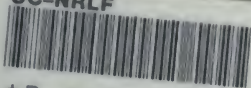
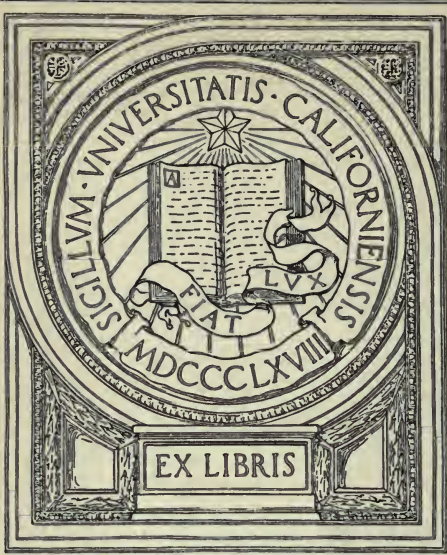


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THE DETECTIVE;
OR,
THE WITCH OF MANHATTAN.

By OLD SLEUTH.



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WONDER JACK,

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The Witch of Manhattan.

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THE
WITCH OF MANHATTAN;
OR,
WONDER JACK, THE DETECTIVE.

CHAPTER I.

"HELLO, sis! what's the matter?"

A little girl one rainy night sat crouched on the coping of an iron rail on a side street leading from the Bowery. She was weeping and appeared in great distress when a street gamin came along and addressed the inquiry with which we open our narrative, and in sobbing tones she answered:

"I am hungry and mamma is hungry."

The gamin looked upon her pale face, illuminated by a pair of large blue eyes.

"So you are hungry and mamma is hungry?"

"Yes."

"Well, you wait here for a few moments and I will get you something to eat. You bet, no one can cry hungry around me when there is so much to eat lying around loose."

The lad walked away and started up the Bowery and soon he arrived opposite a baker's shop and on the counter was a great pile of bread. The lad peeped around a moment furtively and then stole into the shop, "lifted" a fat loaf of bread and dashed out just as the cry arose from the rear of the shop "stop thief!" The thief didn't stop; he had hid the loaf of bread under his jacket and sped

away like the wind. He turned the first corner and was going at full speed when suddenly a great pair of arms were stretched out. They closed and the lad was in the grasp of a "cop."

"Aha! Mister little ginger, I've got you."

The lad was not at all disconcerted, but answered coolly:

"Yes, you've got me."

"You've been stealing."

"That's what I've been doing."

"I'm sorry, lad; I hate to take a boy in for stealing bread these hard times, but law is law and stealing is stealing."

"You're right, cop, but come with me, will you?"

"Go with you?"

"Yes."

"Where, and what for?"

"I want to show you something."

The "cop" was an old-timer and he walked with the lad around the square until he arrived at the spot where the little girl sat, expectantly awaiting the return of the boy who said he would bring her something to eat.

"Do you see that child, cop?"

"Yes."

"I never set eyes on her until about five minutes ago. She was crying. I asked her the trouble and she said she was hungry and mamma is hungry. I lifted the bread for her. Now take me to my room."

The "cop" walked up to the girl and asked:

"What's the matter, sissy?"

"I am hungry."

"Where do you live?"

The girl, who was about nine years old, looked up in the "cop's" face with her lovely blue eyes and told him where she lived.

"And have you nothing to eat in the house?"

"We haven't had anything to eat since yesterday noon."

"Why didn't you apply to some of the charity bureaus?"

"We have only been in the city two weeks, sir. We don't know where to apply."

"You have only been in the city two weeks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you come from?"

"Down on Long Island."

"And you have no money?"

"Mamma did have a little money. She paid for getting our things down here and paid the rent, and she was out looking for work a week ago when some one stole all her money."

"Why did you come to the city?"

"My father was a sailor. He was drowned from the schooner six months ago and mamma had to leave town and come to the city."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you, sir, but we had to come."

"Give her the bread, lad," said the officer, "and let her go home. I will look into her case to-morrow. Where did you steal the bread?"

The lad told the number of the store and the name of the owner.

"You have the name and number down pretty well."

"Yes, sir."

"How is that?"

"Oh, I only borrowed the bread. I intend to go in some day and pay for it."

"You needn't bother your head, lad, I will stop around and pay for the bread."

"And I will pay you back some day, cop. I've got your number."

"You've got my number, eh?"

"Yes, I always use my eyes and ears. I am a mouse, I am."

"Don't you know it's wrong to steal under any circumstances?"

"I don't know much about it. All I know is the little girl was crying and hungry. I had no money and I lifted the bread, that's all."

"Do you think it right to steal under any circumstances?"

"I suppose not, but I couldn't help it."

"You may get into serious trouble some day."

"I am used to that."

"Used to what?"

"Trouble. I am always in trouble."

"Where do you live?"

"Everywhere."

"Have you no parents?"

"Not now."

"Are your parents dead?"

"I guess so."

"Don't you know?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"How long have you lived in New York?"

"I don't know."

"You must know something about yourself."

"All I know is I used to live with an old woman. She said I was left with her by a sailor man who said he was my father. He gave her some money and said when he returned from sea he would pay her big. He never came back. The old woman told me this the night before she died. I reckon I was ten years old when she died and I've knocked around ever since. Never had no home since."

"What have you done all these years?"

"Anything and everything."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I used to sell papers."

"What do you do now?"

"Nothing."

"Too lazy to work?"

"No."

"Then what is the matter?"

"I am a victim, that's all."

"A victim?"

"Yes."

"A victim of what?"

"A lie."

"Tell me all about it."

"If I do you'll take me in."

"No, I won't."

"Honor bright?"

"Yes."

"The cops are looking for me."

"So you stole before, eh? This is not your first offense."

"Yes, it is."

"Then why are the cops looking for you?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you the truth."

"Yes, I will."

"I'll swear to tell you the truth."

"That's right, do so."

"I was putting up one night in a ten-cent lodging house. An old man came there one night who looked like a tramp, but he was stuffed with money. He was robbed and the clerk of the lodging house had me arrested. I jumped the pen and they've been chasing me ever since."

"How long ago did this happen?"

"A month ago."

"Do you know who robbed the old tramp?"

"I've my suspicion."

"Who did it?"

"The clerk who had me arrested."

The policeman was thoughtful a moment and then said:

"You've got my number?"

"Yes."

"Will you see me again some day?"

"Mebbe I will."

"Promise."

"Can't."

"Why not?"

"Mebbe I'm going away."

"Where?"

"To sea. My dad was a sailor, I reckon, and I've got an idea I'll follow his profession."

"How old are you?"

"I don't know exactly. I reckon I am somewhere around fourteen."

"And you have really told me the truth?"

"Yes, I have, and——"

The gamin did not have a chance to finish his remark. A man suddenly leaped upon him, exclaiming:

"You slippery eel, I've got you at last!"

"Not yet," came the answer quickly, and the lad slipped out of his jacket and was away in the darkness like a shooting star. The man started to follow him but the boy was too nimble for him and got away.

On the day following the incidents we have described the policeman who had "nipped" the gamin went to the address given by the little girl. He found a plain but comely woman in a neatly furnished apartment and she verified the story told by her little daughter, and when asked why she had left the village on Long Island she related how she had excited the enmity of a man down there who had started in to persecute her, and she had thought it best to make her home in the city. She said she expected to get work in good time and earn an honorable living, and we will dismiss the woman from our story for the present, with the statement that she did get work through the aid of the nobleman, who proved to be a

kindly man, and she was able to carry out her desire to earn an honest living.

In the meantime, after his escape from the detective, the little gamin wandered down to the river front and secured shelter in a pile of lumber where he slept through the remainder of the night as peacefully as some more fortunate lad in his snug feather bed.

Ten years subsequent to the incidents we have related a well-known captain of police was walking through his precinct taking observations when he was met by a young man who was one of the best specimens of athletic manhood one can meet anywhere.

"Hello, cap," accosted the young man as he came face to face with the precinct captain.

"Hello, Jack, what are you doing up in my precinct?"

"Oh, I am just hanging around, cap."

The police captain smiled and answered: .

"When Wonder Jack is hanging around there is something in the air."

Wonder Jack was a detective—a very young man who had been appointed on the force at the age of twenty-one and who had earned in five years a reputation as one of the bravest, keenest and most successful detectives on the force. Jack Caswell was a general favorite and despite his youth was looked upon as a very valuable man. He had earned the pseudonym of Wonder Jack owing to several very remarkable mysteries he had solved, and it was the dark cases that were usually assigned to him, and it was this fact that had led the precinct captain to remark "When Wonder Jack is hanging around there is something up."

The captain and the detective stood talking for some minutes when to the surprise of the captain the detective said:

"By the way, cap, it's strange you and I should have met just here."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You don't know that we are old acquaintances?"

"It's news to me if we are."

"You never asked me for the money I owe you."

"Money you owe me!" exclaimed the captain, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, money I owe you."

"What are you getting at, Caswell?"

"It's true I owe you ten cents, and I've been in your debt a little over ten years."

"You owe me ten cents, and you've been in my debt a little over ten years?" repeated the captain.

"That's true."

"Say, Jack, you have the reputation of being a great joker when you've nothing else to do."

"Well, I am; but I am not joking now. I owe you ten cents fair and square, and I tell you it's strange we met just here."

"You are talking in riddles, Caswell. Come, man, talk up. What are you getting at? Am I under suspicion, and are you 'working' me?"

"No, captain, I am in dead earnest."

"What are you getting at?"

"Look around; don't you recall a very interesting experience you had just on this very spot about ten years ago?"

"I don't."

"Sure?"

"Yes, I am sure I do not recall any strange incident, and I say, Jack, if you are not joking talk up, for you are perplexing me."

Jack was silent a moment, but after an interval said:

"Captain, do you recollect about ten years ago you arrested a lad for stealing a loaf of bread?"

"By ginger, Jack, what are you going to tell me?"

"It's true, cap; you paid for the bread and the thief said some day he would pay you back. Here's your ten cents."

"Jack Caswell, are you that boy?"

"Yes, I am."

"How is it you never called my attention to your identity before?"

"Well, my reasons were various, but here is your ten cents. Do you want interest?"

"Jack, I've got interest a thousand times in recognizing you as that little vagabond. And do you know I've often thought of you and that night?"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I don't know as I should ever have recalled it if it had not been for the romance that followed that little incident."

"Was there a romance that followed it?"

"There was, sure—one of the most interesting romances you ever heard tell of. Did you ever hear what became of the little girl for whom you stole the loaf of bread?"

"No."

"You have never seen or heard of her since?"

"No."

"Well, well, had you made yourself known to me sooner I would have told you the story."

"Tell it now."

"I will; but first tell me about yourself. I remember our ward detective 'nipped' you that night and you gave him the slip and that is the last I remember ever having seen or heard of you until now, and I little dreamed as I've seen you building up your reputation that you were the

little bread thief. But come, tell me all about yourself and then I will tell you about the little girl. It's a great story, a wonderful denouement."

"I was unfortunate during the early part of my life, cap, and now let me tell you something. You will believe me now."

"Certainly I will, and I believed you that night, didn't I? If I hadn't I'd have taken you in and have locked you up."

"That's true, and so is this true; that was the first time I ever stole anything in my life, but somehow when that little blue-eyed girl looked up at me and said she was hungry I couldn't stand it, you see. I had just been looking in that baker's shop at those loaves of bread, for I was hungry myself, but I wouldn't 'lift' one to appease my own hunger. But when it came to the little girl I made up my mind on the instant and I nipped the bread. Well, I fell into good hands and I really believe that was the turning point in my life. You see had I gotten away with that steal for the girl I might have argued that once having stolen I might do it again. A bad argument, cap, but little gamins don't know logic, you must remember, and I tell you I felt my conscience prick me."

"By the by, Jack, you told me your story that night. Did you ever discover your parents?"

"No, sir, but I reckon I've honest blood in me, for I always felt a desire to tell the truth and do right, and I had no teaching in that direction either. And, cap, I stand a testimony to the declaration that honesty is the best policy, and I've since proved it in a hundred ways. That night I strolled down to the river and found a bunk in a pile of lumber. Well, it does seem that fate was around that night. I woke early and was sitting on the pile of lumber when I heard a scream from the river. I knew what it meant, I've heard those cries several times. I had heard

them twice before that time. I leaped away to the end of the pier and there, sure enough, was a lad struggling in the water and he could not swim. Well, I am a regular water dog, like most gamins around New York. I was a daisy swimmer, and over I went and caught the lad just in time, and I held him above water until they could lower a boat from the ship and we were both hauled on board. The lad was the captain's son and he knew I had saved his boy's life, and after he had given me a good breakfast he asked: 'What can I do for you, lad?' I answered, 'Take me to sea with you, captain.' 'I'll do it,' he answered, 'if everything is all right.' And when he heard my story he agreed to take me to sea with him as cabin boy. I tell you, cap, it was a fortunate adventure for me. I sailed three years on that ship and the captain's wife took a great fancy to me and she became my teacher. I could neither read nor spell and we had plenty of time on that ship and I took to it. She was instructing her own boy. You see before she married the captain she had been a Yankee schoolmarm. I soon caught up with her boy and we studied together and when I left the ship I was as well educated as most boys who have been to school from fourteen to twenty. She had plenty of books and I became a great reader."

"You didn't like the sea?"

"Oh, yes, but I became ambitious, cap. I thought with my education I could make my way better on shore, and when after three years the captain returned to New York I left the ship. I had some money and I set out to be a merchant, but something occurred that led me to change my mind."

"What occurred, Jack?"

"After I had been in a house two years they failed, and a friend of mine said he could get me on the police force. I determined to become a policeman and here I am, and

now you have the whole story of the little bread thief up to date, captain."

"It is a remarkable story, Jack, in some respects, but similar incidents are occurring every day."

"You are right, cap. I've come to learn some very strange life histories since I've been on the force. But tell me about the little blue-eyed girl and her hungry mother."

"I promised the girl I would call and see her mother the following day and I kept my word. I found her a very nice woman and very pretty. She was raised in a town down on Long Island and after the supposed death of her husband a lawyer there wanted to marry the pretty widow. She refused him, very fortunately, as the sequel will prove. He commenced to persecute her and she fled to the city and after being here a week was robbed of all the money she had. She did not know enough of city life, and in despair, when almost starving, sent her little girl out to beg, and you stole the bread that kept them from starving. Well, I took an interest in the woman, got her some work to do, and she lived along nicely for two years, when lo, one day her husband, who had been supposed to have been drowned, turned up alive. He had been washed overboard from his boat but caught on to a log and sustained himself for several hours when he was picked up by an outgoing boat bound around the Horn for California. They could do nothing else but take him along, meaning to transfer him to some incoming vessel. But a storm drove them out of their course and the result was he went on to California. He argued that his wife believed him dead. He reached California and wrote to his wife that as he was there he would try his fortune on the Pacific coast. She never received his letter. He wrote several times and in the meantime joined a party going off prospecting in the mountains. They struck it good and he remained there

for two years and picked up quite a sum of money, then he came east and after a long search succeeded in finding his wife, and found her under circumstances that were very gratifying to him. For, as he told me, dark and aggravating suspicions had shadowed over him. He took his wife back with him to California and to-day he is a millionaire. I have a letter about once a year from him and when my daughter was married he sent on a present that made our eyes water, and he has offered me all kinds of inducements to accept valuable acknowledgments. That is the story, Jack, and I can show you a photograph of the blue-eyed girl for whom you stole the loaf of bread, and she is a beautiful young lady now."

Wonder Jack listened with a great deal of interest to the captain's story, and when it was completed he said:

"That is the spot right there, cap, where I first beheld her."

"Yes, I recall it now, since you remind me of it, and I can exclaim in amazement, 'what will a night bring forth!' but come and I will show you the girl's picture."

The two men proceeded to a near-by saloon where electric lights made clear every line under a radiance almost as bright as day. The captain drew a wallet from his pocket and produced a photograph which he handed to the detective. The latter took it, fixed his eyes upon it and his face assumed a look of ill-concealed surprise. The captain observed the singular expression upon the detective's strong face and demanded:

"What now?"

"Is this a photograph of little blue-eyes?"

"Yes."

"You are sure you have not made a mistake and given me the wrong picture?"

"I have made no mistake."

"It's very strange," muttered the detective, in a reflective tone.

"What is strange, Jack?"

The detective did not answer immediately. He appeared lost in deep study.

"Do you recall the face, Jack?" asked the captain.

"I only caught a glimpse of that face and yet it made a deep impression upon me. Yes, I remember it well, that is the face of the little girl."

"And do you recognize the child in the young lady?"

The detective did not answer the question, but said:

"It's a remarkable face."

"Jack, you are on to something."

"Am I?"

"Yes; I am not a detective, but I am an observer."

"Captain, did you ever recognize a person in your precinct who bears any resemblance to that picture?"

"Aha! I knew, yes, I knew you were not hanging around in my precinct for mere amusement."

"You do not answer my question."

"No, I have never seen any one who resembles that picture."

"No one who would remind you of the picture?"

"No."

"And what is this girl's name?"

"Alice."

"Her last name?"

"Alice Swartswood."

"And she resides at present in California?"

"Yes."

"Her father is a millionaire?"

"Yes."

"No doubt about that?"

