you found an apple imprisoned under the snow—a late windfall that was almost a ball of liquid cider. He swung off the road and, back in the Farley orchard, rooted diligently. Presently, triumphant, he gave a shout. He had found not one apple, but two. He bit through the skin, and the cold, imprisoned juices oozed into his mouth. When the fruit was sucked dry he tossed it aside and bit into the second. And only then did he notice how much the day had darkened.

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And suddenly, for no reason at all, he was filled with a creeping, apprehensive dread. His eyes, startled, rested on the house where Matt Farley had once lived, and he forgot to suck nectar through the punctured hole in the apple. Often, since the house had been abandoned, he had romped around the wide porches and climbed over the heavy railings. But now, in the gathering gloom, the structure had ceased to be friendly and inviting. Against the darkening sky this old friend of a house had all at once become a threatening, nameless thing—a monster of lightless windows, and locked doors, and stark, inner silence. The boy, uneasy, began to move toward the road. Without warning he broke into a run as though peril clutched at his heels.

Back on the road he felt safe. Outside the house of Frederick Wingate two men stood talking; he saw, with surprise, that one of them was Mr. Sweetman. A little while ago the farmer had been working at his own barn, and he was not the type given to hurry. Why, then, had he hurried over here? The boy was conscious, as he approached, that the talking stopped. Roscoe Sweetman called in his slow, heavy, rumbling voice:

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"Why were you running, Joe?"

The boy gulped. "N—nothing."

"Didn't I tell you?" the farmer cried.

But the artist only laughed. "Coincidence, Roscoe." The laugh lingered in the boy's ears, amused, scoffing. "Your uncle going to be home tonight, Joe?"

"I think so, Mr. Wingate."

"Tell him we'll be over."

Joe trudged on through the snow. What was this

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coincidence? Why had Mr. Sweetman cried out, "Didn't I tell you?" Why were they coming to see Uncle David? Had it something to do with the Farley house? Why had he fled in panic from the orchard? Now that he was away from the place the action seemed foolish and cowardly. It was one thing he would not tell his uncle, for he could not imagine Dr. David Stone, blind though he was, fleeing from anything.

At eight o'clock the artist and the farmer came to the house. Frederick Wingate called: "Don't get up, Doctor," and Dr. Stone held out a hand of warm greeting. Lady lay at his feet and stared unwinking at the visitors.

Joe Morrow stared, too. Was it the Farley house? Roscoe Sweetman, ungainly and burly in his leather coat, his corduroy trousers and his heavy boots, sat uncomfortably in a chair and rubbed a calloused hand across a stubble of beard. Frederick Wingate, lithe and jaunty, walked the floor and filled the boy's eyes. An opera cloak draped his shoulders, his shirt was pleated, his collar was long and loose, and a silk tie was gathered in a limp, nondescript bow. He seemed, in his dress, to belong to another age; and this passion for adornments of the past was reflected in his jewelry. His watch was old—a thick, heavy silver timepiece elaborately scrolled that had been converted into an ungainly wrist watch. And on the finger of his right hand was an enormous old-fashioned ring of gold curiously twisted and knotted.

"Doctor," the artist announced, "I have brought you a man half out of his wits."

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"I know what I have heard," the farmer said, slowly and heavily.

"Just what did you hear, Sweetman?" Dr. Stone asked.

"It was last night. I was coming home from the village and took a short cut across the Farley place to get quicker to my back door. I came close past the house, and there were voices coming from the inside. That was strange because there was no light on the inside. I have long had a key from Mr. Rodgers, the real estate man, so I went home and got the key and opened the front door. From inside came groans and cries of suffering. Then I went and shouted for Mr. Wingate."

"And then?" the doctor asked.

The artist shrugged. "I brought flashlights. We searched the house from cellar to attic. There was nobody there—nothing had been disturbed."

"Voices?" Dr. Stone suggested.

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"He's imagining things," Frederick Wingate said impatiently. "There were no voices."

"I heard them plain," the farmer insisted stonily.

"Them'?" The blind man's voice had taken on a note of quick interest. "What do you mean by 'them'?"

"Ghosts," said Mr. Sweetman. "If it was imagination with me, what was it with Joe when he came running hard this afternoon?"

Ice crept up and down the boy's back, and his stomach chilled. His uncle whistled long and softly.

"What did you hear or see, Joe?"

"Nothing."

"But you ran?"

"Yes, sir. From the orchard."

"Why?"

"I—I don't know."

"I do," Mr. Sweetman said with stolid insistence.

Frederick Wingate laughed. "A boy's vivid imagination, Doctor. A sudden fear of the dark."

"I never knew Joe to be afraid of the dark," Dr. Stone said quietly. "You still have the key, Sweetman? By the way, how did you come into possession of the key?"

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"I was thinking of buying," the farmer explained. "Mr. Rodgers gave me the key so that I could look long at the house. Before that Mr. Wingate had the key."

The doctor asked: "Were you thinking of buying, Fred?"

"Yes. Rodgers came to me three months ago and offered it for eight thousand dollars. It's worth far more than that to a man who could use it. With its good lines and its solid construction it has possibilities. However, after looking it over I decided it wouldn't answer my purpose. I gave the key back to Rodgers two months ago."

"Rodgers came to me," Mr. Sweetman added. "I think maybe I will buy, maybe for seven thousand dollars, but I do not tell him. It is bad business to buy quick and pay what is first asked."

"You won't want it now," Dr. Stone said.

"Maybe. First I must think."

After that there was a silence in the room. Joe looked from his uncle to Frederick Wingate. The artist leaned against the mantel and seemed to find a cynical amusement in watching the man who had come with him. Strained lines had formed suddenly around the blind man's mouth.

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"You are afraid of ghosts, Sweetman?" he said softly.

"I am afraid," the farmer answered heavily.

"Yet you might buy?"

"It is good land. I could tear down the house and sell it away, some here and some there." Joe saw greed gleam in the dull eyes. "Maybe with ghost talk around it will come a better price. Maybe I could yet buy for three thousand dollars."

"Business first, Sweetman," the doctor said pleasantly. He snapped a finger, and at once Lady arose; and Joe, his heart pounding, hurried to get the dog's harness. Frederick Wingate still leaned against the mantel above the fireplace.

"Going ghost hunting, Doctor?"

"You can never tell what you'll find on a hunt," the doctor answered dryly. "Coming?"

"This is the year 1934," the artist said, amused again. "Ghosts have gone out of fashion. I have letters to write."

The doctor slipped the harness on the dog. Lady, alert, waited beside him for the signal to go. Mr. Sweetman had lumbered to his feet.

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"Care for it, Joe?" Dr. Stone asked.

The boy felt the chill again in his spine. And yet —

"I'll get flashlights," he said huskily.

They went up the road through the snow in silence—three men, a boy and a dog. A pale quarter of moon had risen, and the world was all white silver, and even the trees seemed ghostlike and unreal. The artist dropped out at his house to write his letters, and the others went on to Farley's. The place, Joe thought, did not look so forbidding under the softening touch of the moon. Frost had come with darkness, and the porch floor creaked under their feet. Mr. Sweetman thrust a key into a lock, the front door opened on complaining hinges, and they stepped into the damp, black, moldiness of a deserted, closed-up dwelling.

"The light!" the farmer cried. "Where is the light?"

Joe jumped, and switched on a flash. He had a momentary glimpse of his uncle, standing in the eternal darkness of the blind, serene and untroubled, and the sight gave him courage. The beam picked out faded walls, a chair, broken and discarded, the dusty floor, a doorway, a yawning staircase. Outside the yellow shaft of light there was naught but a blank, impenetrable, stealthy darkness. Darkness, and the hushed, unbroken silence.

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"Well?" Dr. Stone asked.

There was a sound. At first it might have been the whimper of a wind around the eaves of the house. It rose, and fell away, and rose again. It fell away to a plaintive, worried whimper. And then, without warning, it became a human cry that filled the house with ghastly echoes. A voice—unmistakably a voice—sobbed wildly in writhing anguish. As abruptly as it had risen the cry was gone, and there was only a low, plaintive, heartbroken lamentation.

Mr. Sweetman's teeth chattered. "You hear it, Doctor? From all over the house—upstairs, downstairs, everywhere."

"Quiet," said Dr. Stone.

There was a new sound. It seemed to come from nowhere and from everywhere. It was gone—it came again. A measured beat, a steady rhythm that hammered and throbbed like an unchanging pulse. Hammer and throb, hammer and throb! It beat upon the ears. Hammer and throb! All at once the sound stopped in the middle of a stroke and did not come again. The dark house lay in frozen silence.

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"Doctor!" The farmer's voice shook. "You know what that was?"

"Do you, Sweetman?"

