THE REPORTER AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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The Reporter And Other Stories

1. — THE REPORTER

YORK SYMON was the perfect police reporter. If he had a fault it was one which he shared in common with others who were brought into intimate association with law-breakers—namely, a certain sneaking sympathy with the criminal classes. And his acquaintance was a fairly large one.

He knew forgers, bank robbers, burglars, petty larcenists of all kinds. He knew, and was known, to every detective in town, from the chief in his padded chair to the cold-footed "watchers," and he had spent week-ends with the public executioner.

From "York Symon" to "Y. Symon" and from "Y. Symon" to "Wise Symon" was a natural process of transition, and it was as Wise Symon he was known in journalistic, legal and criminal circles. He was responsible for every scoop that the Telephone-Herald had published in the past five years. He had tracked down the Brinder Gang; he had exposed the Dope Syndicate; he was instrumental in restoring to Mrs. Leverson-Bowle her diamonds—and that without a scandal—for the lady could hardly have explained the circumstances in which she lost them. But, mainly, Wise Symon was wise in the way of high-class tricksters, the top- notch Con. gangs and those swindlers who haunt the great hotels of our big cities.

He could smell a fake a mile away, knew the habits and customs of every rogue that ever turned the hair of a hotel detective from russet brown to dirty grey, and it was only natural that the happiest hunting ground was the Hotel Ferdinand, because to the Hotel Ferdinand, with its gorgeous suites, its perfect service and its somewhat liberal-minded proprietor, came the best and the worst.

There was a lady named English Nell. Her real name was Eleanor Meredith Jusun; but she earned the sobriquet in the southern states of America. It would be difficult to define her speciality, and one may generalize her attainments by describing her as an all-round swindler.

"No," said the hotel clerk as he turned the register—Wise Symon lounging his tall figure across the counter in such a way as to suggest that he had had a collapse— "there's no one here, Y, who answers to the description. What's she been doing?"

"Oh, just being naughty," said Wise Symon vaguely. "She's the Lady Angela Follingham, the beautiful daughter of the Karl of Follingham."

"That's no offence in a democratic country," said the clerk.

"Not if you don't borrow money on your name," yawned Wise Symon. "But if that doesn't impress you, let me tell you that she's Miss Sophonia Griggs, Secretary and Treasurer to the Young Women's Outing League."

"That seems pretty good to me," said the clerk. "I never did think young ladies got enough outings, anyway."

"The mirror's over there," said Wise Symon; "have a good look at yourself."

"Well, there's nobody here. There isn't much of a story in her, anyway."

"Leave the literature to experts," said Mr. Symon, uncurling himself from the counter. "I'll be looking in again later."

A lady came through the glass doors of the vestibule, a page carrying her one small valise. She was well but quietly dressed, and to Wise Symon's eyes was agitated. She was undoubtedly pretty, in a pale, black-and-white kind of way, and she was young. She came to the counter.

"You had my wire?" she said; "Miss Mary Smith."

"Oh, yes, Miss Smith," said the clerk, taking out a key; "384, second floor I hope the room will suit you."

He swung the book round and she wrote her name hurriedly. Wise Symon noticed that she cast furtive glances towards the door. He strolled over to where the bored page was waiting with the valise and observed that a letter or a number of letters had been painted out and he became interested.

By a well-manoeuvred accident he knocked the valise flatways, so that the stamped inscription lay under the light. It was a new valise, and he chuckled—for the figuring was a coronet, beneath which were the letters "S.-M."

He came back to the counter as the clerk was searching for letters and stood, his elbow on its polished surface, till the lady, the page and the bag had disappeared into the elevator.

"Did you see that?" he asked.

"See what?"

Wise Symon pointed to a small handkerchief which the lady had evidently left behind her on the counter.

"I'll tell you something," said Symon. "I admit it's waste of time telling you anything, because you know it all; but I'm telling you something now that, to a man of your limited intelligence, should put me in the Holmes and Watson class."

"What is it?" asked the clerk curiously.

"That handkerchief," said Wise Symon, "is embroidered in the corner with the letters S.-M.",

"How do you know?" asked the startled clerk.

"Examine," said the wise one. The clerk unrolled the little handkerchief, and sure enough on one of the corners was embroidered a miniature coronet and the letters S.-M. "You know my methods, Watson," said Mr. Symon magnificently; "shall I tell you something. The lady is the Duchess, the Countess, the Viscountess, or the Marchioness de S.-M. She's travelling incognito. She doesn't want anyone to know that she's here in this little town, that's why her initials are covered over so that a blind man can read them; that's why she leaves, by a most annoying accident, her handkerchief underneath your myopic gaze."

"But I don't get you," said the clerk. "If she's travelling incognito, why should she give herself away?"

"I wonder," said Wise Symon. "I wonder what she was looking for and who she was expecting," he said, as much to himself as to his audience.

"She would hardly worry about the police. Will you let me take this handkerchief up to her?"

The clerk hesitated.

"The boss doesn't care about his guests being annoyed, you know, Y." But Wise Symon put the handkerchief in his pocket with a laugh.

"384 I think you said. If you don't mind I would like to use your 'phone."

He got Detective Hackett, who was equally interested in the matter.

"It's Symon speaking," he said. "You might tell me, is English Nell working alone or is she running a side partner ?"

"She had a side partner," said Hackett's voice, "but she turned him down; a fellow named Roderique, a Spaniard and a pretty bad citizen."

"Is she likely to be afraid of his following her?" asked Wise Symon, very much interested.

The man at the other end of the wire laughed.

"I should say so," he said drily. "She left him flat in Kansas City."

"Good," said Wise Symon, cutting short the inquiry which was coming by the simple process of hanging up the receiver and making his way up to Suite 384.

"Come in," said the girl's voice, and he walked into the sitting-room, closing the door behind him. She had taken off the beaver coat she wore and was sitting at the writing-table smoking a little cigarette which she threw into an ash- tray as he entered.

"I should like my dinner in my room. Will you ask them to send the menu?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Wise Symon cheerfully. "I am not a member of the staff of this hotel, but a little thing like that won't prevent my passing on your order."

She looked at him in surprise.

"Aren't you a member of the staff?"

"No," said Wise Symon; "I came up to restore this to you." He produced the handkerchief.

"Oh, thank you, thank you very much," she said. She took it from his hand with a little frown.

"I am a reporter," explained Wise Symon, and he thought he detected a hint of alarm in her eyes. "

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Well, Miss Smith," said Wise Symon, "I have reason to believe that you are a runaway countess. Shall I say the Countess S.-M.?" Wise Symon stood and admired her artistic hesitancy. Never let it be forgotten he had a sneaking sympathy with all people who earned their living by avoiding the law.

"I am the Duchess of Svorza-Marino," she said in a tone in which hauteur and nervousness were perfectly blended. "I am travelling incognito, and I should be greatly obliged to you if you would say nothing about my being in this hotel or indeed in town at all."

"Why, that's asking a lot," smiled Wise Symon. "I am maintained at a princely salary by a newspaper in order to discover little details like that, Miss Smith, or should I say, Your Grace? You don't talk like an Italian," he said, carelessly.

"No," she replied; "I am really an American girl. I met the Duke when I was on a visit to South America, and we eloped together. I have lived with him just as long as I could, and now I have left him. He lives an abominable life."

"Is that so?" asked the sympathetic Symon. "Well, that's a pretty good story!"

"But I don't want it in the newspapers," she said hurriedly. "Please, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Symon."

"Please, Mr. Symon, as a personal favour to me, don't let it get into the Press. I want to avoid my husband, who is a man of the most violent temper, and ever since I divorced him—"

"Ever since you divorced him in Kansas City," murmured Symon, and she looked at him in doubt.

"No, not in Kansas City," she said, "I divorced him in Reno."

"I have heard of such things," said the wise one, wiser than the father of owls at that moment.

"You say that he pursues you?"

"He has uttered the most awful threats," she said, and here her agitation was undoubtedly genuine. "If he knew I was here I don't know what would happen."

Wise Symon looked at her critically and on the whole approvingly. She conveyed the illusion of helplessness. She was undoubtedly a woman, and undoubtedly in genuine distress, and he had a kind heart, had Y. After all, he thought, there was a lot in what the hotel clerk had said.

A lady of doubtful antecedents masquerading under a false name, even though that name partook of splendour, was not so unusual an incident that he could expect it to lead the page.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "I have got to think about this."

She nodded.

"I realize that it's a big thing to ask you," she said; "but I feel you will do it for me."

He scratched his head.

"You've got me rattled," said Wise Symon, "and now I'm giving it to you straight, that when I came here I expected you'd only be too glad to see me and to find yourself announced in splash letters. This is a new one on me. Honest! What's your graft?"

She laughed.

"What funny language you use," she said coldly.

"I was just asking you to do me a favour, which any woman is entitled to ask of any man. Surely there's nothing remarkable in that. And you may do me a further favour when you pass the office. Will you tell them that under no circumstances are they to allow my husband to come up to me ? They can't mistake him, he is tall and dark and foreign looking."

"Yes, yes," said Wise Symon impatiently; "I'll do all that."

He thought a moment.

"I'm going to my office. Do you mind if I come back and see you in about half- an-hour's time?"

"I shall be very pleased," she said so simply that he looked hard at her and smiled, with which expression of his scepticism he left her. He made his way straight to the office and dutifully delivered her message.

"Now you can tell me, Augustus," he said, "getting your wits to work in the least possible time, is there any money in this hotel?"

"Money?"

"Is anybody staying here with money, with portable property, that can be detached with little or no difficulty. I am not referring to bank presidents, Pittsburg millionaires and theatrical managers, but is there anybody here with real money?"

"Solomon's here," said the clerk, after a moment's thought.

"Which Solomon?" snarled Wise Symon. "The biblical bigamist?"

"Solomon the jeweller."

"Has he got any stones with him?" asked Wise Symon quickly.

"I believe so," said the other. "I am not supposed to have any information on the subject. I have nothing in the safe, but I happen to know he came here to see Willie Osborne."

Willie Osborne was the hectic son of a doting father, and Willie's hobby was applying chorus girls to diamonds.

"Solomon is close. He doesn't tell you any of his business, but he does a lot of trade here."

"That's it then," said Wise Symon thoughtfully. "What is the number of his room?"

"396; that's on the same floor as your countess."

"Duchess," said Mr. Symon grimly.

He hailed a taxi outside the door and drove back to the office and the city editor greeted him without enthusiasm.

"Got that story?" he asked. Wise Symon shook his head.

"Well you had better hurry up and get it. She's in town, the lady you're looking for."

"How do you know?" asked the startled investigator.

"The York Courier sent a reporter up. She came in here to enquire if you were in town."

"She? Is it a she?"

"A pretty smart she," said the city editor, picking up a card and handing it to him. He read:

MISS MARIE DAINLEY

York Courier Times

"She says English Nell is in town and is working on a big job. They got the tip down at York from a man she's been working with, a fellow named Roderique."

"Where is this girl reporter now?"

"She's gone off to the hotel. You must have passed her," said the city editor.

"Right!" Wise Symon went down the steps three at a time and jumped into his waiting taxi.

He couldn't afford to wait for the denouement. He must call the girl's bluff and get the story from her before the police net closed in upon her, and certainly before Miss Marie Dainley of the York Courier got busy. Incidentally he would have to side-track his rival as best he could. He reached the hotel and the clerk was evidently looking for him, for he beckoned him.

"There's been another reporter here—a peach!" he smirked. "Where is she now?"

"She's gone up to interview Her Ladyship—no there she is."

He pointed to a slim figure in a tailored suit who was sitting on a bench writing rapidly in a note-book which she held on her knee. Wise Symon walked across to her.

"Miss Dainley," he said, raising his hat.

"Oh yes, you are Mr. Symon, aren't you," and rising, offered her hand.

"Have you seen her yet?" she asked.

"Seen who?" demanded Symon with bland innocence. "

"Why, isn't there somebody in the hotel?" she asked significantly. "The clerk told me that you were looking after a lady who was in 384."

Wise Symon cursed the clerk under his breath. If he hadn't opened his mouth Miss Dainley would have been wholly in the dark as to the identity of the visitor.

"She calls herself a Duchess or something, doesn't she? At least, she calls herself Miss Smith, that's what the clerk says."

"Have you seen her?" asked Symon.

"No," said the girl.

"Well, don't," said Wise Symon; "you are on the wrong track. This lady has been identified and known to me as the Duchess of—as a Duchess," he could not remember her name, "for years."

She eyed him oddly.

"Oh," she said, and was not convinced.

"You're wasting your time," said Wise Symon in agitation. "Why don't you go to the depot. She will never come to a place like this."

"Oh," said the girl again. Again a fit of compunction seized him, for he extended his charity not only to the criminal classes but to any pretty girl with a straight nose and solemn grey eyes, even if she was a member of his own profession.

"Well, maybe you are right," he said; "but will you let me go and see her first?"

"Suppose we go up together," said the girl. Whatever answer he may have made to this suggestion was not framed. A man had passed through the swing doors and stood looking about him in the entrance hall, a tall, dissolute-looking man who was obviously a foreigner and presumably a Spaniard. He had not a nice face, and Wise Symon watched him as he crossed the vestibule to the desk. Then he strolled over in his wake.

"That's she," the man was saying, stabbing the book with his finger. "Mees Smit; ah yes, I know dat was the name."

"You can't go up," said the clerk.

"She is expecting me," said the visitor. "It is my wife." And, waving aside the protest of the clerk, he leapt rather than walked to the elevator.

Symon turned and ran after him, but the elevator door clicked in his face. Criminal or no criminal, he was not going to stand by and see the girl ill-treated, and he waited impatiently for the elevator to descend.

"I'll let you go up first," said a voice at his elbow. He turned and saw the girl reporter, and nodded.

No. 384 was at the far end of the corridor, but he sprinted along and tried the door without any preliminary knock. It was locked. There were two doors to the suite, one leading into the sitting-room, the other into the bedroom, and he made for the second door.

This was unfastened and he walked in, closing the door behind him. The connecting doors between the two rooms were wide open and he heard the man's impassioned voice and a little scream. With two strides he had passed into the sitting-room. The girl was on her knees, the men hand about her throat.

"I told you I would kill you," he was screaming, "You leave me, eh!" And with every word he seemed to be tightening his grip, for the woman's voice had sunk to a hoarse gurgle of sound.

"Excuse me," said Wise Symon, and jerked his fist under the man's jaw. It was not a hard jolt as jolts go, but it sent the man staggering back. For a second he stooped to spring, and his evil eyes held murder. Then Wise Symon was on him. Two blows he struck and the man went down in a heap whimpering and sobbing.

"Get up," said Wise Symon sternly; "get up, you poor thing."

He jerked the intruder to his feet and shook him.

"She's finished with you, Pedro, or Michael Angelos, or whatever you call yourself. Do you understand? She's finished. You go and find another partner. She's got her troubles."

He unlocked the door with one hand and flung it open. A figure stood on the threshold and Wise Symon grinned.

"Give me five minutes, Miss Dainley," he said; and kicked the man into the corridor, waiting till he picked himself up and slouched towards the stairway. Then with a little nod to the girl, he shut the door, and locked it behind him.

He turned to the woman who sat crouched in a chair, pale and shaking,

"Now see here," he said kindly, "you are going to get me into trouble. I'm paid to get a story out of you, not to be your gallant little knight. You take a friend's advice and skip. There's a young lady bloodhound outside the door

who is thirsting for literary gore. Go into the bedroom. I will have her in and detain her until you get clear away." She shook her head.

"I have something to do," she said huskily.

"I know all about that," replied Wise Symon; "and someone to do, but I am giving you good advice. Maybe I am going to lose my job for giving it. You get out of town. Anyway, you were a fool to come. Old Solomon's a converted gunman, and carries his sparklers at the bottom of his pistol pocket. Just wait!"

He walked stealthily to the door, quietly unlocked it and looked out. The girl was a little way along the corridor and her back was towards him. He closed the door again.

"Now is your chance," he said. "I tell you there's a female sleuth in the corridor outside and she's after you. She calls herself a reporter, but she's more likely to be a detective sent to mind Solomon. Have you got any money?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't very much." He took out his pocket-book and opened it. "I have enough to get you away," he said, "and I'll fix it with the hotel people. Are you going?"

"No," she said quietly; "you have been very, very good to me, Mr. Symon, kinder than any man has been to me all my life. I shall never forget it, and I hope that I shall have an opportunity of repaying you."

She blushed under his steadfast gaze and dropped her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly; "but you don't suppose you are going to stay here as the Duchess of Svorza-Marino, and not attract attention, do you? The whole hotel knows who you are, and to-morrow you will be surrounded by reporters, your picture will be in the papers and you will be jugged."

Somebody knocked at the door.

"Well, it's your own fault," he said a little sadly; "I am going to admit Lady Holmes."

He stood waiting, but she made no sign.

"I am the poorest kind of fellow I know," he said with a, laugh. "But somehow I haven't got it in me to make capital out of your trouble, Nell."

He unlocked the door and stepped back. It wasn't the girl, but Trencher; and Trencher was a lawyer of such standing and respectability that even policemen saluted him.

"Why, Mr. Trencher," said Wise Symon, "I didn't think this was your kind of case."

"Hello Y., what are you doing here?"

The girl jumped up to meet him.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Trencher."

"I would have come before, Duchess, if I had known you were here," said the lawyer, shaking hands with her heartily. "I met your late husband as I came in and I don't think he will trouble you again."

Wise Symon was standing open-mouthed and the girl held out her hand to him.

"I don't know what I should have done but for Mr. Symon," she said.

"Oh, you are acquainted, are you," said Trencher; and then: "I suppose it was you who made him look as if he had been pulled out of an ash-bin. A regular bad fellow that, Symon, and the Duchess is well rid of him."

2. — THE WRITINGS OF MACONOCHIE HOE

THAT Wise Symon was a great reporter nobody has ever seriously questioned. If he had a weakness it was his inability to tackle effectively any case in which a woman was incriminated. A month ago Maconochie Hoe's greatest book was published. Those who saw the beautifully bound volume on his shelf smiled knowingly and congratulated him upon his wonderful recovery of the Hoe Manuscripts. But now, as ever, Wise Symon denied that he ever handled those remarkable manuscripts, and this narrative, given for the first time, supports his statement.

Wise Symon, as has been remarked before, was something more than a police correspondent. Any cub reporter with a knowledge of shorthand and a reasonably good memory can place on record events which have happened. It was Wise Symon's speciality, and for this he was renowned from one end of the country to the other, that he created the events which he recorded.

From the smallest beginnings he could erect the most imposing fabrics, which were fabrics of' substance and fact. His theory was that the man was charged with something less than his real offence. He believed that behind every detected crime there was a greater crime which was undetected and, on this theory, he had brought to justice such criminals as the Brenner Gang (John Brenner had originally been charged with speeding an unnumbered motor-car, and it was Wise Symon who discovered why that number was missing and what made John in such a particular hurry one night in July).

It was his faith that, however interesting a case might be, there was something more interesting behind it, and even the novel crime of "The Ransomeers" did not seem to him to exhaust all the possibilities in those extraordinary cases.

"The Ransomeers" was a nickname which had been given by Wise Symon himself to a small gang of criminals. They were criminals with unusual methods, who, as their name implied, derived their handsome competence not so much from the abduction of persons as from holding to ransom those personal properties "of no value to anybody but their owners," the tale of loss and the plea for recovery of which fill no little advertising space in the Press of the world from year to year. Every well-off man or woman owns some material thing which of itself is worth (figuratively) ten cents net on the open market, but to which he or she attaches a value beyond computation. It was on this class that "The Ransomeers" preyed. It cost that wealthy man, Sykes Main, over £1,000 to get back his father's watch. Dubonnet, of Dubonnet and Benson, paid as much for the skin of a lion which he had

shot in Africa, and which, incidentally, had almost killed Dubonnet. Mrs. Simson, the wife of Simson's Amalgamated Breweries (there was also a Mr. Simson somewhere in the background but he never appeared), had paid £2,000 for the recovery of an engagement ring. It was not the engagement ring which Mr. Simson had given her, but such a symbol of bygone romance as you might expect a stout, red-faced woman would keep in a secret place with letters tied up with blue ribbon and sprigs of rosemary.

"The Ransomeers" began by being a novelty and ended by being a nuisance. Unpleasant things were said about the police, as unpleasant things are invariably said on such occasions, but the good work of collecting other people's souvenirs went on.

Wise Symon took more than an academic interest in the operations of the gang: he spent a stealthy fortnight watching a suspect, and one rainy evening he walked into the Central Police Office on the Embankment and asked to see the Chief Superintendent. He was tired-looking and unshaven, as was natural, for he had not been to bed for two days and two nights.

The great policeman came out. "Hullo! Symon," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"I've found your 'Ransomeers,'" said Symon wearily. "The two brothers McGuire and a man named Dolan."

"The devil!" said the Chief.

"He may be a fourth member," said Symon, "but I'll leave you to deal with him."

"Are you sure?" asked Superintendent Briscoe seriously. "I thought the McGuires were running straight. They haven't been in trouble for two years. You mean Patsy and Mike, don't you ?"

Wise Symon nodded.

"They do the lifting and Dolan does the locating. Dolan is the clever man of the party. You'll usually find him lunching at fashionable restaurants, and he knows most of the lads about town. That is how he got his information. Dolan is also the go-between when it comes to paying up."

"Good for you, if this is true," said the Chief, rising and striking the bell. "I'll pull those fellows in straightaway. I'll act on your information and get the details after."

"You'll find the details between Mike's mattresses," said Wise Symon. "I've been on their track for about a month, ever since they pinched the Moses woman's pet chow and threatened to return it ear by ear unless she paid up £400."

Answering the bell came Detective Roon, at sight of whom, despite his weariness, Wise Symon must affect startled surprise. Detective Roon, with his pointed moustache, his well-polished hair, and his complacency, was invariably provocative.

"Hullo! Symon," nodded Roon easily, "I haven't seen you for a long time. I've got a lot of little things to tell you."

"I'll bet they're little," said Symon.

"Take Strutt and Bransome," said the Chief, "and any other men you want, arrest the brothers McGuire and a man named Bolan. Mr. Symon will give you some information as to where he is to be found."

"Cailley's Restaurant—third table," said Wise Symon promptly. "He's dining a peroxide blonde from the Hip-i-addy Beauty Chorus."

The telephone bell on the Chief's table shrilled.

"See what that is, Roon," said the Chief.

Roon picked up the receiver and answered in monosyllables. Presently he put the receiver down, paused for drama's sake, and then:

" 'The Ransomeers' have been at it again, sir," he said breathlessly. "They've pinched the Hoe Manuscripts!"

