

# WALLACE EDGAR

JACK O'  
JUDGMENT

Edgar Wallace

**Jack O' Judgment**

«Public Domain»

**Wallace E.**

Jack O' Judgment / E. Wallace — «Public Domain»,

© Wallace E.

© Public Domain

## Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	14
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	20
CHAPTER VI	24
CHAPTER VII	27
CHAPTER VIII	31
CHAPTER IX	35
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	38

# Edgar Wallace

## Jack O' Judgment

### CHAPTER I

### THE KNAVE OF CLUBS

They picked up the young man called "Snow" Gregory from a Lambeth gutter, and he was dead before the policeman on point duty in Waterloo Road, who had heard the shots, came upon the scene.

He had been shot in his tracks on a night of snow and storm and none saw the murder.

When they got him to the mortuary and searched his clothes they found nothing except a little tin box of white powder which proved to be cocaine, and a playing card—the Jack of Clubs!

His associates had called him "Snow" Gregory because he was a dooper, and cocaine is invariably referred to as "snow" by all its votaries. He was a gambler too, and he had been associated with Colonel Dan Boundary in certain of his business enterprises. That was all. The colonel knew nothing of the young man's antecedents except that he had been an Oxford man who had come down in the world. The colonel added a few particulars designed, as it might seem to the impartial observer, to prove that he, the colonel, had ever been an uplifting quantity. (This colonelcy was an honorary title which he held by custom rather than by law.)

There were people who said that "Snow" Gregory, in his more exalted moments, talked too much for the colonel's comfort, but people were very ready to talk unkindly of the colonel, whose wealth was an offence and a shame.

So they buried "Snow" Gregory, the unknown, and a jury of his fellow-countrymen returned a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

And that was the end of a sordid tragedy, it seemed, until three months later there dawned upon Colonel Boundary's busy life a brand new and alarming factor.

One morning there arrived at his palatial flat in Albemarle Place a letter. This he opened because it was marked "Private and Personal." It was not a letter at all—as it proved—but a soiled and stained playing card, the Knave of Clubs.

He looked at the thing in perplexity, for the fate of his erstwhile assistant had long since passed from his mind. Then he saw writing on the margin of the card, and twisting it sideways read:

### "JACK O' JUDGMENT."

Nothing more!

"Jack o' Judgment!"

The colonel screwed up his tired eyes as if to shut out a vision.

"Faugh!" he said in disgust and dropped the pasteboard into his waste-paper basket.

For he had seen a vision—a white face, unshaven and haggard, its lips parted in a little grin, the smile of "Snow" Gregory on the last time they had met.

Later came other cards and unpleasant, not to say disconcerting happenings, and the colonel, taking counsel with himself, determined to kill two birds with one stone.

It was a daring and audacious thing to have done, and none but Colonel Dan Boundary would have taken the risk. He knew better than anybody else that Stafford King had devoted the whole of his time for the past three years to smashing the Boundary Gang. He knew that this grave young man with the steady, grey eyes, who sat on the other side of the big Louis XV table in the ornate private

office of the Spillsbury Syndicate, had won his way to the chief position in the Criminal Intelligence Department by sheer genius, and that he was, of all men, the most to be feared.

No greater contrast could be imagined than that which was presented between the two protagonists—the refined, almost æsthetic chief of police on the one hand, the big commanding figure of the redoubtable colonel on the other.

Boundary with his black hair parted in the centre of his sleek head, his big weary eyes, his long, yellow walrus moustache, his double chin, his breadth and girth, his enormous hairy hands, now laid upon the table, might stand for force, brutal, remorseless, untiring. He stood for cunning too—the cunning of the stalking tiger.

Stafford was watching him with dispassionate interest. He may have been secretly amused at the man's sheer daring, but if he was, his inscrutable face displayed no such emotion.

"I dare say, Mr. King," said the colonel, in his slow, heavy way, "you think it is rather remarkable in all the circumstances that I should ask for you? I dare say," he went on, "my business associates will think the same, considering all the unpleasantness we have had."

Stafford King made no reply. He sat erect, alert and watchful.

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him," said the colonel sententiously. "For twenty years I've had to fight the unjust suspicions of my enemies. I've been libelled," he shook his head sorrowfully. "I don't suppose there's anybody been libelled more than me—and my business associates. I've had the police nosing—I mean investigating—into my affairs, and I'll be straight with you, Mr. Stafford King, and tell you that when it came to my ears and the ears of my business associates, that you had been put on the job of watching poor old Dan Boundary, I was glad."