The man's answer came in a hoarse whisper. "I think it was a heart beating."

Joe's throat was a cramped vice. The flashlight shook in his hand and made fantastic splotches of light upon the floor.

"Upstairs," Mr. Sweetman croaked.

They heard the sound of footsteps on the floor above. A child's footsteps. Footsteps that ran and skipped lightly and gayly. Suddenly the sound was gone from above and in the same room in which they stood the same footsteps gamboled. Joe made a frantic circle of the room with the flash.

"See!" the farmer choked. "Nothing!"

A new sound joined the footfalls. Joe recognized it, and his scalp prickled. The beat of a heart! It throbbed momentarily and was gone. The unseen child continued to romp.

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Dr. Stone's voice, low and clear, came out of the darkness. "Lady!"

Joe's light focused on the dog. Lady, her tail whipping restlessly, had eyes only for the blind master who had spoken.

"Find the baby," Dr. Stone said.

Joe's breath came and went in short, choking spurts. Find a ghost? He kept the unsteady light trained upon the man and the dog. The merry romp of invisible feet still filled the room. Lady, her tawny body red in the beam from the flash, went without hesitation to the nearest wall. And there she stopped, defeated, and whined.

"It's all right, Lady," the blind man said quietly. His left hand held the handle-grip of the dog's harness; his right hand thrust out the cane until it touched the wall. He came closer and laid one hand upon the wall itself.

The echo of young footsteps had stopped.

"Come." Mr. Sweetman trembled. "It is enough."

"Wait," said Dr. Stone.

Without warning the dark house was awake again with sound. Upstairs a childish voice sang softly. Then footsteps once more filled the room. Not footsteps in a home, but footsteps crunching over a graveled walk. Sounds, for a moment, became confused and fragmentary—the icy-clutch beating of that heart, a child humming, the wash and gurgle of water. Footsteps again crunching gravel. Joe could almost vision a child at play.

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The idyllic picture was broken. All at once there was a piercing, terror-stricken scream. With amazing speed it thinned, waned, grew fainter, as though somebody was falling, falling—. Abruptly there was a heavy splash, the sound of water in commotion, a gurgling, strangling voice calling faintly for help.

Joe dropped the flash, and it went out. Mr. Sweetman cried something inarticulate and plunged for the porch. Outside they heard him shouting:

“Wingate! Wingate! Come quick! Wingate!”

The doctor’s voice, in the darkness, was steady. “Frightened, Joe?”

The boy fought for control. “Not—not when I’m with you and Lady.”

“Good lad. Find your flash. Got it? Spot it on the wall. Look sharply, now. Does that wall look strange in any way, in any way at all?”

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Joe compelled himself to make the inspection. “No, sir.”

Roscoe Sweetman’s boots thudded on the porch. The farmer came in, panting, followed by Frederick Wingate. Dr. Stone had moved away from the wall.

“What’s this?” the artist demanded. “Moans, screams, footsteps? It sounds like a dime novel. Let’s hear them.”

But the house now held to a soundless quiet. Ten or fifteen minutes passed.

“It looks,” Dr. Stone observed, “as though our ghost has called it a day.”

“Sweetman,” Mr. Wingate snapped impatiently, “this is the second time you’ve called me from my work for nothing. Where’s your ghost?”

“He was here,” the farmer insisted. He appeared to be filled with a dull surprise.

“The second time,” Dr. Stone repeated thoughtfully. “I’d call that strange, Fred.”

“You, too, Doctor.” The artist’s impatience had given place to amusement. “I thought better of you than that.”

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“Did you?” the blind man asked mildly. Joe stood rigid. His uncle’s voice had carried an undertone that had not been there before.

But nothing more was said. They came from the house, and Roscoe Sweetman’s fumbling hand clattered the key against the lock. In the road Frederick Wingate paused.

“Doctor,” he asked curiously, “do you actually believe in ghosts?”

“I believe what I hear,” the blind man said without emotion.

Joe, struck with terror, hugged close to the safety of the dog. That night his sleep was broken by dreams—dreams of a great, monstrous heart throbbing so that all could hear it and of strange screams that faded into a swift, strange silence. In the morning an east wind blew down from the mountains and the sky was gray and overcast. Twice Joe walked toward the Farley farm, and twice he turned back. He saw Mr. Sweetman, hulked over the wheel of a small car, drive toward the village and, an hour later, drive back. And all through the morning Dr. Stone sat with his beloved pipe unlighted in his

hands, and by that token the boy knew that his uncle was buried in disturbed thought.

Early in the afternoon Police Captain Tucker and Mr. Rodgers, the real estate man, came to the house in the captain's car. Joe hovered in the doorway.

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"Doctor," Mr. Rodgers demanded, "what's this talk about a ghost at Farley's? Sweetman came in to see me this morning—"

"Sweetman?" The blind man was intent.

"Rubbed it under my nose that there was no market for a haunted house. Said you had heard the ghost. How about it?"

"Did Sweetman happen to be in a buying mood?" Dr. Stone asked quietly.

"An eager mood. That's what I can't understand."

"How much did he offer?"

"Twenty-five hundred."

And yesterday, Joe thought, the farmer had mentioned \$3,000. He glanced at his uncle. The blind man had struck a match to the unlighted pipe.

"We heard a little of everything, Rodgers—groans, screams, the footsteps of a child, singing." Blue smoke rose fragrantly from the pipe. "A child singing," the doctor added, and turned sightless eyes toward the captain. "What brings you into this, Tucker. Planning to arrest a ghost?"

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"Ghost?" Captain Tucker snorted. "I don't believe in ghosts. There's such a thing as hocus-pocus to steal away the value of a piece of property. Did you know Matt Farley?"

"No."

"Rodgers and I did. A friend to tie to. Matt was doing well here, but his youngest boy, about four, died. It broke him up. Two years later he closed the house and went away. Now he's out on the Coast, sick and penniless, and he asked Rodgers to sell the place and get money to him. I'm in on this to see that no swindle is put over on him."

Dr. Stone asked: "How did the boy die, Tucker?"

"He fell down a well and was drowned."

Horror froze Joe Morrow's blood. Words passed back and forth in the room—he did not hear them. By and by the three men were in the road and headed for Farley's. He trailed along. They stopped at Mr. Sweetman's for the key.

"Doctor," the farmer said heavily, "not for one thousand dollars would I go into that house again."

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"You'd buy it though," Dr. Stone said mildly.

"Not now. Since this morning I am told that when you tear down a ghost house the ghost follows you into yours. Maybe it is so. I do not take a chance."

"Who told you that?" the real estate man snapped.

Mr. Sweetman's eyes shifted. "I do not say."

The house, on this drab, gray day, was bleak and forbidding in its emptiness. Cold shadows lurked in the corners. However, there was daylight, you could see, and Joe did not feel the frozen terror of last night. Captain Tucker relentlessly searched the house. In the end he came up from the cellar with a paper in his hand.

"Find anything," Mr. Rodgers asked eagerly.

"The cover from a magazine and a scrap torn from a page. Matt's been out of here for years; this magazine is a last August issue. How did it get here?"

"What magazine?" Dr. Stone asked.

"It's called *Wonder World*. How did it get here?"

"Sweetman has a key," the real estate man said. "Wingate did have a key. Either one of them could have brought it in."

"How long did Wingate have his key?" the doctor asked suddenly.

"A month, probably. Painted in here for a while. Gave me back the key at last and said it would cost too much to change the upstairs to get a studio with a northern light."

"Then these things mean nothing," the captain grumbled in disappointment. He crumpled the cover and threw it into a blackened fireplace.

"That scrap of paper?" Dr. Stone asked.

"Half a dozen incomplete lines. Something torn out at random."

"Might I have it?"

Captain Tucker grunted in impatience. "I tell you it's merely a scrap—Oh, take it."

They emerged from the house, and almost at once Frederick Wingate came out of his own dwelling wearing a paint-smearred apron.

"By Harry!" he cried angrily, "this ceases to be a joke. Now the police are here, and next it will be in the newspapers. They'll howl it up with scare headlines, and the rabble will come down on us by train, and bus and private car. The neighborhood will be marked for sordid sensation. Sweetman's place, Farley's, mine—none of them will be worth a dollar. Nobody has heard these screams, and footsteps and heartbeats. It's hysterical imagination."

"I'll come over tonight and try my imagination," Captain Tucker said.

The artist stormed back into his house and slammed the door.

Dr. Stone, holding to Lady's harness-grip, went serenely toward his home. Mr. Rodgers talked warmly. Wingate had the right idea—hysteria. But Joe, though silent, could still feel the tremor of his nerves. There had been screams and heartbeats. And a boy had fallen into a well and drowned!

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Captain Tucker and the real estate man climbed into the police car and were off. Instantly the unconcern fell away from the blind man. He held out the scrap of paper.