"The Hoe Manuscripts!" Wise Symon whistled, and all his weariness seemed to fall from him. "Why, of course, they'd go for those! I never thought of 'em. I've been trying to think of all the precious heirlooms of the city, and the Hoe Manuscripts slipped past me!"

"Pull in the McGuires, quick!" said the Chief, addressing Roon.

"I seem to know something about the Hoe Manuscripts. What are they?" he asked, after Roon had left.

Wise Symon took a cigar from his pocket, thoughtfully bit off the end and lit it before he humped himself into an easy-chair.

"Not Maconochie Hoe?" asked the Superintendent suddenly.

Wise Symon nodded.

"Maconochie Hoe, of course," said the policeman. "I've heard a lot about those writings of his that he left when he died, but I'm not much of a literary man."

"Anyway, you knew about Maconochie Hoe," said Wise Symon grimly.

The Chief smiled.

"Oh, yes, I knew him," he said. "I've had him three times in this very charge room, twice being held down by officers—that was when he had delirium tremens. And, of course, I know his books are the best sellers on the market, My wife has the complete collection—there was one published last month—let me see, what was it called?"

"Her Dreams Came Not True," said Wise Symon.

"What is the story, anyway?" asked the Chief.

"An unpleasant story, prettily told," replied Wise Symon with a little grimace. "Maconochie Hoe was the biggest thing in writers we have had in this country for twenty years. You may not know anything about the business side of literature, Chief, but I can tell you that that man coined money. His books sold by the hundreds of thousands. If Hoe had kept straight, he'd have been a very rich man. If he had only looked upon the wine when it was red he would have been alive and prosperous; but nothing short of rainbow variations suited Maconochie. He went right through the spectrum—from orange bitters to green Chartreuse."

"Oh, yes! I remember—and he married too."

Wise Symon nodded gravely.

"He married the sweetest girl that ever put a pen to paper," he said. "Sylvia Maxson. I don't know where Maconochie came from—out of the gutter, I guess. Maybe, if he hadn't drunk he wouldn't have risen. I usually find that people who have to be doped before they're inspired are built that way. But she's aristocrat all through—at least, she married—" he paused, "and went through hell."

The Chief nodded.

"Yes, I recall the court case," he said.

"There were one or two court cases in which she figured," said Wise Symon. "She brought an action against him to secure a separation. He stood up in court and made suggestions about her that would have brought a blush to the cheeks of Ananias."

"What I can't quite understand," said Briscoe, "is about these manuscripts. How is it that, although he has been dead for four or five years, his stories are still published—were those the writings he left?"

"He was a prolific writer," explained Symon. "I should say he wrote novels in his sleep. Stories with just a little bit of sex and a great deal of sentiment—the kind of sob stuff that goes straight to your heart. Boozers and dope fiends have the knack of it. He wrote a plenty, but the market couldn't absorb more than two books of his a year, and I suppose that the others he wrote were put by. At any rate, he had a round dozen in his safe when he died. To everybody's surprise he left his manuscripts to the wife he hated and whom he had never ceased to revile."

"But if your McGuire story is right, there should be no difficulty in getting back Mrs. Hoe's property," said the Chief.

That Wise Symon's information was well-founded was proved beyond doubt within an hour. The two McGuires were arrested in their respective beds, to which they had retired like good citizens, and they surrendered to the processes of the law with the philosophy which is the personal charm of a certain section of the criminal classes. Dolan was less of a philosopher, being the cleverer of the trio. He showed fight, and there was an exciting ten minutes before they got the gun out of his hand and removed him, handcuffed and voluble, to the nearest police cell.

A search of the McGuires' premises discovered sufficient evidence to convict them ten times over. Briscoe interviewed Mike McGuire in the cell.

"Make it as easy as you can for us, Superintendent," said the earnest Michael. "We've done nobody any harm, and we haven't had a winner for a month."

"I'll order up a squad of marines to hear that story," said Briscoe good-humouredly; "it's the kind of fiction they're partial to. What about the Hoe Manuscripts? Before you speak," he said, "I'll tell you all we know. Mrs. Hoe's apartment was burgled while she was out to dinner; the safe in her study was forced, was found open when she returned, and empty. You were seen outside the building, and I've got the evidence of a cab-driver who can identify both you and your brother as having been driven away from the corner of the block about the hour the burglary was committed."

Mike shook his head vigorously.

"I'm going to tell you the truth, anyway. You can believe it or not, as you like. It is true that me and Patsy smashed that place. We'd heard a lot about the Hoe Manuscripts and their value, and Dolan, who's of a literary turn of mind, thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to pinch 'em. We reckoned they'd be worth three or four hundred, anyway. So Patsy went and did some window-cleaning at the apartments, got friendly with one of the servants, and found that Mrs. Hoe was dining with friends. We went up there to-night and we busted the safe all right."

"Well?" replied Briscoe, as the other paused.

"There was nothing in it," replied the burglar earnestly. "Patsy did the job and I looked on. It took him fifteen minutes to get the safe open—and it was empty."

"Empty!" repeated the Chief.

"It's the truth I'm telling you," said the man vehemently. "That safe was full of nothing except a few old account books. Somebody had been there before us."

The Chief shook his head.

"I'm giving it you straight," said the man. "After all, it doesn't do me any good telling you a lie. We'll have to go down for smashing the safe we shouldn't get very much more for taking the manuscripts."

Which seemed logical to Wise Symon when the story was told him by Detective Roon.

"Now my theory is," said Roon, "that there's another gang working. Any man of common sense knows that McGuire's speaking the truth."

"Even you know that," said Wise Symon unpleasantly. "Have you seen Mrs. Hoe?"

Roon nodded his head.

"She won't give me much information. She referred me to her publishers. I went down there and all that they could tell me was that there were six manuscripts of the late Maconochie which had disappeared."

"Did you get their titles?" Mr. Roon smiled broadly.

"Why, of course, my dear fellow," he said, with insolent familiarity. "You don't suppose that I'd go there and not get the titles?"

"I expect you didn't think of them until he gave them to you," accused Wise Symon. "Maybe – maybe not," said Roon uncomfortably. "At any rate, here they are." He pulled a, sheet of paper from his waistcoat pocket, adjusted pince- nez.

"Here are the titles," he said. "The first is 'Farewell! Farewell!' The second is 'Her Humbled Pride.' The third is 'The Best Hated.' The fourth is 'Her Pride in the Dust.' The fifth is 'Little Miss Nose-in-the-Air,' and the sixth is 'She Married for Fame.' "

Wise Symon jotted down the titles and nodded. "I'll see Drenkew," he said. "He's more likely to talk to a man of genius and sensibility than to well, to you, for example."

"Thank you," said Roon, elaborately sarcastic.

Mr. Drenkew, of the publishers, Drenkew & Hurd, could offer little more information than Roon had procured.

"You pretty well know the facts, Mr. Symon," he said. "Our late client, Maconochie Hoe, left a number of finished manuscripts at his death, and these were bequeathed by his will to his wife when he died – happily for her."

"Why do you say happily for her?" asked Symon.

Mr. Brenkew shrugged.

"The character of Mr. Hoe is pretty well known to you. He died absolutely penniless, in spite of his huge income. His wife, as you know, was a writer when he married her. In fact, we published one or two of her books, and it was at this office that Maconochie Hoe first met her. I feel inclined to say 'unfortunately,'" smiled Mr. Drenkew. "We knew that he had several books on the way, but until he referred to them in his will we had no idea that he had such a large number. The works which we have published of his since his death have been even more successful than those published in his lifetime, and Mrs. Hoe has a very handsome competence. It is a most serious matter for her that these manuscripts are stolen."

"Hoe did not collaborate with his wife?" fished Wise Symon.

Mr. Brenkew shook his head. "Never! He was jealous of her. When he married Sylvia Maxson he smashed a very promising career. A few months

after she was married she submitted a very excellent story to us—better than anything that Maconochie Hoe had ever written, in my judgment. Very indiscreetly one of my readers expressed that opinion, and Hoe came down one morning, demanded his wife's manuscript, and burnt it in front of my eyes—that was the kind of man Maconochie Hoe was.

"The six years of her married life must have been a hell on earth for the poor girl, and it is wonderful to me that she survived it. He killed her career as effectively as he killed her faith in human nature. That he should at the last repent, and endeavour to make some reparation for the wrong he had done her, is truly remarkable. Remember, that up to the very last week of his life he was ill-treating her."

Wise Symon scratched his chin. "Can you tell me any peculiarities of Maconochie Hoe?" The other shook his head. "I think you know them all," he said drily. "I was looking up correspondence I have had with him, and if ever handwriting gave away a man, his does." He opened a portfolio, turned some sheets of correspondence, and showed a letter written in a large, straggling hand to his interested visitor.

"Look at the egotism of it," said Drenkew. "The weird calligraphy—every other word beginning with a capital letter—he put that style into his books too, and we had some job to persuade him to restrict this mannerism."

Wise Symon was looking at the letter.

"Did he always write in green ink?"

"Invariably. That was one of his little eccentricities."

"Can you explain," asked Wise Symon, "why he should leave her valuable property? Was he generous with her when he was alive?"

"Quite the contrary," said Mr. Drenkew. "He was the meanest man with money, so far as his wife was concerned, that I have ever met. He paid all the household bills himself, and allowed her just enough to clothe herself decently. She was reduced to selling stories surreptitiously to the magazines. That is one of the most inexplicable features of his life. He undoubtedly made the will, and it was found in his drawer and was witnessed by two servants—a parlour-maid and a cook—whom he had called up from the kitchen one riotous evening about three months before his death, to read over the document and to affix their signatures. There is not the slightest doubt as to the authenticity of the will. The only mystery is why he made it at all. If you are curious about the will I can show you a photograph of it," said Drenkew, and, rising from his desk, he unlocked a

safe and took from a drawer a mounted photograph. This was undoubtedly Hoe's writing, thought Wise Symon, who was something of a handwriting expert. He read the photographed document through, and handed it back to the other without a word.

"Of the books specified there," said Mr. Brenkew, as he locked away the photograph, "we have published two: 'Her Dreams Came Not True' and 'Her Education' – both of which have achieved a remarkable sale."

"And the remainder, I gather, are amongst the missing?"

"Yes; it is rather a tragedy for us, because we had already arranged the publication of the third of the books: 'The Best Hated.' "

"Do you decide which books are to be published?" asked Wise Symon.

"No," replied the publisher; "the arrangement is very simple. When we want a book, Mrs. Hoe usually brings it down. She chooses the order in which they shall appear, and in such matters has always been an autocrat. However, we have had no cause for complaint, and if the other stories were as good as those we have published, undoubtedly the world is the poorer through the loss."

Wise Symon went back to his office a thoughtful man. He wrote his story, still thoughtful, and when the Managing Editor read it in proof he frowned, and sent for the police reporter.

"This yarn's a bit wooden, Symon," he said. "Heaven knows there's enough material for half a dozen stories. Why didn't you make more of the Hoe Manuscripts? Do you also think they haven't been taken from the house?" he asked, looking up sharply.

Symon nodded.

"That's my theory, too," said the editor. "I knew Hoe pretty well, and I tell you frankly he was a beast. He hated his wife as only a bad man can hate a good woman, and it's my belief that the other six stories were designed to humiliate her, and that he held them back until he died so that he gave her the choice of poverty or publishing stories which were intended for her humiliation. I have been skimming through the two books which have been published since his death. It struck me that there is a hint of something worse to come."

"You don't think they have been stolen?" suggested Wise Symon.

"No, I do not," replied the editor; "and that's the story I should like you to get after, Symon. It's the sort of thing that's been done before. You remember Lady Burton destroyed her husband's manuscripts because she did not think that their publication would be to the advantage of the world. My idea is that Mrs. Hoe has either destroyed or is hiding those six books to save herself."

The editor rose from his chair and, walking to the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, stared out.

"If you get the truth," he said at last, "I'd like you to let this little woman down lightly You have a criminal mind—"

"Thank you," said Wise Symon.

"Well, you have; there's no sense in pretending that you haven't. You must have a criminal mind if you're dealing with criminals and can anticipate. For it's only by anticipating their next move that you can detect them. And you will be able to suggest ways and means whereby the loss of these manuscripts are accounted for."

"I'll see her," said Wise Symon; and, true to his promise, that afternoon he walked across the town to the quiet residential street wherein Mrs. Hoe had her flat. It was Mrs. Hoe herself who answered Wise Symon's ring. A tall girl, with sad, dark eyes, possessed of a certain spirituel beauty which men dream about but seldom meet in the flesh, she carried, even in her poise someting of the tragedy of the six years through which she had passed.

She looked at Symon's card, and from the card to his face. "I didn't want to see a reporter," she said; "but I know you by repute, Mr. Symon. Won't you come in, please?"

She closed the door behind him and led the way to a cosily furnished little study. "My one servant has left me," she said. "I think the burglary must have scared her."

There was a faint and fleeting smile on her lips when she said this, and with a slight gesture of her hand she indicated a chair.

"You've come to talk about the manuscripts, I suppose. I can give you very little information."

"You mean you will give me very little information, Mrs. Hoe," smiled Wise Symon. "Of course, you know that the burglar said he did not find any of the stories?"

She inclined her head.

I know that," she said. "I wish the Press would let the whole matter drop."

"You're not keen on recovering them?" asked Symon quickly.

She hesitated.

"Not particularly," she replied with a faint flush. Wise Symon knew when to be silent, and this was such a time. His fingers drummed nervously upon the table by which she was standing, and her eyes, wondering, fearing, a little resentful, were fixed upon his face.

"I don't think you quite know all that happened before my husband died, Mr. Symon. I have no desire to make a newspaper story of it, and what I say to you is in confidence, if it is possible to be confidential with a police reporter."

"Judges and sweeps have relied upon my discretion, Mrs. Hoe," said Wise Symon, "and I have not failed them; perhaps I shall be asking you to keep my secrets in a minute or two."

She looked at him in surprise and smiled again.

"I don't follow you there," she said. "But if you know anything about Mr. Hoe, you will realize the kind of life I lived. My God! it was terrible!"

Her voice broke, and there came to it a note of passionate protest. "You know that he left me almost penniless?"

"Save the manuscripts," said Wise Symon, watching her face.

"Save the manuscripts," she repeated. "You know, too, that he never lost an opportunity of humbling me. People say that you should speak well of the dead. I have never understood why. Their wicked acts go on like the outward ripples of the stream long after the stone which has made those ripples has sunk to the bottom of the pond. If you may not speak ill of the dead, why should you speak well of the dead? I tell you, Mr. Symon, that Maconochie Hoe was a fiend. I could not tell anybody, even a woman, how vile this man was."

"You needn't tell me," said Wise Symon gently; "Mr. Hoe's reputation was public. And do I understand that his character explains the disappearance of your manuscripts?"

She made no reply.

"I will tell you frankly what my editor thinks, though it is not the business of a reporter," he laughed, "to give away his boss. He thinks that those last six manuscripts, which are supposed to have been stolen by 'the Ransomeers,' were in reality destroyed by you because they contained matter which was intended to humiliate you."

She looked up quickly.

"Do you share that view?"

"That's hardly fair," he countered. "Let me ask you a question: have you your husband's will?"

Again she hesitated.

"Yes," she said a little defiantly. "Would you like to see it?"

"Very much," replied Wise Symon. She left the room and came back, bearing a large, blue foolscap sheet of paper. Wise Symon read:

MY WILL AND TESTAMENT.

To my Wife I leave the Unpublished Stories of:

'Her Education.'

'She Married for Fame.',

'Her Dreams Came not True.'

'Her Humbled Pride.'

'My Daily Joy.'

'Farewell Farewell!'

'Best Hated.'

'Little Miss Nose-in-the-Air.'

MCONOCHIE HOE.

Witness: H. WALTER.

He looked from the document to her.

Mrs. Hoe," he said quietly, "you have been treated very, very badly."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked, for she read the discovery in his eyes.

"I am going to do nothing. If I were you I should go away. You have made a great deal of money by sheer merit, and I think that you have had your revenge upon the man who tried to humiliate you."

"So you do know," she said. "I'm glad! I'm glad! I found the document after his death. He used to write that way, two or three words on a line, and every other word began with a capital letter. The will he left was intended to be his final crushing blow. He had always said that it was worth my marrying him if even for the education in the humanities I gave him. You see how the will runs: 'To my wife I leave the unpublished stories of her education. She married for fame but her dreams came not true. Her humbled pride is my daily joy. Farewell! Farewell! best hated little Miss Nose-in-the-air!' When I found this I thought of destroying it. Then an idea struck me. I took a pen and placed each phrase in quotation marks. He wrote in green ink and you can easily alter words written in green ink without detection. I scratched out the 'but' after fame and the 'is' after 'pride,' and it looked as though he had left me the manuscripts of books."

"I guessed that," said Wise Symon.

"He left me to starve!" she cried passionately. "I, who had committed no other offence than to write stories which critics had said were as good as his. When the will was published I received letters from three publishers all offering large sums for these manuscripts, and I sat down to write the stories myself. Yes, the stories which they said were Maconochie Hoe's best, I wrote! If that man had not broken the safe, or if my publisher had not paraded the fact that these manuscripts were kept in a safe in my study, or if I had had them already written and could have produced them, all would have been well. But I have nothing to produce. I had to admit they had been stolen. Now what are you going to do?"

She was on the verge of tears and her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.

"It's a fraud," said Wise Symon, "but it's the most amiable fraud that was ever committed. Go abroad, Mrs. Hoe, and stay abroad. In three months' time you will receive a letter from a desperado of this city, a letter full of contrition and repentance. It may be ill-spelt and ungrammatical," said Wise Symon slowly, "but it will tell you the story of how a man had burgled your house earlier in the evening and had taken the six manuscripts and now returns them with prayers for your forgiveness. And then, Mrs. Hoe, you can just send along those stories to your publisher."

"But who? How?" said the bewildered girl. "How can I receive such a letter?"

"Because I shall write it," said Wise Symon cheerfully.

3. — THE MURDER OF BENNETT SANDMAN

Y. SYMON swung his pyjama'd legs clear of the bed, switched on the light and blinked at the telephone stupidly. Then he picked it up, and with the intonation of a lioness robbed of her young demanded:

"Hel-lo!"

"You Y?"

"Yuh—who do you think it is?"

"There's a good murder at Tilson's Mansions—No. 74."

"Wise Symon" was the pleasantest-mannered police reporter that ever took note, and to be called from his sleep at 3 a.m. for lesser happenings than murders (and "good murders" at that) was no novel experience.

Nevertheless was he annoyed, for he was working on a forged War Bond case which promised to be full of interest, and he had been in bed exactly forty minutes.

"Can't you put one of the other fellows on it? I don't want to miss this bond story. Issenheim is the crook, and a county bank manager is in it up to his neck."

"I'll put Stern on that story," said the night editor's voice. "He can pick it up from the notes of yours we already have. Get up to Tilson's Mansions like a good little sportsman. There is a hidden hand end to it."

"Who's the corpse?" asked Y.

"Bennett Sandman," replied the voice, and Y. jumped.

"Bennett Sandman!"

Wise Symon was justified in his surprise. He expected many things to happen to Mr. Bennett Sandman, but that he should be murdered was not one of these. He would not have been surprised, for example, to hear that the junior member of the some-time firm of Messrs. Griffith & Sandman, Solicitors, had been arrested for fraud. There was once a great advertising scheme for selling land, which Wise Symon had been instrumental in exposing. Sandman was in that undoubtedly—though his outraged partner was innocent. Much that was unpleasant might have happened to Bennett Sandman but for the outbreak of war and the departure of his partner for France.

"You're sure you said 'murdered'?" asked Y.

"Yes – we just had it in over the 'phone." Symon grunted.

"All right," he complained; "but if ever a son of mine shows the slightest inclination to take up journalism, we'll go to the mat on it; Mr. Oliver, it's a dog's life. I'd sooner sweep a road, or work in a bone factory where you can sleep o' nights. I'd sooner—"

But the night editor had rung off at the word "right," and it was the operator who interrupted him with a weary "Finished ?" He put his note-book and pencil in his pocket and went out into the sharp morning air with a shudder and a long- drawn "br-r-r!"

There was a policeman in the vestibule of Tilson's Mansions, and the police-man knew Y.

"Roon's in charge of the case," he said. "You'll find him upstairs."

"Roon," said Y. bitterly, "is the one man in the C.I.D. who can turn a murder into a tragedy Have you sent for anyone who understands real detective work?"

The man grinned.

"The divisional surgeon is up there now," he said. "We're expecting the ambulance any minute."

Wise Symon paused with one foot on the marble stairs leading to the upper floors.

"I suppose you won't know anything about this murder till you read about it in the papers?" he said. "In other words you have no first-hand information as to how he was killed?"

"Roon says he was stabbed by a woman," said the officer.

Mr. Symon gave a despairing groan. "That means he was shot by a man," he said, and mounted the stairs.

Roon himself answered the door and offered the police reporter a welcome, which made up in chilliness all that it lacked in cordiality.

"Hello!" he said, barring the entrance. "Sorry Symon, but you can't come in. The police surgeon's here, and he's death on reporters."

"Ah, come off, Roon," wheedled the wise man. "I'm running this story in the Sunday Special— are you going to let somebody else get all the credit for your work?"

Roon hesitated. "

"The Commissioner doesn't like our men figuring in the papers," he said. "Do you know Dr. Trowburn?"

"He's my own cousin's uncle," replied Wise Symon promptly, and was admitted. Though he might not in truth claim so close a connection, or indeed any relationship at all, he knew and was known to the doctor.

"They got you out too, did they?" he growled. "Well, you ought to be feeling pretty foolish."

"Where is the 'respected deceased?'" asked Symon, looking round.

"There isn't any 'respected deceased,'" replied the coroner.

Mr. Symon looked from the coroner to Roon.

"If you will forgive the following extract from my biography, I would like to say that in all my long and grisly experiences I have never yet written up a good murder that hadn't a 'respected deceased'—sometimes lamented by the community, but more often not."

The police surgeon nodded.

"That is my experience, too; perhaps Roon will tell you."

"Well, Y., it's like this," began Roon, "and is it asking you too much not to pull my leg over this story which, in my judgment, is the story of a murder."

Detective Roon was a stout man, with a coppery skin and a black moustache waxed at the ends. The hair he possessed was employed to hide the site of the hair he did not possess. He wore a diamond ring on his little finger, and used scent. From which may be gathered this outstanding fact, that Roon did not hate himself.

"In my judgment,'" said Roon, "there is a terrible mystery here."