"None whatever."

"It's strange."

"Jack, will you tell me what you are getting at?"

"Captain, you have heard of the Witch of Manhattan?"

"No, I have not."

The detective smiled and said:

"I don't wonder."

"Will you talk straight out, Jack?"

"I've dubbed her the Witch of Manhattan."

"Tell me about the Witch of Manhattan and her connection with that picture."

"What makes you think the Witch has any connection with this picture?"

"I have been watching you."

"Mebbe you think I am bewitched."

"No."

"Cap, they count me pretty smart in solving mysteries."

"Yes, they think you are a wonder."

"And yet I am at fault just once. I am dead beat."

"Beaten by a witch?"

"Yes."

"Let's hear about it."

The two men had seated themselves.

"There is a thief in New York who has evaded every officer in the business—a female thief. Sometimes she appears as an old woman, sometimes as a beautiful young lady. She has worked on men's sympathies and lulled them until she secured a chance to rob them. At other times she appears before them a golden-haired girl and bewitches them and robs them. She is the most cunning and the most successful thief in certain directions that ever appeared in New York, and thus far she has baffled every officer put on her track."

"Has she baffled you?"

"Yes, so far."

"Did you ever see her?"

"There's the rub, captain. We all think we have seen

her and none are sure. She is the queen of sirens, an alluring mystery, who is plundering right and left with delightful impunity."

"And you have all failed in tracing her?"

"We have."

"What are her methods?"

"I've told you her methods. She beguiles and then steals."

"Large amounts?"

"She takes anything lying around loose. Her last exploit was the stealing of twenty thousand dollars in negotiable bonds."

"Did she negotiate them?"

"She did."

"And got away with the money?"

"Yes."

"She must be smart."

"She is."

"And you think she is in my district?"

"I have no reason to think so."

"Then you did not come up here to look for her?"

"No, I was sent for to meet a gentleman who stated he had very particular business with me."

"Who is the gentleman?"

"I have not seen him yet."

"You know who he is?"

"No; I was only requested to call at a certain number and send in my card to the master of the house."

"Where is the house?"

Jack gave the number and the captain exclaimed:

"I know that house."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then you know now what I am doing up in your district. I want to inquire about that house."

"It is a large, old-fashioned house, built some time during the revolution. It has been vacant for sixteen years."

"It appears to be occupied now."

"Yes, it was reported to me that it is occupied. The building belongs to an estate that was in litigation. Possibly matters have been settled and one of the heirs occupies the house."

"Then you know nothing about the present occupant?"

"No."

"The party, whoever it is, has been there but a few weeks."

"Not over two weeks."

"All right, captain, I will go there and pick up my information from the party direct."

A little later and Wonder Jack appeared before an old double house standing back fully twenty feet from the sidewalk line. He passed through the gate, rang the bell and waited. It was some time before his summons was answered and then an old man, evidently a servant, opened the door and demanded:

"What is wanted?"

Jack handed in his card and said:

"Please deliver it to the master of the house."

The old man took the card and in a few moments returned and said:

"Please come in, sir."

The detective was shown into a large parlor after passing through a broad hall. He found the furniture old-fashioned, but very rich and massive. All the hangings were faded, but as stated the materials were of the richest character. He did not behold a single article that appeared new and fresh, and yet everything had been cleaned and burnished up, and looked neat and comfortable.

The detective was compelled to wait some little time and he ventured to turn up the gas so he could study more

readily his surroundings, and he boldly wandered around the parlor; it was a way he had. He was always investigating, and it was this habit which enabled him to get on to a great many facts at different times. He wandered into the rear parlor, when his attention was arrested by beholding a portrait. It was the picture of a young girl, and our hero stood and gazed in rapt admiration, for it was a beautiful face. Well, he had beheld many beautiful faces in his time; it was not an unusual event to see a beautiful face, but there was something in the expression of this face which aroused strange feelings. The artist had been a man of genius and he had succeeded in putting upon canvas a face beautiful as we have indicated and clothed it with an expression that caused one to become interested at once. The portrait represented a young girl, and despite her apparent youth and wondrous beauty there was a sad look which was actually startling in its life-like distinctness.

The detective was still gazing with rapt attention when a voice demanded:

"Well, now are you prepared to give me your attention?"

The detective turned and beheld an old lady, tall and stately, and with a very stern expression of countenance.

"Excuse me, madam, I was absorbed in admiration; that is the most striking portrait I ever beheld."

The lady did not deign to explain who the original was. Jack hoped she would; on the contrary she asked:

"Are you Mr. Caswell?"

"That is my name, madam."

"I sent for you."

"I beg your pardon, madam, I thought I was to meet a gentleman."

"I do not know how you became possessed of that impression. I sent for you."

"Madam, I am at your service."

"I sent for you especially."

Jack did not ask why she had sent for him expressly, and she proceeded to reveal her reason unasked.

"I had heard about you," she said.

Jack still maintained silence.

"I have been informed that you are a very shrewd man, and an honest man, and a gentleman, who can be entrusted with the most confidential business."

"I am always true to them I serve, madam."

"So I have been informed; and it is a very delicate business I have on hand for you to undertake."

"I am prepared to listen, madam."

"It is a case of robbery."

"Tell me about it, madam."

"It is an extraordinary case."

"You can tell me all about it, madam."

"I will first tell you something of our family history, not that the narrative will directly bear upon the mystery, but I desire that you should know whom you serve."

"I am ready to listen, madam."

"I am the sister of the man who was the real heir to a large property. This house was a part of the estate. My brother's father left this property to him."

"Madam, why do you say your brother's father?"

"Because he was my half-brother only. My mother was a widow when she married my brother's father, and when my stepfather died he left me a sum of money, but all the real estate he left to my brothers, and immediately there followed a lawsuit, which was only finally decided two years ago."

"Who disputed the will, madam?"

"My brother's elder half-brother."

"Your own brother?"

"No, my stepfather had a son when he married my mother. He, like my mother, had been married previously."

"Then one of the gentlemen was your half-brother, the other your stepbrother only."

"Yes, sir."

"Proceed."

"I had three half-brothers, the estate was very large, the property had been in the family over a hundred years."

"I see."

"My stepbrother was disinherited."

"He was an only son, by the first marriage?"

"Yes, sir. He was not mentioned in the will."

"Why?"

"He had offended his father by his marriage, an incident so frequent, as you know, in proud families."

"Yes, it is an incident occurring every day. You say the suit has been decided?"

"Yes."

"In whose favor?"

"In favor of the younger sons."

"And the elder son who contested?"

"He died a bankrupt."

"And why have you told me all this?"

"The time may come when the knowledge will be of service to you in case you undertake the case."

"All right, madam, I am glad to have all facts in my possession, direct and collateral."

"Our family, sir, is pursued by a Nemesis."

The detective smiled as he recalled how many families imagined that they were pursued by a Nemesis, and he asked:

"Have you any suspicion, madam, as to the identity of the Nemesis?"

"No, sir."

"In what manner does the Nemesis pursue you, madam?"

"By robbery."

Again the detective smiled, and said:

"Madam, if every robber was looked upon as a Nemesis, there would be a great many avengers of that sort in the world."

"An ordinary robbery would not mean much, but this robber is persistent, ingenious, and dangerous, and unless his robberies are checked we will become impoverished."

Again the detective smiled. The remark was very womanly and yet the old lady appeared to be a person of nerve, good sense, and courage.

"Will you give me the details?"

"This house has been entered three times, and property to the amount of ten thousand dollars has been taken; family heirlooms, valuable gems, and five thousand in securities and money, which were held here temporarily."

The detective smiled, and the old lady observing his smile, asked:

"Why do you smile?"

Jack, who had a keen sense of humor, said:

"Madam, if they were stolen, they certainly were held here only temporarily."

"I should have said we were compelled to keep them here over night and that night they were stolen."

"And have you any clew to the thief?"

"Now, sir, comes a test of the reasons why I sent for you. Can we rely upon your absolute friendliness?"

"Will you explain, madam?"

"I want this thief caught."

"I see."

"But I do not wish any of our family to be implicated as prosecutors."

"Madam, if that is your desire, there is no need to catch the thief. A complainant must appear."

"I do not care so much about prosecuting the thief. I have another purpose."

"What is your other purpose?"

"I wish to identify the rogue and stop his or her speculations."

"You say *his* or *her*?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It is possible the robber is a woman."

"Have you grounds for believing it possible that the robber is a woman?"

"Yes."

"Will you state your grounds?"

"Several members of our family have been his or her victims. One of my nephews was recently robbed of twenty thousand in bonds."

Jack Caswell almost leaped out of his chair. It was the first intimation he had received that the mysterious robber of the Radcliffe family was the mysterious Witch of Manhattan.

"One of your nephews was robbed of twenty thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"And his name?"

"Theodore Peale."

The detective became very thoughtful and more deeply interested. Theodore Peale was the man who had been robbed by the mysterious witch, the strange creature who appeared as an old woman and as a golden-haired beauty.

The lady, who gave her name as Mrs. Henry Thomas, related a few additional facts and then the detective asked:

"Madam, who is the original of that picture?"

"She was the daughter of my half-brother."

"Where is your half-brother?"

"He is dead."

"And this young lady? Can I see her?"

"No, sir."

The woman spoke in a low tone and betrayed just a little agitation.

"Why not, madam?"

"She is dead."

"The original of that portrait is dead?"

"Yes."

"How long has she been dead, madam?"

"Nearly a year."

"Who is the owner of this estate now?"

"I am."

"You told me, madam, you had three half-brothers."

"Yes, sir; I said I had three half-brothers. I am the last of the family. Death carried off all the family, even my niece, who was the residuary heir of her uncles when the will was decided in her favor. She was the sole legatee. I was her heir."

"And you are now the owner of the whole estate?"

"I am, as the heir of my niece."

"Have you any family of your own, madam?"

"I have a son."

"Does he live with you?"

"No. He resides out west."

"You spoke of a nephew, Theodore Peale."

"Yes."

"Is he the son of one of the brothers?"

"No, he is the son of one of my own brothers."

"I think, madam, that now I have the family history down pretty well."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you live here alone?"

"No, a granddaughter resides with me."

"You recently took possession here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, then, madam, you wish to find the thief?"

"Yes."

"You do not want the thief arrested?"

"No."

"What am I to do?"

"Merely run the thief down, and identify *him* or *her*."

"And you can give me no clew as to the identity of the thief?"

"I cannot."

"How am I to begin?"

"You are a detective?"

"Yes."

"You might set a trap. The thief may visit this house again."

The detective wanted time to think the matter over. He had listened attentively to the story of the lady, as stated, and during the whole time that she was talking he had watched her closely, very closely, and he finally said:

"Madam, I will give this matter some consideration, and see you again."

"You will decide upon a plan?"

"I will."

"You will not take any one into your confidence?"

"I will not at present."

"Why do you put in the reservation?"

"I never positively bind myself. I will agree not to take any one into my confidence without consultation with you."

"That is satisfactory; and now remember all I desire at present is that you will identify the thief."

"I am not to make an arrest?"

"No; but your identification must be positive and absolute."

"And then?"

"You will have earned your reward, and I promise you it shall be the most munificent payment you ever received."

"Madam, you have not been perfectly frank with me."

"I have not?"

"No."

"Why do you think so?"

"You have a suspicion as to the identity of the thief?"

"On my sacred honor, I have not."

"And you cannot give me the slightest clew to work upon?"

"I cannot."

"I will see you again, madam."

"When?"

"After I have fully considered the whole matter."

The detective departed and as he walked along the street he was accosted by the precinct captain who said:

"Jack, I've been on the 'lay' for you."

"Well."

"How did you make out?"

"I haven't made anything out, except that it is another case of the Witch of Manhattan, and the affair is becoming very complicated."

"When I can be of any service to you, let me know."

"I will."

Jack returned to his lodgings. He sat down and thought the whole matter over in his mind. He was satisfied he was engaged in a very remarkable case, and he reached a conclusion that there existed the most startling possibilities in the affair. He passed a sleepless night. He had been haunted, he remarked when he arose in the morning—haunted by a face—and that face was the sad, beautiful one represented upon the canvas in the old house where he had held the strange interview concerning the mysterious robber.

It was true the face had haunted our hero and the features represented upon that canvas were indelibly fixed upon his memory.

When he arose in the morning he recalled all the incidents related by the woman and he was more and more perplexed the closer he studied the facts, and he muttered

"There is a mystery here deeper than I can solve a

present. There is some devilment somewhere. I am not satisfied that the woman was honest. Her instructions were strange and unusual and therein lies the germ of my suspicion. One thing is certain, the Witch of Manhattan is the Nemesis. Now, then, I will start out and make a close study in one direction anyway, and then I will set a trap, but a different one from that suggested by the old woman."

The detective's first move was a visit to the office of Theodore Peale.

He went into the man's law office, and sitting down waited until the head of the office was at leisure, and he had an excellent opportunity to study the man. In due time Mr. Peale was at leisure, and he called the detective into his office.

"Well, Mr. Detective," he asked, "have you made any progress?"

"A little."

The lawyer started and asked:

"What have you discovered?"

"I have discovered, sir, that you are not the only victim."

"Oh, no; the thief whom you call the Witch of Manhattan is very impartial in her peculations. I have had several people report losses to me, and, by the way, that was a happy thought of yours, dubbing her the Witch of Manhattan; how is it you fell to that name?"

"I fell to it from the fact that you told me that the charming young lady who robbed you dubbed herself a daughter of Manhattan, a descendant of one of the old families."

"Yes, yes, I remember, and she did dwell upon that fact."

"Mr. Peale," said the officer, "you tell me that this thief has robbed several of your acquaintances?"

"Yes."

"Relatives of yours?"

"Oh, no."

The detective was thoughtful a moment and then asked:

"Have you an aunt living at — street?"

"Oh, yes."

"I've seen that lady."

"Yes, she sent for you at my suggestion."

"It appears that your aunt is also a victim?"

There came a light in the man's eyes that told much to the keen officer.

"Oh, she should not have told you that."

"She did."

"I suppose it's all right."

"It may be, but I see you have misled your aunt."

"I have?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"She appears to think that your family alone are the victims of the thief."

Again there came a very suggestive look in the lawyer's eyes, at least the look was very suggestive to our hero.

"She told you that, eh?"

"Yes."

"I suppose she thinks so."

"One more fact, sir; you say the thief negotiated the bonds?"

"Yes."

"Where did she negotiate them?"

The lawyer named a bank.

"You did not tell me this before."

"You asked me the question I could not answer. I have learned and since you repeat your question I answer it."

'Under what guise did the Witch appear at the bank?'

"You had better go and see the officers of the bank; they can tell you better than I can."

"I will go and see them," said Jack, and upon gaining the street he muttered:

"Great Scott, I am knocked out on one surmise, that is sure."

The detective called at the bank and learned that a respectable old lady had called, bringing with her letters of the highest character.

"Were the letters genuine?" asked Jack.

"They appeared to be, but the real owners claim not."

"Then you are losers."

"We may be," came the evasive answer.

The answer meant a great deal to our hero, and he determined to start in on the trail of his life.

That night the detective appeared at the house of Mrs. Thomas, and said after some talk:

"I will remain here to-night, with your permission."

"Why should you, sir?"

"I thought it might be desirable to you."

"No, there is no need."

Jack expected his offer would be declined, but he had a purpose in making the request, and after some little time he left the house, but he had gotten his points, and had decided upon his move.

It was about midnight when the detective appeared before the old mansion. He was gotten up in an excellent disguise, and acting on information he had obtained earlier in the evening he gained an entrance to the house. He moved noiselessly along on the lower floor. All was dark and still, and he took up a position in the parlor. He had his mask-lantern with him, and he flashed its light on the portrait which had so fascinated him. He remained in the house for two hours, and finally concluded there was nothing to be learned and he stole forth and gained

the street. He was passing along, lost in deep thought, when he was aroused by being passed by a lady. The latter was heavily veiled and the hour was after two o'clock in the morning.

As we have stated, the veiled lady passed him, indicating that she had come from the direction of the old house.

Jack walked along after the lady and decided upon a bold move. He stepped up beside the female and said:

"Excuse me, but can I be of any service to you?"

The lady did not appear at all frightened, but answered promptly:

"No, sir."

"Do not fear to ask a service, miss," persisted the detective.

"You can do me a kindness," said the lady.

"I thought so."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"Then please go off about your business, and let me alone."

We will here state that a most singular premonition had presented itself to our hero's mind. He could never tell how he came to realize the suspicion, but he always afterward claimed that he was urged to commit the act he did under the strongest impulse of his life. He suddenly reached his hand forth and tore aside the veil, and for an instant he stood paralyzed, and the next he lay bleeding on the sidewalk, stricken by a blow from a club, and the lady disappeared around the corner ere our hero could regain his feet. He had received a pretty powerful blow, but the stroke of the club was nothing compared to the shock of surprise. When Jack tore aside that veil there stood revealed before him the face of the original of the portrait, the pictured face that had haunted his memory, and the discovery was more stunning than the blow, and the latter, as intimated, had been a powerful stroke.

Jack rose to his feet and he muttered:

"I am dead beat. Great Scott! I am on the mystery of my life. Mrs. Thomas told me the original of that portrait was dead and had I not been knocked down by a crack on the head I would swear that I had seen a ghost, and I am no believer in the supernatural."