"Read it, Joe?"

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The boy read the few, disjointed words on the triangular strip:

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effects
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periments.
By means of
succeeded in

"Does it mean anything, Uncle Dave?" he asked, puzzled.

"Perhaps." Dr. Stone's face had become intent. "I think I'll walk into the village with Lady. You'd better stay here, Joe. I may be gone a long time."

He was gone three hours. When he returned he was whistling softly.

Darkness came early out of the drab day. Joe placed a log in the fireplace, and Dr. Stone smoked quietly and toasted his legs in the warmth of the blaze. At seven o'clock there were footsteps on the porch and a knock on the door. Frederick Wingate walked in.

"Still thinking of ghosts, Doctor?" he asked humorously. The afternoon's ill-temper had disappeared.

The face of the blind man was inscrutable. "Still thinking," he admitted.

And then, for a time, the Farley house and the ghoulish beat of its unseen heart seemed forgotten, and Joe listened to sparkling talk of the days when Mr. Wingate had been a student in Paris and Vienna. Abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, the man stopped short.

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"What time will Tucker be back tonight, Doctor?"

"Eight-thirty."

The artist pulled back the sleeve of his coat and glanced at the heavy, elaborately-scrolled, silver wrist watch. "Eight-ten," he said. And then, seeing Joe's fascinated eyes upon the watch, he continued to hold up the bared wrist. "A curious trinket, Joe. I picked it up in Austria. Keeps time to the split second. But it has a curious trick. Do you hear it ticking?"

"No, sir."

"If your wrist happens to turn in exactly the right position——" The man moved his wrist, and all at once the boy heard the watch ticking out an emphatic, muffled stroke. Again the wrist moved, and the timepiece was no longer audible. The artist laughed. "Not bad, eh, Joe?"

Joe said "Gosh!" and looked at his uncle. Dr. Stone had ceased to smoke.

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"It's going to be a bad night, Doctor," Frederick Wingate went on. "There's snow in the air. I'd advise you to sit snug and let Tucker do his

ghost-hunting alone. It will be wasted time.”

“Why are you so sure of that, Fred?”

“Come, come, Doctor. You know how I feel about goblins.”

“Of course. I was wondering. Last night you insisted we hadn’t heard sounds. Tonight you become more positive. You predict we’re not going to hear anything. Why this added certainty? Is it because you had removed the cable running between your house and Farley’s?”

Joe Morrow suddenly found himself tight and expectant. The good humor had been washed from the artist’s face.

“It was hard,” the doctor said serenely, “to locate exactly where the sound originated. Lady, though, took me to one wall. After that, the trick was plain. A blind man’s touch is sensitive, Fred. I felt the vibration in the wall. I asked Joe if the wall looked at all strange. He said it didn’t. Who could break into a wall and then doctor it so it would let out sound freely and still look untouched? Who but an artist accustomed to skilfully blending colors?”

“But at first I suspected Sweetman. The man’s anxiety to take advantage of a ghost scare and buy cheaply fooled me. We all stumble at times. I should have seen from the start it couldn’t be Sweetman. He was greedy, but he didn’t have the brains. Then, too, there were no creepy manifestations whenever you appeared. By the way, who told Sweetman the ghost would invade his house if he pulled down Farley’s? You?”

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“You’re stumbling now, Doctor, aren’t you?” the artist asked. Joe saw that his eyes had become sharp and watchful.

“Not now,” the blind man said. “The road is too plain. Today, when Tucker searched the house, he found the cover of the August *Miracle World* and a fragmentary scrap torn from a magazine page. Only ten words were on that scrap, Fred, but one of them was ‘sonority.’ It’s a word dealing with sound. On a bare chance I dropped in at the public library. There I learned that one Frederick Wingate is a subscriber to *Miracle World*, and each month turns the magazine over to the library after he has read it. But this Mr. Wingate did not turn over his August copy; the library, wishing to keep a complete file, sent for the August number. There was a significant article in that number, Fred. The librarian read it to me. It had to do with sound effects by radio and telephone.”

Joe’s lips were parted breathlessly. Frederick Wingate stood as though he had lost the power of movement.

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“I’m not up on those things. They developed after I became blind. Exactly how you worked the trick I do not know. After reading the August number you concocted your scheme. You took your time. But in December you got the key from Rhodes on the pretext you wanted to paint in the house and try out the light. In that month you did your wiring, broke through walls, inserted your loud speakers and tuned them to the proper pitch. The transmitting cable from your

house to Farley's was probably laid on the ground under the snow. No doubt you thought you would not have to give more than five or six manifestations. Let the ghost talk start. After that you could take up the cable. The thing would be done. Farley's property would be ruined; you'd buy it in for a song.

"What did you do from December to March? Practice the act? Anyway, you ran into the unexpected. Sweetman also saw a chance to buy cheaply. So you filled him with the fear of inheriting a ghost. Then, when the road seemed clear, Tucker came in. You hadn't expected the police. Today, when you protested to Tucker, Rodgers thought you were furiously indignant. I read your voice better. You were alarmed. So tonight, as soon as darkness fell, you took up the incriminating cable. You're wealthy. Why does a man of means stoop to small cupidities? Is it because he thinks it clever and smart?"

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The artist spoke hoarsely. "You'll admit, Doctor, that this is all rather circumstantial?"

"It was until a little while ago. Then I found the absolute proof. Sometimes a thing becomes so much a part of a man that he forgets he has it and it betrays him. Do you mind telling me the time?"

The artist glanced at his wrist-watch. "It is now ——" His eyes, startled, stared fixedly at the doctor. "I see," he said.

Dr. Stone relighted the pipe. "Might I make a suggestion. We don't want Tucker in on this. I'm more interested in Matt Farley. My suggestion is that you buy the place even below its worth, eight thousand dollars. Eight thousand will be a fortune to a man sick and penniless."

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Wet blotches fell against the windows. Snow!

"Doctor," Frederick Wingate said, "will you believe me when I say I did not know Farley was destitute?" He picked his coat from a chair. "I'll see Rodgers in the morning and put down a deposit. Good night."

The blazing log broke and fell, and sparks showered up the chimney. So there really had been no ghost! Relief went through Joe Morrow in a fervent tide.

"Did—did you really have the proof, Uncle David?"

"The absolute proof, Joe. You saw it yourself."

"I saw it?" The boy was bewildered.

Dr. Stone stretched back in the chair and placed his hands behind his head. "I don't know whether he used a telephone mouthpiece or a microphone. Whatever he used he was right in front of it. His hands must have been active—he had to produce the sounds of water, footsteps, gravel. Every time the watch began its mystifying tick——"

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"Oh!" Joe breathed.

"Yes," the blind man said quietly. "You and Sweetman thought it was the beating of a human heart."

AS A MAN SPEAKS

"Hard!" said Police Captain Tucker. "That's what he is, Doctor—hard," and the policeman drove a smacking fist into the palm of his other hand to emphasize the point.

The dog, lying in front of the fireplace, lifted her head. Dr. David Stone puffed his pipe serenely in the warmth of the blazing logs. The winter wind whistled about the house, a shutter banged like the report of a gun, and Joe Morrow jumped.

"Talks tough, Doctor, and sticks out his chin as though asking you what you were going to do about it. I've sent out his fingerprints. Wouldn't be surprised if it turned out he was a bit of a gangster."

"You have him safely in jail," Dr. Stone pointed out.

"Safe enough for the present," Captain Tucker admitted, "but I can't hold him forever on mere suspicion."

"Then you're not charging him with murder?"

"How can I? You can't prove a murder without producing a body. Where's the corpse? Where's Boothy Wilkes, alive or dead? He hasn't been around—. You pass his place every day, Joe. When did you see him last?"

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"Wednesday," Joe Morrow, Dr. Stone's nephew, answered. "He asked me had I seen Jud Cory hanging around."

"Nobody's seen him since Wednesday. That was six days ago. That morning he and Jud had a talk outside the post office—something about money—and suddenly Jud yelled out that he'd kill him. Dozen people heard it. And since late Wednesday Boothy hasn't been seen."

"Why did Jud want to kill him?" the blind doctor asked.

"How do I know?"

"Might be worth looking into," the calm voice drawled.

"Haven't I tried to sweat it out of him? Haven't I grilled him trying to make him tell where he hid the body? What do I get? A stuck-out chin, and a scowl, and him telling me he's not a squealer. That's gangster talk."

The blind man's head rested against the back of the chair; his sightless eyes seemed to stare unblinkingly at some object on the ceiling; the pale face had the calmness of graven stone. Joe, highly excited by all this talk of murder and a hidden body, pulled at a thought that had occurred to him more than once in the past. Could anything happen that would shake his uncle out of that unruffled tranquillity?