"You've been reading detective stories," said the exasperated Symon.

"What the devil do you mean by springing a murder on us without a corpse?"

"It's like this," said Roon. "Mr. Bennett Sandman has been receiving threatening letters, and I've had the case in hand. In fact I've been shadowing him. To-night he dined at the Astoria, and ordinarily I would have picked him up after he was through and come home with him in his car. But to-night he was unusually nervous and asked me if I'd mind hanging round the hotel whilst he was dining, and keeping a sharp look-out for a girl with red hair. That is all the description I got—she would have red hair. Well, I sat about in the lounge and watched the people coming and going. The only red-haired girl I saw was the lady's-maid of Lillie Bertino, the dancer, at the Hippoceum —I know her pretty well."

"And when you saw the lady what were you supposed to do – arrest her for having red hair?" asked Wise Symon.

"If you'll let me go on," said Roon, aggrieved, "I'd be obliged. As I was saying, I saw nobody. At ten minutes after twelve, Mr. Sandman came downstairs from the private dining-room, where his party had been, and he was accompanied by a young lady."

"By 'young lady' do you mean a youthful person of quality or a well-dressed chorus girl?" asked Mr. Symon brutally.

"She might have been either," said the cautious Roon. "Mr. Sandman asked me to take a taxi and follow him. He and the young lady went alone."

"To the flat?"

"No, they parted at the street entrance. The young lady went on in the car. I came up just as she was driving off."

Wise Symon, closed his eyes and conjured up the topography.

"She went round the block to the right, of course," he said.

"Yes, I' think she did," said Roon in surprise. "How did you know that?"

"This building runs through to a narrow street if I remember aright," said Wise Symon. "You can reach that street by the fire escape. That leads to a bedroom," he pointed to an open doorway, "and to another room and to the fire escape, so that if the murdered man felt in need of a little fresh air he could stroll through an open window and descend at his leisure into the back street, being picked up by the car round the corner—but I am anticipating. What happened after you had seen the lady off?"

"I went upstairs," said Roon, "to see Mr. Sandman before I left for the night. My hand was on the knocker when the door opened, and there was Mr. Sandman—a terrible sight!"

He paused.

"Go on, we're not thrilled!" said Mr. Symon wearily. "In what way was he terrible ?"

"His shirt-front was streaming with blood," said Roon, swallowing hard. "He said to me with a sort of gasp, 'Roon! Roon! The woman has knifed me! Quick, catch her!' and he pointed to the door. I flew down the stairs and flew out through the front lobby, but there was nobody in sight."

Again he paused impressively.

"Except yourself, my aviator," said Wise Symon, whose stock of patience was becoming rapidly exhausted. "Obviously you are the murderer. Then what did you do? You flew back, I suppose, like a blinking canary and perched on the gas bracket and saw everything?"

"The door was closed when I got back," said Roon gruffly.

"I knocked, but there was no answer. I tried to smash in the door, but I couldn't. Then I tried to force the fanlight."

"In fact, you couldn't get in, so you 'phoned the office?"

"I found a policeman and posted him here," said Roon, "and 'phoned to the office. When I got back, to my surprise, the door was open."

"And there was no body?"

"No: there was no body," reluctantly admitted Roon.

"So in addition to your own fancy flights the other bird had flown."

"Well, I don't think it's a laughing matter," said the offended Roon.

"Neither do I. I think it's a very serious matter. You have got the divisional surgeon out of bed; you've got me out of bed. By-the-way, did you call up the office?"

"No: I did not," said Roon, and he obviously spoke the truth.

"I will use the late Mr. Sandman's 'phone and find out who did," said Mr. Symon.

The office could tell him nothing except that somebody had called through purporting to be Roon, and had offered the information that the tragedy had been committed and that Mr. Bennett Sandman was the victim.

"Well, I'm not staying any longer," said the doctor. "I think we can leave Roon to clear up this little mystery, Symon."

"I think so," said Wise Symon. He turned to Roon as he left.

"Unless you want to be the hero of the most comical story that has ever been published in the Telephone-Herald, Roon, you had better supply me with early news of anything that turns up."

"You can't intimidate me," said Roon stoutly, but Wise Symon waved a warning finger as he disappeared in the wake of the coroner.

"It is a curious thing it should happen to Sandman," said the doctor as they descended the stairs. "There doesn't seem any money in it, and I can't imagine Sandman doing a thing like this for the sheer love of adventure. Besides which he has made a great deal of money lately."

"I don't know much about him," said Symon; "but I do know this, that he's not the kind of fellow that would allow himself to be murdered unless there was money in it."

"That just about describes him," said the doctor grimly. "He was the partner of one of the whitest men that I have ever met, young Jack Griffith."

"Oh, yes, Griffith was all right," nodded Y. "We've got nothing against Griffith. He was well out of that land swindle. By the way, is that partnership dissolved?—I haven't observed that Sandman has been struck off the Rolls?"

"I believe it was dissolved a few days before Griffith went to France. He has been a prisoner in Germany, you know, and has just been released. Of course, nobody knows why they split. Jack isn't the sort of boy to advertise his troubles, but I guess, rather than know, that Sandman had been up to some sort of shady business and Jack found it out. Sandman was pretty hard hit just about then and in need of money. He has made a small fortune during the War, by the way. The fact beyond dispute is that the partnership is dissolved, though I believe there are still certain details of the dissolution to be settled when Jack comes back."

They walked along the deserted street in silence which Symon broke.

"That doesn't seem a very adequate reason for getting oneself murdered," he said.

"Roon seems to think there's some political reason."

"That's the truest thing you have ever said, doctor."

"What?" asked the doctor in surprise.

"That Roon seems to think," said Wise Symon with an angelic smile. He parted from the coroner and went to the office to report. There was nothing fresh to be learnt, and Wise Symon showed his wisdom by returning home and going to bed.

He was awakened at 10.30 in the morning by the appearance at his bedside of Mr. Roon.

"Ugh!" shuddered Mr. Symon, "I thought you were real."

"I'm doing you a favour, Symon, that I wouldn't do for any other man on the Press," said Roon as he sat on the edge of the bed.

""Then you are real," said Symon; "nobody else in the world would talk like that. What's the favour—do you mind not sitting on my feet?"

"We've found something!" He took out his pocket-book and selected, with that fussy care which the owners of congested pocket-books display, a folded paper.

"I found it at four o'clock this morning," said Roon; "when I say 'it' this is only a copy," he shook the paper. "I had made a very careful examination of every room and suddenly it occurred to me that perhaps there was a secret drawer to the writing bureau. The idea grew on me."

"Unless you want me to go to sleep again," interrupted Wise Symon, "turn your serial into a short paragraph. Of course, there's a secret drawer in all bureaux. It's the first thing you look for anyway. Well, you found the bureau and you found a paper."

"If you don't want to hear the story—" said Mr. Roon, annoyed.

"I don't, I want the facts," said Symon; "let's have a look at that paper."

He took the document, unfolded it and read:

"In the event of anything happening to me I most earnestly request that the officer in charge of any inquiry which may attend my death shall take from

Locker 69 in the International Safe Deposit a sealed envelope inscribed: 'In the matter of Bennett Sandman' and shall deliver that envelope without delay to the Chief Constable of Dublin. The envelope must not he opened under any circumstances except by him, since it contains information of vital national importance in relation to Ireland."

"There you are," said Mr. Roon in triumph.

"Where am I?" demanded Symon.

"Politics! I knew there was politics in this business."

Mr. Symon read the document again.

"Has the Chief seen this?"

"Yes, and he's rattled; in fact, everybody at the office is rattled," said Roon with satisfaction. "They have been on the 'phone to the Home Office, and orders have been given that the envelope is to be sent forward—I am to take it."

Wise Symon was sitting up in bed, his arms folded, his head bent in thought.

"And you'll take it," he repeated mechanically.

"I thought perhaps you'd like to be present when the envelope is handed over. We are going down to the deposit at 11.30."

"I should very much like to be present, Roon," said Wise Symon, mildly for him. "Will you tell me this, is it a crime to hoax Scotland Yard?"

Roon thought.

"No; I don't think so. You wouldn't be very popular, you know."

"And I suppose it isn't even a crime to hoax you," said Wise Symon slowly. "Of course, he's got nothing to lose."

"Who's got nothing to lose?" asked Roon.

"Mr. Bennett Sandman," replied Mr. Symon.

At 11.30 he formed one of the little group which stood contemplating the banked rows of tiny steel doors which constituted the furniture and decoration of No. 5 vault. He, with the Chief Inspector of X Branch C.I.D.

and Roon, had been escorted to the deposit by the manager, who very reluctantly lent his assistance at all.

"The proceedings are most irregular, and of course I should not open this locker at all but for the police order."

"I think you could very well open it on the instructions left by Mr. Bennett Sandman," said the inspector.

"That's where you are wrong, inspector," replied the manager; "this doesn't happen to be Mr. Sandman's locker at all. Mr. Sandman held it in conjunction with his partner, Mr. Griffith, when Sandman and Griffith were in partnership."

"Have you ever been notified that Mr. Sandman was not to use this locker?"

The manager hesitated.

"I won't go so far as saying that," he said; "but I do know that Mr. Griffith insisted upon Sandman surrendering his key. Why not wait till Mr. Griffith comes back? He'll be home in a week or two."

The police chief shook his head.

"We have our instructions to forward the envelope to Dublin, and there's nothing else to be done, " The manager nodded. With his precious passkey he opened the locker, thrust in his hand and pulled out a number of fat envelopes which were tied together with tape.

"Here is the thing you want," he drew from the bundle a sealed packet.

The officer took it.

"Relating to Mr. Bennett Sandman," he read. He turned it over. It was heavily sealed.

"You will give me a receipt for it, of course," said the manager, relocking the little steel safe.

"Certainly," said the chief; "here you are, Roon, put that in your inside pocket. You will take the afternoon train to Fishguard, and, you will allow nobody to touch that packet until you place it in the hands of Mr. Kennedy."

Never did little Roon behave so importantly as he did at that moment. Solemnly he unbuttoned his coat and thrust the packet away in his inside pocket, and. as solemnly buttoned his great-coat over that.

"That concludes our business for the morning, Symon. What do you think of it?"

"I think it is very funny," said Wise Symon.

"I don't see any humorous side to it," demurred the inspector; "but they say you're a whale for wisdom, Mr. Symon."

"The owl is the fish you're thinking of, Chief," said Wise Symon.

Outside in the street the little group split up, Roon strutting (there is no other word for it) homeward to prepare for his journey. Wise Symon watched him, and stopped the chief of police who was taking his departure.

"One moment," he said, "I don't know how wise I really am, but it seems to me that if I took

this extraordinary adventure at its face value, I should be the biggest fool in this town."

"What does that mean?" asked the policeman.

"Doesn't it occur to you that all the circumstances are very remarkable? Bennett Sandman, a man who has been fired by his partner for crooked work—"

"How did you know that?" asked the Chief quickly.

"I guessed it," said Wise Symon grimly: "there are some things you've got to guess, and whilst young Griffith is in Germany, or at any rate out of touch, we must confine ourselves to guessing. Griffith is one of those loyal idiots who would never give away a defaulting partner, but I would recall to your memory the fact that just before the outbreak of war there was a big land swindle with which the name of Griffith & Sandman was associated – they acted as solicitors for the crooks. The issue of that case was rather obscured by the outbreak of war."

"I remember," nodded the Chief. "There was a settlement and the case was kept out of court."

"And Griffith did the settling, I'll bet," said Wise Symon. "Sandman remains behind, makes a lot of money, probably by some new swindle— "

"What are you driving at?" interrupted the police chief curiously.

"Nothing, only I want you to watch Roon. Don't let him out of sight till those papers are delivered in Dublin."

The chief of police smiled.

"You must think I'm a child. Of course he's watched. Two of my men picked him up the moment he left here, and will shadow him to Dublin Roon doesn't know – he would feel sore if he did. There's no foolish modesty about Roon."

Roon had rooms at Merville Hotel, an economical hostel in Bloomsbury and this obviated any necessity for taking a cab Incidentally, it enabled the shadowing police to keep some distance from him and save him the humiliating knowledge that his Chief had answered the question quis custodiet ipsos custodes by placing him under the watchful care of two of his comrades.

So Roon went back to the hotel alone, passed straight up to his room and locked the door. This was a quarter after noon, and the train for Fishguard was due to leave at two. True to his instructions he avoided crowds and ordered his lunch in his room. At a quarter to one a telegraph messenger arrived at the little hotel. Because of Roon's peculiar work, it was the practice to send all telegrams direct to his room, and not, as is the usual case, to put them into the hotel box or to "page" them. The messenger who called went up to Roon's room, knocked at the door which Roon opened, cautiously.

"Roon!" said the messenger.

"That's me," said the detective and took the envelope from the messenger's hand.

"There's a reply," said the messenger gruffly.

The detective turned away to the window to read the message.

THE TELEGRAPH messenger strode quickly along the main street. He was evidently in a hurry and on most important business, for he beckoned two taxis before he found one which was disengaged. An energetic telegraph boy was, under any circumstance, a phenomenon which appealed to Wise Symon, but this messenger was not returning to the Central Telegraph Office at all. He was hastening in the opposite direction and was, moreover, employing the services of a taxi-cab to increase that haste. Nor, thought Wise Symon, as he brought his little two- seater car in the track of the taxi, do messenger boys take a cab to go home to their meals. He knew nothing of

Roon and the telegram, was wholly unconscious of the fact that Roon lay insensible in his room with a bloody head, breathing stertorously, and that the messenger (who in real life was aged twenty-four, and an expert user of what is called a "cosh") was carrying in his pocket a sealed envelope inscribed: "In the matter of Mr. Bennett Sandman," though he guessed something had happened.

He was in the vestibule when the telegraph boy had arrived, so also was an intelligent officer of the detective service, whilst another detective was before the building and a third was at the side under Roon's window.

He was acting on impulse when he followed the messenger into the street, and now, as the taxi-cab gathered speed, Wise Symon knew that his impulse was right.

The cars passed beyond the line where town merges into country, where the serried blocks of dwelling-houses part into little villas standing in their tiny grounds, and these in turn give way to green fields and tree-shaded lanes. The taxi-cab stopped at a small railway station and the messenger jumped out and passed into the station building.

Wise Symon checked his car, descended and followed at leisure. He found the messenger pacing the platform. A train was signalled and the hum of its wheels was faintly audible. Presently, with a roar and a clatter, it pulled into the station and stopped, and a man jumped out. He was the only passenger to alight. Until the train pulled out the messenger did not approach him, but as the last car cleared the man came forward and the two were engaged in earnest conversation before they walked from the platform into the road towards the waiting taxi.

The door of the taxi-cab had been opened by the messenger and the passenger had one foot upon the step when Wise Symon intervened.

"I hate to interrupt your joy-ride, Mr. Bennett Sandman," he said; "but last night there was a murder committed in town, in which you are considerably interested."

"I don't know what you mean," said the passenger. "Who are you?"

"If you take off your blue spectacles, you will probably recognize me," said Wise Symon coolly. "You are not so dead that you can't see."

Bennett Sandman took off his spectacles with a little nervous laugh.

"Well, I fooled you fellows anyway. It was a little practical joke of mine. Nobody can charge me with that you know, Symon."

"Excuse me," said Symon. The wind had flapped open Sandman's overcoat and he had seen the end of a sealed envelope stuck away in the inside pocket. With a lightning dive he snatched it.

"You're both going back with me to Scotland Yard," said Wise Symon. "I have no authority for using this gun," he said, caressing the Browning he had slipped from his pocket; "but I think I. could explain the shooting to everybody's satisfaction." He looked over his shoulder to the taxi-cab driver who was watching the proceedings with interest.

"Cannon Row Station," he said—and then to the two men sharply: "get in!"

"IN THAT," said Wise Symon pointing to the envelope on the Assistant Commissioner's table, "you will probably find a full statement of Sandman's swindle, and likely as not, a confession signed by him. As I read the case, young Griffith only discovered how deeply his partner was involved just before he joined up."

"You're quite right," said the Commissioner, "we have had a cable from Mr. Griffith. Sandman signed a confession, which is in that envelope, and which was placed with Mr. Griffith's documents in the safe deposit. I have since learnt that Sandman has made several attempts to get access to the safe."

"So he thought out this great murder scheme to avoid exposure and disgrace—he would certainly have been struck off the Rolls when Griffith came back," said Wise Symon. "On the excuse of having received threatening letters, he got Roon appointed to shadow him, knowing that Roon would be in charge of the 'murder case' and would be the man to whom the packet would be handed if the authorities believed his story. He kept Roon close to him on the night of the murder by putting him in the vestibule of the Astoria to watch for a red-haired girl who had no existence. It was he who telephoned my office to get the publicity he wanted."

"But why Dublin?" asked the Commissioner.

"It was necessary that Roon should be the custodian of the packet for just so long as would give Sandman a chance to take it from him. Roon was his trump card. He was determined to ensure having him on the spot when the 'murder' was committed. He hired the thug, just as he hired the girl who accompanied him home that night."

The Commissioner nodded.

"You're rather rough on poor Roon," he said, "his head will be in bandages for weeks."

"What use has he got for a head anyway?" demanded Wise Symon unpleasantly.

4. — THE CRIME OF GAI JOI

MR. YORK SYMON did not attain to his position as the best- known police reporter of the newspaper world without acquiring a fairly generous knowledge of the Three Arts. The police courts, like death and the turf, are great levellers, and into their dingy purlieus come representation of all social orders. In common fairness it may be said, he had made the acquaintance of artists, actors and musicians whom he numbered amongst his friends in happier circumstances than would have been possible had they floated into his orbit in court—which was his favourite haunt. Through these friends he knew by name most of the big people in the art or entertainment world, so that, when the office boy brought him a card inscribed:

Malcolm de Vaux

Manager to

Mlle Gai Joi

he was neither puzzled nor impressed.

"Push him in, Horace," he said, and Mr. de Vaux was escorted through the door.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. de Vaux," he said; "sit down and unburden your mind."

"We've heard all about you, Mr. Symon," said de Vaux ecstatically. He was a stout, clean-shaven man with a double chin, and ecstasy was his normal condition.

"We've heard of you from one end of the world to the other! Miss Joi thinks you are the most wonderful thing on earth. She's always talking about you. What a wonderful story it was you wrote about the Brennan Gang! What a story! I don't know how you got hold of your facts."

"I don't," said Wise Symon, "they get hold of me. Now, cutting all the superfluous dialogue, Mr. de Vaux, let's hear your proposition. I gather that the manager of the best paid revue artiste in this or any other world hasn't come here to throw flowers at the police department of the Telephone-Herald! To put it brutally, what do you want? Has Miss Joi lost the superb emerald necklace given to her by King Demento of Illusia? If so, you will find the advertisement department opposite the lift."

Mr. de Vaux smiled and shook his head.

"Oh, Mr. Symon!" he said, pained but affable, "you don't suppose that a great artiste like Miss Joi would descend to such a common- place and, if I may say, vulgar method of advertising herself! No, no; no, no!"

Wise Symon waited, passing his cigarette-case to his visitor.

"Thanks! No, sir; we don't do that sort of thing. Miss Joi has finished with that kind of Press agent; that is why I'm here."

"Proceed," encouraged the police reporter.

"Now you mustn't be offended at what I am going to say," warned the manager, raising his glittering hand. "Promise me that you won't be offended."

"Oh, go on!" growled Y.

"Well, it's this: We want the best Press agent. that money can buy. Miss Joi is determined to have you at your own price. There you are, Mr. Symon!" He leant back in his chair and already was overlooking Wise Symon with a proprietorial eye.

"In other words, Miss Joi Gai wants me to throw up my honest and respectable work as a police reporter and become her boomster?"

"Press agent," murmured Mr. de Vaux. "Fix your own salary."

Wise Symon did not often laugh, but he laughed now.

"Thank Miss Joi—she's at the Orpheum, isn't she?—yes, thank her for the offer, which is not accepted."

"Sleep on it," suggested Mr. de Vaux. "Turn it over in your mind."

"Nothing doing!" Symon shook his head and smiled. "It's not my game. I'm the worst kind of liar, and I want facts or I can't write. For a Press agent you need the gift of invention, and an artistic temperament. I've neither."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. de Vaux gravely – even to his gravity he imparted an ecstatic fervour. "I'm very, very, very, very sorry. And Miss Joi will be very, very, very, very grieved."

"It hurts me to hear you say so," said Wise Symon.

He was, of course, no more hurt than (he imagined) Miss Joi would be grieved or Mr. de Vaux was sorry, but he was dealing with people who

creamed the emotions for their vocabularies, and robbed superlatives of their emphasis.

There was a solemn silence.

"Miss Joi feels that she has not had her share of publicity," said de Vaux at last. "For three months her name has scarcely appeared in the public Press."

"Yet I seem to remember pages in the Sunday Press devoted to her secret marriage with Prince Eitel of Pommorania," said Wise Symon softly. "And wasn't there some talk—three columns of it—about her giving up the stage and studying law?"

Mr. de Vaux shrugged his shoulders.

"That was six months ago," he said. "A great actress – and who will deny Miss Gai's right to the proud title? – cannot live on publicity which is six months old. Besides, Myrtle O'Sullivan—a third-rate article compared with Miss Joi—is featured every week in some paper or other."

Wise Symon twisted round in his chair.

"You've an alternative proposal to the Press-agent offer," he said. "Let's have it."

"Well," said the manager, "suppose Miss Joi on her way home from the theatre to-night, or some other night, was kidnapped by masked men, who carried her off in a grey motor-car?"

"Why not a pink motor-car?" sneered Wise Symon. "No, de Vaux, that thrilling act doesn't get two lines in the Telephone-Herald if I can help it. Take my tip and drop down the lift to the advertising department – you'll get more satisfaction there. You buy the space and write your own story. The police department on this organ of public opinion is sealed to the sacred cause of genuine crime."

"But—"

"If Miss Gai Joi wants to shine in the newspaper space I control, she can easily qualify. She can shoot a policeman; she can chase you round the theatre with a hatchet; she can rob the box-office; or she can poison my friend Roon—I never did like the man!—but she can't get publicity unless she delivers the bads, so to speak."

He rose, and Mr. de Vaux followed his example.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Symon," he said regretfully. "Perhaps you'll call round and see Miss Joi?"

"I think not," said Symon, shaking his head. "I'm only human, de Vaux. I might not be able to resist your charming principal."

And the interview ended.