Our hero was completely mystified, and the more he revolved the matter over the mystery deepened and became in its elements more remarkable.

The portrait represented a youthful, sad-faced, and very delicate girl, and yet the blow that knocked him down was dealt with force one might expect from a powerful athlete. Jack was a very powerful man and no light blow could have knocked him from his feet.

Again he muttered, "I am completely nonplused, but as I live I will solve this mystery."

On the morning following the incident we have described the detective again appeared at the house of Mrs. Thomas, and when the old lady with the dignified mien joined him he asked:

"Madam, did your mysterious thief appear last night?"

"No, sir."

"Let me ask you, how many times has the Nemesis been in this house?"

"I should say three times."

"And the last visit?"

"Was made about a week ago."

The detective had purposely taken a seat near the portrait which had so interested him and he suddenly demanded:

"Is the original of that portrait dead?"

"Yes."

"So you told me."

"I did, and why do you ask me to repeat the declaration?"

"Because I have another question to ask."

"Very well, sir."

"Do you know of any living relative of the family who resembles the original of that picture?"

The woman hesitated a long time and then asked:

"Why do you ask me that question, sir?"

"The face appears like one I have seen before."

"How long since?"

"Within a year."

Again the woman hesitated a long time and then said:

"I reckon it is only a chance resemblance; you know resemblances are very common."

"I have either seen the original of that picture or one who bears a resemblance so striking that it cannot be accidental."

"If you saw the face within a year it was not the original of that picture, for the original has been dead nearly two years. The party you saw must have borne a chance resemblance."

Jack was more and more mystified and finally he asked:

"What am I to do if I run down the thief?"

"You are to report to me."

"That is all?"

"Yes."

"I am not to make an arrest?"

"No, all I desire you to do is to locate and positively identify the robber."

"Madam, let me ask you; it would appear that the original of that picture was a blonde."

"Yes, sir."

The detective, in the brief glimpse he had of the face of the veiled girl who had knocked him down, recognized that she had dark hair.

During the talk recorded Jack kept his eyes fixed on the woman and he recognized that she was very furtive

and watchful and very careful and guarded as to every reply she made. When he left the house he determined before proceeding further to verify the story the woman had told him, and he did with results we will record in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II.

AS WE have stated, Jack was convinced that there were some strange and weird elements in the affair which he had in hand. He did not know just exactly whom to suspect as the conspirators. One fact was assured: there were others engaged in the game, whatever it might be. Thus far he had fallen to nothing that would indicate that Mrs. Thomas was not an honorable woman, and sincere in all that she said; but one fact was plainly apparent—whether honest or otherwise she was not absolutely frank with him. All she had told him might be true, but she had not told him all, and then again the one other mystery was the marvelous strength of the seemingly delicate female who had so deftly knocked him down.

The detective proceeded to the surrogate's office and there he learned facts which appeared to confirm every word that had been told him by the woman. The facts concerning the family appeared to be correct. The elder brother had been the contestant in the suit. The will was made in another State where the bulk of the property was located, also all the personal estate. The property in New York was represented by the old house above mentioned which had been the homestead of the family for three generations. The present owners came into possession under the decision in the courts in another State, and it became necessary to present proofs only in New York to acquire title, and Mrs. Thomas was the legal owner of the estate as the heir of her niece, the daughter of her half-

brother, who under the decision of the court became sole heir and took possession just previous to her death.

Despite the fact that the old woman's statements were fully confirmed the detective, since having met the veiled woman whose features he had disclosed, and also despite the singular conditions under which the mysterious thief was to be located, indulged a suspicion. He was a natural analyst and he easily figured out conditions which would permit of the grossest frauds, and his final exclamation was:

"I've got a tangled mystery on my hands, but I'll get at the truth if it takes the rest of my life."

As stated, the detective was fully possessed of a suspicion of fraud and wrong somewhere. He could not account for his suspicion based on any actual facts, but there were little indices which impressed themselves upon his mind, and his suspicions were very positive and well defined.

He made up his mind to run down the veiled lady, and the following two days and nights were devoted to strategic movements, barren of results however.

On the third day he received a note asking him to call upon Mrs. Thomas. He went to the house and found the lady laboring under a spell of great excitement and she told him they had been visited by the Nemesis on the night previous.

"Did the thief get away with anything?" asked Jack.

"No, but I now fear that for some weird reason my life is in danger."

"Will you describe what occurred?"

The staid old woman told a strange, weird story and during the narration our hero dissected the tale and reached his own conclusions. He remained some time in the house discussing matters with Mrs. Thomas and rose to go when the lady said:

"I wish you would wait here a moment. I have something to show you."

Mrs. Thomas left the room and Jack sat with his eyes cast down, when a ray of bright sunlight shot in through a turned lattice and there revealed a single thread of hair. Detectives are always on the alert and always quick to discover any little thing within the line of their suspicions. Jack picked up the single thread of hair and quickly ensconced it in an envelope and awaited the return of Mrs. Thomas. The lady soon put in an appearance and after showing the article she wished him to see asked:

“Have you any hopes of running down the mysterious robber?”

“Oh, yes.”

“You understand fully that you are to make no arrests. You are merely to locate and report.”

“That is the understanding, madam.”

“If you carry out your mission successfully your reward will be large.”

“I will carry out my mission successfully, you need not fear.”

A little later the detective departed, and proceeding to his lodging he drew the strand of hair from his pocket and examined it carefully under a glass, and we will disclose the result by the exclamation he uttered.

“I’ll be hanged if it is not a clear blond. It came from the head of some blond-haired miss, and let me see, the original of the portrait is dead. Hang me, if this mystery is not getting more and more tangled.”

Jack thought over his talk and he clearly discovered facts that were very suggestive, and not the least of these was the command not to arrest the thief. He was to locate the Nemesis only.

Jack started in to trail Theodore Peale. He had met the man several times but knew very little about him. He lay one whole day near the man’s office and late in the afternoon got on his track. Peale upon leaving his office

went to a fashionable hotel restaurant. Jack, who was under a disguise, entered the place, and saw a lady enter shortly after who went toward the table where Peale had located. The man rose to greet her and soon they were seated at the same table, where they enjoyed a gorgeous repast. Jack maintained his position. He studied the woman well and reached a conclusion concerning her. She was a handsome woman, but her beauty was of the coarsest sort. Her manners also indicated a woman of little refinement and one who enjoyed all manner of dissipations.

When the meal was concluded Peale and the woman separated, but not before our hero had managed to hear the woman say:

“I will see you to-night?”

The man smiled and answered:

“Possibly to-morrow morning at an hour not far removed from to-night.”

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when Peale separated from the lady. They had been three hours at dinner and evidently had enjoyed a merry time.

Our hero decided to follow the man and he “lay” upon his track until he saw him enter a gambling den which we will here state ruined more men during the year it thrived than any other gambling den that was ever started in New York.

Peale entered the place and became engaged in betting. He bet at high rates and was a loser. Our hero managed to make his acquaintance. As we have stated, Jack was excellently disguised and he felt he could rely upon his disguise to escape detection. He and his “quarry” became temporarily quite intimate. Peale was a heavy loser, and our hero had the privilege of accommodating him with a loan of fifty dollars.

Peale was a little under the influence of wine and then is the time when some men lose their caution and talk.

Jack calculated Peale would talk and he asked him quite a number of questions. He seemingly received very frank answers, but they were not confirmatory of any suspicions indulged by our hero.

It was well on toward midnight when the two men separated and Jack fell again to his man's trail, and to his surprise he discovered that Peale even at so late an hour intended to pay a visit to his aunt, Mrs. Thomas. Jack saw him enter his aunt's residence and the detective managed to get into the house. He had been there so often he had the plan of the house well in his mind and it was an easy thing for him to gain access. He stole along and discovered the nephew and aunt engaged in a consultation.

"You have had your own way and this is the result," Jack heard Peale say.

"How have I had my own way?"

"We were safe enough, but you, urged by unwarranted fears, must go and call in a detective. In doing so you commenced playing with edged tools."

"How?"

"You were anxious to discover and locate our Nemesis."

"Yes, it is absolutely necessary. We do not know at what moment our secret may be disclosed."

"You feared the Nemesis."

"I had reason to do so, as I am assured that an avenger is on our track. Theodore, it is too great a property to lose."

"We were all right. Had you not acted on your own responsibility we should have been all right."

"You do not appreciate the danger."

"Yes, I do; but we could have trapped the Nemesis ourselves."

"You expressed fear."

"But that did not mean surrender."

"How have I surrendered?"

"By calling in this detective. He is more dangerous than the Nemesis."

"Nonsense!"

"I have something very startling to tell you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"That man is not 'piping' the Nemesis."

"What is he doing?"

"'Piping' us."

The woman stared and after a moment demanded:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say; that man is 'piping' us."

"Why should he 'pipe' us?"

"Because by some strange and possibly occult process he has fallen to the suspicion that there is something wrong."

"How do you know he is 'piping' us?"

"I know it well enough."

"You were always a suspicious man, my son."

The detective had been informed that Theodore Peale was the nephew of Mrs. Thomas, and now the woman called him "my son," and Jack had learned facts that confirmed his suspicions. Indeed it had ceased to be a suspicion. He was well assured that some great deed of wrong had been committed and these people were scheming to hide their tracks and make their deed a permanent success.

"I may be a suspicious man, and my suspicions are well confirmed this time."

"You say he is 'piping' us?"

"Yes."

"You must have some proof."

"I have."

"What is your proof?"

"He was 'piping' me this very night. I played my part well."

"He was 'piping' you this night?"

"He was."

"What nonsense!"

"It is true, and I tell you a more dangerous foe is on our track than the Nemesis, or the Witch of Manhattan, as the fellow calls our dummy."

A second great disclosure was made to the detective. There had been no robberies; the schemers were using a dummy to rob themselves and this disclosure opened up the fact that there must be a real heir somewhere, a victim of a deep and well-laid conspiracy. Jack was indeed a wonder in his ability to put facts together.

There followed a few moments' silence broken at length by the woman, who said:

"Do you really mean to tell me that the detective has been 'piping' you?"

"I do."

"And you are sure?"

"I am."

"What can be his purpose?"

"He suspects something wrong. We could not carry out such a scheme as we have and be able to conceal every little fact liable to arouse suspicion. I knew that we were all right until you called in this man."

"I thought we might locate and— Well, you know."

"Oh, yes, that part of it was all right. We did it successfully in one case but we should not have employed any one as keen as a detective to do the locating."

"We have tried ourselves and failed."

"It is true, but in the end we would have succeeded."

"Or at any moment all might have been exposed," said the woman. "It was necessary that we should act quickly."

"We must act quickly now."

"How so?"

"Undo the mischief that has been done—in other words remove the peril we have invited."

"What do you mean?"

"That detective."

"Well?"

"Unless something is done our game will be defeated. We are winners. We hold on, however, by a very slender thread at present. Suppose the detective and the Nemesis should come together?"

"Well?"

"It would be good-day to us, or rather to the millions."

"And what can we do?"

"I'll tell you."

"Do so."

"We must get rid of the detective."

"That can be done easily enough."

"It can?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I will dismiss him."

The man laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Well, it is very astonishing, mother, that a woman as cunning and clear-headed in some things should be so weak and near-sighted in others."

"What do you mean?"

"You say you will dismiss the detective."

"Certainly."

"What will he care?"

"That will take him out of the case."

"You think so?"

"Why not?"

"Why, mother, it will start him in. Yes, we have made a great mistake."

"We have the money."

"Yes."

"What can we not do with all this wealth absolutely at our disposal?"

"We can do a great deal, but it is hard to think that you should have invited a Nemesis number two."

"Who is the Nemesis number two?"

"The detective."

"And you really think he is dangerous?"

"I know he is."

"We will get rid of him."

"Not by a dismissal."

The detective peeped and saw the woman's face. It assumed an expression simply fiendish as she said:

"Yes, by a simple dismissal."

"Never."

"You do not appear to understand me."

"Tell me."

"We will dismiss him. Yes, and he will not trouble us."

"Do not talk in riddles."

"We will kill him."

"We must; but we thereby invite a second peril. It is not an easy affair to put a detective out of the way."

"We will do it, easy or not easy."

"We must do something, for I tell you in plain words that man is on our track."

"To-morrow I will arrange to dispose of that man."

"Oh, yes, and invite new complications. It is very unfortunate."

"How will I invite new complications?"

"In disposing of this man."

"Leave it to me."

"What will you attempt?"

"Never mind. He will be out of the way."

"Will you explain how you mean to do it?"

"He will enter this house some day and never leave it."

The man thought a moment and said:

"That is the only way you can do it. The deed must not be entrusted to any one else."

"You can leave it to me."

A little later Theodore Peale left the house and the detective determined to stay in the house, and after the old woman had retired to her own room he had ample time to revolve over in his mind the remarkable disclosures and discoveries that had come to him. He could not understand why the woman called her nephew her son, or her son her nephew. There was some deep design in that singular fact. Indeed, the whole matter was each moment becoming a deeper and deeper mystery.

Jack had ensconced himself in the parlor. He lay stretched upon a sofa and he was engaged in deep study. He was baffled as to a solution of all the complications. He recalled the finding of the strand of hair and this led him into a train of thought. He had "piped" down to the occupants of the house and could only identify three persons as residing in the old homestead—Mrs. Thomas and a man and woman, both the latter foreigners, and as far as he could discern they were Swedes. Then, as stated, he recalled the strand of blond hair and he muttered:

"There is one occupant of this house I have not seen yet."

The words had hardly escaped his lips when he beheld a sight that caused him to lie and stare like one paralyzed. He felt that he was gazing upon an apparition. A female figure robed in pure white suddenly appeared in the room. In her hand the ghostly being carried a little lamp and she moved with a slow step, a regular Lady Macbeth step. Her face was pale, but the features were beautiful, and the detective made a second very startling discovery. The apparition bore a remarkable resemblance to the portrait—

the portrait of the beautiful girl whose lovely features had so haunted our hero's imagination. But the figure on which he gazed was that of a person at least forty years of age, preserving in a most wonderful manner a youthfulness that was startling, considering the evidences of the maturer age, for the hair was gray while the features were perfect, the face un wrinkled, the brightness of the eyes was apparent, and the contour of the figure was as graceful as that of a girl.

The detective gazed in rapt attention. He knew he was not dreaming. He knew it was not a freak of his imagination inspired by a remembrance of the pictured face in the portrait. No, no, he was gazing upon a living beauty, on her apparition, and only for an instant did he indulge the suspicion of the ghostly character of the visitant.

He determined to lie still and watch, but there came a most startling incident. The figure was evidently moving toward the portrait, when suddenly a man appeared. He stole up behind the beautiful apparition, quickly threw a cloth over her head and clasped her in his arms, and quick as lightning the night-walker was dragged away.

The first impulse of the detective was to rush to the rescue, but instantly there came a second thought. He had made a discovery—a most thrilling and startling discovery. He could wait and abide his time.

A little longer he lay still. He knew the lovely apparition would not appear again, and he considered that for future operations that he should "lay low" and not disclose his presence in that house. He stole forth and as he gained the street he muttered:

"I am on to a great mystery and I am making great headway in its solution. I am gathering up the ends and I will soon trail down thread by thread."

Jack reached his home and he resumed his study of all the circumstances. It was necessary that he should obtain

some facts. He knew the blond lady would remain in the house. At some future day he could trail down to discover her. There were other facts he needed to study.

As our readers know Jack had been to the surrogate's office and had ascertained considerable, and all he had learned appeared to confirm the story the woman had related to him, and it was just here where he was so greatly mystified. He determined to know more and on the morning following the incidents we have described he packed his valise and left town.

Jack's destination was the city where the trial had taken place. He determined to learn from the records and other sources the real facts of the great suit that had lasted so many years, and which had been so stubbornly contested.

Jack arrived in the town and had little trouble in getting on to many facts not interesting to our readers. He learned the name of the counsel for the contestant and from him learned some very startling facts. He learned that there had been two contestants. Contestant number two claimed to be a son of the younger brother in whose favor the decision was finally given, but absolute proof was furnished that this young man was an illegitimate offspring, his own mother appearing and admitting the facts under cross examination.

We will here state that the cross examination to which this mother was subjected did not compare to the one conducted by the detective in his interview with the lawyer, and the clear, discerning mind of our hero perceived little suggestions which appeared to point to one of the most skillfully arranged plots ever conceived for the stealing of millions. And when Jack Caswell took the train to return to New York he had mapped out a line of investigation which promised great results. He knew all he would have to contend with, he fully realized the peril he would encounter, for he felt assured that the thieves were a bold and des-

perate gang, who by a series of persistent perjuries had deceived judges, counsel and every one. He became convinced that they were a gang who would not hesitate at murder even if it were true that already their hands were not bloodstained.

The detective arrived in New York and at once made up his mind to find the strong-armed girl who knocked him down. As described in a preceding chapter, he spent several days in tracing up the movements of the so-called Witch of Manhattan, and with the light he had following his visit to the country he was able to form entirely different conclusions from those he first conceived. This beautiful creature who was reported to have beguiled and robbed so many people under so many different disguises, he concluded was either a myth or— Well, our sequel and his investigations will demonstrate his other conclusions. According to the stories he heard the woman was indeed a witch. He had her description from several people, those whom she had succeeded in robbing and those whom she had attempted to rob, and she was described by all as very beautiful when she appeared as a young woman, and very beguiling when she appeared as an old woman.