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"How old did you say he was, Captain?"

"Twenty."

The doctor sat up and knocked the ashes of his

pipe into the fireplace, "No boy is hard at twenty, Captain. He only thinks he's hard. Mind if I talk to him?"

Captain Tucker sighed. "I was hoping you would."

Dr. Stone reached for the dog's harness. "More work for us, old girl," he said, and the dog looked at him steadily. Joe wondered if she understood. They went out to the small police car, the tawny shepherd anxiously leading the blind man through the snow to the running-board. Crowded into the car, Joe and the dog in the rear seat, they rode toward the village.

"How long is it since Jud Cory left here?" Dr. Stone asked.

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"Seven years. That's what I can't understand. Why should he come back after seven years to do a murder? He used to live with Boothy; did chores for his keep. We've sent for his brother."

"Jud's?"

"No; Boothy's."

The doctor said, surprised: "I didn't know he had a brother."

"Neither did anybody else. But for that matter Boothy was a tight-lipped man who told his business to no one. After the neighbors reported him missing we searched the house. Found a will and a note written the day before the quarrel outside the post office. The note said if anything happened to him——. See that, Doctor? He was afraid that something would happen."

"He wrote that note the day before Jud threatened to kill him," the blind man said slowly.

Joe thought that Captain Tucker had the look of a man stumbling over a rock he had not seen. "Well——." The captain coughed awkwardly. "Why couldn't Jud have gone to the house several times before that meeting outside the post office? Certainly he didn't come here planning to loiter in the streets until Boothy appeared. Anyway, the note said if anything happened to him to notify his brother, Otis Wilkes, at once."

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"Any witnesses to the will?"

"No. Oh, it's in his handwriting. We proved that."

"Who gets his property?"

"This brother, Otis Wilkes."

Dr. Stone said, "I'd like to meet Otis." Joe, sitting taut on the rear seat, had the feeling that his uncle had touched something hidden in the dark. The car halted outside the village lock-up.

"I won't go down with you," Captain Tucker grunted. "He wouldn't talk if I were there."

"I'll want Joe with me," Dr. Stone said, and a turnkey led man, boy and dog down a damp staircase. It was the first time Joe had ever seen this forbiddingly bleak corridor of cells, and his heart grew heavy with a sick chill. A key rasped

in a lock, and the jail attendant threw open an iron-barred door.

"Somebody to see you, Cory."

"I don't want to see nobody," a voice answered harshly.

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The blind man said, "Lady, left," and followed the dog into the cell. Joe saw a disheveled youth who sat scowling upon a cot. At sight of them he arose with an air of bravado. The cell door closed.

"What's the idea?" the harsh voice demanded. "Trying to scare me with a dog?"

"Nobody's trying to scare you, Jud. Don't you remember me? I'm Dr. Stone."

"Another cop?"

"No," the blind man said gently; "your friend. And here's another friend—Joe Morrow. You ought to remember Joe. He was only a little tyke then, and always followed you when you brought the cows in from pasture."

Joe saw the hard eyes waver. At that moment Jud Cory looked, not the murderous gangster, but a frightened, bewildered, sick-souled boy.

"He always brought me a cake with raisins in it," Jud said huskily. And then, like some wild animal touched by danger, the youth had sprung back against the wall of the cell. "Hey! Trying to pull soft stuff on me? Nothing doing, I don't talk."

"You've had your share of bitter days, haven't you?" Dr. Stone asked quietly.

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The hard eyes wavered.

"I knew your father, Jud. It doesn't seem possible that his son could butcher a man for a few dollars."

"It wasn't a few dollars," the lad cried thickly. "It—"

Joe shivered. Then this had really been a murder for a lot of dollars. The youth had choked off the sentence and stood against the stone wall shaken by the appalling significance of what he had said.

"Jud," the blind man said, "don't try to fool me and don't try to fool yourself. You're just a poor, miserable kid who's caught in a squeeze that's too tight for him. Don't you think you ought to tell me."

The chin wasn't a hard chin now. It quivered, tried to steady itself; and suddenly, like a tree that snaps in a storm, Jud Cory broke. One moment he stood against the wall, still suspicious, still afraid; the next he was on the side of his cot, his head in his hands, sobbing.

"You don't know what it's been like in here, Doctor. Everybody telling me I was a murderer and asking what I did with the body. When I said I'd kill him I was mad. I didn't mean it. I tell you, Doctor, I didn't mean it."

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The blind man groped across the cell, and sat upon the cot, and one hand reached out and

rested on the boy's shoulder.

The sobbing had stopped. "We—we lived in the city," came from between the lad's hands, "my pop and me, and pop got sick and they said he should go to the country. I don't know how it happened, but we came to Boothy Wilkes'. I liked it there. Then pop died, and that changed everything. I was nine then, nine nearly ten, and Wilkes made me do all the chores—said I had to earn my keep. Telling me every day I was a pauper and threatening to send me away to the pauper farm. Then he began to shout and yell that I ate too much. That was when I lit out.

"I went to Philadelphia and sold newspapers. They told me to keep out of the way of the cops or they'd slap me in a home because I ought to be in school. It wasn't so bad in the summer, but in the winter it was tough. Snowy days I wouldn't sell many papers, and maybe I'd have to sleep in a hallway that night."

"How old were you then, Jud?"

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"About fourteen."

Joe shot a glance at his uncle. The unruffled tranquillity was gone. The blind man's face was dark with a bitter wrath.

"I figured I'd go some place where there wouldn't be so much cold, so I beat it to California. There I got jobs doing this and that, and got along. One day, when I was out of work and feeling pretty low, a man stopped me and asked wasn't I Jud Cory. He said I looked as though I was on my uppers, and I said I was. He said I must have gone through the money pretty fast, and I asked him what money, and he said he had been cashier for the bank here and that just a few days before my father died he was sent for, and went to Wilkes' house, and that my father put nine thousand dollars in Wilkes' account for me. It seemed pop didn't want any dealings with lawyers and courts and thought Wilkes was honest. Maybe this man was telling me straight and maybe he wasn't. I got thinking it over, and it seemed maybe Wilkes had laid it on me heavy so I'd light out and he'd have the money to himself. So I came back here, and the first time I spoke to Wilkes I knew it was true."

"How?" Dr. Stone asked.

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"By his face."

"What was the name of this man, Jud?"

"I—I don't know. I got so excited I forgot to ask, and when I went looking for him afterwards I couldn't find him. Does that make any difference?"

"I'm afraid so."

Jud Cory's hands went out in a hopeless gesture. "I don't suppose anybody'll believe me." He was up from the cot, frantic, terror-stricken. "But I didn't kill him. I didn't."

"I know you didn't," Dr. Stone said quietly. "I've known that for the past ten minutes."

Serenity had come back upon the blind man. Holding the handle-grip of Lady's harness he followed the dog up the damp stairway to the

headquarters room. There he told Captain Tucker Jud Cory's story.

"A fairy tale," the police captain scoffed. "He got it out of a book or the movies. Anyway, it doesn't explain the riddle. Where's Boothy Wilkes' body?"

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"Let's go to the bank," the doctor suggested.

Again they rode in the police car, and again Lady cautiously conducted her master through the snow. Bryan Smith, president of the bank, admitted them to his private office and closed the door.

"The Wilkes case, gentlemen?"

Captain Tucker shrugged. "In a way. Cory has burst forth with a wild——"

"Just a moment, Captain," Dr. Stone said sharply. "Mr. Smith, did a cashier resign eight or nine years ago?"

"Eight or nine years?" The banker considered. "That would be Herman Lang. He resigned about that time."

"Do you know why he resigned?"

"Yes. He had an offer to join a land development company."

"Where?"

"In California."

Joe saw Captain Tucker's mouth sag, but his uncle's face was impassive. Bryan Smith lowered his voice.

"Ordinarily, gentlemen, we do not discuss our depositors' business. However, there is something I think you should know. Boothy Wilkes drew out five thousand dollars in cash the day he vanished. Cash!"

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The sag that had been in Captain Tucker's jaw was gone. Out in the car he spoke a positive judgment.

"There's your motive, Doctor. Find Boothy's body and Cory'll soon tell us what he did with the five thousand dollars. Anyway, we all know Boothy kept a tight fist on a dime. Suppose he did rob the boy. Is that any excuse for murder?"

"You haven't yet proved Jud did commit a murder," the blind man suggested gently.

"The body?" Captain Tucker snapped an impatient finger. "That's only a matter of time. It couldn't have been taken far."

Outside the village town hall a constable awaited their coming. Otis Wilkes, he said, had arrived from Baltimore and was now at the Wilkes farm. Captain Tucker turned the car about. Fifteen minutes later they swung into a driveway between trees and skidded to a stop. On the Wilkes porch a thin, wiry man paced back and forth restlessly.