One afternoon in May, before the hot weather had set in and sent up the crime barometer – there's nothing like a little bright sunshine to arouse the murderous passions of men—Mr. Symon was strolling along aimlessly in the direction of the office. Town was very dull. Nobody had killed anybody for a terrible long time. No great cashier had disappeared leaving a note saying that he had been unexpectedly called away to Patagonia and expected to be back in I974. No night-club had been raided and prominent citizens arrested in the act of stuffing the faro cards into their boots. It was a dull time!

The editor of the Telephone-Herald had suggested to Symon that he should take a holiday, but Y. was sufficiently human not to want a holiday when he could get it. He had no desire to leave town at all. He had mouched round the Ferdinand Hotel, but the Ferdinand was unusually virtuous. Its register was filled with the names of highly-respected merchants' families, prosperous folk with cheque-books and bank balances. There was no crime, no mystery, no intrigue. The Hotel Magnificent was as blameless. The Waldteufel certainly held a runaway honeymoon couple, but elopements are not criminal unless both parties are too poor to pay their hotel bills.

Wise Symon was on his way to the cool lounge of the Magnificent when he met The Girl. She was getting out of a taxi, and she smiled at Symon. He smiled back and lifted his hat. He did not remember her face, and rather wondered at his lapse of memory, for it was a face that was not easily forgotten. A live, intense face, beautifully modelled, with the darkest, merriest eyes, when she smiled, he had ever seen.

"How do you do, Mr. Symon?" she said. "You don't know me?"

"The curious thing is that I do," he smiled, taking the hand she offered. "But to my eternal shame I don't place you!" Her laughter was like the music of waters.

"You shall take me along to the Magnificent and give me tea," she said. "I'll penalize you that much for your forgetfulness."

Did he meet her at Fothingays', at the Arnolds', the Sounds', or the Southorns'? He puzzled it out at the interval as he walked by her side.

Perhaps he had seen her in a bad light. Yet it was not his weakness that he forgot faces.

"Tea and cakes and lots of scones and cream and jam and things," she ordered largely, when he had found the right kind of chair for her in the best corner of the palm court, and had placed just the exact cushion she wanted to cover the identical area of the back that needed cushioning.

"I wanted to see you," she said. "In fact, I've been following you in the taxi far an hour, but could not quite intercept you. I'm Gai Joi!"

He looked at her in dismay. "Oh, Lord!" he said, dolefully.

"Don't be rude," she commanded. "Look happy. Why, people I know would give their heads to be sitting tete-a-tete with me – and you're looking positively ill!"

Wise Symon chuckled. "Bad manners are my speciality," he said, "and you've got to allow for my being a little overwhelmed."

She looked at him quickly, and now her eyes were at their happiest.

"You're afraid of me, aren't you? You think I'm going to spring a stunt an you?"

"Well," said Wise Symon—after a struggle to discover a pleasant lie to cover his retreat—"yes, I honestly think so. You see, Miss Joi, I'm rather a sceptic, and I'd hate you to tell me anything about yourself that I'd sort of doubt – in a professional way."

"Here is your tea," said the girl. She poured it into the cups before she spoke again. "Mr. Symon, I haven't become a star of revue without a little trouble and a few heartaches. I was once a reporter on a New York paper. I was a kid at the time, and the story of my translation to Broadway will never be included in the 'Tales Told to the Children' series. I can sort of sense people's feelings and I can feel your suspicion oozing out of you!"

"Miss Joi," said Wise Symon in his most solemn manner, "you interest me vastly. I am waiting to hear your story. Do I understand that some £5,000 worth of rare and sparkling minerals have been abstracted from your dressing-room? If so, I know that you have in your bag sufficient evidence to bring the thief to justice. That evidence consists of your latest boudoir photograph, a portrait of yourself at the age of eleven, a snap of yourself taken in the act of your entering your new Rolls-Royce outside your country house, and possibly a photograph of your first contract."

"Wrong!" she laughed. "That isn't the proposal I'm putting to you. What I want is the privilege of writing a full-page crime story in your paper.

"Is that all?" said Wise Symon. "That seems pretty modest. And what is the crime you are going to write about?"

She looked at him, laughter in her eyes.

"Suppose I have a great mystery to reveal."

"Oh, yes?" said Symon politely.

"Something that I wouldn't tell you here in broad daylight. Something which had to be—" she looked at her watch on her wrist— "it is there now. Come, Mr. Symon, I know that things are dull in town, I am enough of a newspaper woman to realize that much. Are you sufficiently curious to investigate?"

Wise Symon hesitated only a moment.

"I'm your man," he said, and five minutes later was being piloted in a two-seater driven by Gai Joi along the Rochester Road.

THE NEWS EDITOR of the Telephone-Herald, the managing editor, and Streeter, one of the crime reporters of the paper, foregathered in the managing editor's office. It was on the Thursday following the Tuesday on which Wise Symon had his interview with Miss Joi.

"I don't like this business at all," said the editor. ""Symon had a lot of enemies, and I don't think we can afford to sit tight and wait for him to come back."

"Perhaps he's taking his holiday after all," said the city editor hopefully.

The Chief shook his head.

"Symon wouldn't go out of town without leaving a word or wiring, and here is the fact that for three days he has neither been seen nor heard from Did you see Miss Joi?" he asked the reporter.

Streeter nodded.

"She was pretty mysterious, but she could give us no information. I believe she has the end of the story, but she won't talk."

"Will she write?" asked the Chief. "I seem to remember that she's had some newspaper experience before she became a revue star."

"I'll put it to her," said Streeter.

"In the meantime," the Chief went on, "I think the police should be notified. As I say, Symon has been in too many bad crimes for us to treat this matter lightly. There are half a dozen gangs laying for him, and as likely as not he has been sandbagged."

Miss Joi was seen by Streeter that afternoon. She was grave and uncommunicative.

"I don't know whether I should be doing justice to Mr. Symon if I told the whole story," she said.

"The Chief's nervous about him," said Streeter; "and people in town are beginning to talk—why, they even sent a reporter across from the Morning Herald, and that's never happened before in the history of journalism. The Chief thinks perhaps you don't want to be interviewed for fear you say too much, and we suggest that you might like to write it."

Miss Joi thought for a moment and then nodded.

"I will think that over," she said.

She thought it over to some purpose. On Saturday afternoon the rumour went forth that the Telephone-Herald had the most sensational story that it had ever published. Even rival newspapers hinted that there were revelations to come, "involving a newspaper man in an extraordinarily romantic story."

Those who expected much were not disappointed; those who expected nothing were astounded, for the Telephone-Herald held not one page but two which were headed in a huge line covering both pages, illustrated by photographs of Wise Symon and a great four-column cut of the beautiful Miss Joi, and was embellished by maps and diagrams, none of which, however, equalled in interest the amazing explanation of Wise Symon's disappearance.

Wise Symon, it appeared, was the grandson of the Earl of Chetmore and had succeeded two years before to the earldom. His father had been so badly treated by his grandfather, and so bitter were Wise Symon's feelings in relation to the aristocracy in general and of the Chetmore branch of that aristocracy in particular, that he refused to take his seat in the House of Lords. Unfortunately for him, the earldom had been granted on the specific condition that he should reside in Chetmore Castle for seven days in every seven years. Failing this, the title lapsed, and the estates reverted to the

Crown. The heir to the earldom, one Fitzmaurice Bronson, had offered Wise Symon fabulous sums to return, if only to retain the title in the family.

All this (wrote Miss Gai Joi) Wise Symon had told her and had expressed his fears for the consequences of his refusal. Chetmore's emissaries had been dogging him for a month. They had made three attempts to kidnap him.

"On that fatal day we drove into the country. He would not tell me all in the crowded lounge of the Magnificent. Four miles from town the car was pulled up by a rope being stretched across the road. I did not see what happened. I only know that a man stepped up to the side of the car—a man with a long white beard—and spoke in a whisper to Mr. Symon, who got out, looking very pale."

"'You had better go back, Miss Gai,' he said. 'All may yet come right.'"

The story created a sensation. It was felt that something more had to be told, and this belief was strengthened when someone pointed out that there was no earldom of Chetmore and therefore no conditions attached to the maintenance of the peerage. Miss Gai Joi kept to her story, and on Wednesday morning the Telephone-Herald came out with the announcement that Miss Gai had received a long and detailed story from Wise Symon, which would be published in the next day's Telephone-Herald. She made this communication to the managing editor the night before.

"I hear some story of your wanting Symon to be your Press agent, Miss Joi," said the Chief.

"I did have such an idea," she admitted frankly. "We artistes live on publicity—even this unhappy business has packed the Orpheum, and has brought me letters from all parts of the country—and I thought that Mr. Symon would be the very man to help me."

"Well, poor old Symon's certainly helping you now," said the editor grimly; "but I tell you candidly that I am not swallowing this story entirely. It sounds pretty thin to me."

"You surely do not doubt my word?" she asked in a shocked tone.

"Heaven forbid!" said the editor. "Anyway, get his letter in shape and let me see it to- morrow."

Miss Gai Joi finished her work at the Orpheum that night at eleven o'clock, took her six calls before the curtain, and kissed her hand rapturously to a

house where even those who had standing room regarded themselves as privileged.

She returned to her hotel, which was the Magnificent, and went up to her suite on the third floor. Her maid relieved her of her cloak and then went down for Miss Joi's sandwich and glass of milk. Gai Joi was humming a merry little tune when she walked into her bedroom, where her writing-table had been placed and the material for the great story of Wise Symon was heaped upon the table. She took off her diamond necklace and her diamond and platinum bracelet, opened the little steel jewel-case in which these and other jewels were kept, and was putting them in when a voice behind her said: "Put up your hands and don't scream."

She turned quickly. A man was in the room, his face covered by a black silk handkerchief, in which two holes had been cut for his eyes, and even these were shaded by a broad-brimmed felt hat. The argument he carried in his hand was quite sufficient. She retreated to the wardrobe, her hands raised, leaving him free access to the jewels. With one hand he scooped the contents into his pocket, then backed to the door.

"I shall be three minutes outside the door of this room," he said, "during which time if you scream I shall come back and settle you. Understand!"

She nodded. She was trembling in every limb, and her face was deathly pale. She had lost her jewels before, but this was the first time they had been lost by this method.

The news editor dashed into the Chief's office.

"I say, Gai Joi has been robbed of her jewels."

The Chief looked up incredulously.

"What does she want to lose her jewels for?" he growled. "She can't have any more publicity than she's getting."

"But this is genuine. She's in hysterics. Streeter has seen her, and he has no doubt about it. She's going on like a mad woman."

Briefly he told the story of the robbery as it had come through on the telephone.

"Ten thousand pounds, eh?" said the Chief thoughtfully. "I don't wonder she's vexed! Who's on the job?"

"Roon is one of the detectives, and the first thing he asked for was where was Wise Symon. Symon is the best man for these hold-up cases. He knows most of the bad men in that line of business."

There was a tap at the door and one of the juniors came in.

"There's Miss Joi wants to see you, sir," he said. The two men exchanged glances.

"Tell her to come in," said the Chief.

The little revue actress came in, a woebegone figure, her nose red with weeping, her face haggard.

"It is all my own fault." she sobbed, without any preliminary. "Oh, what a fool I've been! He told me on the way out that there was a hold-up gang in town, and said he'd look after me."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Mr. Symon," she wailed. "Oh, I was a fool! I thought it was such a joke on him, and I wanted the publicity."

"What have you done to Wise Symon?" asked the Chief sternly.

"I've locked him in my little cottage," she sobbed. "He has got enough food for another week, and there's no way out, and they couldn't hear him shouting from the windows – which are barred – even if he shouted. I wanted the publicity—"

"And you've lost your diamonds," said the Chief. "And I am not saying that you aren't well served. Do you know it's a crime to kidnap people?"

She nodded and gulped.

The office car carried a subdued Gai Joi, whose demeanour utterly belied her name, and the managing editor of the Telephone-Herald, to the stone house off the Rochester Road.

"I specially hired it," she said. "I had bars put into the windows, even the window of the bathroom. I thought it would be such a joke."

"Well, isn't it P" asked the Chief brutally.

They found Wise Symon sitting in the little dining-room reading a volume of poems, and quite calm. He bowed to the miserable Miss Joi and shook hands with his Chief.

"It hasn't been so bad," he said airily. "The food was good. Miss Joi had thoughtfully provided shaving materials, and, beyond the fact that I had to make my own bed, I experienced no discomfort. Anyway," he said, with a smile, "I've had my holiday."

"I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Symon," said the girl. "I have been wicked—and I have been punished, and I know you won't look for my diamonds."

"Your diamonds?"

"She's been held up," said the Chief, with a little grin, and told the story.

"I warned you about that gentleman," said Wise Symon. "You'd have got all the publicity you wanted if you'd only waited."

"Will you help me to find them?" she pleaded.

"Well, I like your nerve; but," he laughed, "I will."

They travelled back to town, and as a sign of forgiveness, Wise Symon sat next to the girl. He even went so far as to be extremely humorous about her experience.

"I don't think you want a Press agent, Miss Joi," he said. "I never imagined you did, and when I saw the house last Saturday—"

"Last Saturday!" she gasped.

He nodded.

"I thought I'd come along and see how your story was affecting business," he said. "And I must congratulate you on the thrilling boom you gave me. It was a corking good story, and I enjoyed it very much."

"But you haven't seen it!" He nodded.

"Oh, yes, I have. It was a good story. I bought it on Sunday morning, almost as soon as the paper was on sale in the street."

"But weren't you locked in the cottage?" she whispered.

He shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said; "I wasn't in your cottage more than two hours. You're a good Press agent, but a mighty bad conspirator. To get into the house from

the outside you had to use a key. To get out from the inside you merely turn the handle."

She had no words. They dropped the editor at his club, and parted at the door of the newspaper office—a dejected girl, a calm young man who, inside, was all a-gurgle with merriment.

"I suppose you'll never forgive me?" she said miserably.

"Oh, Lord, yes," he replied. "But you've got to square up that thrilling serial of yours in to-morrow's paper."

She shook her head.

"I shall have to get out of town," she said; "and, Mr. Symon, I've worked hard to get where I am. Practically all my life's savings went with those jewels."

"And my reputation went with the story you wrote," said Wise Symon. "However, I'll try to get you out of the mess – catch!"

He tossed a little package into the cab and she stared open-mouthed.

"You'll find it all there," he said.

"The burglar—was you!" she gasped.

He nodded and made his way into the office.

The lift-boy touched his cap.

"Hello, Mike—glad to see me back?"

"Yes, me lord," said the boy; and Symon knew that his task of countering the vivid imagination story of Miss Gai Joi was likely to be a strenuous one!

5. — THE LETHBRIDGE ABDUCTION

"DO YOU REALLY want to know what I think about you?" asked Symon.

"I don't know and I don't want to know," replied Mr. Roon loftily. "I know what I think about you, and when I write my book –"

Wise Y. Symon staggered back.

"When you write your book!" he said in- credulously. "Are you going to be a book-maker?"

"My memoirs," said Detective Roon proudly. "If I can only get the Chief's permission I'm going to publish it serially in the Herald."

"I don't like the Herald," said Wise Symon thoughtfully; "but it's my duty to warn the editor of your perfectly horrible intentions."

"You're not the only man who can write," said the huffed Mr. Roon. "Lots of people think you're the rottenest writer in this city. I met a man the other day who said your stuff about crime was childish compared with that new man's on the Herald —Boscombe."

He looked at Wise Y. Symon narrowly, but the police reporter took the blow with admirable fortitude.

"I dare say you're right, Roon," he said. "I was reading some of Boscombe's stuff the other day, and it did certainly read well. I am not much judge of fiction, but certainly the writer showed imagination—"

"What do you mean about imagination and fiction and all that stuff? Every fact in those articles is a – a – a fact."

"Surprise me," said Symon politely. "Go on, surprise me! So you're the artist who has suddenly dawned upon this town?"

"What do you mean?" asked Roon again, redder than ever.

"You're the gentleman who writes the weekly article in the Herald under the swell pen-name of 'Cyril Boscombe.' I ought to have recognized your style from your story of the Lethbridge abduction. A greater tissue of inaccuracies and make-ups I have never seen before."

"Listen, Wise Y," said Roon earnestly. ""You'll keep this dark, that I'm writing won't you, old man?"

"Don't call me 'old man,' " snarled Y. "I've told you before about that disgusting familiarity."

"I admit I write the stuff, but I should get hell if the Chief knew it. But, facts apart, old – Y, don't you think that it's pretty good style?"

"So that is why you avoided me lately?" said Wise Symon thoughtfully; "and that is why you've been so reticent about information—you miserable little hound. You've been keeping your facts to yourself for your own column! And I suppose that I am the 'journalistic amateur' to whom you made reference last Sunday?"

Mr. Roon looked very uncomfortable.

"Of course, old man," he began, "I mean old fellow—I have to put a little bit of that sort of stuff in for the good of the paper, you see. But what do you say about the Lethbridge abduction?" he asked anxiously. "Aren't the facts right?"

"The only fact you've got right," said Wise Symon, "is that Gloria Lethbridge went to a dance and she came home with her aunt in their car at two o'clock in the morning, was held up on Main Avenue by three masked men, and carried off in a waiting car from which the number had been removed. And the reason you've got those facts right, Roon, is that they're the only facts you know. You wouldn't have known those but you read them in my paper."

"Oh, come now," said Detective Roon with a knowing little smile, "anyone would think I was not in the police force."

"They would, to see you work," admitted Wise Symon. "But, happily for the world and for the quality of justice in particular, you didn't happen to be put on the case."

A smile of triumph dawned on Roon's face.

"Well, I'm going on it now," he said. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Wise Symon was genuinely surprised, and showed it.

"Is it as bad as that?" he said. "Do they really think they'll never find the girl?"

"What makes you think that?" asked the unsuspecting Roon.

"Do you imagine they'd put you on it if St. John thought there was any chance of getting credit out of it?"

Roon looked uneasy. "St. John has been sent for to take charge of that big bank fraud case," he said.

"Macdonald's on that," said Wise Y. Symon promptly; "and the mere fact that St. John is prepared to play second fiddle shows just what he thinks of the case. Roon, your exalted pride is scheduled for abasement."

With this parting shot he left the little man twirling his moustache thoughtfully.

Wise Y. Symon was on his way to the Lethbridge house when he had met Roon. It was the fourth visit he had paid since the disappearance of Gloria Lethbridge, and he did not expect an enthusiastic welcome. As he turned in the gate of the handsome residence, and slowly mounted the broad steps to the door, he turned over in his mind all the excuses he could invent for this visit, and found none that was entirely satisfactory.

Mrs. Lethbridge was waiting for him in the drawing-room, a tall, handsome woman of middle age, and she did not welcome him as an honoured guest.

"I'm extremely sorry to bother you, Mrs. Leth- bridge," said Wise Y. with his most winning smile, which, however, awakened no response in his wholly unwilling hostess, "but there are facts in this case which have just occurred to me, and on which I wish to satisfy myself before I make my story for the Sunday paper. Shall I sit down?"

She nodded.

"I haven't the whole of the details," he went on; "but I know that Miss Lethbridge was forcibly pulled from the car whilst one of the attackers held a revolver to the head of the chauffeur, who was wounded, I believe? But certain new facts have come to knowledge, as I said, which I wish to test. One story I have received from an old servant of yours is that Miss Lethbridge was a girl of ungovernable temper. She would fly off the handle on any excuse; and once, I believe, publicly boxed the ears of a servant who annoyed her?"

Mrs. Lethbridge looked at him steadily, biting her lips. Some people bite their lips when they are distressed in mind, some when they are merely thoughtful, or speculating upon how much truth they need tell. And Wise Y. Symon was wise enough to know that her exercise came into the latter category.

"It is perfectly true," said Mrs. Lethbridge, ""that my daughter – she is really my step-daughter you know – was inclined to—" she hesitated.

"Lose her temper?" suggested Wise Y., and the woman nodded.

"Had she any enemies?" asked Symon.

"Many, probably," said Mrs. Lethbridge frankly.

"Another thing," said Symon. "After she had these fits of temper, I am informed, she was very penitent, and would do almost anything to make reparation. She was a fairly rich girl, by the way, was she not?"

Mrs. Lethbridge nodded.

"She inherited the greater portion of her father's fortune," she said, with a certain amount of sourness in her voice.

"Yet another question," smiled Wise Y., "and I really feel awfully ashamed at examining you, but the public want the facts. This is a question I have asked you before. How did it come about that such a long time elapsed between the abduction and your reporting the matter to the police?"

"I have already explained that," said the woman sharply; ""and really, these questions are getting beyond reason. I could not believe what had happened, and neither could my chauffeur. We both thought that it was a joke played by some friends of Gloria's, and that she would turn up later in the evening. You know, she was very fond of practical joking, and she belonged to a very high-spirited set. At two o'clock in the morning, when she had not returned, I made my communication to the police."

Wise Y. Symon had noted these few facts on a slip of paper, and this he now folded and put into his pocket.

"And here's the very last of all the questions, Mrs. Lethbridge," and he spoke slowly and emphatically. "Miss Lethbridge returned with you at twelve o'clock. Your car was seen to pass the policeman on point duty at ten minutes past twelve, and disappear into the avenue where this outrage was committed. At one o'clock," he paused, "at one o'clock," he repeated, "a shot was heard by a neighbour coming from the direction of this house."

The woman's face was white, but she did not move a muscle.

"That is absurd," she said. "If there had been a shot fired in this house the servants would have heard it. What was probably heard was the back-fire of the motor-car. Selby, although wounded, was getting it ready to go back to look for Miss Lethbridge."

"Let me ask you this, Mrs. Lethbridge," said Symon quietly. "Did any of your servants suggest that they had heard a shot that night?"

She hesitated.

"One of them did," she said.

"And you explained to her that it was the back-fire of a motor?"

"I may have done," she said defiantly.

"Thank you; that is all I require. I am sorry to have been such a nuisance," said Symon, and was leaving when she called him back.

"What theories have you formed, Mr. Symon?" she asked.

"I have so few theories that I should be wasting your time still further if I gave them to you in detail," said he; "but I should like very much to see your car."

She assented readily with a gesture.

"I will ring for Selby," she said.

"It isn't necessary, Mrs. Lethbridge. Let me go round to the garage; I think I can find it myself."

The garage was at the end of the garden. It was a new, brick building, the lower part of which was occupied by the car and its accessories, the upper part being the living apartment of the chauffeur. Wise Y. Symon looked up and saw the neatly curtained windows, and the general appearance of comfort, and decided that there were worse things in the world than chauffeuring.