The detective did not go near the woman Mrs. Thomas until he received a message from her requesting him to call on a certain night after ten o'clock. Jack smiled when he received the note and said:

“Well, she has matured her plans for ‘laying me out.’”

Upon the night named he called at the house. He arrived on the minute and was soon sitting in the library with Mrs. Thomas.

“So you have not made any progress?” she said.

“None whatever.”

“I am surprised at your non-success.”

“We cannot do these things in a day, madam.”

“You have been some weeks engaged on the case”

"Are you dissatisfied, madam?"

"I will be frank, I did think something would be accomplished by this time."

"Do you wish to employ some one else?"

"Now you are taking an advantage."

"I am?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I have given you my confidence; I do not feel like giving it to another. It is a very delicate business."

The detective fixed his eyes on the woman and asked:

"Why should it be, my dear madam? If it is an ordinary case of robbery it is simply to find the thief; but you exact very peculiar conditions."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"You are at liberty to withdraw from the case."

"I am perfectly willing to do so, madam."

The woman was thoughtful and there came a wicked look in her usually cold, gleaming eyes.

"I do not wish you to do so. I know you are an honorable man and you have the reputation of being a very shrewd man. I should think you could locate the thief."

"Madam, I have done all I could to locate the thief."

"You have the most accurate descriptions of her appearances."

"Yes, madam, and that is all I can get from any of her victims."

There was great significance in the detective's last statement and it was a true one. All he could get from the victims of the thief was a description, no little facts or clues that might lead to a detection.

"You once proposed to remain over night in this house."

"I did, madam."

"At that time I declined to permit you to do so. I

now desire that you remain here several nights in succession."

"For what purpose?"

"I think you can catch the thief."

"All right, I will remain here to-night."

"How shall we prepare for your remaining?"

"You need make no preparations at all, madam. I will simply remain in the parlor and conduct my campaign according to my own plan."

"Let me tell you there are reasons why I am very anxious to capture the thief. After the capture all the evidence you need will be forthcoming. Conviction is assured and then you will receive the largest fee you ever received in your whole experience as a detective."

Our hero especially noted the statement "After the capture all the evidence will be forthcoming." Here also was a very grave suggestion in connection with all the facts he had in his possession.

"Then you will remain here to-night?"

"I will."

The woman and the detective had extended their interview beyond eleven o'clock and Jack had said:

"I will insist that not a person leave their room after twelve o'clock. I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"What do you mean?"

"It may be that I will be compelled to shoot. I do not wish to make a mistake."

Jack watched the woman's face closely as he made the statement and beheld an expression that spoke volumes to him, and the woman said unguardedly:

"That would be a short way out of it."

"What would be a short way out?"

"Were you to shoot the thief down."

"I may be compelled to do so."

"If you do you will earn your reward and it will be a large one."

The detective was leading the woman on. He was gaining verification of his darkest suspicions.

"Very well, madam, you had better retire and leave the house to me for the rest of the night."

Jack believed some attempt was to be made against his life, and he had spoken under the inspiration of that suspicion.

The woman finally retired and our hero was left in possession of the lower part of the house, and once alone he revolved over in his mind all the possibilities. He did not anticipate meeting with any one from without. He did expect to meet with some one from within the old house. When once alone the detective fixed himself on the sofa. He was well armed, he knew his weapons were in good order and he determined to be on the alert and there dwelt in his mind but two subjects for study: The fact that all the evidence was promised after capture, and the fact that the death of the thief would end matters most satisfactorily.

Twelve o'clock passed and not a sound had been heard once, so one o'clock and two o'clock, and it was well on to three o'clock when our hero became aware that some one was moving about in the room. He drew his club. He placed more reliance upon his locust than he did upon a pistol in the darkness, and as he sat and listened the query was presented—what is the game? It was a critical moment and death hung in the air. It was necessary that he should be very careful, and yet it was equally necessary that he should change his position, and the chances were the party or parties moving in that room knew his position exactly.

Jack believed it was an assassin. He believed he was the intended victim; in fact, he had ciphered out the

whole programme for getting him out of the way. The people had indeed arrived at the conclusion that in employing him they were playing with dangerous tools.

Our hero with a movement as noiseless as that of a mouse slid from the sofa to the floor and then he crawled off to one side, and as he lay still again he mentally declared he would give a thousand dollars just to flash his lantern light for one second, but he did not dare do it. But as the moments passed he became perplexed and finally he questioned of himself:

“Can it be possible that indeed a thief has entered the house?”

Jack had been very noiseless, but he soon had reason to believe that the party knew of his presence and that brought him around to his original conclusion. The seeming intruder was some one who knew of his presence before entering the room and there the party stood. There was just sufficient light for the detective to see halfway across the room. The individual was in the shadow beyond. Jack was trying to discern when the party moved a little and came within the area of light, and the detective made a discovery which changed all his ideas. He discovered that the mystery was a woman. He could only see her in dim outline but the latter fact was fully established. Jack was perplexed. It being a woman dismissed the suspicion of harm intended to him, and it made plausible the possibility that after all the thief theory was genuine, and that at that moment he was gazing upon the veritable Witch of Manhattan.

“Where am I at?” he muttered. “It does seem that in some directions these people are proving their statements to be true.”

The next consideration was, what should he do? Who was the woman? If not the Witch was it possible it was the iron-limbed female who had knocked him down that night when off his guard?

He made up his mind to another fact; the intruder was not aware of his presence. The advantage was with him if he indeed intended a capture, and that was his game.

The detective had taken his observations while lying upon the floor. He slowly rose to his feet and started to advance toward the figure of the woman, when suddenly there came a flash, a report and a crash, and ere our hero could recover from his surprise, for he was taken by surprise, the intruder vanished.

Jack made an effort at pursuit. At the same instant he became aware that the house had been aroused. Mrs. Thomas came rushing down the stairs carrying a light. She met the officer in the hall and she demanded:

"Have you killed him?"

Jack, despite the excitement of the moment, noted the inquiry "Have you killed *him*?"

"No, madam, I just escaped with my own life."

"He fired at you?"

"Yes, madam, he fired at me."

"Was it a man?" the woman demanded.

Jack saw that she had fallen to her error and was evasive, answering:

"I can hardly tell; it was in the dark."

"And the thief fired at you?"

"Yes."

"How unfortunate!"

"I think it was very fortunate."

"How?"

"That I was not killed."

"You are a man of courage."

"Madam, any man can be murdered. Courage is no protection against murder."

"I wish you had fired and your aim had been true."

"Not much chance for aiming in the dark."

"And the thief escaped?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you can retire now."

"Yes, madam."

"Will you go on duty to-morrow night?"

"I will."

Jack went forth to the street and he was very thoughtful and muttered:

"It's a mystery; it's a mystery. That woman is indeed very deep and cunning and I had a narrow escape. She told her son she would down me. Well, she came very near making good her promise. No, no, I see through it all now. She intended to throw me off when she asked 'Did *he* shoot or did you shoot *him*?' A great game, madam; yes, a great game. You played the thief well. All right, the next time I may do the shooting and the thief may be winged at least."

The detective's soliloquy as recorded will indicate to our readers the line of his suspicion. He believed the thief business had been a ruse and a part of the plan to murder him and get him out of the way. A knowledge of the game of an enemy is always of great advantage to a good detective. Jack was a good detective and he was prepared to keep another vigil and give Mrs. Thomas another opportunity to play her game. "I'll solve that end of the mystery next time," he muttered.

On the day following the adventure we have described Jack called upon the woman. He found her cool and calm as usual and she again expressed her regret that he had not downed the intruder.

"Never mind, madam, I escaped and the next time I will have a different tale to tell. I may show you a dead thief."

"I hope you may, and you will be well satisfied with your reward."

That night Jack was on his way to the house when he

discovered the man Peale. The latter was going to call on his mother.

"Good enough," muttered our hero. "I will have a chance now to hear her tell her dear boy how near she came to laying out the 'dangerous tool,' the detective."

Jack saw the son enter the house. It was after eleven o'clock. The detective managed to gain an entrance also and he was at his post ready to listen just as Mrs. Thomas joined her son, so he overheard her very first words and they were startlingly confirmatory of his latest suspicions.

"Well, auntie, did you succeed in downing your detective?"

"No, and I have something to tell you."

"Well?"

"I am vindicated."

"You are vindicated?"

"My policy is vindicated."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I had the detective on watch here last night."

"Well?"

"And *he* came."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"*He* almost killed the detective."

Jack was all at sea once more. In those few words the woman had dispelled his latest suspicion.

"What happened?" asked Peale.

"As I told you, I had the detective on watch and he came. The officer discovered him, made an attempt to seize him and he discharged a pistol at the officer at short range."

"And missed him?"

"Yes."

"How unfortunate."

Jack's original suspicion was revived but even within the moment it was dispelled again as the woman said:

"It was not unfortunate. That detective is our only hope. Next time it will be the other way."

"How?"

"The detective will shoot, and then we can defy the world; all will be over."

"Mother, you exaggerate the danger. In my opinion there is more danger from the detective than from the other quarter."

Peale sometimes addressed his mother as auntie and at other times he used the more endearing title.

"You fear the detective?"

"I do."

"And I fear him. We have underrated him all these years. He is a man now, and each hour becomes more dangerous."

"Great Scott!" was the detective's ejaculation under his breath. Those few words were the most extraordinary confirmation he had received, and he muttered:

"I begin to see light now."

"I fear the detective," said Peale.

"That is only an idea of yours."

"No, the man has been dogging me as I told you, and he is ferreting out concerning some one else. He is playing a deep game and it is against us. It is a pity you ever called him in; everything was all right. We have played the greatest game ever attempted. We have played it successfully—we have won a million."

"What you say is true, but remember we had a great many confederates. Any one of them may get sour and communicate with the one person and then——"

"Bah! we would have been all right, but now I feel the greatest alarm."

"You do?"

"I do."

"And the detective is your bugbear?"

"He is."

"That man is devoted to his own interests and therefore to ours. I tell you within a few weeks I will have the one we fear and have reason to fear where he will do no harm, and then the detective and all our other confederates become harmless."

"I have a plan."

"What is your plan?" \

"Let us turn everything into cash and get away."

"No need."

"You can sell the real estate."

"We must not call attention to our doings so soon. Remember there are those who understand our whole game, but what they lack is proof. Let us once get rid of *him* and then we can sell and go or hold and stay with none to molest us or make us afraid. I tell you we are not safe as long as he lives."

"You promised to get rid of the detective."

"I've changed my mind."

"And I tell you he is the one we have most to fear. He is liable at any moment to get in contact with him, if he has not already, and then where are we? I tell you the detective must be put where he can do no harm, or the day will come when he will put us where we will be harmless."

The detective had heard enough and left the house, and once again by himself he muttered:

"I can have no misunderstanding now, all is plain and clear. The mystery is solved. All that is lacking is the evidence, and I will get the evidence."

Jack was walking along in a thoughtful mood and muttered unconsciously aloud:

"I wish I could find that mysterious *him*."

The words were still echoing along through the night when suddenly our hero was confronted by a woman. As usual she was veiled, but Jack was not at a loss as to her identity. The woman advanced to him boldly and asked:

"Are you an officer?"

"I am."

"Your name is Caswell?"

"That is my name."

"Will you go with me?"

"Why should I go with you?"

"I think I can aid you."

"Aid me?"

"Yes."

"In what?"

"In your present business."

"What is my present business?"

"You are seeking to solve a mystery."

"And you can aid me?"

"I can."

"How?"

"Come with me."

"All right, I will go with you; lead on."

The woman led the way and the detective followed. He did not attempt to remove the veil or seek to establish the identity of the woman—he felt well assured as to her identity. She was the woman with the strong arm—the woman he had seen in the old house and who had shot at him, and indeed at last he was nearing the goal. Neither spoke as they walked along and Jack was not surprised when invited to enter a coach. He followed the woman into the carriage, but he was watchful and ready at any moment to grasp his weapons or his inevitable "billy."

CHAPTER III.

THE CARRIAGE was driven for fully an hour. Jack knew he was being driven out of town and yet made no protest, nor did he ask a single question. He was on the road to a solution of a great mystery and that was sufficient. He was ready to take all chances, brave all perils.

In good time the carriage was stopped. The woman alighted and in a tone of command said:

"Follow."

Jack obeyed. He was ready at that moment and under all the circumstances to follow to heaven or the other place. The woman led the way up an embankment and a little later there could be seen the glimmer of light through the darkness.

"I wish you to accompany me to that house," said his conductress.

The woman spoke in very commanding tones. Indeed for a female all her movements and her words were very decisive.

The two soon reached the house, a building which was but a slight advance on a shanty. Once within the door Jack looked around. Only rude furniture fell under his observation, and on a common deal table stood a kerosene lamp. The woman pointed to a seat near the window. Jack settled himself as directed, the woman closed the door and seated herself at the table in a position facing her visitor.

"You do not appear to be surprised," said the woman, who had not removed her veil.

"I am surprised all the same."

"You are?"

"I am."

"You have an excellent way of concealing your surprise."

"Yes, that is my way usually."

"Have you no questions to ask?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"I propose to let you do the talking."

"You are a friend of Mrs. Thomas," said the woman abruptly.

"Oh! am I?"

"Are you not?"

"You appear to know."

"Will you answer me?"

"We will assume I am her dear friend."

"You are a very cautious man."

"Yes."

"But you are an honest man."

"I trust you are also," said the detective.

The woman gave a start. Jack wished that at the moment he could have seen her face, but the aggravating veil intervened.

"Did you consider your words?" came the question.

"I did."

"Fully?"

"Yes."

"You said I was an honest *man*."

"Did I?"

"You did."

"I said I trusted you were also."

"They were not idle words?"

"No."

"Will you explain?"

"No."

"You are very abrupt."

"I am."

"Why?"

"Because I am here to listen to you. I've got nothing to say only in answer to what you say."

"Your name is Jack Caswell."

"That is correct."

"You are a detective."

"Correct again."

"You are employed by Mrs. Thomas."

"Correct again."

"What are you to do?"

"You know so much concerning my affairs you should know my special employment."

"I trust you will answer my question."

"I may on one condition."

"Name your condition."

"I wish to see your face."

"What has that to do with your answering my question?"

"I wish to know the person who addresses the question."

"It does not matter."

"But it does."

"And are you particularly anxious to see my face?"

"No, but I make it a condition."

The woman removed her veil and Jack for once in his life started in dire amazement. He had anticipated beholding a youthful face; instead he saw one of the most hideous-looking physiognomies he had ever beheld. Indeed his surprise was so great that for a moment he remained speechless.

The woman laughed in a manner that was really startling. It appeared as though he were confronted by some witch who had undergone a marvelous transformation. As the creature's whole manner changed, even the tones of her voice, a chill permeated the detective as this seemingly old horror asked:

"Are you surprised now?"

"I am."

"I have fulfilled your condition—you have seen my face."

"Yes, and you can cover it up again."

This permission appeared to amuse the old horror and she said:

"You don't think I am very beautiful, do you?"

"Hardly."

"You expected to behold a charming young girl?"

"Sure."

"You can answer my question now."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I am not answering questions to an old witch."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the creature, "I am the Witch of Manhattan, the real old genuine Knickerbocker Witch."

"I reckon you tell the truth," said Jack, in a peculiar tone.

"I have fulfilled the condition—answer my question."

"Repeat it."

"What are you employed to do?"

"I may scare you if I answer."

"No."

"You are sure you will not scare?"

"I am."

"I am employed to catch the Witch of Manhattan."

The creature laughed.

"You do not scare," said Jack.

"No."

"Haven't we had fun enough?"

"Yes."

"Then let's get down to business."

"All right."

"You say you are the Witch of Manhattan."

"And you think your work is done."

"Certainly; I have found my game."

"What will you do?"

"Arrest you."

"Oh, you will?"

"Yes."

"That is contrary to your orders."

Jack was again greatly amazed.

"It is against my orders?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You were only to locate the Witch of Manhattan, not arrest her."

The detective was perplexed and very thoughtful. The singular interview had assumed a very strange phase. He recognized the fact that it was necessary for him to go very slow.

There had followed a moment's silence when the creature asked:

"Have you located me? Can you identify me?"

"I think I can."

"Then you can go and get your reward, and it will be a rich one."

Jack fell to the truth; there had been a double espionage. While he had been trailing Mrs. Thomas and her son or nephew some one had been trailing them also and he had been included in the trail. It was evident this old witch had by some means learned the conversations that had occurred between Mrs. Thomas and himself, or it was another deal on the part of the old woman whom our hero was now convinced had stolen the Radcliffe estate.

Jack was not disconcerted. He was down to a case that called for a display of those wonderful qualities that had earned for him his complimentary sobriquet.

There followed a moment's silence. The detective was deciding upon his plan of action and he determined by a startling statement to clear up one phase of the mystery.

"You think I can go and claim my reward?"

"Yes."

"You are mistaken."

"I am?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I am claiming nothing from Mrs. Thomas."