"I'd know him for a Wilkes anywhere," Captain Tucker said in an undertone. "Favors Boothy in looks, only this one's all whiskered. Mind if I use Lady while you're here, Doctor?"

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"What for?"

"Clues. She might scent us something."

As they left the car and came toward the house, Joe Morrow had eyes only for the man on the porch. A voice called down to them across the railing.

"Captain Tucker?" The tone carried a high, nasal twang. "Land o' Goshen, I've been a-waitin' for you until I'm like t' freeze." The sentence ended in a choking, sputtering cough. The man spat violently with a burst of breath. "Come in; come in out of the cold."

The house, untenanted for a week, was scarcely warmer than the outdoors. But it was the house from which a man had disappeared, and Joe Morrow kept staring about uneasily as though expecting to find a ghost. They went into a front room that overlooked some of the land bordering the road. Here, at least, there was sun.

"Did they get him?" Otis Wilkes demanded. "This Jud Cory?" Speech was momentarily halted by that same choking cough, that same sputtering outburst of breath. "This Jud Cory who killed Boothy."

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Joe was conscious of a sudden, intent look on his uncle's face. Captain Tucker answered very, very slowly.

"Did you stop at the police station, or did you come straight to the house?"

"To the house, of course. Where else with maybe Boothy lying dead?"

"How did you know he was dead?" Captain Tucker demanded.

"He wrote me, Boothy did." One hand made a frantic reach for the inside pocket of his coat and drew forth a folded paper. "Boothy said it was on him. Here!"

Captain Tucker read the letter aloud:

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Dear Otis: Like as not you'll be surprised to get this letter seeing as we have not seen or heard of each other in twenty years. But when a man feels he is going to be took, it is natural he should turn to his only kin. I have wrote a will leaving everything to you, and you will be notified when necessary. If anything should happen to me sudden, look for Jud Cory. He has made talk of killing me, and I think he is the kind to do it.

Your brother,
Boothy.

Captain Tucker folded the letter. "Well, Doctor?" he asked in poorly-concealed satisfaction.

The blind man's face was inscrutable. "Does a man facing death, a man known to keep a tight fist on a dime, stop to draw five thousand dollars in cash from a bank?"

"Boothy was a-tryin' t' buy him off," Mr. Wilkes shrilled.

"How do you know that, Mr. Wilkes?"

"Reasonable, ain't it? Reckon a man would ruther pay five thousand dollars than be laid out stiff. What about Jud Cory?"

"We have him," Captain Tucker answered, "but Boothy's missing. We believe he's been murdered."

"Then why you standin' 'round wastin' time doin' nothin'?" Mr. Wilkes' outburst arose to a tremulous falsetto. "Find him. I'll pay a reward."

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"We're starting a search now with the dog," Captain Tucker soothed the agitated man. "If you wish to come along——"

But Mr. Wilkes was seized with a shuddering reluctance. "It ain't fitten' I should, seein' as folks might say I was powerful anxious t' find him so's t' claim the property. Besides——" Stragglin' hairs again bothered his mouth, and there was another spell of coughing and sputtering. "Besides, I ain't so spry anymore and the cold gits into my bones. I'll set here by the window in the sun an' watch out through the apple orchard."

"It's a fine orchard," Captain Tucker observed.

"Boothy set great store by it," Mr. Wilkes said feelingly. "Blasted the soil with dynamite before settin' out the trees."

"Comin', Captain?" Dr. Stone asked.

There was an undercurrent to the words. Joe, roused out of his expectation of a ghost, saw that the strained lines were gone from his uncle's mouth and that now the face was placid and serene. The boy knew the sign. Once more Dr. Stone had touched something hidden in obscurity. Light had come to the brain that lay behind those blind eyes. And so they came outdoors, to the snow and the frozen ground.

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"Careful, Doctor," Captain Tucker warned.

"Lady won't let me on ice," the doctor answered. "Search, old girl."

The dog winnowed through the snow, back and forth, ever advancing. The quest took them past the house, on past the summer kitchen. Suddenly the animal, no longer advancing, began to dig in the snow with her paws.

"She's found something," Joe cried.

Out from under the snow Lady dragged a hat. Captain Tucker seized it eagerly.

"It's Boothy's, Doctor. Here are his initials. B. W."

The doctor asked a question. "Where are we, Joe?"

Joe's throat ached. "On the driveway to the barn."

"Doesn't it strike you as strange, Captain, that Boothy's hat should be found here?"

"What's strange about it? Isn't this the driveway?"

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"That's exactly what's strange about it," the blind man answered. "If somebody wanted to

dispose of a body would he drag it through the open or would he seek cover? Might not the hat have been left here to be found?"

But the police officer was absorbed in a fresh discovery. The hat was sodden with snow; and yet, darker than the soak of water, was a stain above the sweat-band.

"Doctor, there's something on this hat."

"What?"

"Blood."

Dr. Stone's lips formed to a soundless whistle. "Boothy's blood?"

"Why not?"

"Because, Captain, if that had been human blood Lady would have shied, and whimpered, and trembled. She would have called our attention to it, but she would not have brought the hat out to us."

Captain Tucker flared into temper. "Doctor, that's going too far. Even a clever dog is only a dog. We're going back."

The police officer carried the gruesome find to the house. Joe stumbled in the snow. There had been that dark stain near the sweat-band; he had seen it, and was troubled. Was Uncle David wrong? They crossed the porch and entered the room where Mr. Wilkes waited, and on the instant the man cried out in nasal horror:

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"It's Boothy's hat. And there's blood on it."

"I'm going back to the village," Captain Tucker said hurriedly. "I'm coming back with a crew of men. We'll find what's hidden here. We'll find it if we have to dig up every foot of this farm."

The captain was gone. The outer door closed. Dr. Stone still stood just within the room. Outside a motor roared, and suddenly the blind man shouted.

"Tucker! See that Herman Lang comes here as soon as he arrives."

It seemed to Joe that Mr. Wilkes leaped and jerked in every muscle. "Lang? What about Herman Lang?" Another fit of sputtering and coughing seized him, and he spat violently. "What about him?"

"Oh!" The doctor's voice was soft. "So you know Herman Lang?"

"Never heard o' him. Who is he?"

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"He's the bank cashier who was at this house the day Jud Cory's father trusted Boothy with nine thousand dollars. Jud came here to get that money."

"Bah! A likely tale. What am I supposed to do about it?"

The blind man, holding to the dog's leash, stepped well within the room. Joe edged a little to the side. He had been with his uncle on so many adventures he had developed an instinct that told him when a trap was to be sprung. And instinct told him a trap was to be sprung now.

"You might answer a few questions, Mr. Wilkes. You and Boothy hadn't seen or heard from each other in twenty years?"

"Maybe it was twenty-one years."

"Then how did you know Boothy used dynamite to break the hardpan when he set out his orchard. Those trees were planted in the spring of 1920, thirteen years ago."

Joe saw the Adam's apple in the man's throat work convulsively. "Likely I heard about it somewhere."

"When Tucker came in, how did you know he had Boothy's hat?"

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"It must have been Boothy's—Boothy allers wore the same kind."

"How did you know of the blood? You were across the room. You couldn't have distinguished a stain on a wet hat. Or—" The blind man paused. "Or did you know, before we left the room, that we were going to come back with a blood-stained hat?"

Joe could almost feel the man tremble. But no words came from the stark, startled lips.

"Nine thousand dollars," Dr. Stone mused. "Simple interest for eleven years at six per cent. Five hundred and forty dollars a year. A total, principal and interest, of fourteen thousand nine hundred forty dollars. Sit down, Wilkes."

Mr. Wilkes sat down.

"Make out a check to Jud Cory for fourteen thousand nine hundred forty dollars."

Joe expected shrill, nasal protest. Instead the man sat there, huddled in tremulous abjection. By and by the fingers, strong and work-hardened, began to move slowly; and with that Joe saw a look of shrewd, calculating cunning steal into the eyes. He was like a man who, lost, sees a glimmer of hope.

"Doctor, most likely this Jud Cory's been a-tellin' you a passel o' lies. But it ain't fitten to speak ill o' the dead, and Boothy's my brother and I don't hanker t' have folks a-whisperin' about him and makin' light o' his good name. Tell you what I'll do, Doctor. I'll give this Jud Cory enough to stop his mouth. Likely he'll need it, anyway, t' pay his trial lawyer."

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"That's kind of you," Dr. Stone said dryly.

Mr. Wilkes wrote a check and pressed it into the blind man's hand.

"It's no more than fair to tell you, Wilkes, that Herman Lang is not expected here."