"Is that intended as a compliment?" asked Stafford, with the faintest suspicion of a smile.

"Every way," said the colonel emphatically. "In the first place, Mr. King, I know that you are the straightest and most honest police official in England, and possibly in the world. All I want is justice. My life is an open book, which courts the fullest investigation."

He spread out his huge hands as though inviting an even closer inspection than had been afforded him hitherto.

Mr. Stafford King made no reply. He knew, very well he knew, the stories which had been told about the Boundary Gang. He knew a little and guessed a lot about its extraordinary ramifications. He was well aware, at any rate, that it was rich, and that this slow-speaking man could command millions. But he was far from desiring to endorse the colonel's inferred claim as to the purity of his business methods.

He leant a little forward.

"I am sure you didn't send for me to tell me all about your hard lot, colonel," he said, a little ironically.

The colonel shook his head.

"I wanted to get to know you," he said with fine frankness. "I've heard a lot about you, Mr. King. I am told you do nothing but specialise on the Boundary enterprises, and I tell you, sir, that you can't know too much about me, nor can I know too much about you."

He paused.

"But you're quite right when you say that I didn't ask you to come here—and a great honour it is for a big police chief to spare time to see me—to discuss the past. It is the present I want to talk to you about."

Stafford King nodded.

"I'm a law-abiding citizen," said the colonel unctuously, "and anything I can do to assist the law, why, I'm going to do it. I wrote you on this matter about a fortnight ago."

He opened a drawer and took out a large envelope embossed with a monogram of the Spillsbury Syndicate. This he opened and extracted a plain playing-card. It was a white-backed card of superfine texture, gilt-edged, and bore a familiar figure.

"The Knave of Clubs," said Stafford King lifting his eyes.

"The Jack of Clubs," said the colonel gravely; "that is its name I understand, for I am not a gambling man."

He did not bat a lid nor did Stafford King smile.

"I remember," said the detective chief, "you received one before. You wrote to my department about it."

The colonel nodded.

"Read what's written underneath."

King lifted the card nearer to his eyes. The writing was almost microscopic and read:

"Save crime, save worry, save all unpleasantness. Give back the property you stole from Spillsbury."

It was signed "Jack o' Judgment."

King put the card down and looked across at the colonel.

"What happened after the last card came?" he asked, "there was a burglary or something, wasn't there?"

"The last card," said the colonel, clearing his throat, "contained a diabolical and unfounded charge that I and my business associates had robbed Mr. George Fetter, the Manchester merchant, of £60,000 by means of card tricks—a low practice of which I would not be guilty nor would any of my business associates. My friends and myself knowing nothing of any card game, we of course refused to pay Mr. Fetter, and I am sure Mr. Fetter would be the last person who would ask us to do so. As a matter of fact, he did give us bills for £60,000, but that was in relation to a sale of property. I cannot imagine that Mr. Fetter would ever take money from us or that he knew of this business—I hope not, because he seems a very respectable—gentleman."

The detective looked at the card again.

"What is this story of the Spillsbury deal?" he asked.

"What is that story of the Spillsbury deal?" said the colonel.

He had a trick of repeating questions—it was a trick which frequently gave him a very necessary breathing space.

"Why, there's nothing to it. I bought the motor works in Coventry. I admit it was a good bargain. There's no law against making a profit. You know what business is."

The detective knew what business was. But Spillsbury was young and wild, and his wildness assumed an unpleasant character. It was the kind of wildness which people do not talk about—at least, not nice people. He had inherited a considerable fortune, and the control of four factories, the best of which was the one under discussion.

"I know Spillsbury," said the detective, "and I happen to know Spillsbury's works. I also know that he sold you a property worth £300,000 in the open market for a sum which was grossly inadequate—£30,000, was it not?"

"£35,000," corrected the colonel. "There's no law against making a bargain," he repeated.

"You've been very fortunate with your bargains."

Stafford King rose and picked up his hat.

"You bought Transome's Hotel from young Mrs. Rachemeyer for a sum which was less than a twentieth of its worth. You bought Lord Bethon's slate quarries for £12,000—their value in the open market was at least £100,000. For the past fifteen years you have been acquiring property at an amazing rate—and at an amazing price."

The colonel smiled.