Selby sat in a windsor chair outside the garage, his legs crossed, cutting his nails and watching two men polishing and cleaning a big limousine which was drawn up outside the open doors of the garage. He rose to meet Symon; a tall, strikingly good-looking man of thirty, ready to smile and to show his white, even teeth. "

"Any news, Mr. Symon?" he asked. The reporter had already made his acquaintance, and now shook his head.

"I've come round to see your car. Are these your assistants?" he asked.

"Oh, no," replied Selby carelessly "I have a couple of men to do the dirty work. I hate that sort of thing, polishing and scrubbing."

Symon glanced at the man's white and well- kept hands, and nodded.

"I see you do," he said. Then he turned to the car. "It's a nice machine."

"It's not bad," said the chauffeur. "She can get up to the fifty, and there isn't a hill in the country that she couldn't climb on top speed."

"And a very nice garage, too," said Symon. He turned suddenly and put his finger on the big door of the building. "What is that, by the way?" he asked.

"That?" The man walked slowly towards it. "Oh, that is where a workman hit the door with a pickaxe."

"It must have been a hard blow," said Symon, pulling back the gate and examining the other side.

"There's a hole right through. It almost looks like a bullet hole to me."

"Do you think so?" drawled the chauffeur. "Possibly somebody's been doing a little rifle practice."

Wise Y. Symon said nothing. He went back to the office and interviewed the Chief.

"There's a lot to come out in this story," he said, "and I think I have the threads of it. The only thing I cannot understand is why the chauffeur has not disappeared."

"Why the what?" asked the startled editor.

"Why the chauffeur hasn't vanished," said Symon calmly. "That certainly does put a heavy strain upon my wisdom."

"By the way," said the editor, "how is the chauffeur's wound?"

Wise Symon stared at him and then banged is fist into his palm.

"By gosh!" he cried excitedly. "Of course, that's it! I'd forgotten he was wounded. They shot at him to bring the car to a standstill, and used a Maxim silencer, or something comical like that, didn't they?"

"How is he ?" asked the editor.

"He's sitting up taking nourishment and a little gentle nail exercise," said Wise Y., "but he's not strong enough to wash cars."

This was nine o'clock in the evening, and the offices had long since been closed. Burton and Dubert were Miss Lethbridge's lawyers, and he knew he would find young Burton at the club. Burton, outside of business hours, was not inclined to discuss his clients' affairs. Wise Symon lured him into the almost deserted library and Burton came protesting.

"My dear fellow, you know I cannot talk about my clients," he said; "particularly about Mliss Lethbridge, now that there's all this trouble on, and every word I say will be reported."

"There's only one thing you need tell me, Socrates," said Symon (they had been at school together and he never took Burton seriously), "and that is this: is there any large sum of money due to Miss Lethbridge in the course of the next week or so?"

"Why ?" asked Burton quickly. "Do you think she is being held for ransom?"

"I never speculate," said Symon impatiently. "Tell me this, and maybe I can restore your client to your loving arms."

"There is a very big sum of money coming to Miss Lethbridge the day after to- morrow," said the lawyer, after a few minutes' thought. "It consists of deferred dividends and the proceeds of sales which will be placed to her credit at the Ninth National Bank."

"And can only be drawn out by her?" asked Wise Symon quickly.

"Exactly," he said. "Of course, Mrs. Lethbridge has authority to draw a cheque on her daughter's account."

"To what extent P" Burton shrugged his shoulders.

"Up to the limit," he said. "When old man Lethbridge died, he left practically the whole of his fortune to his daughter. I think the second wife, which is the second Mrs. Lethbridge, was – er – rather disappointed."

"She was a widow, was she not?" Burton nodded. "The girl, who was quite a good sort, in spite of her eccentricities," he went on, "did all she could to make her stepmother feel comfortable. So far as money is concerned, Mrs. Lethbridge has the same power as her daughter in the control of the account. I don't want you to say this in print," he added hastily "I am telling you this for your private information. Has any further news been received?"

"None whatever," said Symon. "You'll get news from me."

"Half a minute, Symon; you're in a devil of a hurry now you've got all you want."

Burton's hand fell on his arm.

"I am worried sick over this business. What do you think has become of her? Do you believe it is a case of ransom, or that the girl is in any danger?"

"I believe essentially it is a case of ransom, but I do not believe the girl is in any danger," said Wise Symon.

"Well, let's have your theory on the subject," insisted Burton. "I admit you're a pretty shrewd fellow in these things."

"If you want my theory," said Wise Symon solemnly, "you can secure it by paying a very small sum of money to a newsboy next Sunday morning." He went back to the office and found his assistant knee-deep in provincial newspapers. His assistant for the nonce was a cub reporter.

"Have you discovered anything?" asked Wise Symon. The youth took a slip from underneath a paper weight.

"This is the nearest thing I could see," he said. It was an extract from an agony column.

"G.– Nobody knows yet. Very slowly recovering. Quite Forgiven.– M."

"Oh! Where did this appear?" asked Symon.

"It appeared in a paper published in a seaside town in Essex."

"Too late to go down to-night," said Symon, looking at his watch; "but I'll bet that that's what I'm looking for," and he tucked the newspaper cutting into his waistcoat pocket.

He was dressing for dinner that night when, without any preliminary tap at the door, Roon burst in.

"Say, old man!" he cried excitedly, "I've got it."

"Then take something for it," growled Wise Symon. "Who told you to come into my room, anyway."

"I want your help, old man," said Roon a little importantly. "I'll give you credit for your share. All that I need is a little information."

"All you need is a little brains," said Wise Symon, turning round. "Now, let us hear this tragedy of yours – for tragic blunder it is sure to be."

"I know how Miss Lethbridge disappeared," said Roon. "I have had information from a neighbour who swears she heard a shot fired. I came out to the Lethbridge house and had a good look round. What do you think I found?"

"A bullet hole in the door of the garage," said Wise Symon. "I happen toa know, because I made it myself."

Roon's distress was pathetic. His jaw dropped and his mouth opened wide.

"You made it?" he stammered.

"I made it," lied Wise Symon solemnly. "I happened to be up there and Mrs. Lethbridge was showing me a revolver which she had found in Miss Gloria's room, and by accident it went off I had no idea it was loaded."

"But—but—you never said anything about this?"

"I haven't said anything about anything," said Wise Symon patiently. "But go on with your theory, my lad. I would hate to put you off a good story. You think somebody shot at Miss Lethbridge and the bullet went through her and. hit the door—is that your idea?"

"Well, it certainly was something like that," admitted Roon.

"And I suppose you're going to dig up their beautiful flower-beds to discover the body?"

"I have suggested that to the Chief," said Roon stoutly; "I can't see that there's anything against it. You take too fantastic a view of these cases, Symon, and that is where you get left and we regular police succeed. We're not too clever –"

"There I agree with you," said Symon; :and heaven knows you ought to mark this day down in red letters in your diary, for I don't remember having agreed with you before."

"Do you think there's anything in the idea?" asked Roon anxiously.

"I think your theory is rotten. Is this the first time you've heard of a shot fired at night—why, I had it in print last Sunday."

"Oh, of course I saw that," said Roon with a shrug. "I read it, and I said to myself: 'Well, this is a queer tale,' and thought no more about it."

"Now I come to think of it," said Wise Symon, "I did not print that story last Sunday. I was reserving it for next Sunday's edition. Still, if you saw it, it shows that there's something in telepathy—you're a spiritualist, Roon."

The next day, Symon did not go to Essex, but sent his junior, and he himself spent the whole of the day searching registrars' offices for evidence of a marriage. He was certain that the marriage had not yet taken place, but there was still time. At the very last office he visited he made his discovery. Private notice had been given of the intention of two parties to be married by special licence on the following day.

"That suits me admirably," said Wise Symon to the astonished clerk.

"Are you the bridegroom, sir?" asked the man.

"No," said Wise Symon, "I am the fellow that's writing up the marriage for next Sunday's Telephone-Herald."

The train for the Continent leaves Victoria at ten minutes to nine in the morning. There are many trains that will carry intending passengers a part of the way—to Folkestone, for example. At six o'clock in the afternoon Wise Symon was waiting patiently near the barrier to greet the happy couple who, he judged rightly, would be leaving by the evening train for Folkestone.

To his annoyance Roon had kept particularly close to him that day, suspecting that he had the main string of the story, and anxious that he, at any rate, should be in at the death. Soon after six, Wise Symon saw his prey approaching, strolled away from the barrier, following them past the ticket-collector at a respectful distance. They had a carriage specially reserved, which made his task much easier than he had anticipated.

The Folkestone express stops only at London Bridge, and between Charing Cross and London Bridge there was just time for him to carry out his business. The guard's whistle blew, the engine squawked, and then, as the train began slowly to move, Wise Symon threw open the carriage door, and stepped in, closing the door behind him.

"This carriage is reserved," said the man haughtily.

"But not so reserved as you have been," said Symon.

The woman gasped.

"It is the reporter," she said.

"It is the reporter," repeated Wise Symon nodding. "Now, Mrs. Lethbridge, I've got about three minutes in which to clear up a very unpleasant business. You can either clear it up in a perfectly friendly way, or you can get out of the train at London Bridge and clear it up in a very dour and unpleasant police station."

"What da you mean?" said the woman.

"Look here" —it was the man who interrupted— "you've no business here."

"You just shut up for a moment, will you please?" said Wise Symon politely. "I call you Mrs. Lethbridge," he went on, "because I do not know your new married name. Your chauffeur has had so many names in his life that I do not quite know in what name he married you." The ex-chauffeur glared, but there was fear in his eyes as Symon went on. "I know the whole story about the disappearance of Miss Lethbridge," he said. "Part I have guessed and part I discovered from Miss Lethbridge herself—she was brought to London by one of our staff about two hours ago, and I have had a brief interview with her in a railway waiting- room."

"What do you want?" asked the woman.

"I want, first of all, the money you have drawn from Miss Lethbridge's account to-day," said Wise Symon. "Even when you hand that over you have still enough for your honeymoon, for I understand that you have cleared your own account bare. What I particularly want is the sum of £26,000 which this gentleman," he nodded to the chauffeur, "whose name is—"

"My name is Selby," said the man, red of face.

"It was Kendall when you were sentenced to three years at the Assizes for bigamy," said Wise Symon. "I suppose you know, Mrs. Lethbridge, that this man is about three deep in wives?" She swayed and would have fallen, but Symon caught her.

"Who has the money?" he asked. She did not speak but nodded towards her "husband."

Symon put out his hand, but the man made no response. Then, just as the train was crossing the bridge before entering London Bridge station he put his hand in his inside pocket, and, taking out a portfolio, flung it on the floor.

"Pick it up," said Wise Symon sternly. "Pick it up, you son-of-a-gun, or I'll take you and the money, too!"

Sullenly the man obeyed.

"Stand up," said Symon, and ran his hands over him scientifically.

"What's this?" He pulled a little bundle of Treasury bills out of the man's waistcoat pocket. "You'll want these," he said, and pushed them back. "Now, Mrs. Lethbridge, I think you will come with me."

She looked imploringly at the man before her, as though seeking a denial of Wise Symon's charges, but Selby did not meet her eyes. With bowed head she left the carriage on Symon's arm....

"I suppose you know the story?" said the woman.

"I know it," said Symon; "but I'd rather hear you tell it, to correct any little errors into which I have fallen."

"It will sound dreadful to you that a woman should fall in love with her chauffeur," she said, "yet that is the truth of it. He is a very superior man, and—and—well, I don't know how it happened, but I just got to like him more and more, and missed him when he was not there. I used to meet him sometimes and walk with him in the garden. Sometimes he would sit on a box outside the garage.

"On the night of the party we came back early because Gloria had a headache. She went straight to her room, and thinking she would not come down again, I went with Sam—Selby. I think he had me in his arms when Gloria must have come down furtively and seen him. She is a girl of ungovernable temper, and her pride, particularly in the name of her father, amounted to a mania. She ran up the stairs to her room pulled open the drawer where a revolver was kept, and running down, and seeing me still—" she hesitated— "still in Sam's arms, she shot at him. She missed us both, thank God! but Sam fell in a faint. I don't think he was very brave," she faltered.

"Gloria ran back to the house, thinking that she had killed him. She was beside herself with grief and remorse, and I went out to Sam, who had recovered, and told him what had happened. We had long planned to run away, and he had persuaded me—" She covered her face with her hands. "Oh, I am ashamed! I am ashamed! How can I confess it?

"He persuaded me to take Gloria's money. He saw the opportunity which this incident afforded. He insisted on my going back and telling her that he was badly wounded, and. that she must go away somewhere in the country where it was quiet until the affair blew over. I had confided to him details of Gloria's financial position, and he knew that if Gloria could be kept out of the way far a week or so we could get away ta the Continent with the momey. I told Gloria and she agreed.

"I drove her myself to a station ten miles out of town and saw her on the way to a little Essex village, where I have a cottage, promising to communicate with her through the medium of a local paper. It was Sam who invented the story of the abduction. As it happened, it was a stupid thing he did, for he directed public attention to something which we did not want made known. I wrote to Gloria, telling her that I had fooled the reporters and that nobody knew that Sam was so dangerously ill —that is the story."

"That's the story I've written," said Symon.

"But you're not going to—" gasped the woman.

"I have written the story practically on those lines," said Wise Symon sternly.

"But how can I go back to my house?" wailed Mrs. Lethbridge.

"You are not going back to your house, Mrs. Lethbridge," said Wise Symon. "You have been guilty of a very wicked act, and you will be fortunate if you escape making your bow to the judge. I advise you to do as you advised your step- daughter to do, namely, to go into the country and keep away out of sight and out of sound. I will arrange with Miss Lethbridge to send you money. But the story has to be told."

The story was told.

Wise Symon, coming from his house on the Sunday morning, met Roon with a long face and a copy of the paper.

"Say, Symon," he said, "this isn't playing the game. You ought to have told us that Miss Lethbridge was found."

"Why?" asked Symon.

"Why?" spluttered Roon, "because I am the officer in charge of the case."

"You're also the blinking reporter in charge of the case," said Wise Symon brutally, "Cyril!"

6. — THE SAFE DEPOSIT AT THE SOCIAL CLUB

YORK SYMON strolled into the office of the society editor. The society editor of the Telephone-Herald was a good-looking young man who was always beautifully dressed, whose head was invariably brushed so that not a single hair was out of place, and to these other attractions he added a black-rimmed monocle, white buck-skin gloves and a top-hat which, if anything, was more polished than his hair.

He turned his head as the door slammed—Wise Symon had that bad habit of slamming doors as a protest against the parsimony of his proprietors in refusing to fix patent silencers.

"Sorry to rattle you, Flossie," said Symon, "but I'm going into society and I thought I'd come over for a few tips."

Mildred grinned, pushed a tortoise-shell and silver cigarette box along the polished surface of the table and leant back in his chair. Wise Symon picked up the box and admired it.

"I wish I'd been born pretty," he said. "What dear heart thought of this love-gift?"

"It came from Mrs. Stebini," said Mildred easily. "I helped her at her charity ball."

"Mrs. Stebini!" repeated Wise Symon, putting down the box and flopping into a chair. "Why, that's strange, because Mrs. Stebini is the lady I have come to inquire about. Who is she?"

"She's the American wife of an Italian motor-car manufacturer—one of the Stebinis of Turin."

"I'm as well informed as ever," said Wise Symon. "The only tureen I know is the one that holds the soup."

"Turin," said the patient Mildred, "is a manufacturing town in Italy, where a few fortunes were made during the war. Mrs. Stebini has been on a visit to some relations and. she has identified herself very closely with Italian charities. She is a very beautiful woman–"

"Cut all that unnecessary descriptive matter," said Wise Symon in protest, "I've seen her. I agree with you, she's too beautiful for words. All I want to know is something of her history. I don't keep track of social happenings, and when I read 'Society Leader to marry Eminent Pill- Maker' I generally find names underneath which I have never heard before. It was to save

myself dragging down Vol. 1 of 'Who's Which' that I came to your boudoir, Flossie."

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'Flossie,'" growled the other. "One of these days I'll take you down the gym and I'll give you one of the hottest six rounds –"

"Wake up," said Wise Symon coarsely; "those are the sort of dreams you get in this scented atmosphere. So Mrs. Stebini's the goods all right."

"She's the goods all right," said the ruffled Mildred. "She has yards of money, tens of thousands of pounds' worth of jewellery, and she is certainly the most lovely creature that providence ever set in this ugly world."

"Loud cheers," said Symon. "Come over and dine with old man Bolton and me to- night."

"Which Bolton?"

"You don't know him," said Symon. "You'll never meet Bolton at a The dansant; in fact, you will never meet Bolton at all unless you live a respectable commercial life. He is the managing director of the West End Safe Deposit Company."

"Oh, yes, I know. It's a bit groggy, isn't it?" nodded the other. "Have you a good crime on? Yours is the life, by Jove!" he said enviously. "You've no idea how absolutely sick I get of this social business. But I'm sorry I cannot join you. I've got ta rush home and change. Mrs. Silbery-Green is giving a, little dinner to some people who want to meet Mrs. Stebini. She's all the rage, that little woman. She showed me her engagement book this morning, and it's absolutely crowded. How she stands it I don't know," said Mildred ecstatically. "You meet her in the morning, after a heavy day's society work and finishing up with a dance that lasts to well after midnight, and she's as fresh as paint, as clear-eyed as a girl of sixteen—"

"I can see you getting into serious trouble if Giovanni or Guiseppi or Antonio Stebini ever turns up in this burg. You're a naughty boy," said Wise Symon, shaking his head and slamming the door, stopping only for a second to watch his victim jump.

Wise Symon did not move in social circles except when the placid surface of society was disturbed by such common-place happenings as jewel robberies, wilful murders and such manifestations of the unwritten law as reach the public ear. Bolton moved in his own orbit and he was looking forward to the meeting because Bolton was a close man, as befitted tho managing director of a Safe Deposit Corporation, and usually fought shy of the Press. He was

certainly not the kind of man to invite the leading police reporter of a leading newspaper to dine with him in public, and it was with the idea of saving the reputation of this staid gentleman that Wise Symon put forward a tentative invitation to Mildred.

Augustus Bolton was a man of fifty-five, beetle-browed, strong-jawed and clean- shaven—save for an iron-grey moustache which ran stiffly across his upper lip. Some of Wise Symon's doubts were set at rest when he found Bolton waiting for him outside the restaurant.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Symon," said the Safe Deposit director, "I have ordered our dinner in a private room. I don't think it would be goad for business if I were seen in serious conversation with you. Clients might think that something was wrong, when in reality there is nothing at all that is wrong—in your way."

"I can eat my dinner in any kind of room," said Symon smiling. "And maybe it's best for both parties. It might get round that you were trying to suborn me."

The dinner was a simple one and was quickly over.

"Now," said Mr. Bolton, when the waiter had gone after depositing liqueurs and coffee. "I want your advice. You are acquainted with almost everybody, and it struck me the other day when you were at the Safe Deposit—"

"In connection with the Bennett Sandman case?"

"Yes; it struck me, I say, that you would be the man to advise me. I suppose my co-directors would think I was mad to ask your advice on a purely business question which has nothing whatever to do with crime or criminals; and yet, somehow, I am convinced that you are the man who can assist me. You are a journalist, you understand the curious phases of public fancy, and perhaps you could put the arguments I want to use with my clients in more readable language that I can frame."

"Oh, I see," said Wise Symon, "it's a write-up you want?"

"Not exactly," said Bolton quickly. "The fact is we are losing business. Ever since the Social Club Deposit vaults opened – and that is only three months ago— we have been steadily losing our clients."

Wise Symon scratched his chin.

"The Social Club Deposit—oh, that's the new place in Saville Street? I'm afraid I haven't paid much attention to the development of new business,

and anyway, safe deposits have always been mysteries to me. Are they profitable concerns?"

Mr. Bolton nodded. "They pay a very handsome dividend. You see, the cost of running a safe deposit is a very small one after the initial expenses of laying down fire-proof vaults and safes has been covered. There is practically only rent and staff to pay for. We don't even take the risks of a bank—that is to say, we do not insure our customers against loss as the Social Club Deposit does, and our running expenses are much smaller than the new concern."

"Well, it seems to be a very simple proposition," said Wise Symon. "You are the older concern, and all you have to do is to bring down your charges and freeze the new people out."

Again Mr. Bolton shook his head.

"That is impossible. To compete with the Club means absolutely rebuilding our premises. When Milton opened his new club, he made a special feature of his deposit vaults—you see, he made business a pleasure. Women who keep their jewels there can drive down, take them out of the safe, and put them on in beautiful dressing-rooms which they have built. There are attendants on duty at night when the jewels are replaced. It is easy to see that I cannot go into competition, the more so since Milton—who is a pretty enterprising fellow—is prepared to insure jewels even after they have left the deposit, providing they are returned the same night or within twenty-four hours."

"That's a pretty big risk," mused Wise Symon, "with the town full of crooks as it is just now; but don't you think this phase will pass and you'll get your people back again? After all, there are lots of good citizens who don't want a supper club—staid old gentlemen who need a safe only for their documents."

"They are not the people who pay," said Bolton decisively. "The people who pay are exactly the class that Milton is getting. And, besides, how long do you think it will be before these women take their husbands and fathers over to Milton's place? I've been in the safe deposit business all my life and I've seen them grow up and crash down, and I know just how little it takes to smash a business like ours. Sometimes it is the rumour of instability; sometimes the police make a raid upon certain of the safes which have been let to people of a criminal character. Anything like that upsets the clients. Moreover," he said, "I have an idea that somebody has been putting bad reports around about our place."

Wise Symon raised his eyebrows in perplexity. He also had heard little rumours and recalled "Flossie's" words.

"You know, Mr. Bolton, I would do most things for you, but for the life of me I can't see how I'm going to help you along. Can't you get one of those famous business experts who advertise in the magazines to come along and put you right?"

Mr. Bolton shook his head.

"There isn't a business expert who can tell me more about safe deposits than I already know," he said. "If he can tell me why Mrs. Stebini, who had the largest of our safes, suddenly decided to transfer all her property to the Social Club vaults, he might be worth while hiring. I can't trace any inducement that Milton is offering. He has certainly circularized the whole of the fashionable folks, but that was a purely justifiable phase of business. But perhaps you don't know Mrs. Stebini? She's the leader—"

"Oh I know about Mrs. Stebini all right," said Wise Symon. "Is she one of the deserters?"

Bolton nodded. "And she's a leader of fashion," he said. "What she does the other women will do. There's nothing more certain than that."

Wise Symon poured himself out another cup of coffee, and when he had finished he put his elbows squarely on the table and faced the older man.