With a snarl the man was on his feet. "Give me that check!" Lady gave a warning growl, and on the instant the grasping hand was stayed. Mr. Wilkes shrank back.

"It would be a simple matter to telegraph and bring him East," the doctor said pointedly.

As slowly as it had come the shrewd cunning faded out of the man's eyes. He sank back into

the chair.

Dr. Stone held out the slip of paper. "How much is it for, Joe?"

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"Five thousand dollars, Uncle David." This time it was the boy who trembled. Five thousand dollars was the amount of cash Boothy Wilkes had drawn from the bank.

"Signed by whom?"

"By Otis Wilkes."

Without haste the doctor folded the check twice, and tore it into bits.

"Write another check," he ordered quietly. "This time write it for fourteen thousand nine hundred forty dollars. This time sign your own name. Sign it Boothy Wilkes."

To Joe Morrow the world went topsy-turvy. Through an incredulous haze he saw a snarling man sign a check and almost hurl it into his uncle's face. As they came out upon the porch with Lady, Captain Tucker's car swung into the driveway from the road.

"I'll have men here in half an hour. Where's Otis, Doctor?"

"Gone. Boothy's inside."

"Boothy?"

"Otis, if you like that name better," the doctor said pleasantly.

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For the second time that day Captain Tucker's jaw sagged. Dr. Stone brought out his pipe, filled it, and puffed with calm enjoyment.

"You see," he said, "Jud Cory told us the truth. When he arrived with the information that he knew of the money that was his, it was like plunging a knife into Boothy's heart. Money has rather been Boothy's god. The way to save the money came with Jud's threat to kill him that so many persons overheard. Boothy went to the bank, drew out five thousand dollars, wrote the will and the note that you found, wrote himself the letter he showed you, and went to Baltimore to await the results he knew would follow. When it was discovered he was gone people remembered Jud's threat. And so Jud was arrested, and you wrote Otis to come on, and the search began for a body that would never be found.

"Boothy had it figured out nicely. As Otis he would have five thousand dollars to live on. There was no hurry. Let Jud Cory stew in jail. He would never be tried for murder, for without a corpse no murder could be proved. Public opinion, though, might try Jud for threatening life, or for disturbing the peace, or for something else. He might even be sent to the county penitentiary for nine months. All right; let him go. When he was released he would be so sick of the game, so glad to be at liberty again, that he'd take the first train out and never come back. And then, after an interval, Boothy would reappear. What story would he have told? Well, he might have claimed a complete loss of memory—aphasia, as it is called. And there he'd be with his nine thousand dollars intact and Jud

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Cory gone for good.”

Captain Tucker had recovered from his chagrin. “I can see all that now, Doctor. But how did you know he was Boothy? Man, he had me completely fooled.”

“There were several signs,” Dr. Stone answered. “An apple orchard, for one; a hat for another. But the real give-away—” He passed the pipe under his nose and inhaled the aroma of the burning tobacco. “You wear false teeth, Captain?”

“What has that to do with it?” Captain Tucker demanded impatiently.

“Took you a while to get used to them, didn’t it?”

“Of course.”

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“There’s the answer. Boothy didn’t take time to get used to them. They kept straggling out of place and interfering with his speech.”

“What are you talking about?” Captain Tucker cried impatiently. “False teeth?”

“No,” the blind man said mildly. “False whiskers.”

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ARM OF GUILT

Hurrying along the shadowed road beside Dr. David Stone and Lady, Joe Morrow was conscious of the hard pounding of his heart against his ribs. The telephone call from Police Captain Tucker had been terse and abrupt, but out of it had come alarm and revelation. The explosion he and his uncle had heard an hour ago had not been the backfire of an automobile, but the murderous bark of a pistol. And Ira Close, the Foster’s hired man, had been shot, and nine-year-old Billy Foster had been kidnaped. Joe gulped. He had seen the small boy at school that afternoon.

Moonlight flooded the yard in the rear of Ben Foster’s house, and black shapes stood out in sharp relief. Pressed against the powerful flanks of the dog Joe strained his eyes and made them out: Mr. Foster, agitated, walking back and forth restlessly; Captain Tucker staring hard at the ground, and a third man—Why, the third man was Ira Close. The boy gave a suppressed cry.

“He’s there, Uncle David.”

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“Billy?” Dr. Stone asked eagerly.

“No, sir; Ira. Ira wasn’t shot badly. It’s only his hand. His hand is bandaged.”

Dr. Stone said: “Lady, left,” and the dog swung them into the Foster yard. At the sound of their feet on the driveway gravel Mr. Foster gave a cry and hurried toward them.

“Thank God, Doctor, you’re here. If you can find him, if you can get him back——”

“Are you sure,” the doctor broke in quietly, “he

hasn't gone to a friend's house and stayed for supper? Small boys sometimes forget to come home."

Captain Tucker shook his head. "It's kidnaping. We have the ransom note. Five thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand!" Mr. Foster cried wildly. "Fifteen! Any amount, so long as he comes back unharmed."

"Easy," said Dr. Stone, and took out his pipe and reached into a pocket for tobacco. Amid the hysterical panic he was controlled, steady. "If we're to get any place we must try to think clearly. When was the boy seen last?"

Captain Tucker answered. "Four o'clock."

"Then we know he wasn't kidnaped until after four. And about eight o'clock you were given a ransom note. That means the kidnapers were in the neighborhood an hour ago. How did the note get here?"

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"It was brought to me," said Mr. Foster.

"Who brought it?"

"Ira."

Dr. Stone's hand came out of his pocket without the tobacco pouch. Joe, startled, saw his uncle's eyes turn, as though by instinct, toward the hired man he could not see. Ira Close, always given to a dull, stupid sullenness, shifted his thick-set, muscular body awkwardly.

"I sent him out to find Billy," Mr. Foster explained. "The boy had been gone since four o'clock when he went out of the house with a plate of food for his rabbits. I thought he might have gone trailing after that organ-grinder—"

"What organ-grinder?" Dr. Stone asked sharply.

Again it was Captain Tucker who answered. "A stranger, doctor. Gave his name as Pasquale Monetti. Came to the police station four days ago and paid two dollars for a permit. Had a monkey on a chain. The kids have been following him all over the village."

The doctor said quietly: "How did you come to get the note, Ira?"

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"I went for Billy like Mr. Foster said." The man's voice was a low rumble. "Down by the Howard's woodlot there's a bang and I know I'm shot."

"The right thumb," said Captain Tucker. "The bullet creased the skin."

"It bled," Ira Close said unemotionally, and Joe saw blood on the handkerchief-bandage. "He tells me not to move, and ties my arms behind, and puts the note in my pocket."

"He," Dr. Stone said. "What he, Ira?"

"The organ-grinder."

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him?"

"No; I have my back turned. He does not talk our kind of American."

Captain Tucker gave a grunt of exasperation. "That's too thin for identification. A thousand men within twenty miles might talk with a foreign accent. I can't understand this, Doctor. If somebody wanted to use Ira to carry a message why did they shoot close enough to hit him?"

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"I wonder," Dr. Stone said gravely. His hand went into his pocket and this time came out with the pouch. Slowly, almost leisurely, he filled the pipe.

Joe Morrow, groping in the dark for light, abruptly grasped the cords of memory. "Ira could have known his voice," the boy cried, excited.

"How's that?" Captain Tucker barked.

"I saw Ira talking to the organ-grinder yesterday in front of the bank."

"I asked him about the monkey," Ira said stolidly. "I thought maybe I might buy one for Billy."

"Why didn't you tell us that?" Captain Tucker flared in a temper. "Here we're wasting time —"

"And my boy being taken farther away every minute," Mr. Foster groaned in sick despair. "Do something! I tell you I can't stand this waiting, waiting! Do something!"

"Perhaps," Dr. Stone said gently, "we have already done something. How was Ira tied, Tucker? Tight?"

"I've seen them tied tighter. Didn't have to cut the rope—slipped it down over his elbows. A botchy job."

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"This organ-grinder?"

"Swarthy, with a heavy mustache. Not over four and one-half feet tall and weighing about 135."

"How much do you weigh, Ira?" the doctor asked.

The hired man answered without interest. "One hundred eighty-five pounds."

Joe, trying to read his uncle's face, found it inscrutable. And yet the question meant something. The pipe had gone out; Dr. Stone lighted it again.

"Let's try to reconstruct this crime, Tucker. At four o'clock Billy left the house with feed for the rabbits. After that—a blank. Did he feed the rabbits and wander on? Did he ever reach the warren?"

"No," Mr. Foster choked. "Whatever happened to him happened here."

And then, for the first time, Joe saw what lay upon the ground in the moonlight—the shattered pieces of a blue plate, scraps of lettuce and carrot, and a boy's cap. Evidently, Billy Foster had never reached the rabbit warren with the feed. While Captain Tucker described the scene

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to the blind man, Joe picked up the cap. Why, they were in full view of the house. Could a boy be kidnaped in broad daylight from his own doorstep?