"You are claiming nothing from Mrs. Thomas," repeated the old witch.

"No."

"How is that?"

"I am on to her game."

The old witch had been cool, but when our hero made the statement recorded she betrayed great agitation. She forgot to chuckle.

Again there followed a moment of silence and then the old witch repeated:

"You are on to her game?"

"I am."

"What is her game?"

"I do not know why I should make a confidant of you."

"You can."

"I am not assured as to your identity."

"I am the Witch of Manhattan."

"That settles it—you are the robber."

"I thought you were on to their game," came the startling suggestion.

"I am."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"Then you must know there are two Witches of Manhattan."

"Aha! that is so, eh?"

"You must know it."

"I must?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"One is a golden-haired maiden. I am not a golden-haired maiden."

* Let me ask you one question."

"Proceed."

"Do you love the Thomas woman?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Answer."

"No."

"Then I reveal a secret. She has not long to live."

Suddenly and in a perfectly natural voice the old witch exclaimed:

"That she-devil has lived long enough."

The detective was satisfied the old witch was not a decoy in a new scheme of the Thomas family.

"So you think she has lived long enough?"

The old witch remained silent and the detective continued:

"So you think there are two Witches of Manhattan?"

"Yes."

"You are Witch number one."

"Well?"

"Who is Witch number two?"

"How can I tell?"

The detective suddenly changed his whole manner and he said:

"Come, my *young friend*, you have played your part well, but the play is over. Let's come down to business, real business. You are a Radcliffe; why did you invite me here?"

The old witch laughed and said:

"How funny!"

"What is funny?"

"You call me a Radcliffe."

"I do, and I propose to unmask you. Yes, I have known all along who you are. You are the Nemesis; you are the natural son of Henry Radcliffe. You have a game—what is it? Do not attempt to fool me any longer."

The old witch suddenly leaped to her feet and so did the detective. The latter leaped forward and grasped the pretended old woman. A desperate struggle followed. Jack had the battle of his life on his hands as far as personal strength was concerned, but the old witch was encumbered by her clothes. Otherwise it might have been a question as to who would prove conqueror. Jack had the advantage and succeeded in bearing the old witch to the floor, and he also succeeded in clapping on her the "darbies" and she was at his mercy.

"Well," said the detective, "I reckon I can locate you now."

"I am at your mercy," said the old witch.

"Yes, you are at my mercy."

"There is but one reason why I took this chance."

"What was your reason?"

"I know you to be a man of honor."

"I do not think you have made a mistake."

"I propose to appeal to both your honor and your mercy."

"You can do so safely."

"I am Anthony Radcliffe."

"Oh! you are not the Witch of Manhattan?"

"You have not been deceived at any time, you are the victor?"

"I am."

"I have said I will appeal to your honor and mercy."

"You said so."

"Then release me."

A sudden and strange impulse led the detective to fall to the spirit of young Radcliffe's proposition and he immediately released him and said:

"Young man, I am your friend, you can trust me. I believe you have been wronged. I am an impartial testifier. I have obtained facts that have led me to this conclusion. You can trust me—now tell me the whole truth."

"I will."

"Do so."

"First let me remove my disguise. I wish you to behold my real face.

"All right."

"I will return in a few minutes."

The disguised party moved toward a door opening into another room, when the detective called:

"Hold! can I trust you?"

"You can."

"I will."

A moment later the officer was alone, and in giving his confidence and trust he relied entirely upon his discernment and good judgment.

Fully half an hour passed and there entered his presence one of the best-looking youths he had met in many a day.

As the young man entered the room he said:

"There shall be no more concealments. I am Anthony Radcliffe."

Jack surveyed the youth from head to feet. He beheld a youth whose features were wonderfully like those in the mysterious portrait. His eyes were blue but his hair was dark brown. Jack was running several theories through his mind and after an interval said:

"No, there must not be any more concealment. There are several singular incidents in this affair, several mysteries. I reckon you can open them all up and explain everything."

"How much do you know?" asked young Radcliffe.

Jack had decided upon his course and he proceeded and told all the facts that led to his being called into the case. He related all that he had learned and all that he suspected, and then demanded:

"Now tell me who you are?"

"I am Anthony Radcliffe."

"That is your real name?"

"It is."

"And you have a right to the name?"

"I have."

"Who was your father?"

"I am the son of the man to whose heirs the estate was awarded the Radcliffe estate."

"You are?"

"I am."

"And who was your mother?"

"My father's legitimate wife."

"Then you are the real heir?"

"I am."

The detective told the story as it had been related to him by Mrs. Thomas, and then said:

"Now explain how much of her story is true."

"I can trust you?"

"Yes."

"You are really my friend?"

"I am."

"I will tell you the story. Mrs. Thomas claims to be the half-sister of my late father. The claim is false. She is personating my aunt—she is a fraud. My father was a man who, because of an injury, became mentally weak. This woman secured control over him and from the beginning plotted to steal the estate. When I was a child I was sent away and placed in charge of a woman who later on testified that she was my mother. She retained control of my sister."

"Where is your sister now?"

"This woman claims that she is dead."

"You have been in the old Radcliffe house?"

"I have."

"You have seen the portrait of the fair girl?"

"I have."

"Who is she?"

"I do not know."

"Is that a portrait of your sister?"

"I do not know. I have not seen my sister since she was three years old. I have but a faint recollection of her, but I have a suspicion."

"And what is your suspicion?"

"I believe that is a portrait of my mother."

"A portrait of your mother!" ejaculated the detective.

"Yes."

Our hero recalled the glimpse he had had of the woman in white who resembled the portrait and who had been so summarily dragged away the night he was on watch in the old house.

"Where is your mother?"

"I do not know."

"Is she dead?"

"I do not know. They claim she is dead as they claim that my sister is dead."

"What do you claim?"

"I have reason to believe that my sister still lives."

"And what is your theory?"

"They won the verdict in the court against my uncle. That part of the story as told by Mrs. Thomas is true. My sister became the heir. Suddenly my sister died. Proof of her death must have been furnished—probably manufactured, as these people had everything in their own hands—and they produced a will wherein this Mrs. Thomas became sole heir of the property as nearest of kin."

"Now what do you suspect?"

"I have indicated I believe my sister still lives or was murdered. I was a contestant in the court through counsel and they proved that I was an illegitimate son. The woman who had always taken care of me swore to me as her child and her evidence was supported. I believed she told the truth."

"How did you learn to the contrary?"

"The woman repented and told me the whole truth, and told me she believed my mother still lived and also my sister."

"How long ago did this confession take place?"

"About six months ago."

"Did the woman furnish you proofs?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"She was about to confess her perjury. She threatened to do so unless these people did me justice."

"And why has she not kept her word?"

"She has mysteriously disappeared."

"Murdered?"

"I fear she has been murdered."

"You have been haunting these people?"

"I have."

"Did you ever steal anything from them?"

"No."

"What has been your purpose?"

"I have been 'piping' them, hoping to learn that my mother still lived, that my sister still lived; and also hoping to obtain evidence against them."

"How is it they did not put you out of the way?"

"I have been too smart for them. They have tried to murder me or capture me, but I have evaded them."

"How about the Witch of Manhattan number two?"

"She is one of their confederates. They are arranging evidence and proof so as to identify me with the thief and thus put me out of the way. If they could once capture me they would have abundance of proof of my guilt. They are great people for furnishing false testimony. That Thomas woman is a really wonderful woman."

"How did you learn about me?"

"I have been secreted in that house and I have listened

to conversations between you and the Thomas woman. I have 'piped' you. I became convinced that you were an honorable man. I believed you suspected these people of wrongdoing, and I determined to meet you and throw myself upon your mercy. Heretofore I have worked alone."

"You met me one night when you were disguised as a woman."

"I did."

"And those robberies are all 'fakes'?"

"They are."

"Only intended to manufacture evidence wherewith they can put you out of the way?"

"Yes."

"Who is the Witch of Manhattan?"

"I do not know."

"Have you any suspicion?"

"No; I have tried to run her down but failed."

"How is it you called her the Witch of Manhattan?"

"I was present at an interview between you and Theodore Peale and learned you had dubbed the mysterious woman the Witch of Manhattan."

"But they claim the Witch has robbed other people."

"Yes, under the guidance of Peale and with his connivance she has done so, or rather appeared to have done so. In my opinion he was the thief. All was contrived. He is a very ingenious man—an arch-conspirator."

"And you believe your mother lives?"

"I do."

"And your sister?"

"Yes."

"And you have outlined their whole scheme?"

"I have."

"If your sister lives we may find her."

"Yes."

"If your mother lives we may find her also."

"Yes."

"How have they succeeded in making it appear that your mother is dead?"

"I believe that in the case of both my sister and mother substitutions have been made, while my mother and sister have been held secret captives."

"This has been an extraordinary game in case it is proved that your suspicions are correct."

"Yes, sir, but with your great knowledge of the world you can readily see how under all the circumstances the game could be played. I was but a child, my sister also; and my mother a poor, weak, heartbroken woman. So you see it only required boldness, more than cunning, to carry out their scheme."

"You are right, young man; yes, you are right. And now how are we to beat their game?"

"In the first place we must find my old nurse, the woman who swore to being my mother."

"You think she is alive?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Simply because they have not sought to establish her death as they did the death of my father, my mother and my sister."

"Do you think it possible your father lives?"

"I believe he is really dead, but it is possible that he lives."

"You firmly believe your old nurse, the woman who swore falsely, lives?"

"I do."

"What is her name?"

"Susan Werner."

"If we find her she can furnish proofs?"

"She will confess that her former testimony was false

And then again if we find my sister and my mother she will know of facts that will aid us in identifying them both."

"They admitted in court that you were really a son of the maker of the will?"

"Yes."

"They claimed, however, that you were not his legitimate son?"

"Yes."

"If we prove your legitimacy you become the heir?"

"Yes."

"And your sister's will is null and void?"

"Yes."

The detective meditated a moment and then said:

"If we secure possession of Susan Werner we have got 'em, anyhow."

"We have."

"If that woman lives we will find her, I will promise you that much, young man. And now we will work together."

"Then you accept my story?"

"I do."

"You believe I am the real heir?"

"I do; and if you act under my advice we will establish all the facts. The first thing for us to do is to find Susan Werner."

"No."

"What would you propose?"

"If my mother and sister are alive they are in the power of these people."

"That is true."

"We must find them first."

"Do you think that your mother, if alive, knows of your existence?"

"I believe she thinks me dead."

"And your sister?"

"She probably knows nothing about me."

"And the Witch of Manhattan? You have some idea as to her identity."

"I have not."

"This is your home?"

"At present, yes."

"You live here alone?"

"I do."

"Under what guise?"

"As an old woman."

"You must have worked your disguise well to escape detection."

"I have, but I have another home. This is my refuge."

"Who supplies you with money?"

"A lawyer who will bring my case in court when I secure the evidence."

"Your case will never come in court."

"Necessarily so."

"No, I will wind these people up so that in order to unwind they will be compelled to confess all and make full restitution. And now one word—I am to undertake your case?"

"If you are willing."

"I am."

"Then I know I shall recover my own."

"In order to do so you must follow my directions to the letter."

"I will."

"Then you must remain right here as the old woman until you hear from me. I have a test to make. I have reason to believe that your mother really lives."

"You have reason to believe so?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me on what you found your suspicion?"

The detective related his adventure in the old house, telling how he saw the seeming apparition who so greatly resembled the portrait. The young man displayed considerable agitation and exclaimed:

"Indeed, you beheld my mother."

"I will know within twenty-four hours."

Our hero held an extended talk with the young man and then departed in the carriage which had been placed at his service. On his way back to his lodgings he thought the whole affair over in his mind and fully realized the desperate chances that were to be taken. He recognized that the conspirators had so successfully entrenched themselves behind the law that his moves must be independent of the law, and he fully appreciated the cunning and skill of the people against whom he was pitted, and could see that in an emergency they were capable of the most desperate deeds.

Jack reached his home and on the morning following his remarkable adventure he sallied forth, determined to make a bold move.

Later in the day he received a note from Mrs. Thomas. He called upon that lady, who informed him that she had no more use for his services. Jack accepted his dismissal quietly and without protest, and this caused the woman to turn pale. She had expected and even hoped that he would protest or at least ask an explanation, and she accepted his ready acquiescence to his dismissal as very ominous; for after the departure of the detective she was joined by her son and to him she said:

"I have followed your advice."

"You have done well."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"On the contrary that man is now free to turn all his efforts against us."

"He was working against us anyhow. He was our foe from the beginning. Now we can treat him as a foe."

"He is a very brave and intelligent man."

"One fact is assured—he suspects us and has been on our track. He will make us trouble unless——" The man stopped short and Mrs. Thomas urged:

"Proceed."

"You can guess."

"Unless he is out of the way?"

"Yes."

"Well, let him look to himself. His days are numbered now that I know he is our foe. We have gone too far now to let one life stand in our way."

There was a malignant gleam in the woman's eyes as she spoke.

"We must not strike unless we are sure."

"You need have no fear. I have a man in my employ who needs only one word from me and the deed is done."

A little later mother and son separated and so matters rested until midnight. Theodore Peale had warned his mother against one possibility and she had assured him that she would guard against it.

It was two hours after midnight when through the darkness in the great parlor of the Radcliffe mansion there shot a ray of light. In the center of the floor stood a masked figure and in the latter's hand was a masked lantern, the mask of which he had just slid from before the bright little spark of light, and he sent the glimmering streak from point to point around the great room.

The singular figure presented a strange appearance. As intimated, he wore a mask upon his face, a loose gown-like robe enveloped his whole person and on his feet he wore a pair of regular Indian moccasins, and a strange and weird sight would have met the eyes of one who suddenly might behold him as there he stood, his body motionless save

as his arms slowly moved as he changed the direction of the sharp ray of light.

Fully three minutes passed and under the circumstances three minutes were quite a spell of time. Finally the man closed the mask of his lantern and moved slowly and noiselessly toward the door opening into the hall. Once in the hall he stopped and again the sharp ray of light passed over the various recesses.

It was a fact worthy of observation that the man kept one hand close to his side, and a close and shrewd observer would have discovered that while he moved his arm and kept the ray of light glancing around from object to object his head was turned a little to one side, and he was really covering the space in his rear with covert glances. Thus the seeming pantomime proceeded, for it was all movement and gesture, not a murmur escaping the strangely acting man's lips. At length he moved to the foot of the stairs leading to the upper hall. Here he again closed the mask over his light and stood still, and then a most startling incident occurred. A second figure suddenly rose up and immediately there followed a struggle—a desperate noiseless struggle in the dark. The combat was a brief one, for one of the contestants was borne to the heavily carpeted floor and then under a flash from the mask lantern, its slide once more removed, a very exciting tableau was exposed. One man lay stretched upon the broad of his back, a little way off on the floor lay a stiletto which had evidently been knocked from the prostrate man's hand by the masked figure in the long robe, who held him pinned to the floor. The masked figure after throwing his thin ray of light around in several directions finally flashed it full in the prostrate man's face and then he spoke, but in a very low tone.

“Utter one outcry,” said the man in the mask, “and you die.”

The prostrate man made no answer and the victor again said:

“Your intentions were good but I was on to your move. You would have received a big price if you had succeeded in plunging that ugly knife into me.”

“I was justified,” said the prostrate man.

“Speak low, very low,” came the warning. “Raise your voice and you die.”

“I will speak low.”

“Remember that I hold your life in my hands, and now mark me, I want you to go with me into the parlor. Any attempt to raise an alarm will prove your death knell.”

“I know my peril.”

“You do?”

“I do.”

“You say you were justified.”

“I said so.”

“What was your justification.”

“I believed you to be a burglar.”

This last remark, as our readers will observe, indicated a recognition; and indeed there had followed a recognition, for the masked man as he bore his victim to the floor had spoken a name, and the latter had either recognized a voice or was governed by a conclusion when he appeared to assume that the victor was not a common burglar.

The detective permitted his man to rise and led him into the parlor, and he said:

“Goeffe, I did not expect to meet you again.”

The man remained silent.

“I see you are up to your old tricks.”

“I am seeking to earn an honest living.”

“You are?”

“I am.”

“By murder?”

“No.”

"You intended to murder me."

"I was employed in this house as a private watchman. The house has been robbed several times."

The detective laughed in a quiet way and said:

"That will do for you to tell, but it don't work with me."

"I did not know you had any interest in this house."

"You did not?"

"I did not."

"And you say you wish to earn an honest living?"

"I do."

"I will give you a chance to earn an honest dollar and then——"

The detective stopped short.

"Go on, sir."

"You will leave the country, or go to jail, that's all."

"I will be glad to earn an honest dollar."

"All right, I will talk with you later on. In the meantime I will let you remain here until my business is concluded. I will make sure of your remaining, however."

"You can trust me."

"I can?"

"You can."

"I will not, all the same; but you can answer me one question."

"Proceed."

"Where is the woman who is mistress of this house?"

"She is not here to-night."

"She is not here to-night?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"She went away, fearing I might have an encounter with a burglar."

Again the detective laughed and said:

"All right, stick to your story; but do you tell me the truth?"

"I do."

"She is not really here in the house?"

"She is not."

"Who is in the house?"

"Only one servant and myself."

"Where is this servant?"

"In her room, I reckon."