"Now, Mr. Bolton," he said, "you didn't bring me here to ask my advice as to how you were to run your vaults. You're not that kind of man. There's something at the back of your mind, and perhaps now is the best time to let me have it."

Mr. Bolton hesitated. "It's not right that I should give away the secrets of our clients," he said; "even those who have left us. But the circumstances are such that I feel I must tell you just how I'm worried about—" He looked round and lowered his voice. "Mrs. Stebini had one of the biggest safes in the vaults," he said; "and into that safe every week she has for the past five weeks put a new little parcel. It was, as far as I can gather, a stout cardboard box, wrapped in brown paper, and heavily sealed. It was a box of the size you could put a hundred cigarettes into."

Wise Symon nodded.

"Every week, sometimes twice a week, these parcels used to arrive, and Mrs. Stebini brought them down, put them in her safe and went away. When she

transferred her valuables to the Social Club, the safe was half full of these boxes. She allowed nobody to take them out but herself, and made several journeys in her car without mishap. When she was taking the last load she accidently dropped one of the little packages on the mosaic floor of the vault." He paused impressively. "The box burst—it was full of precious stones. My chief clerk Adams, was down there at the time, and saw them scattered over the floor—diamonds, emeralds and sapphires mostly. He reckoned that the value of that one box was not far short of £50,000—and there were twenty boxes."

Wise Symon stared incredulously.

"You suggest that she had a million pounds' worth of jewels in your safe deposit?"

"That's what it looked like," said Bolton. "She was very angry at the accident, and begged Adams to say nothing. Of course, he reported the matter to me, and I have felt myself rather in a dilemma. Then I thought of you."

"A million pounds! Phew!" said the wondering Wise Symon. "I knew she was rich, but not that rich."

"She wouldn't allow Adams to touch them," Bolton went on; "but gathered every one herself—Symon, I don't like it. Of course, I resent Mrs. Stebini transferring her patronage to a rival establishment; in fact, knowing what I do now, I am rather glad that she has done so, save for the bad example it sets to other women."

Wise Symon scratched his head.

"One boxful would have been startling enough," he said. "Were they cut and polished?"

Bolton nodded.

"Do you think that Milton knows?"

"I haven't any idea," replied Bolton. "Naturally I cannot take him into my confidence without betraying a former client. But I shouldn't imagine that he would be very happy if he knew the amount of property he had in his vaults. I like Mrs. Stebini, she's a bright pretty little woman, and there's going to be some bad trouble in this town if it ever becomes known to the crooks who abound, that Mrs. Stebini is stacking this treasure."

Wise Symon sat deep in meditation.

"It's a queer business," he said. That was the only comment that he would permit himself to make.

On his way back to the office he met Detective Roon, and Detective Roon was in a very cheerful frame of mind.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Wise Symon suspiciously. "I just hate to see you happy, Roon. It's always a sign that the public service is bad."

"You will have your little joke, Symon," said Roon. "But I don't mind telling you, my lad, that I've a bit of information that you'd give your head to know."

"If I gave it to you, you wouldn't know how to use it," said Wise Symon unpleasantly; "but I see you're bursting to tell me. Let it loose."

Roon shook his head.

"No, no, my friend," he said airily, "and—"

"Don't call me your friend," snarled Symon.

"Friend or no," replied Roon, affectedly patronizing, "I can give you no information about this matter, because in a sense it's a little too important to get into the newspapers."

Wise Symon laughed long and sarcastically.

"On the face of it that is a lie," he said; "for if it were truly important you wouldn't be allowed within a block of it."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Roon in a burst of confidence; "you know Mrs. Stebini?"

"I do," said Wise Symon, "as I do my own right hand."

"And you know young George Milton?" Wise Symon nodded.

"Well?" he asked quickly.

"They are engaged to be married; in fact," said Roon, "they are to be married to-day and they are leaving on their honeymoon to-night. Now, what do you think of that?"

If he hoped to create a sensation his hopes were justified.

"One minute," said the wise man; "how did you come to know this?"

"I happened to be at the Great Central and I saw Milton putting some baggage away. I just nose round these places on the off-chance of picking up something," explained Roon; "in fact I've got some of my best cases there."

"That sounds like cases of whisky to me," said Wise Symon. "Go on, what is your story? Was Milton startled to see you?"

"He was a little said the other complacently. "Then he told me and asked me not to say a word."

Wise Symon scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"What train is he leaving by?"

"By the nine o'clock."

"Another question," said Wise Symon. "Who is Milton? I don't know much about these Club people. I know his father was the head of a good business."

"The old man's retired," explained Roon. "Milton used to be a pretty bad boy and was in Italy for some years. There was a row between him and the old man and they were not on speaking terms. Then, after his father had turned over the business to the trust, he came back reformed. It only shows you," said Roon, "what I might call the refining influence of art and travel on a wild nature—"

"Spare me your slush," said Wise Symon. "Where is his father to be found?"

Mr. Milton senior had an estate thirty-five miles from town, where he lived alone save for a small army of servants. He was an invalid and something of a recluse, and Wise Symon who had come on by a racing motor-car found some difficulty in securing an interview. At last, however, he was admitted into the library and found the old man in his dressing-gown, suspicious and wholly unwilling to talk.

"My son?" he said violently, "I don't want to discuss my son!"

"But—" began Wise Symon.

"I tell you I don't want to talk about him. He has cost me a fortune. He's a crook, a blackguard—"

"Hold hard, Mr. Milton," said Wise Symon, "you are talking now of a man who occupies rather an important position in town."

"Bah!" said the old man.

"He's running a dancing club and has, moreover, a safe deposit—"

"I know nothing about him," said the old man violently; "all I know is that he's a rascal. The people who put up the money to start him in business are fools or rogues. He knows no more about business than a Tom cat. I warned everybody. I put an advertiseiment in the Courier-Globe four years ago that I would not be responsible for his debts, and that I had no connexion with him. Where did he get his money from? In Italy he and his infernal wife were associated with swindlers. They were in trouble in Paris. They were broke in Vienna."

"That's all I want to know," said Wise Symon.

There was a great social function in town that night. All society flocked to the Albert Hall and the limited space of the Social Club was packed with people, especially those who had come up from the country during the day, deposited their jewels, and were now receiving them back preparatory to joining the Kensingtonian revels.

At eleven o'clock there arrived in the purlieus of Albert Hall Mr. York Symon, and he was accompanied by the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department and a dapper, bald-headed little man whom many recognized as Isadore Solomon, the biggest jewel expert in Europe.

"Excuse me, your Grace."

It was the flighty young Duchess of Telboro whom Wise Symon had intercepted, hat in hand.

"Yes?"

She looked at the young man suspiciously.

"This is Mr. Coleburn from Scotland Yard," said Symon, "and we are anxious to know whether you have just come from the Social Club?"

The Duchess nodded.

"Yes, I went to the vaults to get my necklace," she touched the glittering bauble about her throat. "I came from Scotland yesterday and left it there."

Symon smiled.

"And this gentleman is Mr. Solomon—a well- known jeweller who wishes, with your Grace's permission, to examine your necklace."

"My necklace ?" she said in alarm; "but why?"

"We have already examined three sets of jewellery," explained Symon, "and we have found that in every case the stones have been removed and fakes inserted in the setting."

With a shrinking hand the duchess removed the Telboro emeralds and Solomon took it in his hand.

"Paste," he said laconically. "Very good paste, worth about a pound a stone."

The duchess collapsed into a chair.

"Telboro will never forgive me," she wailed….

"It's rum how they all said that their husbands wouldn't forgive them," said Wise Symon as he and the detective chief bowled eastwards in the latter's car.

"How did you get on to this story?" asked the other curiously.

"Guessed a bit, inquired a bit, and knew a bit," said Symon briefly. "It cost 'em a lot of money building the Social Club, but it was a good idea. Milton married Terrema Olandi, the daughter of a jeweller. I found that out by telegraphing to our man at Milan. She had already been under the notice of the Rome police for a jewel fraud; she is apparently an expert at resetting jewels. Every week she received from Italy a parcel of faked stones—she had to have a lot to match the stones so the fraud should nat be detected.

"The rest was simple! Mrs. Stebini patronized the old-established safe deposit to gain the confidence of her friends. She started the stampede to the Social Club, and spent mast of her time there exchanging new stones for old.

"Here is the Great Central and the train for Hull leaves in ten minutes."

It left without Mr. and Mrs. Milton.

7. — THE CASE OF CROOK BERESFORD

ORDINARILY women did not greatly interest Wise Symon just because they were women and young and pretty. But the new arrival in Flat 14 was not ordinary. He saw her the day he moved in – a girl with delicate, aristocratic features (that was the first impression) – and since he abhorred ignorance as much as Nature abhors a vacuum, he made urgent inquiries of' the caretaker.

Wise Symon lived in a block of flats which ranged in price and exclusiveness from the highly-rated first-floor apartments to the tiny bed-sitting-bath on the fourth.

"She is a Miss Hilda Cresser," said the caretaker.

"She's an artist or something of that sort. Her father, or her uncle, I don't know which it is, runs the Florentine Art Company. I happen to know," explained the caretaker, "because my brother is in the printing business. He told me all about them. Yes, it's her uncle," he corrected himself. "He and his two sons run this little business in the city. They only print art etchings and things like that for the picture shops."

There were four flats on each floor, and Wise Symon occupied one of the two more expensive front apartments. No. 14 was on the same floor, but at the back and much smaller. He used to see her some mornings going off with a big portfolio under her arm, and had grown accus- tomed to passing the neat figure on the stairs. Once she had dropped a drawing from her port- folio which Symon had retrieved. He noted her extreme nervousness on that occasion. Without: a word. of thanks, she had snatched the drawing from him and had fled up the stairs. And it had rather amused him. Once in his wanderings he came upon the Florentine Art Reproducing Company, a small, severe-looking shop, the windows painted a dull red, and the title of the company artistically done in gold and Gothic letters over the facia.

It was not a case of genius starving in a garret, for he had seen her also lunching and dining at the moderately-expensive restaurant which he patronized.

One day Symon was out looking for Burberry Kate, whose speciality was shop- lifting an the grand scale. He knew that the lady was in town, and so apparently did Detective Roon, for York Symon literally collided with his bete noir in the lingerie department of Wilfridge's Store.

Symon looked at the little man severely.

"This is hardly the sort of place I should have expected to see a single man. I am rather surprised at you, Roon."

Roon spluttered an indignant protest, and made counter accusations.

"I'm here on business," said Symon; "and, besides, a journalist can go almost anywhere with propriety. Come and have a cup of tea."

They went up to the roof refreshment room, and Roon was surprisingly affable.

"Yes, I am looking for Kate," he admitted; "but she's not by any means the big game I am hunting."

"I like you best when you're not literary," said Symon. "Who is the particular elephant you're trailing?"

Roon smiled very shrewdly.

"You don't know," accused Symon.

"Oh, don't I?" snorted the other. "I can tell you, Symon, that I've got the biggest case – or I'm on the way to getting the biggest case," he corrected, "that has come my way for years."

It was not the first time that Symon had heard that Roon was on the verge of a coup, and he was not impressed. He said as much as he stirred his tea.

"Oh, aren't you?" said Roon aggressively. "Well, perhaps you will be, when you know all about it."

"Perhaps you will be too, when you know all about it," said Symon. "At present I shouldn't think you know much."

"I don't, eh?" said Roon, twirling his moustache with an air of great reticence; "look here, don't you come hanging round me when I get on to 'Crook' Beresford –"

"Crook Beresford?" said Wise Symon sharply. For a crime reporter not to know Crook Beresford was to argue himself unknown. Beresford was at once the Napoleon and the Whiteley of crime, whose exploits, trials and triumphant acquittals had been more paragraphed than the most popular of cinema stars.

"He's in America, anyway," said Wise Symon.

"May be, may be," replied Roon airily. "Of course, you know everything, Mr. Wise Symon. What's the good of me telling you anything?"

"He's in town, eh?" Symon rubbed his knee thoughtfully.

"I don't say that he's in town," Roon hastened to add.

"All that we know is that we've had information of a big scheme that's coming off and that this city is to be his headquarters."

"What sort of a scheme? Like his last?" asked Symon.

Crook Beresford's last coup was carried out in New York. It was known as the Milanaise Stocking Fraud. At a moment when the world's supply of Milanaise stockings had fallen to its lowest, and frantic women the world over were paying exorbitant prices for stockings which looked like Milanaise, there had appeared in every New York paper and in all the leading papers of the United States full page advertisements announcing that Timber Bros. had procured immense quantities of these garments which had been stored in Rome, and which were now offered to the pubic at a price about ten per cent. lower than the pre- war price. Timber Bros. whose name appeared to this advertisement, had employed an enormous staff to deal with the applications. Timber Bros.' bankers were deluged with postal notes and cheques; and then one fine morning the staff of Timber Bros. received at their private residences a month's salary, with a polite notification that their services would be no longer required. Of course, there weren't any Timber Bros. It was the name of a crook who rented a large suite of offices which had been taken furnished. More to the point, there were no Milanaise silk stockings. It was estimated that the unknown genius who had worked this gigantic swindle had taken a clear profit of a quarter of a million dollars from the American public.

The man had not escaped attention. He had appeared on another charge before a judge in California, but such was his extraordinary cleverness in covering his tracks that he had escaped conviction both there and in India, where he was charged with persuading a gullible Rajah to entrust his jewels to him at a spiritualistic seance. Later, one may tell the whole story of Crook Beresford and his surprising end; but for the moment we may see him through Mr. Roon's eyes.

"I think he's made a mistake in coming here," said Roon. "He's given us a wide berth and kept himself to the Colonies and America. When he gets up against our organization he'll feel a draught."

"Not if you keep your mouth shut," said Wise Symon unkindly. "But tell me this, oracle, have you any idea of the business Crook is working?"

Roon shook his head.

"All we know is that he's coming here, or he's here already," he said.

This was news for Wise Symon, and immediately took his mind off the question of the peccant Kate. He had a hunger to handle Crook Beresford, and had read with envy the long police-court proceedings in other countries, and prayed fervently that Crook Beresford would keep out of danger long enough to reach the territory which Wise Symon covered. And now he was here. Symon did not pay too much attention to all that Roon said, but the little man had spoken with such conviction, and he was so unlikely to have invented the story, that Symon was convinced he spoke the truth.

That night he carried home to his room the big portfolio from the office library which constituted the dossier of Mr. Beresford. Pipe in mouth, he sat at his table from eight till eleven, and might have sat the greater part of the night turning over newspaper cuttings, but for the bump which came against his door. It was a soft tap, and it was followed by a sound as though some heavy hand was rubbing the door with a cloth. In two strides he was at the door and opened it, and as he did so the girl fell into the room. He thought at first she had fainted, and, lifting her up, carried her to the sofa. She was deathly white. He lifted her eyelids with the professional touch, and saw that the pupils were contracted and showed no reaction to the light. He bent down and smelt her breath.

"Morphia!" he said. "Poor little girl! Poor little girl!"

But if she was a dope-taker, it was unlikely that she would be so overcome as this girl was. Your regular taker of morphia is hardened to its action. She was breathing heavily and Wise Symon was alarmed. He soaked a towel in his bath and laid it over her eyes and head, then hastily lit the gas in his kitchenette and boiled up the coffee which the housekeeper had left for him.

It was nearly an hour before the girl came to herself. She struggled up, supported by his arm, and stared into his face.

"Who are you ?" she said. "Why did you not let me die?"

"I thought so," said Wise Symon. "What has life done to you, my girl, that you should want to get out of it?"

For answer, she buried her face in her hands and burst into a passionate fit of weeping, and this was a symptom which Wise Symon was wholly incapable of treating either with coffee or without.

A thought struck him. He left the girl to herself and. walked out on to the landing. As he had expected, her door was open and a light was burning in her sitting-room. He walked in, and the first thing he saw on the table was a small wine-glass containing the dregs of a dark brown fluid. He picked it up and smelt it.

"Laudanum!" he said. "That isn't the tipple of the dope taker."

On another table under a strong light was a sloping artist's desk, on which was a piece of drawing paper fastened at the four corners with drawing-pins. It wasn't like ordinary paper, either. It was more like that which is employed by lithographers, and all that was visible was the pencil sketch of a woman sitting with out-stretched arms. He looked round the room. It was cosily furnished and the walls with etchings; all bearing the signature "H. Cresser." The work was beautifully executed. He saw, too, the tools of her craft, the etching tray, the acid bottles, and the gravers neatly hung on a sort of pipe rack above the bench where the trays were standing. There was evidence here of comfort and refinement, and he came to the conclusion that it was not money or the lack of money which had driven the girl to her desperate act. He picked up the wine-glass and smelt it again, then examined the small bottle which stood by his side.

After a while he put them down and returned to the girl, closing the door behind him.

"Now, Miss Cresser," he said, "you've got to be sensible. You've been very foolish and very weak. You've no more right to attempt to take your life than I have to murder you."

She raised her tear-stained face ta his, and there was a pathetic little droop to her mouth which went straight to his heart. She was more than ordinarily pretty, he thought, she was beautiful. She was the type of beauty which invariably gripped Wise Symon, and helplessness and the sense of tragedy which pervaded her brought his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"My dear," he said kindly, "as a rule I wouldn't advise you to tell your troubles to any man, because a man's sympathy has always got a come-back. But, if you will act against my advice and tell me what's worrying you, perhaps I can help you."

The girl shook her head.

"Nobody can help me," she said wearily. "I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!"

"That's because you're young," said the cheerful Wise Symon. "At your age everybody wishes they were dead. Very likely they're right. Take my advice, go on drawing pretty ladies—"

She jumped up, her hand to her mouth.

"You've seen it? You've seen it?" she whispered, her eyes staring at him in horror.

"Seen it?" he said in surprise.

"What, the drawing of the lady on the table? Why surely I've seen it. Tell me," he said, more to make conversation and to distract her attention, "why do you use that kind of paper for drawing on? Why not use a millboard."

Her mouth dropped again.

"A millboard," she repeated. "Then you know."

"I don't think you're quite yourself yet," said Wise Symon gently. "The only thing I know is that you're making a drawing on lithographer's paper. There's nothing very remarkable about that."

"I told them I wouldn't do it, and I won't, I won't!" she said fiercely.

It was some time before he could calm and reassure her that he had no sinister meaning in his reference to millboard and at last she became almost normal.

"I've been a great nuisance to you, Mr.—"

"My name's Symon," said Wise Symon; "and you are Miss Cresser."

She nodded.

"I am very grateful to you," she said; "you have been really kind and I am afraid I have been rather a fool," she added frankly, smiling though her eyes were still swollen with tears, "rather dizzy, too," she said as she tried to walk and stumbled. She gave a little hysterical laugh and Wise Symon lent her his arm to her door.

"Are you sure you're alright?" he asked anxiously. She had turned at the doorway and evidently had no desire that he should enter.

"I am quite alright," she said; "thank you ever so much, Mr. Symon. I shall never forget your kindness. Some day—" she added.

"Some day?" said Wise Symon.

"Nothing," she said shortly, and with a little nod closed the door almost in his face.

The experience puzzled him and took his mind from his work for the night. He put away the cuttings about Crook Beresford and went to bed, but not to sleep. He was conscious that within a few feet of him was a troubled little soul, lonely and friendless, who found the burdens of life so heavy that she was ready to end it.

He heard her step pass his door the next morning on her way to work and was relieved. Delicacy prevented him trying to meet her and it was not until four days later that they exchanged words. They had met in the doorway of the flats and her colour rose when she saw him.

"I am afraid you think I am very ungracious, Mr. Symon," she said. "I should have come to you the next morning to thank you, but I was so ashamed."

"Have you finished your drawing?" he asked for want of something to say, and was astounded to see the colour leave her face.

"No; I have not finished it," she said hastily, and turning from him abruptly she ran up the stairs.

Half an hour later Hilda Cresser came down to the street and looking round apprehensively walked rapidly eastward. She turned from street to street, looking behind her as she passed every corner, and presently reached the main thoroughfare and hailed a taxi-cab. She gave an address and was whirled rapidly away.

Wise Symon who had watched her egress and had followed her from a distance was puzzled. Why this secrecy and this furtive method of hers? For the matter of that why the laudanum and the tears? He bit his lips in thought and went back to his rooms. He had followed her out when he heard her door close softly, without any idea in his mind save his ineradicable itch for information. He switched on the light above his table and turned anew to the examination of Mr. Crook Beresford's record. It was in the account of the court proceedings in New York that he found the two paragraphs which made him sit up.

"Phew!" whistled Wise Symon.

He went carefully through the remainder of the dossier, seeking another reference to one of the statements which had caught his eye but failed to find confirmation.

It was his luck to run against Roon. Roon, bursting with importance, his coppery face shining with suppressed excitement.

"Can't stop, can't stop," said Roon, stopping nevertheless. "Old man! I've got the biggest job I've ever had in my life—chosen from all the other men at Headquarters to carry it out."

"As I've told you before—" began Wise Symon.

"I know what you've told me," said Roon loudly, "but this is a clue I've ferreted out myself, and I'm going after it. I've found Crook Beresford's game."

"The dickens you have," said Wise Symon considerably interested.

"I can't tell you what it is," said Roon, who was simply aching to tell; "but if you'd give me your word of honour that you wouldn't use a word until the thing's through I might take you into my confidence."

Wise Symon hesitated.

Ordinarily he would have made no such promise, but now the anxiety in his mind was one from which he had been free in every previous case he had tackled.

"Word of honour," he said, "if this is the real story, I promise you I won't tell."

Roon looked round with exaggerated caution and took out his pocket-book. From this he removed a sheet of thick paper which was folded in four.

"What do you think of that'?" he asked opening it, and Wise Symon, looking at the document, felt his jaw drop. He looked long and earnestly, then refolded the paper and handed it back to Roon.

"Roon," he said despondently, "I'll never say another word against you. You've got the story; I'm perfectly sure of that."

"Haven't I?" said Roon eagerly; "say don't you think I ought to get promotion out of this? I was the first person to see the prospectus, and I took the trouble to go round making inquiries about the directors. Not one of them is

known in the city. What is the idea of the Central African Timber Trust, and why is it suddenly put upon the market?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Wise Symon, his eyebrows rising. "I'm talking about the new company, and about the share certificate I showed you. If Beresford isn't behind the whole thing, pulling the strings to get money out of the gullible public, I'm a Dutchman!"

"Let me see that certificate again."

Roon dug it out of his pocket-book and handed it to the reporter. It was a nice share certificate: very attractive, beautifully engraved, and announced to the world at large that the bearer held one hundred shares in the Central African Timber Trust. Capital £200,000; 200,000 shares £1 each. These and other facts were set forth in flowing script and enclosed in an artistic border.