"It couldn't have happened," Captain Tucker insisted testily. "Not here. The place is too open. Probably something startled the boy and he dropped the plate."

"If he were frightened," Dr. Stone asked mildly, "why didn't he run to the house? What frightened him? Did whatever happen happen so quickly that there was no time to run? And then there's something else."

"What?" Captain Tucker snapped.

"The cap. It would take quite a fright to pop a cap off a boy's head." The blind man put the pipe back in his pocket. "You've kept track of this organ-grinder, haven't you, Tucker? Where has he been staying?"

"Petey Ring's shack on the river."

"I think," Dr. Stone said, "it might be worth our while to go down toward the river." A dozen steps toward Captain Tucker's car he paused. "You'd better have that finger looked at, Ira. Gun-shot wounds can develop lock-jaw."

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"Doctors want money," Ira Close said resentfully.

"It's a common failing," the blind man observed pleasantly.

Joe tingled. Something lay behind those four words. But again the bland face was expressionless.

Petey Ring, unkempt and wrapped in a soiled apron, met them in the frowsy public room of this river "hotel."

"Cap," he said, "I was just thinking of giving you a buzz. You know that bird who's been penny snatching with a monk?"

Joe's mouth fell open, and Dr. Stone stopped dead in his tracks.

"Where is he?" Captain Tucker demanded.

"Ask me. I ain't clapped a peeper on him since this morning. Looks to me like he's taken it on the lam. You got a line out for him, Cap?"

The captain shrugged. "Just checking up, Petey. What time did he shove off."

"You're asking me? I thought he was out working his graft. Then there's a jabbering from his room, and there's the monk all alone in there throwing fits."

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Dr. Stone's voice cut in. "Where's his room?"

Petey, stepping past the dog warily, led the way. The room was a squalor of untidiness. Dirty blankets were tumbled on the army cot bed, and a cracked mirror stood upon a paint-chipped dresser. The hand-organ, gaudy with cheap trappings, leaned in a corner and, attached to it by a light chain was a wizened, wrinkled, black-faced monkey. The animal flew into a rage,

climbed the length of its chain and, from the top of a window-casing, shrieked and chattered.

"Ira was right," Captain Tucker said harshly. "And we're too late."

Joe's throat ached. Jolly Billy Foster taken by violence and held for ransom! Hidden away in some dark hole, probably, homesick and terror-stricken. He looked at his uncle. The blind man's face had become intent.

"This room reeks," Dr. Stone said, "with the stench of cheap shaving soap. Search it."

"For what?" Captain Tucker asked, puzzled.

"Hair."

Joe, conscious only of the stale stench of the room, marveled that his uncle could detect the smell of soap. He poked into the corners. Petey, lounging in the doorway, watched the search narrowly.

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"What's this bird been pulling, Cap?"

"Kidnaping," Captain Tucker threw at him.

Petey went white. "So help me, Cap. I'm out of it. You ain't got a thing on me. Take my oath. I ain't touching nothing like that. Who'd he snatch?"

There was no answer. Lady, pawing, had brought a ball of paper out from under the bureau. Captain Tucker opened the wad.

"Hair," he said.

"There's blood, too," Joe cried.

The blind man whistled soundlessly. "A shaved off mustache and a cut lip."

"Tried a disguise and marked himself." Captain Tucker bolted for the door. They pushed past the alarmed, agitated Petey and left him crying after them.

At the railroad station a strange agent, a relief for the regular man, came to the ticket window.

"Did you sell a ticket late this afternoon or this evening to a man with a cut lip?" Captain Tucker barked the question.

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"Why, yes." The agent spoke with a slow, maddening drawl. "Short, dark fellow. Couldn't help noticing that lip. Looked as though——"

"How many tickets did he buy?"

"Why, if I recollect, he bought one. Yes; one ticket."

"Where to?"

"Peekskill. Yes; I remember that. Just happens that I have a married daughter in Peek——"

Captain Tucker frothed. "Never mind your family. This is important. What train did he take?"

The agent was galvanized into more rapid speech. "The 6:29."

"Did you see him get on?"

"Yes. Yes; I did. I happened to be looking out the window——"

"Did he get on alone or did he have someone with him. Quick!"

"He got on alone."

No flicker of change showed in Dr. Stone's face, but Captain Tucker was staggered. Joe was suddenly wan and bleak. Had they followed the trail this far only to have it fail them. And then, abruptly, the police captain was pounding the grille of the ticket-window with a huge fist.

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"What time does that train make Peekskill? In twelve minutes? Get that key working. I want that man with the cut lip held. If he doesn't get off the train have it searched. Give me that telephone."

The captain called Peekskill police. Presently they were out on the platform and he took off his cap and fanned his face. Green signal lights blinked out of the darkness down the right of way.

"Doctor, what did he do with the boy?"

"Perhaps he did nothing," the doctor said quietly.

Joe stiffened with new hope. That tone of his uncle's—? But the captain, brooding, was lost in his own thoughts.

"There's a slant to this I don't understand," he said slowly. "That boy was kidnaped in broad daylight. Snapped out of his own yard. How could a stranger have brought him through a village where he was known? How could he have been taken past his own house out to the road?"

"I have been thinking about that," Dr. Stone admitted. The blind face was again intent. "Suppose we go back to the house."

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Mr. Foster hurried toward them with pathetic haste. "Any news?"

"The organ-grinder left for Peekskill on the 6:29," Captain Tucker told him. "I've telephoned and wired. They'll pick him up when the train gets there."

"Was Billy with him?"

The captain made a merciful answer. "I'm not sure."

Ira Close came across the yard through the moonlight. "You want me to pick up those pieces of plate, Mr. Foster?"

"I'll take care of them, Ira. I—I don't want Mrs. Foster to see them."

"Have you his cap?" Dr. Stone asked with that same understanding gentleness. "I don't believe he was ever taken out to the road. Now, Tucker, if you'll lead me to where the plate was dropped—. Lady, forward."

Joe could feel Ira Close beside him rubbing the injured hand as though it pained, but his eyes were on the man walking beside the dog. They

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came to the shattered pieces of crockery. The doctor held the cap to the dog's nose.

"Lady, find," he said quietly.

Joe trembled. What now? Nose to the ground, the great, tawny dog sniffed for the scent. And then it moved, not toward the road but off to the left toward a grove of apple trees. The blind man pulled on the leash and the dog stopped.

"What lies ahead, Foster?"

"The orchard, the barn where Ira has a room in the loft, the chicken runs, the cow shed, and Billy's rabbits."

Captain Tucker exploded. "Doctor, this is getting nowhere. The boy may have gone to the rabbits. That's the trail you may be following this minute."

In the moonlight the sightless eyes were calm. "Aren't you forgetting the broken plate, Captain? He started out with feed. Why should he go on without it?"

Beside him Joe Morrow could feel the hired man still rubbing the hand and hear the soft scraping of flesh along the bandage. The doctor appeared to listen to something in the night.

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"Are you going on?" Mr. Foster cried.

"Tomorrow," the blind man said with that same gentleness. "The night offers obstacles. We might miss something we should see."

"But to wait—to wait—" The voice broke.

"We wouldn't hold you in suspense a moment longer than necessary. Tomorrow, at daybreak. Have you the cap, Joe? Don't lose it."

Ira rumbled a heavy "good-night" and passed from the moonlight into the shadow of the orchard. A woman's voice called: "Pa! Pa! Captain Tucker's wanted on the telephone." The captain hurried toward the house. Dr. Stone spoke softly:

"Ira's been with you a long time, Foster?"

"Nine years. Surly, but a good worker. A bit gruffer than usual tonight. Billy was always a little afraid of him; that's probably on his mind. And then this shooting and the loss of his money."

"Money?"

"Three hundred dollars. He drew it out yesterday to send to his sister and carried it in a hip pocket. That's the pocket in which the organ-grinder put the note. The money's gone."

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The blind man's head was thrown back; Joe saw the lips strained and tight once more. Captain Tucker came out of the house, slowly.

"Bad news," he blurted. "Our man fooled us. Wasn't on the train; slipped off at one of the way stations."

Mr. Foster swayed unsteadily. "Don't," he begged hoarsely, "tell Billy's mother."

The policeman walked down the driveway with

the doctor. "That Italian may have left the train a station or two out, and come back for the boy. I've ordered every road out of the village guarded."

Joe came away with a choking lump in his throat. The blind man, holding the harness and walking close to the dog, whistled an almost soundless whistle. The boy knew, by this sign, that the brain behind the sightless eyes had caught a glimmer of light.