"She knows of your presence in this house?"

"She does."

"What are her orders?"

"To keep her room unless there is an alarm of fire."

"And where is her room?"

The man located the room.

"There is no one else in the house?"

"No one but yourself."

"You know the risk of deceiving me."

"That is why I am telling you the truth."

"And you are telling me the truth?"

"I am."

The detective proceeded and in a manner peculiarly his own bound the man hands and feet, bound him so he could neither move nor speak, and as he concluded the detective said:

"I reckon I can depend upon your awaiting my return."

The man did not answer, he was securely gagged.

Jack left the room. He proceeded direct to the room where the man Goeffe had said the one servant awaited an alarm of fire. Jack listened a moment at the door. He heard some one moving inside and after an interval he rapped. The door was opened a little way, a head was protruded and the demand followed:

"Is there anything you want?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Will you come in?"

Jack entered the room.

The woman appeared to be acting on an assumption. She did not look at the detective, but as she stepped across the room she asked:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want you," said the detective.

The room was fairly well lighted and as the detective spoke the woman turned with a look of surprise and alarm on her face, and asked:

"Who are you? What do you want here?"

"I told you what I wanted—I want you."

The woman glared a moment and then like an enraged tigress sprang upon the officer. A really desperate struggle followed. Jack appeared to be in for desperate struggles, and he had a tough time of it ere he subdued the woman, who bit and scratched like a wild cat. The detective, however, succeeded in subduing her, and, not wishing to indicate his identity, he bound her with stout cords which he had brought with him to use in an emergency.

The woman fought all the time, but our hero succeeded in binding her and then he set her in a chair and for a moment or two studied her face. The woman was able to talk and finding herself powerless she used her tongue.

"Why am I treated in this manner?" she demanded.

"You will learn later on."

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"Are you anxious to know?"

"I will know."

"Yes, I will give you an idea."

The detective commenced to form a noose. The woman's face assumed an ashen hue.

"Do you intend to murder me?" she demanded, in tones of wildest alarm.

"I do, I mean to strangle you."

The woman made a motion with her lips as though about to scream, but terror held her speechless and her effort to scream was only a pitiful pantomime.

Deliberately Jack formed the noose and the woman in a husky voice managed to ask:

"What can I do to save my life?"

"Oh, you do not wish to die?"

"I cannot die."

"And you are willing to save your life?"

"I will do anything to save my life."

"You can do so."

"How?"

"Confess."

"I have nothing to confess. I have done no wrong to any one."

"How dare you tell me that?"

"It is the truth."

"All right, I will accept it as the truth. If you have nothing to confess so much the worse for you. Yes, madam, you are doomed."

The woman's terror increased. She looked like one with the noose already about her neck.

"Spare me," she pleaded.

"Only on condition that you confess."

"I have nothing to confess."

"How long have you been in the employ of Mrs. Thomas?"

The woman was silent.

"Your silence is a confession."

"Then spare me."

"Only on condition that you answer all my questions."

"I have been in the employ of Mrs. Thomas for five years."

"Then you know all her secrets."

"No, she never trusted me."

"It's a pity you have no information to give me, and you must die."

The woman writhed in torture and murmured:

"Has it come to this?"

"Yes, it has come to this."

"You will murder me for the sins of another?"

"No, for your own sins. And now, madam, we will get right down to business, as it is said. Will you confess and live, or refuse and die? I have no time to waste. I must be moving. If I strangle you it will be the tenth death I am responsible for to-night."

Our hero's words sounded terrible, but the bloody murders he claimed to have committed are easily explained—his victims were mosquitoes. The woman, however, was in such an excited condition she appeared to accept his declaration as real, and her face became blue with terror.

"What can I tell you?" she asked.

"You are custodian of a female prisoner in this house?"

"No, no!" almost screamed the woman.

The detective tested his noose, when the woman fell over in a dead faint.

"There she goes!" ejaculated the detective, and he set to work to bring her around. As she revived he pretended to withdraw the noose from around her neck.

"Oh, mercy!" she pleaded.

"Will you confess?"

"I will."

"Where is Susan Werner?"

"I do not know."

"Is she living?"

"I do not know."

"What do you suspect?"

"She was alive three weeks ago."

"Where is the girl Louise Radcliffe?"

"Oh, spare me!" pleaded the woman.

"Answer my question or the next time you will complete the journey."

The woman appeared to fully comprehend his ghastly allusion and in trembling tones she answered:

"I fear she is dead."

"You are not certain?"

"I am not."

"When did you last know of her being alive?"

"Who are you?"

"Answer me—that is my name for the present."

"I know she was alive three months ago but neither of the persons named are in my custody."

"I know that the party in your custody is Mrs. Radcliffe."

"I feared this," moaned the woman; "yes, I feared that some day my sins would find me out."

"Yes, madam, sins always find out those who commit them, and sooner or later retribution overtakes the sinner; but answer me."

"What will become of me?"

"You die unless you answer me."

"And I will be murdered if I do."

"No, you shall be protected."

"I do not care to be protected. Give me my freedom and I will protect myself."

"What will you do?"

"Flee away to my own country."

"Reveal all you know to me and you shall have a chance to flee away."

"I know but little."

"Tell me all you do know."

"There is a lady under my care."

"In this house?"

"Yes; I have always treated her well and I have protected her many times."

"Who is the lady?"

"She claims to be Mrs. Radcliffe."

"She resembles the portrait in the parlor?"

"Yes."

"She is in this house?"

"Yes."

"Will you lead me to her?"

"It will cost me my life if I do."

"It will cost you your life if you do not."

"If I do will you let me escape?"

"I will."

"I am innocent of any crime save that of guilty knowledge. I have only been the nurse and custodian of that dear woman. I love her and why I have been so false to her I cannot tell."

"You can atone for all now. Lead me into her presence."

"Let me go and prepare her to receive you."

"No, no, madam, you must lead me to her."

"You distrust me?"

"I do."

The detective as he spoke held aloft the threatening noose.

"I shall escape?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Immediately, if you so desire."

"Release me and I will lead you to the poor lady."

The detective only partially released the woman, and while doing so his heart was bounding with delight and satisfaction, for he was into the very heart of the mystery and would soon have the arch-conspirators at his mercy.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK knew that the moment he secured possession of any one of the victims of Mrs. Thomas' cunning he would send consternation into their camp, and he believed he would within a few moments reach that point in the game.

"Now, madam," he said, "lead on, and remember I do

not trust you. I am watching you and any attempted tricks on your part will prove fatal to you."

"I will attempt no tricks. I am glad to make what reparation I can. I have been blind; it is a delight to me to place that dear, beautiful woman in the hands of those who will protect her. But I tell you one thing—you must be prepared."

"Prepared?"

"Yes."

"Against what?"

"She is guarded by a man who is one of the most desperate scoundrels on the face of the earth to-day."

"I will take care of him."

"You are, sir, I believe, a detective."

"Well?"

"If so you are accustomed to combats."

"I am."

"Let me explain. Mrs. Radcliffe is confined in a room on the top floor of this house. The room is built in the very center. It is padded and thick-walled so as to prevent any sound going forth. Indeed it is a wonder in its construction, as all sounds go through a prepared construction to a chimney which carries the sound up in the air through a high chimney, and one could scream and I scream in that room and never be heard."

"You say the room is guarded?"

"Yes, a man is there night and day, only relieved by me a few hours in the day."

"And is he armed?"

"He is, to the teeth; and he is always on his guard. He is a very powerful man, and as I said a desperate fellow who will fight to the death."

"He will get all the fight he wants."

"I will tell you all."

"Do."

"His orders are to kill without one word of inquiry any stranger who may appear on that floor, so you will have to be on your guard. Of course I cannot accompany you beyond here."

The woman came to a halt at the foot of an enclosed stairway.

"Do you mean to trick me?"

"I do not."

"You can never hide from me if you do. Better have the enmity of these people than mine."

"I am seeking to make peace with my own conscience. It is necessary for me that you should prevail over this man. If you fail I am at the mercy of desperate people who will become my foes."

"What would you advise me to do—shoot the man down at sight?"

"No, he often sleeps. He fears no danger as a rule. You can steal upon him."

"Trust me, I will; and where will I find you?"

"I will await you here. If you win I go with you, if you fail I will flee away at once—flee to the uttermost parts of the earth."

"You will have no occasion to flee."

The detective prepared for an encounter and the weapon he relied upon was his billy. He had a regular police night-club, and as our readers all know, in the hands of one who knows how to use it in a close encounter it is the most effective of weapons.

Jack opened the door and slowly ascended the stairs. He had his mask lantern ready, and his club, and slowly he ascended until his head was on a level with the floor of the attic apartment, for the stair opened right into the great chamber, as is usual in all old-fashioned houses.

The detective glanced around. There was a light burning on a table and he was able to see the central well-

guarded and padded room of which the woman had spoken, and thus far her statements were confirmed.

A moment the detective glanced around, then ascended the remaining steps and as he did so a man suddenly rose up and confronted him, as though he had actually slid down from mid-air.

Jack was hardened to surprises or he might have momentarily lost his head, and an instant's consternation would have proved fatal, for the man held a club in his hand and was prepared to strike. Indeed his silent weapon was twice the length and heft of the billy carried by our hero, and even while Jack was taking in the above facts at a glance the man swung his club in the air and made a vicious blow at the detective. The latter managed to spring aside and it required a good eye, nerve and agility to do so, as the fellow having missed one blow followed up the attack, and for several seconds all the detective could do was dodge. And he did prove an artful dodger, for the man exclaimed with an oath:

"I'll get you yet, you infernal thief."

"Hold on, old man," answered Jack, "I am not a thief. You are going on too fast."

"I am, eh? Well, here goes for a settler."

The man had thrown aside his club and had drawn a pistol which he cocked and presented, but ere he could fire the weapon was knocked from his hand.

In discarding the club the fellow made a mistake, but he did not know that our hero was armed with a "billy" or he might have held on. As stated, Jack knocked the weapon from the man's hand just as he was about to fire, and as the little gun rattled to one side on the floor Jack followed up his advantage by dealing the fellow a rap on the head which brought him to his knees. He was not conquered, however, for he drew a long knife, recovered his feet and made a rush, and with an ordinary person he

would have succeeded in his assault, but he was not dealing with an ordinary person. On the contrary he was assailing one of the coolest and most nery men on the force, and the detective well maintained his reputation, for he played around his assailant like an acrobat, and his club moved with the rapidity almost of a scintillation of light. Watching his opportunity he landed a terrific blow on his assailant's head—a blow which caused the fellow to vell and fall to the floor—and quicker than the movements of a frightened mouse Jack was upon him and as quickly clapped the darbies on him, and then he coolly exclaimed in imitation of a blast man:

“It's all over.”

Indeed it was all over as far as the combat was concerned. The man lay with a battered head and helpless with the “darbies” on him, and he was sullen indeed.

“My friend,” said the detective, “I reckon you've lost a job.”

“Curse you,” said the man, “if I had been prepared for you I reckon you would never have gotten away with me.”

“But I have, all the same, and now how is your prisoner?”

“I have no prisoner.

“Don't tell that to me. Come, come, where are your keys?”

“I have no keys.”

“Oh, you haven't?”

“No.”

The detective looked the man over thoroughly. He had drawn his mask lantern and flashed the light full in the fellow's face and after a little asked:

“What do you know?”

“I don't know anything beyond the fact that you have got the best of me.”

“It's bad for you, old man, if you do not know anything.”

"What do you expect me to know?"

"I expect you to be able to tell me a heap. If you can't I'm sorry for you, that's all."

Jack had made great progress. He had one prisoner down in the parlor, bound hands and feet, he had the woman at his command, and he also had the fellow who had been acting as custodian; and he reasoned that if he could not go very deep into the workings of the mystery it would be very strange.

The man was a sullen, desperate fellow as the woman had said, and he answered:

"You will get nothing out of me."

Jack laughed and advanced within the vestibule of the central room and there he beheld a door doubly bolted. He slid the bolt and stepped into the outer room, for he had been informed that there were two rooms. He advanced to the second room and after several raps a voice inquired:

"Who is there?"

"Are you prepared to receive a visitor?" demanded our hero.

"Who is my visitor?"

On the impulse of the moment Jack answered:

"A friend and messenger from your son."

"Enter," came the immediate invitation.

The detective pressed the door open and the next instant stood in a room very comfortably furnished. There was a lamp on a table and the apartment was fairly well illuminated, and standing by the table was the lady whom the officer had seen just for one moment the night he was on watch in the parlor—the woman who so strangely stood as a living counterpart of the portrait. The lady was cool and self-possessed and said:

"Did I understand you, sir, that you come as a messenger from my son?"

"Yes, madam."

"I have waited a long time. I expected you."

The detective was really amazed.

"You expected me?" he said.

"I did."

"May I ask on what you based your expectations?"

"I knew that sooner or later this great wrong would be righted."

"Then you are the victim of a great wrong?"

"I am; but who are you, sir?"

The detective decided that it was better to be frank and explicit from the start and he said:

"I am a detective officer."

"I welcome you. Tell me about my son."

"I will, madam, but first tell me about yourself."

"Do you not know?"

"I do not, and it is necessary that I should to enable me to aid you."

"My story is briefly told. I am Mrs. Radcliffe. My husband is dead. We had in our family a woman named Beach."

"Not Thomas?"

"That is the name she has adopted," said the lady.

"Proceed, madam."

"She is a wicked and designing woman. She determined to secure my husband's fortune. She resembled a step-sister of my husband and she determined to personate the lady."

"What is the name of the genuine stepsister?"

"Thomas."

"And where is she?"

"She has been dead many years and this woman has personated her. She was present when my husband died. I was overcome with grief and I believe for a time lost my reason. When I regained consciousness I found myself a

prisoner, my children had been taken from me, and I have been a prisoner ever since."

"Have you ever heard from your children?"

"Yes, Mrs. Thomas has kept me informed concerning my children."

"Has she given you exact information?"

"I do not know."

"When did you see your children last?"

"Not since the night their father died."

This story did not agree with the statement of Anthony Radcliffe, and we will here state that later on the discrepancy was fully explained.

The woman related a great deal to the detective which our readers will have verified as our narrative progresses. Jack told his story and finally said:

"Madam, you are to leave this house with me."

"I am ready to go."

"When?"

"At once."

"Prepare yourself and I will await you outside."

At least thirty minutes passed and the woman appeared, and strangely enough was equipped for the street. During the interval Jack had seen the nurse and that woman had also prepared herself for a departure.

Jack released the man in the parlor. He had his reasons and knew he could close in on the fellow at any time.

The detective took Mrs. Radcliffe to the home of the captain of the precinct. He had arranged for this part of the programme and it was daylight when he sought his own apartment.

While Jack slept the sleep of a man who had performed a great deed, some very stirring events occurred. Mrs. Thomas returned to her home just after daylight. She entered the house; all was still. She ascended to her own room and rang her bell. She waited and no one answered

the call. She ascended to the nurse's room and then a dire suspicion entered her mind. She ascended the stairs and a moment later discovered the man who had acted as guardian and jailer. The woman uttered a cry and demanded:

"What does this mean?"

"It means," answered the man, "that the other side have played a great game."

"Speak, explain!" cried the woman.

"Your bird has been stolen from you."

"How dare you?"

"I dare tell the truth any time."

"Will you explain in plain language?"

"I will tell you all I know about it."

The man told his story and the woman moaned:

"I have been betrayed."

"No, but you have been out-played, that is all. You would not take my advice. Dead men tell no tales. With the dead all planning ceases. You permitted your friends to live, they have been active and vigilant and have out-played you, that's all."

"And the woman has been taken away?"

"Yes."

"And the nurse?"

"I reckon she has been carried off also."

"And Goeffe?"

"He may have been in the game against you, I do not know. I always warned you against that fellow. But will you kindly release me? I have lain here a number of hours as you see me."

"It is the work of that man Caswell," exclaimed Mrs. Thomas.

"Yes, it is his work, no doubt."

"And we are ruined."

"It looks that way now."

Mrs. Thomas released the man and bid him go at once for Theodore Peale. An hour later Peale appeared. To him the woman told the story of their disaster and he said:

"What else could you expect? I warned you."

"What can we do now?"

The man meditated a moment and then said:

"All hangs on one life."

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"What can we do?"

"You know as well as I do."

"I tried to do it. I had arranged to have him put out of the way."

"Oh, yes, in an indirect manner, and you have failed."

"What can we do now?"

"He must die at all hazards; or we must make terms."

"What do you suspect?"

"Suspicion will not avail us now."

"Can he be in communication with Anthony?"

"I believe he is. Of course I cannot say for certain, but it looks that way."

"I have failed."

"You have."

"Can you not succeed?"

"I will try."

"Do so; we are in great peril at this moment."

"The fortune is in great peril. We could deal with all the rest but this detective—he is a terror. I fear all is lost unless we can get rid of him."

"You have money at your command; act."

"I will, at once."

"And what shall I do?"

"Remain here."

"I am liable to arrest."

"No, no; you need not fear. He is not going to make

any arrests. He is playing a different game. Yes, it is now a game of life and death."

"He may go right into court."

"Bah! he is no such fool. No, no, he could never prove anything in court."

"He has that woman."