"So you think," said Symon, "that this is a fake company?"

"Don't you agree," asked Mr. Roon.

"But what makes you think it is a fake—because the directors are unknown?"

"That's one reason, nobody has heard of them on 'Change, they are not business men or city men, and if you look at the prospectus you will see that they are described as store-keepers and clerks, just dummies you see?"

"I see," said Wise Symon; "possibly the Colonial Office can tell you much more about them than I can, but you will probably find that that company is made up of a number of local white men who have secured the concessions either from the native chiefs or the government. The reason they are unknown is because—well because they are unknown in this country."

It was Roon's turn to look surprised.

"Do you mean to tell me you think that this company isn't a fake?"

"I should think it was unlikely," said Wise Symon calmly.

"Then what the devil do you mean by telling me that I had the story?" demanded the justifiably indignant Roon.

"That was my humour," said Wise Symon. "So long, Roon. Take my tip and go to the Colonial Office."

Mr. Roon muttered strange and disrespectful words, but nevertheless followed Wise Symon's advice, and there met with what he subsequently, described as the culminating disappointment of his career. The Colonial Office knew the vendors and the directors. They were, as Wise Symon had suggested, perfectly honest men who had secured concessions and were now floating their company upon the British market.

In the meantime Wise Symon was pursuing inquiries on his own. The cab deposited him before the sedate premises of the Florentine Art Reproductions Company. There was a little lobby with a counter, and behind the counter a glass-screened desk, and its distempered walls bore specimens of the artcraft of the Florentine Reproduction Company. A spectacled young man inquired Mr. Symon's business.

"I want to see the boss," said Symon. "I want to ask him about some share certificates."

"I can take any order you wish to give," said the young man politely.

"This is a particular job," said Wise Symon, "and I have been told I should see the proprietor."

The young man disappeared through a door and was gone some time. Presently he returned.

"Will you step this way, sir," he said.

He was led down a little passage into a room at the back of the shop. A bearded man in a white overall rose to meet Wise Symon and pulled a chair forward. He was tall and good-looking, despite the grey streaks in his beard, or possibly because of them, and he took off his glasses with a smile as he asked: "Now, what can we do for you?"

"Did you print the share certificates of the Central African Timber Trust?" asked Wise Symon.

"I think we did; yes, I am pretty sure we did," nodded the other.

"It was very beautiful work," said Symon, "and I am going to ask you to prepare a sketch."

"For a share certificate?" asked the other.

Symon nodded, and the man took up his pencil and drew a sheet of paper from the rack.

"The Company is called the Endeavour Lead Mining Syndicate, and the share capital of £200,000,'" said Wise Symon glibly. "Registered offices, 189 Fort St. That is all the information you want. Can you get a sketch out on those lines?"

The man rose with a smile.

"I'll see to that at once," he said.

Wise Symon looked down at the desk reading what the man had written, and then with a nod and a commonplace about the weather he left.

He wrote out the preliminaries of his story and in his mind allowed a fortnight for its full development. He was working late that night, having been switched on to a very commonplace larceny which had its importance by reason of the high position in society of its victim. He turned in his copy as the hands of the office clock were pointing to one.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Nothing very much," said the editor. "There's a murder in Wigan, a big strike in Pennsylvania and the French Government have admitted that there is over five million francs' worth of bad notes in circulation, and that the design of the thousand-franc note is to be changed immediately. There's a girl missing from Leeds; we've got her portrait somewhere. No; there's nothing worth talking about."

Wise Symon walked home, his shoulders hunched, his hands thrust into his pockets, a certain sign of his mental perturbation. He had turned the corner which leads to Grayley Mansions, where he had his home, when he suddenly drew back and flattened himself against the wall. There was a car outside the door, a little two-seater, and a man had alighted and had opened the outer door with a key.

Now only tenants have keys, and Wise Symon knew all the tenants well enough to know that this was not one of them. He waited until he heard the door fastened and gave the visitor a reasonable time to reach his destination before he let himself in. Closing the door softly he went up the two carpeted flights of stairs to his own door and softly and noiselessly admitted himself to his flat.

Above the girl's door, as above all the doors, was a round glass transom in which he had seen a momentary flash and he guessed that a door giving to the passage had been closed suddenly. He went to the party wall with a

glass tumbler, placed the foot of the tumbler to the wall and his ear to its mouth. He heard a voice distinctly—the girl was inaudible.

Slipping off his boots he made his way into the passage to the girl's door and he listened again, but there was no sound. He returned to his flat and passing into the bedroom, lifted his window, being careful to make no sound. Outside the window was a parapet a foot wide, but Wise Symon had no nerves. He walked steadily along until he came to the first of the windows of the girl's rooms. It was open at the bottom and covered by a thick curtain. Silently he slipped through the window and justification for his act was to be found in the menacing voice he heard.

"All packed up and ready to go on the first train," sneered the voice of a man; "I suspected something like that. Now you can unpack as fast as you like. If you ever try a trick like that on me again, by God, I'd shoot you if you were twenty times my niece, you ungrateful little devil! Haven't I brought you up? Haven't I educated you at the best schools?"

"For what?" said the voice of the girl bitterly; "for this!"

"For this," growled the man; "aren't you comfortable? Haven't you all the money you want? Can't you cut a shine? You get all those fancy ideas out of your head and get to work. Maybe your new friend has been putting these ideas in your head."

"What new friend?" she asked quickly.

Presumably the man made a gesture and she replied at once, her voice rising in indignation. "Perhaps I do not want his help, only his respect. I'd be dead now if it hadn't been for him—and I wish I were dead."

"Very touching, very touching indeed," said the man sarcastically; "but that isn't going to help me. The French Government is changing the design of its notes. I've spent a little fortune to get that design and you're the only person I know who can engrave it. You are going through with this business, and when that's finished you can go to the devil so far as I am concerned."

"I'll not do it," said the girl's voice quietly.

"You'll not do it?"

There was a quick rush of feet and a scream from the girl.

"Beresford!" said Wise Symon.

Crook Beresford turned, his bearded face livid with rage. He half-crouched to spring, but the gun in Symon's hand was very business-like and was moreover pointed to that portion of the crook's anatomy which would occasion him the greatest distress if it were fired.

"What do you mean by Crook Beresford?" he stammered.

"I've been reading up your record," said Wise Symon; "incidentally I learnt that you had a little niece who was present in court and that one of your failings was to spell Endeavour with an 'I,' instead of an 'E.'"

"She's in it, too," said the man, pointing to the shivering girl.

Wise Symon shook his head and smiled.

"I am one of the principal witnesses for your prosecution, Beresford," he said, "and one of the principal witnesses for her defence."

He walked to the girl and put his arm round her.

"Only one thing I want to ask you, Hilda," he said; "why were you so scared when I said millboard?"

There was no need for her to answer. It was then that he remembered that in France a thousand-franc note was called "a mille" and nothing else.

8. — THE CRIME EXPERT

YORK SYMON was a man without any notable prejudices, and if it is argued that his periodical protests against the wisdom of Providence in allowing such men as Detective Roon to exist suggested a contrary view, it may be said that there are pet dislikes as well as pet likings, and that deprived of Roon's association, Wise Symon would have lost one of the pleasures which life held.

Detective Roon, meeting the prime reporter one afternoon, suggested as much in the course of a brief conversation and Wise Symon was staggered by the sheer logic of the man whom he regarded of all men as being most illogical.

A provincial bank had been held up by a gang of three masked men, and Roon, in an expansive moment, was giving the reporter a few particulars as to the precautions which the police were taking to prevent the repetition of this outrage in the city.

Wise Symon had made some snappy reference to the beneficial effects which would follow the resignation of Detective Roon, when that worthy, stung to retort, had uttered a great truth.

"Anyway, Y," he said, "ou wouldn't be half as sharp if you hadn't me to hone yourself on."

Symon thought a moment. "

"That view never struck me before," he said. "There are moments, Roon, when I would mistake you for an intelligent man. It would have to be rather late at night," he qualified his compliment.

He went back to the subject of the bank robbery. "

"It is pretty clear," he said, "that it is the Rivers gang which is working. Jack, Tom and Jerry, and the greatest of these is Jerry."

Roon nodded, being for once in agreement.

"Their methods in Birmingham are exactly the same as those they worked on in New Rochester," he said, "and I believe that they will never come to the city."

Roon shook his head.

"I think they will," he said. "I've figured everything out, all the possibilities and probabilities, and I've reached a conclusion." "

"That didn't take you long," said Wise Symon unpleasantly. "I should say you'd reach the conclusion of your reasoning faculty in about three thinks."

Wise Symon was feeling a little more snappy than was his wont. In the first place, he was pretty certain that the Rivers gang were planning a coup, and for once all the information he had collected concerning these redoubtable bank robbers had been at fault. They were working outside his province and that alone was enough to rattle him, and in the second place there had arrived on the paper a new crime investigator, well recommended to the chief and by him acclaimed as a real acquisition to the staff.

Wise Symon was not a small man in any way. But he would have to be very large- minded indeed to accept the arrival in the office of such a new factor. For Gregory Brown, the quiet young man who had found a desk in the reporters' room, was undoubtedly capable. He was, moreover, a possible rival, and at this moment, when Wise Y. Symon dreamt of a little home of his own and an assured position to which he could bring a certain dark-eyed girl, it was vitally necessary to his peace of mind that rivals should not exist.

Nevertheless, he had sufficient confidence in his own ability to enable him to keep a normal view, and when, after leaving Roon, he overtook Mr. Gregory Brown, he greeted him with frank friendliness.

"Well, how did you get on?" asked Symon.

Brown was nominally appointed as his assistant and Wise Y. had sent him to make certain inquiries at the bank.

"They're very confident," said Brown, with a little smile on his dark face, "especially the Provincial. In fact, they were a little boastful and were ready to receive the gang at any hour of the day or night."

Wise Y. shook his head.

"I doubt very much whether they'll go for the Provincial," he said. "Their system is good – their guard method would take a bit of breaking through. It is the Commercial Bank that presents the best opportunities for a gang like the Rivers crowd."

Gregory Brown did not agree with him. He uttered a polite "It is possible" and would not have pursued the subject, but Symon was just as anxious that the matter should not be dropped.

"The Commercial Bank is old-fashioned," he said. "The average age of the directors is about one-hundred-and-six and the manager is one of those thick- headed nincompoops——"

Brown laughed softly. "I thought he was a pretty decent fellow," he said. "At any rate, I persuaded him that I was, and I've been invited out to dine with him at his house."

"The devil you have," said Symon in surprise. "Well, that's all to the good. You can't know too many people or know them too well," he went on, "especially a stranger to this town. By the way, what newspaper were you on before you came here?"

"I was never on a newspaper," said the other frankly. "I dabbled in crime stories and collected a great deal of information about the most prominent criminals in the country, but I cannot say that I've ever had an official position such as I now possess."

"What do you know about the Rivers?" asked Symon after a pause, as they turned into the main street in which the newspaper office was situated.

Mr. Brown shrugged.

"I know about as much as most people, perhaps a little more," he corrected. "Jack and Tom Rivers are the brains of the organization. They are both expert locksmiths, and were the first people in this country to introduce the hydrogen flame for cutting out of safe-doors."

"I know all that," said Symon briefly. "I thought you were going to give me some exclusive stuff."

Again Mr. Brown smiled. "I can only tell you this," he said guardedly, "that they are coming here for the Provincial Bank."

"How do you know that?" asked the other quickly.

"That is my information," said the cautious Mr. Brown. "They will blow the bank on the seventeenth of this month."

Wise Y. Symon frowned. He himself had not been idle, and he knew that on the 17th of the month the Provincial would carry an abnormal quantity of currency. It was the day before the great bonus distribution of the Fairfax

Manufacturing Company, which was one of the biggest clients of the bank. The Fairfax divided a portion of their profits with their employees and on the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day, the division was carried out. He knew also that on that date the bank employed an extra armed guard and, forewarned as they were, the efforts of the Rivers brothers would be attended by a certain amount of difficulty.

If Mr. Brown had predicted the 12th and the Commercial Bank he would have been equally impressed, because on the 12th the Commercial Bank carried even a larger treasury than the Provincial.

Mr. Tiller, the manager of the Commercial, pompous, conservative, and a pillar of respectability, was one of the trustees for the mansion of a millionaire whose eccentric will had filled the columns of the daily Press.

"I can't help feeling that it's the Commercial they're aiming at," said Wise Symon as they walked into the building together. "Tiller boasts that he carries one-hundred-and-twenty-thousand pounds in bank notes in his vault ready to pay over the legacy to old Staines's nephew when he arrives in England, and he is due to arrive about the middle of the month. I suppose Tiller told you that, too?"

Mr. Brown nodded.

"Of course, it's probably a lie. It's wonderful how glibly these old devils can rattle off yarns of that description. But whether he's got the money in his vaults or not, he's pretty sure to have it there ready for this gilded youth when he arrives."

"That isn't my information," said Gregory Brown very definitely, and Wise Symon was not unnaturally irritated by the confidence in the other's voice.

The managing editor was away taking a cure, and the paper was in charge of the assistant editor, a man who was no great friend of Symon's and who had, moreover, been responsible for bringing Brown into the building.

Symon went to his room to report and found John Gresham, a beetle-browed gentleman who never smiled, reading the expense sheet.

"These expenses are pretty stiff, Symon," was the greeting the reporter received. "Can you justify them?"

"If my expenses are too heavy and you are dissatisfied with my work," said Symon coolly, "you know what you can do."

The other flushed. His position was a temporary one, and he had not the authority, if he had the will, to take the reporter at his word.

"There's no occasion to get fresh about it; I'm telling you," he growled. "Now what about this Rivers story? Have you anything fresh?"

"Nothing whatever," said Symon.

"You've fallen down on it, eh?" said Gresham with a little sneer.

"There's nothing to fall down on yet," replied Symon. "They haven't arrived in town."

"That isn't Brown's story," rejoined Gresham.

"I'm not worrying anything about Brown's story," said Wise Symon passively. "I'm only interested in the York Symon story. If you want me to hand the job over to Brown I am willing to do it; but the least you can do is to tell me just what Brown has discovered. He was a little reticent with me."

Mr. Gresham hesitated, and then very reluctantly disclosed the extent of his knowledge. Brown had reported that the Rivers were in the town and that they were preparing for a big coup on the Provincial Bank——"

"That I don't believe," said Symon. "The Provincial are too smart. Look here, Mr. Gresham, Brown's information is a little wrong. He tells me that the two elder brothers are the brains of the Rivers organization, and that's not true. It's Jerry who works these robberies out in detail, and for once I agree with Roon, who says the same thing." But he had an unsympathetic audience and left the room so exasperated that five minutes later he wrote out his resignation. It was not the first time that he had written out his resignation, nor the first time he had torn it up, and this wise course he followed on this occasion.

Neither Roon nor the official police had given any information to confirm the statement of Brown, and the days which followed were the most trying that Wise Symon had ever experienced in his career. Every thread which he found and which had the appearance of leading to a main clue was neatly clipped. He came against more dead walls in the course of the following week than he had ever remembered facing before—and the police were in exactly the same position.

As for Roon, he became an intolerable nuisance with his theories and hypotheses. One afternoon Wise Symon sat down in a freakish humour and perpetrated the only practical joke he had ever worked on Roon. He was

sorry for it afterwards and would have recalled the letter he had sent to New Rochester to he posted. But there came a time when he was remarkably grateful. The 9th of the month came, and the 10th, and Wise Symon was growing irritable and nervous. He had it "in his bones" that something was afoot and that that something would produce a sensation. He felt personally responsible for checking the machinations of the gang, though as Roon – unexpectedly wise was Roon in this case—pointed out to him, his job was merely to record happenings and not to influence them.

"Never did I think," groaned Wise Symon, "that there would come a day when I should listen patiently to your fool talk. The question is are the Rivers in town?"

"That is the question," said Mr. Roon profoundly. On the morning of the 11th York Symon had a surprise. It was no less than a telephoned request from the Commercial Bank that he should call upon Mr. Harold Tiller. Mr. Harold Tiller was one of the most unapproachable business men in the city. To reach his august presence it was necessary, in the ordinary course of events, to go through as many preliminaries as the debutante endures before reaching The Presence. Moreover, Mr. Tiller had a rooted and constitutional objection to the Press, and nothing had surprised Wise Symon more than to learn that his co- worker had received an invitation to dine with this unapproachable magnate.

Mr. Tiller was a broad, short man, bald and red of face, who wore horn spectacles and an air of mystery. It was his habit to speak in a hushed whisper, which gave the visitor the curious illusion that Mr. Tiller's private office was something between a temple and a sanctuary.

"I am glad to see you are punctual, Mr. Symon," whispered Tiller, offering a large, soft hand. "I do not as a rule take the Pressmen into my confidence, but I have been induced in this instance to consult you by a gentleman — may I say a mutual acquaintance—Mr. Gregory Brown."

Wise Symon listened and wondered. Certainly Gregory Brown had qualities which he had never suspected.

"Mr. Brown," Tiller went on in his hushed voice, "is not, if I may be allowed to say so, an ordinary type of journalist."

There was a significance in this statement which suggested that Wise Symon was a very ordinary type of journalist, but this the reporter passed over.

"A very intelligent man," Mr. Tiller continued solemnly, "acquainted with subjects with which the ordinary man, as a rule, is not conversant."

Wise Symon wondered what those subjects were and how the ingenious Mr. Brown had discovered them. It was Wise Symon's theory that you could get at any man if you once knew his hobby, but every attempt on his part, and he had made several, to discover the human side of Mr. Tiller had been unsuccessful.

"It is very good of you to see me, Mr. Tiller," he said politely. "I presume it is in reference to the possibility of the Rivers brothers making a call upon you."

Mr. Tiller permitted himself to smile.

"I do not think that is likely, nor does Mr. Brown. But he has represented your views to me and has, I will not disguise the facts from you, praised your wisdom and sagacity so highly that he has induced me to meet you. Now, Mr. Symon, will you tell me just why you think this gang of criminals will raid the Commercial Bank."

Wise Symon gave his theory very briefly.

"Hum!" said Mr. Tiller, when he had finished. "There is, of course, much in what you say. We carry a very large sum of currency in our vault; but honestly, I think your theories are inaccurate. Our vaults," he went on, allowing his voice to rise with pride at his possessions, "are the strongest in the city. We have a most excellent watchman, a man in whom we can place the utmost reliance——"

"If you had a regiment of soldiers guarding your vaults," said Symon, "I believe that the Rivers would get through. They're not ordinary crooks, Mr. Tiller. They are the most ingenious band that has ever worked in this country."

Mr. Tiller nodded.

"That may be so," he said. "My young friend, Mr. Gregory Brown, told me that your views were worthy of serious consideration and I am inclined to agree with him. What I am not inclined to do," he said, "is to bring the police into this matter, because such a fact gets known in the town and does the bank no good. Now, Mr. Symon" —he leant forward over his desk, his large white hands clasped together, his faded blue eyes fixed on Wise Symon — "I'll tell you what I propose doing. You may be right and you may be wrong, but I am going to allow you a privilege which nobody else has ever shared."

"What is that?" asked Wise Symon, interested.

"If you honestly think that a raid is to be effected, and if you agree to my suggestion you will spend the night of the 12th in the vaults of the bank with the watchman. At any rate," he said humorously, "if anything occurs you will be on the spot to report it."

Wise Symon thought a moment. Even if there was no robbery it would be an "experience" and would be the foundation for an article on some future occasion.

"Right you are, Mr. Tiller," he said. "I accept your suggestion."

"I have made the same officer to Mr. Brown and he also has accepted, so there will be three of you—quite enough to tackle the three Rivers!"

That night Wise Simon was to receive a shock. The annoyance of his chief had increased and when he reported his proposed visit to the bank, Mr. Gresham sniffed.

"I don't know what you're going to get out of that sort of stuff," he said unpleasantly. "At any rate, it doesn't very much matter, Symon. I've put the whole of this Rivers case in the hands of Brown."

"You mean you've superseded me," said Symon, his anger rising.

"Far the time being," said the assistant editor carefully, "it is necessary that I should make a change. There are plenty of cases that you can work on. Let Brown do this—honestly, Symon, you've fallen down."

It was singularly unfortunate that returning to his own office and slamming the door behind him Wise Symon should discover his pet abomination awaiting him.

"What the dickens do you want, Roon?" he snarled.

"Y," said Roon, lowering his voice and looking round, "I've got a great bit of information."

"Take it to Brown," said the reporter, not without wrath, "he is in charge of the case."

Detective Roon raised his eyebrows.

"Who's that, the young fellow that's just joined your staff?"

"That's him," said Symon ungrammatically.

"So he's in charge of the case now, is he, in a newspaper sense? Well, well, well."

"Now, what do you want?" asked Symon impatiently. "I'm not in a mood to exchange airy badinage and what is your information?"

"The Rivers are in town," said Roon. "We've had the information from a man who knows them."

"Here's Brown, you'd better tell him yourself," said Symon as the door opened and the youth came in.

"You know Mr. Roon, don't you, Brown; he's one of the brightest and most brilliant detectives in the City Police, from which fact you may gather the quality of the City Police."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Roon," said Brown, offering his hand.

"He's got some information for you," Wise Symon went on.

"The Rivers are in town."

"That I know," said Brown quietly. "They've been seen, haven't they?"

"One of them," said Roon carefully. "As a matter of fact, only one of them has ever been seen. He's the chap who was photographed by one of the clerks at the National Bank."

"What's that?" said Brown quickly, "that's a new one to me."

"I've had this from private sources," said Roon importantly and his eyes never left Brown's face. "The only photograph of one of the gang has come into my hands. As a matter of fact, it was sent to me from New Rochester by an anonymous correspondent."

Had Wise Symon been the sort that blushes guiltily he would have so blushed. As it was he remembered his ill-conceived practical joke and cursed his folly—and Roon's which was the greater.

"A photograph, eh?" said Brown, thoughtfully. "I did not know that there were any in existence. Have you got it here?"

Roon shook his head. "

"I haven't got a copy here, but it's at my diggings," he said. "

"There's no doubt it is Jerry."

"Jerry," interrupted Wise Symon quickly.

"Why, he's the brains of the party. What is he like?"

Again Roon shook his head. "The only description we've got," he said, "is that he's a little chap with a dark moustache; but you can't go round pinching all the little chaps with dark moustaches."

"I don't see anything to stop you," said Wise Symon.

The next day was an uneventful one until he went on duty. He was admitted to the bank premises by Mr. Tiller himself at six o'clock in the afternoon and found the watchman, a sturdy man of middle age, and Gregory Brown all ready waiting for him.