Suddenly, without warning, the apple-scented peace of the night was broken by a flash and a roar. A whistling whine filled the air.

"Drop!" Dr. Stone cried.

Not until he lay prone in the road did the boy grasp the significance of flash and roar. Somebody had fired on them from ambush. A shuddering chill ran up his spine, and sweat stood out upon his forehead. The moon-splashed world was silent again, and faintly to his nostrils came the drift of burnt powder.

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Dr. Stone stood up. "Another shot," he called clearly, "and I'll send the dog to tear you down. Come, Joe."

Quaking, Joe stood up. They moved ahead again, and the boy's nerves were torture-tight as he waited for another flash and roar. But the silence remained unbroken and they came at last to the welcome protection of home.

The boy's voice trembled. "Why did the organ-grinder come back and shoot at us?"

"That bullet," Dr. Stone said grimly, "was intended for Lady, not for us." His hand fell upon the dog's head. "Old girl, somebody's afraid you know too much."

In the chill dark of the following morning the boy and the man gulped hot coffee in the kitchen. Arising from the table Dr. Stone walked to a desk in the hall, took out a small first-aid kit, and slipped it into a pocket. Then man, boy and dog were out in the road, when the first golden streak was faint in the eastern sky.

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Captain Tucker's car stood in the driveway. Mr. Foster looked as though he had not slept. Ira Close, his right hand wrapped in a handkerchief, went about small chores.

Dr. Stone said: "Could Ira get Lady a drink, Foster?"

Ira brought water in a pan. The blind man, shifting the leash, stumbled against the dog and tottered. Joe, with a cry of alarm, sprang forward. But the doctor's arms, outstretched, had gone around the hired man; they slipped along the stout body, down, down—. He caught himself and stood erect. Ira Close swore morosely and swung an arm.

"That finger?" Dr. Stone asked, concerned. "I warned you. Why didn't you have a doctor see it?"

"I fixed it myself."

"Nonsense. Here; give it to me."

After a moment of hesitation the hand was held out. Joe watched his uncle's fingers move as though they had eyes. The tweezers came out of the kit. Abruptly the doctor's body was between him and the throbbing wound.

"Fever in here," the blind man said; "infected." Ira Close cried aloud. Joe glimpsed a corner of his uncle's face, intent, strained; then there was the drip of iodine, and Dr. Stone stepped back. The blind eyes were bland and serene.

"Have Mrs. Foster bandage it," he said.

Ira went into the house. The kitchen door slammed shut, and immediately tranquility left the doctor.

"Tucker, stay here. Joe, this way. A few minutes, Foster; just a few minutes."

Back where the broken plate had lain yesterday, Dr. Stone unhooked the leash and gave the dog the scent of the cap.

"Lady, find," he urged. The tawny dog, as though puzzled by the absence of the leash, looked up inquiringly. "Find," the man said again.

Lady, nose down, padded toward the orchard.

"Take me back, Joe."

The boy had the feeling that they hung in air. Ira Close came out of the house with a finger freshly bandaged. Captain Tucker gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Doctor! Where's the dog?"

Lady made her own answer. From some place in the near distance they heard her deep-toned, full-throated, insistent bark.

"Foster," Dr. Stone said quietly, "I think Lady has found your boy."

Two men began to run—Foster toward the orchard, Ira Close toward the road. To Joe Morrow the world whirled and spun. Dr. Stone cried, "Look out, Tucker; he has a gun." The policeman leaped, and the hired man went down. With amazing quickness brawny arms turned Ira over, and the first shaft of sunlight glinted on a blue barrel.

"See if there are two exploded cartridges," the doctor called.

Captain Tucker broke the gun. "Two," he said. "What does this mean, Doctor?"

"It means you have your kidnaper."

And so it came that Ira Close, snarling and venomous, sat handcuffed in Captain Tucker's police car.

"Where's the boy, Doctor?"

"In the barn, most likely. Not a bad idea, was it? Snatch the boy and hide him away three hundred feet from his home. Who'd think of looking for him there? Why should anybody look for him there when the hue and cry had gone out for an organ-grinder who had disappeared after trying to disguise himself?"

"Why did Ira do it? You'll have to ask him. The papers have been full of kidnappings and ransoms. Probably, with a greed for money, he'd been turning the thing in his mind for a long time. Then came the organ-grinder, and that brought inspiration. But there was one point, Tucker, you failed to take into account, and that was why I was not surprised to learn the Italian had boarded the train alone. A man, fleeing after a crime, does not shave off his mustache and leave the clipped hairs behind him to advertise his disguise.

"Ira snapped Billy up yesterday afternoon. The boy had never liked him; there was a momentary struggle. The signs of it lay upon the ground. Probably he hid the boy in the barn loft and gagged him. With the coming of night there was alarm in the Foster home. 'Ira, go see if you can find Billy!' He had anticipated that command. And so he went forth, and managed to run a noose up his arms, and came back with the note and a cock-and-bull story. He was loosely tied. Did you ever see a captive who was not tied tightly? For this Italian to tie Ira, a taller man, he would have to put away his gun. Can you picture 185-pound Ira allowing a 135-pound stripling, no longer flourishing a pistol, to wind him with a rope? It didn't hold together.

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"Nor was that the only point where the story didn't hold together. Ira made positive identification of the organ-grinder. He identified him through a foreign accent. But he said nothing of a previous meeting until Joe told of seeing them in conversation. Where had that conversation been held? Outside the bank. Not significant in itself, but strikingly significant when we find Ira suddenly announcing to Foster that he had drawn three hundred dollars from the bank to send to his sister and that it had been stolen from his pocket.

"What's your guess about that three hundred dollars, Tucker? Mine is that it went to the organ-grinder. The Italian is guilty of no wrong. All he knows is that a stranger offered him three hundred dollars to shave off his mustache, abandon his organ and monkey, disappear quietly and leave the train before reaching the station for which he had purchased a ticket. Why did Ira tell us about the three hundred dollars? What's your guess, Tucker? Mine is that he was suddenly touched with a cold fear. The withdrawal of the money was a matter of record at the bank. The money was taken out the day of the kidnaping, the day of the organ-grinder's disappearance. These facts might have given rise to a few unpleasant questions."

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Joe, breathless, looked at Captain Tucker. The policeman frowned doubtfully.

"How about that shot in the finger, Doctor? Do you mean he shot himself?"

"What's your guess?" Dr. Stone asked mildly. "Mine is that, when he was sent out to look for Billy, he fired a shot in the air as an afterthought. Do you remember, when we got there, that his hand pained? He kept rubbing it as though it throbbed. Infection doesn't set in so quickly, Captain; there must be a period of incubation. He had cut that finger earlier in the day. He objected to going to a doctor even after I warned him of lock-jaw. Why? Because he

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didn't fear the lock-jaw that may follow a gunshot wound. Because he knew that no doctor would look at that wound and believe it came from a bullet. Of course, he let me handle it; but, then, I am blind. He figured I didn't count. My guess is that, in running the rope over his arms, he reopened a wound he had received earlier in the day."

"By the Eternal," Captain Tucker burst out, "this seems to be nothing but guesses. You guess this and you guess that. How about a few facts. We have placed this man in irons. If Billy isn't found you and I may discover ourselves in a sweet peck of trouble."

A voice called from the house: "Captain Tucker! Telephone."

The captain mounted the porch steps. The doctor, fishing out his pipe, methodically stuffed it with tobacco.

"I can't understand," he said musingly, "why you didn't light out last night, Ira, after trying to shoot Lady. Afraid to run and lose five thousand dollars, and afraid to stay and be caught. You were in one sweet peck of trouble, weren't you, Ira?" Ira said nothing.

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"How were you going to work it? Collect the money and then get word to them where to find the boy?"

The hired man glared in impotent fury.

Captain Tucker, looking slightly dazed, came back to the car. "They picked up our Italian in a small village fifteen miles above Peekskill."

"Search him, Captain?"

"Of course."

"Did they," the doctor asked mildly, "find three hundred dollars in his pocket?"

"Three hundred dollars to the penny in one roll." The captain fanned his face with his uniform cap. Abruptly the motion of the cap stopped. "Look here, Doctor; you said you found the first clew in that injured hand."

"The first clew and the last," the doctor told him.

"The last? Did you find something else when you dressed that finger a little while ago?"

The blind man puffed serenely on the pipe. "I found a nasty cut and something foreign imbedded in the cut. It had set up the infection; I could feel it under the pressure of my fingers. I took it out with the tweezers. Something hard and gritty, Captain. I haven't seen it; it's safely stowed away in my pocket. But I'll stake my soul it's a chipped splinter from a broken blue plate."

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At that moment Joe Morrow saw Lady and Mr. Foster emerge from the orchard, and the man carried a small boy in his arms.

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