"Bah! we can prove her a lunatic and an impostor. He knows that."

"He may produce Anthony."

"We have already established his identity. No, no, the game is not lost yet. There is but one incident that can give him a 'dead cinch' on us."

"And what is that?"

"If he should secure Susan Werner we are lost."

"But you forget."

"Louise?"

"Yes."

"Bah! we can attend to that end of it all right, but Susan Werner would prove fatal. She is a witness of record. She could recall her testimony, make a full confession and the fortune would go one way and we the other—to jail. You can make up your mind that Caswell's objective point at this moment is the woman Werner."

"He can never find her."

"If he lives he will. The whole scheme rests on his life. We must dispose of him or surrender, that's all."

"And you will see what you can do?"

"I will make one effort and if I fail the 'jig's up,' and we must skip or surrender."

It was late in the day when the detective issued forth. He was gotten up under a good disguise and went direct to the shanty where Anthony Radcliffe was hiding. To the young man he related his experience and some time later mother and son were reunited.

Jack did not remain with Mrs. Radcliffe and her son—

he had business on hand. He desired to find Susan Werner. Theodore Peale had told the truth—without that woman all his efforts would prove of little effect.

Our readers may not understand the situation and we will here state that in following the narrative they have followed the true facts, but here was one side of it only. Facts are facts, but it is oftentimes a very hard task to establish them in court and in most cases it takes years to do so, even when the truth is most patent to every impartial witness. Jack had the facts, but there were decisions of the court against the true heirs, and a regular *coup d'état* was needed in order to establish the real facts and secure right to the wronged.

The detective began a tentative game. He commenced to skirmish around for an opening. He knew that the Thomas people would attempt a bold and desperate game and it was his purpose to "get on to their game," as the saying goes, and beat it. Night came after a day of skirmishing. Jack learned a great many facts. He had a way of "getting on to things"—a way of his own—and he put himself in the way of the man Peale, whom he knew was captain on the other side. It was along about midnight; the detective had about made up his mind that the play for that day was over, when a young man seemingly under the influence of liquor suddenly approached him and said:

"Hello, boss."

"Hello," answered Jack.

"Come a step with me, will you, boss?"

Jack moved off with the young man and when they were some distance from the glare of light flashing forth from the hotel the stranger said:

"You're a cop."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"You were pointed out to me."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I have something to give you."

"Go it."

"There's a great bunco game to be played to-night."

Jack pretended to be all interest.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"How did you get on it?"

"I am the selected victim."

"You are?"

"I am."

The detective laughed and the man said suddenly, permitting a change to come over him:

"You think I am under the weather."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, you do."

"Well?"

"I've only been playing it."

"Oh, I see."

"That's straight; I am as clear as a glass of ice-water."

"Good enough."

"If you will work in with me you can make the best pull you ever made."

"I am with you, honey."

"I am invited to a house where they are to work the game, and I want you to lay in with me."

"I am with you."

"We must invent an excuse for your presence."

"We can do that easy."

"Can you work a transform?"

"I can."

"Come the old countryman dodge?"

"I can."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"Meet me in half an hour."

"Where?"

"Right here."

"In half an hour?"

"Yes."

"You will be on hand?"

"I will."

"There is not a scheme in this?"

"Scheme!" ejaculated the young man.

"That is what I said."

"I reckon you ain't in it. Good-night, boss, I can find one of your profession to go in with me. I liked your looks and thought I'd give you the job. There's nothing in it for me only fun and glory."

"All right, get another man."

"You pull out?"

"No, you are throwing me out."

"I'd like to have you in it."

"Then talk right."

"I've told you all there is in it for me is fun and glory."

"So they have put up a job?"

"Yes, and I am to be their victim. You see I've been around town a few days throwing off the 'stuff' and they think I'm a soft victim, and I'd like to give 'em a surprise."

"You can do so."

"I can and will, and you can have some of the fun and glory."

"You want me to meet you here in half an hour?"

"Yes."

"All right, I am in for the fun and glory. In half an hour I will be here."

The young man walked away. Jack had no preparations to make. He had been on the out-look for some such scheme and was well prepared. He sauntered back to the hotel, entered the reading-room and sitting down at a table commenced to thrum with his fingers on its surface. It seemed a simple and natural act, but in that simple and seemingly natural act he was in the most definite manner conveying information to the proper quarter. A few feet distant sat a business-like looking man reading a paper. He did not raise his eyes from the paper, but he took in the finger telegraphy all the same, and received the fullest and most definite instructions.

Having arranged that end of it, the detective sauntered to the street. He passed down toward the parallel avenue and on the way worked a complete transform, and on the minute, one half hour from the time he parted from the man he had made the appointment with, he was on the spot again, prepared for the night's adventure. He was not kept waiting. The young man showed up on time and said:

"I see you are on hand."

"I am on deck."

"You've worked it well."

"Think so?"

"Yes."

"Do I look old?"

"Very."

"Good enough; now we are ready for the steerers."

"We are."

The two started along the street together and as they proceeded the young man said:

"We will have to play this very neatly."

"Oh, certainly."

"I have been in the house where they are to play me."

"All right."

"You see they have been working up this job for some time, and they now think they have everything down fine."

"I see."

"I will enter the house and when they are about ready I will say I have a friend outside who wants to get some of the 'queer.'"

"Yes, that is a good scheme."

"I will come out and signal for you and introduce you as a friend from out west, and once inside you will watch the game and at the proper moment close in on the rascals."

"Yes, at the proper time I will close in on the rascals."

"We will have a great time."

"You bet we will."

"It will win great laurels for you."

"You bet it will, if we are successful."

"That will depend upon you."

"Oh, yes, I know it will."

The men had proceeded several squares and finally the guide stopped short and said:

"There is the house."

"All right."

Jack beheld a very respectable-looking residence.

"I will go in and in a little time when all is ready I will signal you."

"I will be on the alert."

The young man left the detective and ascended the stoop of the house. He rang the bell. The latter act was a "guy" as the detective well knew.

The young man was admitted into a dark hallway and in a low tone the man who had admitted him asked:

"Is it all right?"

"Yes."

"Did he make any objection to coming with you?"

"No."

The young man was led into a rear room where there were four men, and one of them said:

"You are here?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"No."

"He is with you?"

"Waiting outside for a signal."

"What was your racket with him?"

"As you arranged it."

"He made no protest?"

"He fell right into the trap."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"This looks bad," said the man.

"It does?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I'd rather he had been more particular. He is a very cautious man and it looks as though he was on to the game."

"You can bet he is not. Your plan was a dandy one. He is just on the jump to catch a batch of 'steerers.'"

"But he knows he cannot do it alone."

"He is off his guard."

"You think so?"

"I know he is."

Another of the men here spoke and said:

"It makes no difference; on his guard or off his guard we've got him the moment he steps inside that door. All it requires is nerve."

"But suppose there are others at his call?"

"He will never call."

"But they will track him to this house."

"Suppose they do; they will never find him."

"We run great risk."

"Not the way we have arranged it. If we once get him

cold we can carry what is left of him away according to our plan. This house will be deserted, and it will only be a mystery, that's all. And we have enough behind us to go sure."

The young man who had acted as guide said:

"But here; there is one thing you overlook."

"What is that?"

"If he has pals around I have been spotted."

"Your 'cover' was good."

"These men have a way of going under one's 'cover.'"

"You can skip."

"But my pay?"

"You will get it."

"When?"

"As soon as the man's eyes are closed."

"I would not go on with this if I thought I was spotted, 'cover' or no 'cover.'"

"What do you think?"

"I do not think he is on to the game at all."

"Then we are safe."

"Yes, that's my idea. Are you all ready?"

"Every man must be at his post."

"When do you strike?"

"The moment he enters the door a noose will fall over his head. It will be drawn close and there will follow a few kicks and the game is ours."

"It's a dangerous undertaking at best."

"It's a dead sure game."

"Suppose we fail?"

"We can't fail."

The man who was offering the objections was evidently more cautious than his companions. He evidently had more experience and he said:

"You never can tell about these detectives. We must make sure."

"We have taken all precautions. We will have a report in a few moments."

The men sat down and waited, and in the meantime our hero stood near the house. He also was waiting, and a little boy came walking down the street. He passed close to the detective and as he did so stumbled and fell. Jack ran forward and picked the lad up, and while doing so in a rapid manner the lad imparted certain facts, and regaining his feet with the detective's aid walked off down the street, limping as though he had hurt himself as he fell.

Jack meantime stepped under a gaslight and leaned against the post like a man who was tired, but while under that post he moved his hands several times to his hat, which he removed and replaced, and at the same time he muttered:

"Catch a New York weasel asleep, eh! I guess not."

While the detective was getting his report the men in the back room were receiving theirs. A man joined them, coming from the rear yard, and upon his entrance the evident leader of the party asked:

"Coast clear?"

"All clear."

"No one around?"

"No one."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"Gentlemen," said the man, "we can now invite our victim in."

Up to this time the men had stood around with their faces revealed, and each physiognomy was of a deathly pallor. They appeared to fully realize the awful peril of the tragedy they were about to enact, and after the remark above quoted they all assumed masks, all save the man who had acted as guide.

"Is all ready?" came the question in a hoarse voice.

"All is ready," answered each man successively.

"There must be no failure. If the noose fails you all know what to do. It will be our only chance."

"We appreciate that fact," said one.

"You all do?"

"We do."

It is not necessary to state to our readers the plan of the assassins. It has been sufficiently indicated in the dialogue we have recorded. One fact was patent—they were a desperate party of men, determined to commit a terrible and atrocious crime, and all their plans had been carefully laid, so that it did not appear that there could be a possibility of failure.

"Our lives are in it," said the leader.

"Yes," came the response.

"If we fail it will be worse for us. Success will not incur half the risk that failure will, and if we fail now it will be our last chance."

"We cannot fail; the man is at our mercy."

"We must show no mercy. We are acting in self-defense. Our lives and liberties are at stake."

Thus do men who meditate crime appease their consciences, or seek to do so. The leader said: "Our lives and liberties are at stake." He partly spoke the truth, but it was their own evil deeds that had imperiled their lives and liberties. Had they been honest men they would not have been in any danger at that moment.

"Go," said the leader, addressing the guide who had sought to lead our hero to his death.

It was a critical moment. The man started as directed, and the others arranged themselves for the carrying out of their contemplated crime, and with a man less cautious than Jack the chances would have been sixty per cent greater against him. As it was the detective was running

great risk, although forewarned and to a certain extent well posted as to their intentions and contemplated methods.

The young man passed from the house. Jack waited at the point where he had been left. The guide approached and said in a low tone:

"It's our turn now."

"They are ready?"

"Yes."

"How many are there of them?"

"There are four of the scoundrels."

"What excuse did you make?"

"I told them you carried my money."

"And they let you come for me?"

"Yes."

"They expect me?"

"Yes."

"They have no suspicion that you are putting up a job?"

"No."

"You are sure of that?"

"I am."

"Remember, these fellows are worse than rats when cornered, and if you think we run any risk you had better adjourn the affair for one night."

"No, they are ready; we are ready."

The man's voice trembled and the detective said:

"You are losing heart already."

"No, what makes you think so?"

"Your voice trembles."

"I am excited."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I will have to depend upon you if it comes to a fight."

"You can."

"You will stand by me?"

"I will."

"To the bitter end?"

"Yes."

"All right, lead on, and woe to you, my friend, if there is any trick attempted on me."

Jack went with the man across the street. He ascended the stoop, following his guide, and the latter said:

"I have a night key; we can go right in."

"All right."

"Follow me quickly."

"Sure."

"There may be some one lying around, you know."

The latter was a weak remark. It was evident the guide was losing his head, but as our hero was well posted he did not question. But our readers will observe his wonderful nerve, for despite all his knowledge and preparation the chances were against him. It takes but a second to kill a man and sometimes help at hand can be half a second too late.

The guide entered first and here is where our hero most wonderfully betrayed his presence of mind and coolness. He stumbled and fell against the side of the door, tripped on the step. He caught himself and did not fall, but he gained a few seconds of time and at that moment a quarter of a second was a gain. He stepped inside the door, which closed after him with a bang, and something fell over his head. A ready knife caught the rope on its sharp edge and the men that pulled fell in a heap, for the rope was severed. Then Jack opened the door and three men who might have seemed to have risen from the ground leaped into the hall. Two flashes from masked lanterns illuminated the hall and four men with clubs leaped forward. There followed cries and blows, and in less time than we can tell it five men lay bleeding and partly insensible, scattered around on the hall floor and in the two rooms.

The scheme had failed. The detective had five prisoners, so well had he planned and acted against the would-be murderers, all of whom were handcuffed and dragged into the rear room and planted in chairs or laid out on the floor. The light was turned on in full and there were the assassins—safe, but not sound, for every one of them had received a crack on the head.

They had tried their game and like a streak of lightning Nemesis had swept in the door, defeated and discomfited every one of them.

We will here explain how Jack was so well prepared. As has been stated, he had all along anticipated some such game and he had a lad at hand, a boy who at some future time we will fully introduce to our readers. This lad was what may be called a little fiend in the way of "piping." He had his instructions. He was lying around every minute for any emergency and when the youth arranged with our hero for the raid on the "steerers" little Jim Slick was at hand. He had received a signal, and when the guide parted from our John, Jim fell to his trail. The lad followed him to the house where the conspirators were assembled. He gained an entrance and lay low until the man went again to meet the detective. He overheard every word spoken by the intended assassins, learned their plans and intended mode of attack, and the boy who stumbled and fell near the waiting detective at a later period was Jim Slick. His fall was a ruse, and while the detective was picking him up he unfolded the whole scheme, and when Jack went to the lamp post and fooled with his own hat he was signaling to his pals what to do. His stumble at the door was to give his pals time, and they were at hand and made the rush in at the proper moment, and thus our hero's counter-play was a success and the murderers were badly beaten.

Having the assassins at his mercy the detective examined

each one of them, seeking to find the man whom he knew had put up the whole diabolical scheme. Peale was not among the rascals. He had put up the deal, as the men say, but he did not share their dangers. He had selected two desperate characters, men who for a few dollars would stand at nothing. They had secured the services of two others and had laid the plan.

The question arose with the detective, "What shall I do with them?" He considered for some time and after taking one of them into a room and putting him under a strict and searching cross-examination he decided that the men were hired for the one deed and knew nothing about the secrets of the arch-schemers.

Jack considered the whole matter well and finally said to the leader:

"I've got your mugs; I can put my hand on any one of you when I want you. I do not want you now; you can go."

The five men were released and started, and the detective muttered:

"I wonder who this house belongs to? I will investigate." He did investigate, but arrived at no satisfactory result, and finally said to his men:

"We will leave the matter until to-morrow."

All hands left the house, and our hero proceeded to his lodgings, intending upon the following day to call upon Mrs. Thomas. He ran down to facts which he believed would permit him to work the woman pretty close to a full confession.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE morning following his startling adventure he proceeded to the old Radcliffe residence. The house was closed—the birds had evidently flown.

As we have recorded, the detective permitted the assassins to depart, and their leader according to agreement proceeded direct to the Radcliffe house where he had been directed to report immediately after the *death of the detective*. Mrs. Thomas and her son were awaiting him. The man entered their presence. He was pale and laboring under great excitement, looked like a man who had committed a murder, and the man and woman who awaited him also looked pale enough to have been murderers.

For a moment after the man's entrance not a word was spoken. Mrs. Thomas dared not ask the question, neither did her son, for both knew how dire would be the consequences in case the diabolically concocted scheme had failed.

"Well?" at length ejaculated the man in an interrogatory tone.

"You have earned your reward?" Mrs. Thomas ventured to say.

"No."

"You have failed?"

"Yes."

The man spoke abruptly.

"He did not appear?"

"He appeared."

"And you failed?"

"We did."

"He got away?"

"No."

"How then?"

"We got away."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Speak, man! What has happened?"

"Have you a game against that man?"

"We have or we would not have employed you."

"Give it up."

"Will you tell us what has occurred?"

"The men or women do not live who can beat that man."

"Will you speak and tell us just what occurred?"

"I will."

"Do so."

The man told his story and added:

"No better scheme was ever arranged, and yet in some way that man got on to it. No loophole was left open for him to get information."

The woman and her son exchanged glances.

"We are lost," said Mrs. Thomas.

"Not yet," answered the more hopeful Theodore.

"He now knows our game."

"He has known it all along."

"He now has absolute proof."

"He has had it all along. We are paying the penalty of your woman's work in calling a detective into the affair."

"Who could foresee all this?"

"I certainly foresaw it. I told you the moment I learned of your move just what we might expect. My words have been more than verified."

"You appear to know so much—what will be his next move?"

"I cannot tell."

"What will be our next move?"

"The game is not lost."

"What can we do?"

"Bribe him."

The last words were spoken after their assassin had left the room to await instructions.

"He cannot be bribed," said the woman.

"He can be."

"No; here I am more farseeing than you. He has the woman in his charge, it is evident he has Anthony also in

his care. He has but one more move to make and the game closes as far as we are concerned."

"Something must be done or we are paupers."

"Worse than paupers. We will be called upon to pay the penalty. There is no step backward for us—we must go forward."

"And you are still hopeful?"

"I am."

"What shall be our next move?"

The man's face assumed the hue of death as he said:

"We must make sure."