"I've arranged for you to have a cold dinner," said Mr. Tiller; "and I hope you're not going to have a very exciting evening."

The dinner was laid in a little alcove in the vault itself, and behind the table were the two green doors of Mr. Tiller's impregnable safe. Every quarter of an hour the watchman made the round of the premises, but the two reporters spent their time in the vault playing piquet on a corner of the table.

"This is pretty dull," said Symon looking at his watch. "Eleven o'clock! In five hours there'll be daylight."

"What difference does that make?" asked Brown.

"It would take them at least five hours to open this safe and get away," explained Symon. "That's a weird question for a criminal investigator to ask, Brown."

Brown laughed.

"I suppose it is," he said, and changed the subject.

At a quarter to twelve Symon lifted his head and listened.

"What was that?" he asked.

Brown yawned.

"It sounded like somebody tapping with a stick on the pavement outside," he said. "I think this alcove is directly under the road."

Presently it came again. Tap, tap, tap.

"It sounds like a signal to me," said Wise Symon, and then for no reason at all a cold thrill of fear swept down his spine and he shook as he had never shaken before.

"What is coming over me?" he asked wonderingly.

"What is the matter?" demanded Brown.

Wise Symon did not answer. He had a horrible premonition of trouble and every hair on his head seemed to be electric and alive. The watchman had gone his rounds and the two were alone.

"I don't trust much to instinct," said Wise Symon huskily, "but I think on this occasion" —he stripped his revolver from his pocket and pushed down the safety catch. And then he heard a slight movement behind and turned. He saw the life-preserver in Brown's hand, marked the swing of it as it crashed down and raised his hand to guard himself—and then everything went black.

Brown looked down at the prostrate figure at his feet and smiled, then stepped noiselessly to the door to which the watchman would return. He heard the footsteps in the stone corridor outside and drew back with his life-preserver poised. The door opened slowly and a man leapt in so quickly that the falling bludgeon missed him. Then before Gregory Brown, or Jerry Rivers, to give him his real name, could raise his weapon again, the cold barrel of a pistol was pushed under his nose.

"Name of Roon," said the newcomer. "I want you, Jerry. Are you going quietly, or are you going dead?"

"Quietly," said Jerry Rivers, and held out his hands for the bracelets.

MR. ROON sat by the side of the bed in a nursing home, occupied by Wise Y. Symon, and explained his process of reasoning.

"It's pretty hard luck on you, Y.," he said apologetically; "but I didn't think he'd cosh you, or I'd have pinched him earlier in the evening."

"But how did you know he was Jerry?" asked Symon.

"Deduction," said Roon modestly. "Just deduction, Y. You know how I put these things together."

"Oh, I know all about that," said Symon with a faint smile. "But you don't as a rule—"

"I know what you're going to say," said Roon, raising a warning hand, "but don't disparage my genius, if I may be allowed to call it such, Y, Anyway, I've been made a sergeant."

"But how the dickens did you know it was Jerry?" persisted Symon.

"I had the photograph all the time," said Roon, impressively. "It was sent to me from New Rochester. I only had to cover up the moustache to see that this bloke – fellow, I mean ,was the chap I was after. It was sent by an unknown friend in New Rochester. That man," said Roon, quivering with emotion, "has made my career!"

Wise Symon took the photograph from the detective's hand and groaned, for he it was who had written that letter, and he it was who had enclosed the photograph. It was his little joke—and it had been a profitable joke.

"The moment I saw young Brown I knew I had him," Detective Roon went on. "You see, he's in a sort of tramp disguise here," he pointed to the photograph and Wise Symon nodded, though it hurt him to do so, "but I penetrated it my boy, I penetrated it."

He rose presently to go and Symon gave him his hand.

"Roon," he said gently, "if I were you I wouldn't tell anybody about that photograph or the letter, but particularly I wouldn't show the photograph."

"Why?" asked Roon.

"Because," said Symon more gently than ever, "that is a photograph of Charlie Chaplin."

9. — THE LAST THROW OF CROOK BERESFORD

THE EDITOR sent for Wise Symon, no unusual circumstance, nor one out of the ordinary.

"Shut that door, Symon. I have a little item of interest for you." The editor had so often called Wise Symon into his private office to pass on an item of general interest that Mr. York Symon, police reporter and philosopher, was neither thrilled or so much as interested. But his chief's first words brought him to the alert.

""Do you remember Crook Beresford?" he asked.

Wise Symon remembered Crook Beresford very well indeed. He had been instrumental in bringing that clever forger and expert in roguery to justice. Justice had not quite fulfilled all Wise Symon's expectations for with Crook Beresford's record he expected the man would go to penal servitude for life. It was no small matter to be engaged in the forging of French banknote but there was a judge on the bench who had theories as to the efficacy of short sentences, and Crook Beresford had gone down for three years, to his and Symon's amazement.

Even the fact that Beresford had leant over the front of the dock and, shaking his fist at the police reporter, had threatened to finish him when he came out, did not seem to shake the judge's confidence in his theory. It shook Symon not at all. This was not the first time he had been threatened by criminals whom he had succeeded in bringing to justice.

"Yes; I remember Crook Beresford rather well," said Symon. "When was it? About twelve months ago?"

"Less than that," said the editor; "and you'll be rather surprised to learn that he's out."

"Out of gaol," said Symon in astonishment. "Why, he couldn't possibly get out so quickly!"

The editor nodded.

"He has interested some members of Parliament in his case, and they have prevailed upon the Home Secretary to release him in order that he may lead—"

"I know; a useful and lawful life," said Wise Symon grimly.

"I thought you ought to know, because this man will certainly lay for you," the chief went on, "and I have an idea that he is a little worse than the average criminal."

"A little more dangerous, you mean," nodded Symon. "I agree with you, sir."

He went out of the office and walked down the main stairs of the building, his chin on his chest, deep in thought. Crook Beresford was dangerous, but it was not the danger to himself that concered him. Once upon a time Crook had had a conscious or unconscious confederate in his niece, Hilda Cresser; and in Wise Symon's heart there was a special place which was occupied by this engaging lady. She had been one of the principal witnesses against him at the trial, and it was mainly through Wise Symon's efforts that she had secured work with various illustrated newspapers—for she was more than a passable artist.

Acting on Wise Symon's advice, too, she had taken a little flat in the suburbs; and it was hitherward that the crime reporter made his way after he had finished his work that evening. He was not, however, to escape meeting Detective Roon, and as usual, when Roon was in possession of "exclusive information" which was common property, he was bursting with importance. He buttonholed Symon on the steps of the office building and nodded mysteriously.

"Can I have a word with you?" he said. "There is something exceedingly serious—"

"I know all about it," said Wise Symon brusquely. "Crook Beresford's out and your life is worth about twopence net."

"Why my life?" demanded Roon indignantly.

"Because you were the man who pinched him," said Wise Symon gravely. "I'm rather sorry for you, Roon, because at heart you're a very decent fellow, and I'm sure somewhere in the background you have a wife and a family – "

"That's a lie," said Roon loudly. He was cursed with a faculty for accepting all statements literally and was wholly devoid of a sense of humour.

"Be that as it may," said Wise Symon, "it's up to you to look out. Do you know where Crook is going to operate in the future? Is he taking Holy Orders or anything of that sort?"

"He is coming here," said Roon surprisingly, and Wise Symon's eyebrows rose.

"You don't mean that?" he said incredulously.

"I do, indeed," said the triumphant Mr. Roon, delighted to supply original news of any kind. "We have had orders that he will report himself to us periodically."

Wise Symon rubbed his chin, and a frown gathered on his face.

"You're not going to leave him unsupervised, are you!"

Roon shrugged his shoulders.

"What are we to do?" he said, accepting full responsibility with the Home Secretary for the follies of the law. "You know what an outcry there is when an old lag starts to earn an honest living—if we interfere with him or expose him.

"Personally," he went on—and this time his shrug was more emphatic—"I'm not worried about Crook Beresford, that is, not so far as his threats go. The only thing that worries me is that little girl—Miss Cresser—and it was about her I was coming to see you."

Wise Symon dropped his hand on the other's shoulder and there was a kindly light in his eyes.

"Roon," he said, "you're not intelligent, but there is something about you that is very attractive."

Mr. Roon twirled his little pointed moustache.

"You're always guying me about my looks," he said complacently, "but there are people—"

"Don't spoil the only genuine compliment I've ever paid to you," said Wise Symon, and continued his journey with a lighter heart. Roon was—Roon. But Roon had his points, as Wise Symon had said. He was a little fellow, full of courage, if not of resource; and it brought a queer sense of satisfaction to the police reporter to know that there was some other person than himself who was thinking of Hilda Cresser's future.

That Crook Beresford would be content to accept the situation in which he found himself on his release from prison, Symon never expected. The Crook was a Bad Man. He had been thief, forger and gunman; and, but for the fact that he was a British subject and therefore it was impossible to extradite him to America, he might not be alive at that moment. How dangerous he was Wise Symon had yet to learn.

All the way to Furnival Avenue his mind was occupied, not so much with finding the solution to any difficulties which arose out of Crook Beresford's release, as to putting into plain language the thought which had obsessed his mind for months past, and which he had never before been able to translate into words. Hilda Cresser opened the door at his half-hearted ring, and stood looking with astonishment at her visitor.

"Why, Mr. Symon," she smiled as she held out her hand impulsively, "this is most unexpected. You've always been promising to come and see me, but I'd given up hope of ever welcoming you here."

Wise Symon found himself uttering husky commonplaces as he was ushered into the big dining-room, where evidence of the girl's work lay scattered upon the table.

"You're busy," he said, and was annoyed to discover that he found some difficulty in speaking.

"Oh, yes," she laughed; "thanks to you, I'm very busy. I've a two-page illustration to do for the Lady's Dress Review. I've some etchings to finish for Rosenstein and—"

Then she looked at his face in the light.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" she asked. "You look fearfully serious!"

"Oh, nothing," he said airily. "Only I thought I would come along and see you."

"About what?" she asked quickly.

He hesitated, then blurted out the truth.

"Crook Beresford is out of gaol."

She turned a shade paler, and nodded slowly.

"I've been dreading that news," she said quietly. "It is very soon, is it not? But it really didn't matter, it had to come." She paused in thought, then: "Won't you sit down?" she said, and took a seat on the opposite side of the table.

"I have put off thinking about my uncle's release, but it had to be faced." She looked up suddenly, straight into Wise Symon's eyes.

"I suppose you know that you are in the greatest peril whilst my uncle is at liberty?"

Wise Symon laughed.

"I'm not worried about my great peril, but yours," he found himself bold enough to say.

"Mine?" she repeated in surprise. Then slowly: "Yes I suppose I am. But it is you that uncle will trail."

"It's absurd to imagine he'll trail anybody," said Wise Symon. "These fellows who threaten the wonderful things they will do when they come out of prison are usually tame enough when they get into the world again."

She shook her head.

"That won't be the case with uncle," she said quietly. "You see, we interrupted one of the biggest coups he had ever attempted. He was hoping to make enough money to get away to South America and live in comfort for the rest of his days. Your detection of the forgery hit that plan on the head, and he will never forgive you—nor me. He is not young, and he is a very bitter man."

There was a silence till Wise Symon, clearing his voice, said:

"I've been thinking about things, Hilda. Somehow I don't like you living out here alone. It was all right whilst your uncle was in prison, but now things are different."

"But where can I live?" she asked, a little smile playing about the corner of her lips.

"Well, I want you to live somewhere near me," he said with an effort, and she laughed.

"You can't always be looking after me, Mr. Symon."

"I've got a Christian name, by the way," said Wise Symon. "My very intimate friends call me 'York.' My father, who was strong on biblical subjects, wanted me called Ham. My mother, more romantic, wanted me to be called Chester. York is the compromise."

The girl laughed heartily. "

"Well, I'll call you York," she said. "Now about this housing problem. Don't you see, Mr.—York—that I cannot go back to my old flat, even if it had not been snapped up a long time ago?"

"I have a large flat," said Symon, more husky than ever. "I've also a respectable bank balance, an assured income, and a romantical cottage by the sea."

She looked at him open-eyed, but made no answer, which was very embarrassing for Symon.

"Also," he went on valiantly, "I am very much in love with you, Hilda."

"Mr.—York!" she gasped.

He nodded.

"Do—do I understand," she asked in a low voice, "that this is a—?"

"This is a proposal of marriage," said Wise Symon, gaining courage, "and if it is crude and unusual and different in any respect from the proposals which you have already received, you must put it down to the fact that this is my first experience...."

So Hilda Cresser became Mrs. York Symon, so quietly and unobtrusively that even his own colleagues on the Press knew nothing about the event until they saw the simple announcement in the advertising columns.

For three months, a month of which was spent in the country, life was amazingly sweet and swift and undisturbed. Amongst the letters which had reached York and his wife upon their honeymoon was a respectful little note, written in a faultless hand, offering polite felicitations, and bearing a signature which to Wise Symon was by now familiar.

He frowned, tore the letter up, and told his wife nothing about this communication from Crook Beresford. A defiant crook he could understand. A penitent crook might awaken suspicion, but a Crook Beresford, who wrote polite notes and slopped over his congratulations was something to be watched all the time.

Symon came to earth and to the gross realities of life one morning, when he was waited on by Detective Roon, who supplied him with a great deal of information about Crook Beresford's movements which, if it was not vital, was at least interesting. It was the first time that Wise Symon had seen Roon since his marriage, and when the detective held out his hand with a heavy-fatherly smile, Wise Symon cut short the congratulations.

"I've a horrible feeling that you're going to be humorous about my marriage, Roon—and I am so happy this morning!"

"As you should be, my boy," said Roon with ponderous good humour. "I was merely going to say:

"Now you're married I wish you joy,

First——"

"That will do, you naughty old man," said Wise Symon loudly.

"What is the news in the police department? Have you caught anybody lately?"

Roon reeled off a list of convictions for which he had been responsible, and broke off before that list was completed to convey news of a more important character.

"Oh, by the way, do you remember Hammond's Shooting Gallery?"

"Very well. It's in a cellar under the Frivolity Theatre, isn't it?"

Roon nodded. "

"Well, who do you think has taken it?"

"Not Crook Beresford?" said Wise Symon quickly.

"That's the chap," replied Roon. "It appears he had a little money put by, so he bought out Hammond, and is giving revolver-shooting lessons."

"And why?"

"He's a reformed character."

Wise Symon groaned.

"It only needed you to say that to convince me that he's out for trouble," he said.

"Give the devil his due," pleaded Roon. "I've had a talk with him, and he's agreed to let bygones be bygones. He's quite straight—in fact, he gave me a key of his flat and told me I could walk in any hour of the day or night I liked and search it."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Wise Symon sarcastically. "He's bull-dozed you all right."

"Bull-dozed me?" said the indignant Roon. "Me? My dear fellow, I tell you that the man who can put one over me isn't born!"

Symon was thinking rapidly. He was quite satisfied in his mind that Crook Beresford meant mischief, and that his continuance in town spelt danger to Hilda. He was in that irritated condition of nerves, when he would have given all he possessed to force Crook Beresford's hand and get the worst over.

"He's invited me to go down any afternoon I like and improve my shooting," the detective went on. "He's a bit of a gunman himself, you know, Y."

"I know," said Wise Symon grimly.

"He asked me whether you could shoot, and I said I thought you could," Roon continued.

Wise Symon was listening now with all his senses alive and working.

"I see," said he; "and what did you say then?"

"I told him I thought I was the best shot," replied Roon, "and really, Y., I think I am. Do you know what he did?"

Wise Symon shook his head.

"He offered to put up a cup to be shot for between you and me."

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Symon thoughtfully, "so that's the game."

"That's what I thought," nodded Roon. "I said to myself, there's some game to this. But when I come to think the matter out, how could there be? If he's going to play monkey tricks, he wouldn't ask us there in the afternoon and snoot us down in public, would he?"

"Doesn't seem reasonable," agreed Wise Symon, "but I'm going to find out for myself."

He made his call on the Hammond Shooting Gallery that afternoon. He knew the place; it was a long, underground cellar, brilliantly lighted, and consisted of three separate ranges. Across one end of the cellar was a black canvas screen, on which were painted three small targets.

Crook Beresford welcomed him with a deference and politeness which might have deceived one less wily than Wise Symon.

"Well, here we are back again, Mr. Symon," he said—flashing a little smile—"and living the virtuous and upright life, eh?"

"This is very touching," said Symon drily, and Crook Beresford laughed.

"Now look here, Mr. Symon," he said, "let bygones be bygones. I bear no malice, and I hope you feel the same. How is my niece?"—I have to congratulate you in person upon securing such a very charming wife."

Wise Symon ignored the inquiry.

"What is this idea of a shooting match between Roon and myself?" he asked. "Have you fixed up a. dud gun that will burst in the hand?"

Crook Beresford laughed, and his amusement was obviously genuine.

"My dear good fellow," he said, "what benefit would that be to me? I presume that you not only doubt my bona fides, but imagine that I have some sinister plot to bring about your destruction. Does it occur to you that if I wanted to do you an injury, I would not take the chance of a bursting gun? I have had revolvers backfire in my hand without doing me any other injury than blackening my wrist, and it would be just as likely that I should be killed as you."

Wise Symon saw the logic of this and nodded.

"Honest," he confessed "I'd give a lot to know what's behind this fantastic scheme of yours."

Crook Beresford smiled disdainfully.

"Why don't you come and see?" he asked.

Wise Symon thought for a moment.

"I'll come," he said, and he knew as he spoke that he was accepting a challenge.

He went back to his cosy flat and and communicated the morning's news to a troubled girl.

"The whole thing is absurd and theatrical," he said, "but I have it in my bones that this ridiculous shooting match will settle accounts between Crook Beresford and myself for ever."

She put both hands on his shoulders and turned her pale face up to his.

"Don't do it, York," she pleaded. "I know him too well to think that anything but trouble can come from this. I tell you that he will never forgive you for putting him in prison, and I am sure he is planning some diabolical revenge."

Wise Symon said nothing. He had an uncanny premonition of trouble, and in such crises his instinct never failed. him. The more closely he inquired into the thing, the mare clear it became that all Crook Beresford's operations since he had taken over Hammond's Shooting Gallery were designed to manoeuvre a match between himself and some other man. He found that Crook Beresford had been making inquiries about Symon's skill as a shot—and here the convict had no difficulty in securing information, for Wise Symon's ability in that direction was well known. He was a holder of several prizes for target-shooting, and had never met his match. Even the phlegmatic and self-satisfied Mr. Roon had his misgivings.

"l'm bringing a couple of our men to watch the match," he said, "so that if Crook Beresford starts any of his hanky-panky, he'll be in bad trouble."

"A fat lot of good that will do us," said Wise Symon, "if we happen to be dead at the moment."

"Dead!" scoffed the detective. "Why should he arrange a shooting match with four witnesses if he wanted to put us out?"

On the morning of the match Hilda Symon received a letter which was delivered by hand. She recognized her uncle's handwriting, and opened the envelope apprehensively.

"My dear Hilda", it began, "from hints which reach me it seems that your admirable husband has still some doubts as to the honesty of my intentions. I do wish you would convince him that I have no ill-feeling against him. If you could come and see me before lunch, I would convince you that I will never raise my hand to harm him. If my presence in town really worries you, I will clear out. But unfortunately, this infernal shooting business has nearly ruined me. A quick loan of £50 would get me out of town to-night."

The letter puzzled the girl. At first she thought of ringing up her husband and went to the telephone for that purpose, but Wise Symon was not at the office. She looked at the clock: it was half-past twelve. Was he sincere? It was Crook Beresford's boast that he had committed many robberies, but told no lies. She determined to risk it. She wrote out a cheque for £50, put on her hat and coat, and calling at the bank on the journey, made her way to the shooting range.

SYMON came home to lunch at half-past one, but his wife had not returned. On her writing desk was a sheet of blank paper, and in the waste-paper basket he found an envelope innocent of writing. The sheet of paper looked as though it had come folded, and he carried it to the light, but there was no trace of ink, and for an excellent reason. Crook Beresford had written his letter in ink which had faded almost before the girl had left the flat. He did not worry, because Hilda had her own business, and was probably making a call upon one of the illustrated papers which employed her.

At three o'clock that afternoon he met Roon by appointment, and, accompanied by two detectives, they went to Hammond's saloon and found themselves the only occupants of the range. As usual, the range was brilliantly lighted, and the central target had been set for the contest.

"Well, gentlemen," smiled Crook Beresford, "you've got over your suspicions, eh?"

"Personally, I have not," said Wise Symon picking up a revolver from the table and testing it. "What are the conditions to the match?"

"Six shots at thirty paces," replied Crook Beresford promptly, and Wise Symon nodded. He took a coin from his pocket and flipped it up.

"Heads," called Roon.

It fell tail uppermost.

"I'll take the first shot," said Symon. He loaded the revolver carefully, examining each cartridge; then, taking up his position, he pulled back the hammer and raised the barrel until the fore-sight rested a little above the centre of the target. His finger was on the trigger—he was actually pressing—when he broke into a cold sweat and his hand shook. He lowered the revolver and looked round wonderingly.

"What the dickens is the matter with me?" he asked. He raised the revolver again and found a difficulty in keeping it steady. Then he fired, and Roon, who knew his skill, gasped, for the bullet had gone six inches to the left of the target's outer circle.

He lifted the revolver again. He was steadier now, and pressed the trigger. Between the pressure and the report, Roon with a yell knocked up the barrel.

"What are you doing?" demanded Symon angrily.

"Look! look! look!" gasped Roon, pointing to the target. "Canvas... bulging... !"

The target was moving. It was as though something behind it was pressing out the canvas.

Wise Symon dropped the revolver and raced along the alleyway, and as he did so Crook Beresford with a snarl snatched up the weapon. Two shots rang out together, a bullet whizzed past Symon's head and Crook Beresford collapsed on to his knees, a dying man, before the smoking revolver of Detective Roon.

To tear away the canvas target was the work of a second, and then Wise Symon saw something which almost made him swoon. Bound to two rings fastened in the wall behind the canvas screen, so effectively gagged that she could utter no sound, was his wife!

"I was mad to go to the range," said the girl that night; "but somehow I did not fear for myself... only for you. He gave me a cup of coffee, he was just finishing his lunch when I came and—I don't remember what happened until I found myself tied up."

Wise Symon nodded slowly.

"The target was on a level with your head," he said unsteadily. "My God! How diabolical!"

She smiled faintly.

"Who won the match?" she asked.

"Roon," said Wise Symon. "Good old Roon!"

THE END