"Of what?"

"The last link," came the answer, in a hoarse tone.

"What do you mean?"

"Can you not discern?"

"I cannot."

"Susan."

"She is safe."

"Not as long as she lives. Let that man once get possession of her and we are doomed."

"And what do you propose?"

"We tried to settle the detective."

"Yes."

"And failed."

"Yes."

"We must not fail when it comes to settling Susan. Get her out of the way and we destroy all chance for proof. They may bring us into court again."

"The real mother——"

"Bah! the court records are against her and against her son, and court records and decisions and evidence are hard to dispose of. They cannot dispose of it against us. All our moves have been in the wrong direction and all because of your one terror. We could have defied everything if that detective had not been invited into the case to become our worst Nemesis."

“And what can we do?”

“I have told you; but we must vacate this house for the present, so as to guard against all possibilities.”

“What possibilities do you dread?”

“All the chances are against us as it stands. We must hide for the present—hide in a respectable way of course.”

“Leave this house?”

“Yes.”

“That would be an absolute confession.”

“We can confess as far as that man is concerned. He knows all and now all he is planning for is proofs, and he will get the proofs if he once gets possession of Susan Werner.”

“He will never find her.”

“We can hope so, but we cannot tell. The man is a wonder. He is an overmatch for us. Just see where we are; we had everything all safe and now we are in greater jeopardy than at any time since we started in to win this great fortune. We had it safe and sure, but, alas! your infernal fear of Anthony will prove our ruin.”

“Suppose they never find Susan?”

“They never will.”

“And then——”

“In a little time we can defy this man.”

“But he has the widow?”

“Yes.”

“And the son?”

“Yes.”

“We will still be in peril.”

“Not as long as the records of the court stand, and those records will stand forever. I did not dream you would ever invite a stranger into the game. That was your great mistake and our ruin, but it is still in our hands. Yes, let us get Susan and Louise out of the way, and I will go into court and meet this man openly. He

can prove nothing, and we can put up a job on him in time, and also some day fix Anthony. As to Mrs. Radcliffe, we have nothing to fear from her. She is a lunatic; we can prove her one; in that direction our proofs will be complete. It is Susan; she is their sure card; if they get possession of her we are undone."

"What can we do?"

"It is life to life. She must be removed. Even now I believe she is dying. It is only a matter of a few weeks with her at best. All we need do is wait. She once in her grave we will be safe enough. We will wait now, but we have already waited too long."

A little later and mother and son left the house. There was nothing really strange in their doing so—under ordinary circumstances it is a common affair for people to close their houses and go away.

As stated, Jack had gone to the Radcliffe house and had found the people gone and the house closed, and he muttered:

"Well, well, I suppose they think they have given me the slip, but we don't do business that way."

As the detective spoke a satisfied smile flitted across his handsome face and again he muttered:

"I anticipated this move."

Jack proceeded to a corner which was a regular rendezvous point for him. He lay around for a few moments and then ejaculated:

"Aha! there he comes and now we'll know."

A moment later and Jim Slick came sidling up like a snowflake blown against a fence. The lad was peculiar in his movements—very peculiar—and as he came up to the detective his face was very expressive and he said:

"I have located 'em."

"I thought so. When did they flit?"

"In the early morning."

“And where are they now?”

“In a hotel down on West street. The old woman is under cover.”

“And the man?”

“He is there.”

“How long ago did you leave them?”

“Seventeen minutes ago.”

He had located the hotel for our hero, and Jack slipped away, and in less than seventeen minutes he had the hotel under espionage. He recognized that Mrs. Thomas had selected an excellent hiding-place under all the circumstances. The hotel was the resort of country traders who brought produce to the city, and the last place that would under ordinary circumstances be selected for a home by other people.

The detective had not lain around long when he saw a man looking exactly like a farmer come forth. The man lolled around for a little time and then re-entered the hotel reading-room, and the detective muttered:

“He is playing it well; he might beat some people, but I am on to him and his scheme.”

It was fully half an hour before the farmer came forth again, and the detective saw him go down toward the Cortlandt street ferry. Jack was under a disguise and he followed. The man passed into the ferryboat and Jack followed. When the boat arrived on the Jersey side the man ordered a hack, the detective also, and gave his orders, and he knew just how to give orders under all conditions. The hack containing the farmer was driven away and after half an hour's ride it was halted. The farmer alighted and proceeded across the meadows afoot.

“A good scheme,” muttered the detective. He knows he cannot be followed. I wish I had a flying machine, but lacking one I'll ‘leg it.’”

The detective made a great detour and he had a hard

time of it, but he crossed the meadow and reached the level hard ground nearly half a mile above the point for which the farmer was making, and our hero remarked:

“That fellow’s looking behind him all the time. He is guarding against followers. That’s wrong for him, but all right for me.”

The farmer in good time reached the hard ground and the detective commenced to act the role of the artful dodger, and he did so well that in good time he saw the farmer enter a house standing alone—a regular farmhouse, a dilapidated old building. And it was but a quarter of a mile from the house to the bay shore.

Jack lay in the brake, well contented, muttering to himself:

“*It’s all over.*”

The latter was a favorite expression of the detective and was a term having a great deal of significance. He had been lying low for nearly two hours when he saw the farmer come out from the house and look out toward the bay.

“Well, I’ll eat my hat,” cried Jack, “if he hasn’t arranged this well. He expects a boat and intends to carry his prize away by sail; and now what shall I do?”

The detective was alone. He was brave and courageous enough, but being so well down on the scheme he did not wish at the last moment to take any chances. He was assured of two facts. In the first place he had recognized the pretended farmer from the start—the man was Theodore Peale, and he was equally certain that he had trailed to the hiding place of either Susan Werner or the lovely girl, Louise Radcliffe.

Jack, as intimated, had thought the matter all over and his conclusion was that the man Peale had been preparing for this move several days. He also discerned that the schemer would have a boat lying off in the bay and possibly

he would have on board quite a crew of desperate fellows. There was one possibility in the detective's favor. It appeared as though Peale did not intend to make the removal until after dark, and the detective calculated he would have plenty of time for his own movements. He was still on the watch when he saw a movement of the grass behind him, as though some animal was rooting through the mire. Jack watched, recognizing that the beast was making straight for the spot where he lay concealed, and he prepared himself to scare the object away, when suddenly the movement ceased; and Jack was pondering over the incident and finally drew his revolver. He was a man who did not think he knew it all; there was a possibility that smart as he was he had been trailed, and he did not mean to be taken off his guard, and thus he "lay low," when suddenly a little human head was protruded through the grass, and our hero ejaculated.

"Great Scott!"

"I am here," came the announcement.

"Yes, I see you are here, Jim, you marvel. What brought you here?"

"My legs."

"How did you come?"

"I walked."

"What led you to come?"

"Habit. I thought I might be wanted."

"You're a jewel, I do want you."

"I thought so."

"How did you do it?"

"You left an open trail."

"I did?"

"You forget one thing."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"What's that?"

“There is Indian blood in me.”

“I should say so.”

“It was an easy trail.”

“And what do you know?”

“Nothing.”

“What have you been watching?”

“You.”

“Nothing else?”

“No.”

“I’ve business for you.”

“I thought you would have.”

“You thought right.”

“What can I do?”

“There is going to be some boating.”

“Oh, that’s it?”

“Yes.”

“And you want a boat?”

“I do.”

“Who will sail her?”

“Mr. Ready.”

“He’s an old sailor?”

“He is.

“Where do you want the boat?”

“Right off there.”

“When?”

“As quick as she can be brought around after sundown; and I don’t want her far off when the sun drops to the west.”

“All right, you shall have your boat.”

The detective gave the wonderful lad some further instructions, and Jim Slick stole off through the brake with the snake-like movement that had brought him there.

When once again alone the detective exclaimed:

“Well, that is immense. That lad is the most remarkable human being I ever struck. Here I am called Won-

der Jack. Why, that lad is a greater wonder than me, a thousand times. I am commonplace compared to him. I never heard or read of a being like him. He appears to read the future—not the mind, but events. To think of his showing here at this moment! In all his life there never was a time when I needed him as I do now, and here he is, and there he goes to carry out instructions which will enable me to close right in on this whole business. I'll have this fellow Peale a prisoner."

It was well on in the afternoon when little Jim slid away, and all the hours our hero lay low until near sundown. Early in the afternoon he had seen a small schooner cruising off the house. He had seen signals from the schooner and he knew they had been answered. The signals would never have been noticed by one not looking for them, but Jack was looking for them and his watch was rewarded and he muttered:

"I went through this scheme just right. That schooner is in communication by signal with that fellow Peale. Well, well, their game just suits me. I want the woman quietly smuggled on board."

As intimated, Jack had watched through the long afternoon and he saw a small tug go steaming away toward the Staten Island shore and he exclaimed:

"There she is, as sure as guns. Little Jim is a marvel indeed."

Even as the detective spoke he heard a chirp and the next instant little Jim came crawling to his side.

"She is there," said the boy.

"I see she is."

"You're hungry, boss. I've brought you a bite."

Jack was indeed hungry and glad to get a bite, and after devouring a sandwich he said:

"How is it?"

"All right."

“Who comes here?”

“Ashley and Brown.”

“Where are they?”

“They’ll be here as the sun goes down. I thought you’d like to be relieved.”

“That’s right.”

“As soon as the sun gets a little lower you can go aboard the tug.”

“And that’s all right.”

“I thought so.”

Sure enough, as soon as it was dark Jack and Jim made a detour and gained the water front, and there was a boat drawn up in a little inlet. Jack got in and the boat was pulled out, and half an hour later Jack and his pupil were on the tug which had run in to take them aboard.

“We’re all right now, boss,” said Jim.

Even as the lad spoke our hero saw that a large yawl containing three men had put out from the schooner and was being pulled in toward the shore. The tug in the darkness was able to run in pretty close, although it was a clear night. The detective was on the watch, and by his side stood the sharp-eyed little Jim, and the latter at length said:

“They’re pulling out to the schooner.”

“How many are in the yawl, Jim?”

“I’ll tell you in a few moments,” said the lad, and quicker than a flash he slid overboard into the water. He sped along like a little cutter. Jack would have protested, but the lad was away ere he had time. Ten minutes passed; a little figure came stealing along the tug deck aft where the detective was watching. He said:

“I’ve got it.”

“They are on the schooner?”

“Yes, sir.”

“They are making ready to sail?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Well, what did you make out?”

“ Two women and four men are in that boat.”

“ Two women and four men?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Three went ashore?”

“ Yes.”

“ Six are returning?”

“ Yes.”

“ Six will go on board the schooner.”

“ They are aboard.”

“ Good enough, Jim. *It's all over.*”

The schooner set sail and was gliding slowly- -very slowly along, when the tug made for her and ran so close that people on the schooner hailed, saying:

“ Keep off, you are running right into us.”

The captain of the tug paid no heed but held his course, and soon the tug was right along the sailing vessel and four men leaped from the tug to the former. At once great excitement followed. One man who had run from the cabin made a rush toward the rail, intending to leap overboard, but Jack was upon him, seized him, and said:

“ No, no, Mr. Peale, you can't swim away from your crimes.”

In less time than it takes to tell it, the darbies were clapped on the fellow. The rest of the men on the schooner offered no resistance. All hands, at least those who were on to the game, saw that a play had been made, and that it was a losing game. The others did not care, it was not their funeral. Jack ran down into the cabin, and a sight met his gaze that caused his heart to thump. In a berth lay a pale-faced woman, and reclining on a lounge was a beautiful girl. The latter bore a remarkable resemblance to the picture in the old Radcliffe house.

Addressing the woman in the berth Jack said:

“You are Susan Werner?”

“I am.”

“And you,” he said, addressing the beautiful girl, “you are Louise Radcliffe.”

The girl did not answer, but gazed in amazement.

Our hero entered into full explanations and remained with the two females. A few moments and he had both removed to the tug. He also had Theodore Peale carried on board the steamer, which was immediately headed for New York.

Our hero returned to the ladies after the tug was in motion and he held a long talk with them.

In due time all hands arrived in the city. Peale was left on the tug and Jack took the ladies to the house of his old friend the captain of the precinct. A reunion followed, for a message had been sent to Anthony and he was present to greet his mother and sister. With the former he had held several interviews previously.

Jack in due time sought his home, but on the morning following he held a long interview with Mrs. Radcliffe and her children, and then he proceeded to the hotel where he knew Mrs. Thomas awaited news from her son. He gained the woman's room and knocked for admission. Mrs. Thomas opened the door in person, and upon beholding our hero, for he had thrown aside all disguise, she stood and gazed with terror imprinted upon every feature.

“Madame, your son awaits you.”

“My son?”

“Yes.”

“Where is he?”

“Come with me.”

All life, all energy had deserted the woman, and she said:

“He is in jail?”

“No.”

“You will lead me to him?”

“I will.”

“Is he injured?”

“No.”

A little later, and the woman entered a carriage with the detective and both were driven to the dock and soon went on board the tug, and mother and son stood face to face.

Indeed it was all over. Both realized it, both were disposed to make a complete surrender.

A month later the courts had passed upon the matter. The confession of Susan Werner was sufficient. Anthony became the heir, the sole heir, under a will, and the daughter did not figure in the proceedings. The reason for his being the sole heir was explained in the will.

Susan Werner was convicted and pardoned at once. Mrs. Thomas and her son were permitted to go free, for their discomfiture was so complete the real heirs did not choose to prosecute, but permitted it to be assumed that all was the result of a series of blunders. Jack was largely rewarded on having done so well. He bid his friends adieu and started for San Francisco, where he hoped to meet the girl for whom he stole the loaf of bread, and some day we will relate his wonderful and romantic adventures in the Golden State.

THE END.

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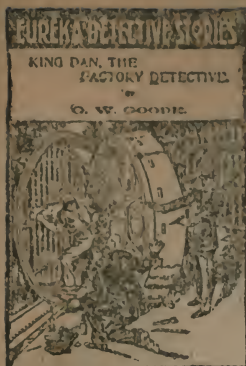
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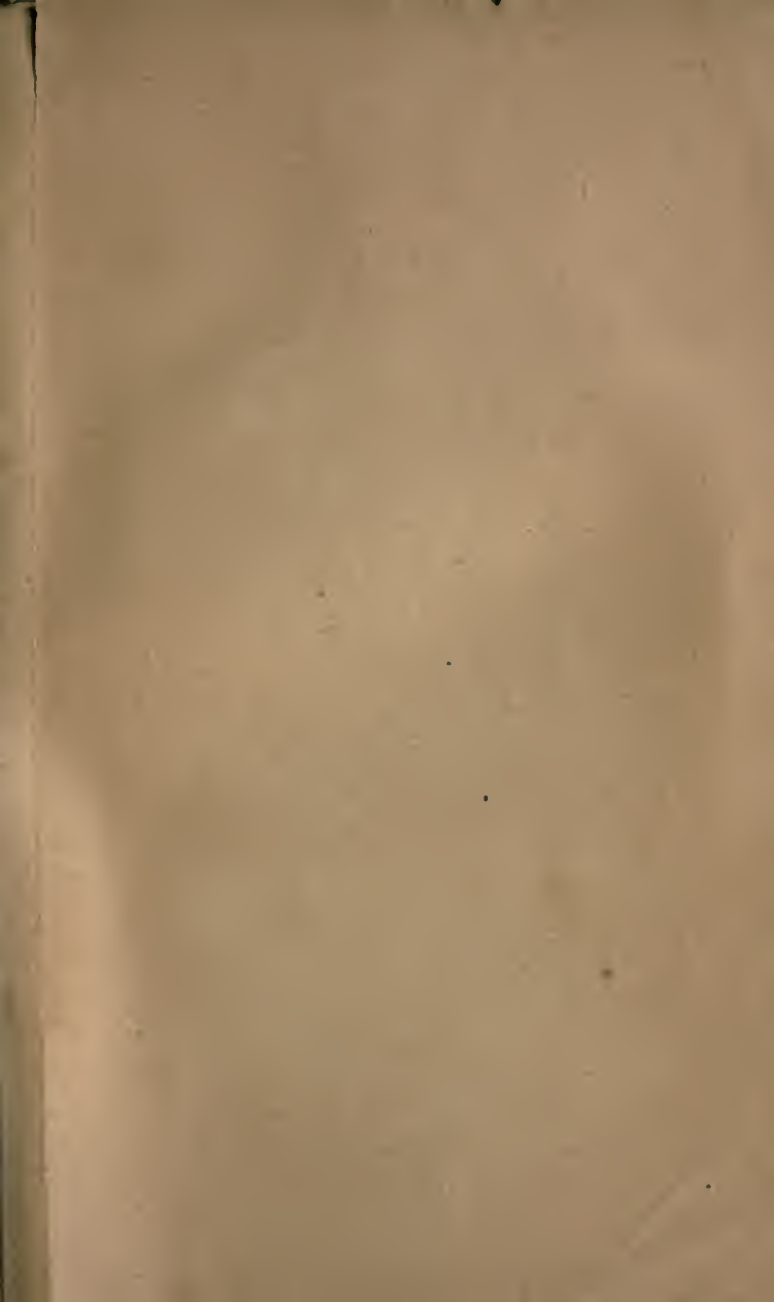
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