"You're paying me a great compliment, Mr. Stafford King," he said with a touch of sarcasm, "and I will never forget it. But don't let us get away from the object of your coming. I am reporting to you, as a police officer, that I have been threatened by a blackguard, a thief, and very likely a murderer. I will not be responsible for any action I may take—Jack o' Judgment indeed!" he growled.

"Have you ever seen him?" asked Stafford.

The colonel frowned.

"He's alive, ain't he?" he growled. "If I'd seen him, do you think he'd be writing me letters? It is your job to pinch him. If you people down at Scotland Yard spent less time poking into the affairs of honest business men—"

Stafford King was smiling now, frankly and undisguisedly. His grey eyes were creased with silent laughter.

"Colonel, you have *some* nerve!" he said admiringly, and with no other word he left the room.

## CHAPTER II

### JACK O' JUDGMENT—HIS CARD

The wrong side of a stage door was the outside on a night such as this was. The rain was bucketing down and a chill north-wester howled up the narrow passage leading from the main street to the tiny entry.

But the outside, and the darkest corner of the *cul-de-sac* whence the stage door of the Orpheum Music Hall was reached, satisfied Stafford King. He drew further into the shadow at sight of the figure which picked a finicking way along the passage and paused only at the open doorway to furl his umbrella.

Pinto Silva, immaculately attired with a white rose in the button-hole of his faultless dress-jacket, had no doubt in his mind as to which was the most desirable side of the stage door. He passed in, nodding carelessly to the doorkeeper.

"A rotten night, Joe," he said. "Miss White hasn't gone yet, has she?"

"No, sir," said the man obsequiously, "she's only just left the stage a few minutes. Shall I tell her you're here, sir?"

Pinto shook his head.

He was a good-looking man of thirty-five. There were some who would go further and describe him as handsome, though his peculiar style of good looks might not be to everybody's taste. The olive complexion, the black eyes, the well-curved moustache and the effeminate chin had their attractions, and Pinto Silva admitted modestly in his reminiscent moments that there were women who had raved about him.

"Miss White is in No. 6," said the doorkeeper. "Shall I send somebody along to tell her you're here?"

"You needn't trouble," said the other, "she won't be long now."

The girl, hurrying along the corridor, fastening her coat as she came, stopped dead at the sight of him and a look of annoyance came to her face. She was tall for a girl, perfectly proportioned and something more than pretty.

Pinto lifted his hat with a smile.

"I've just been in front, Miss White. An excellent performance!"

"Thank you," she said simply. "I did not see you."

He nodded.

There was a complacency in his nod which irritated her. It almost seemed to infer that she was not speaking the truth and that he was humouring her in her deception.

"You're quite comfortable?" he asked.

"Quite," she replied politely.

She was obviously anxious to end the interview, and at a loss as to how she could.

"Dressing room comfortable, everybody respectful and all that sort of thing?" he asked. "Just say the word, if they give you trouble or cheek, and I'll have them kicked out whoever they are, from the manager downwards."

"Oh, thank you," she said hurriedly, "everybody is most polite and nice." She held out her hand. "I am afraid I must go now. A—a friend is waiting for me."

"One minute, Miss White." He licked his lips, and there was an unaccustomed embarrassment in his manner. "Maybe you'll come along one night after the show and have a little supper. You know I'm very keen on you and all that sort of thing."

"I know you're very keen on me and all that sort of thing," said Maisie White, a note of irony in her voice, "but unfortunately I'm not very keen on supper and all that sort of thing."

She smiled and again held out her hand.

"I'll say good night now."

"Do you know, Maisie—" he began.

"Good night," she said and brushed past him.

He looked after her as she disappeared into the darkness, a little frown gathering on his forehead, then with a shrug of his shoulders he walked slowly back to the doorkeeper's office.

"Send somebody to get my car," he snapped.

He waited impatiently, chewing his cigar, till the dripping figure of the doorkeeper reappeared with the information that the car was at the end of the passage. He put up his umbrella and walked through the pelting rain to where his limousine stood.

Pinto Silva was angry, and his anger was of the hateful, smouldering type which grew in strength from moment to moment and from hour to hour. How dare she treat him like this? She, who owed her engagement to his influence, and whose fortune and future were in his hands. He would speak to the colonel and the colonel could speak to her father. He had had enough of this.

He recognised with a start that he was afraid of the girl. It was incredible, but it was true. He had never felt that way to a woman before, but there was something in her eyes, a cold disdain which cowed even as it maddened him.

The car drew up before a block of buildings in a deserted West End thoroughfare. He flashed on the electric light and saw that the hour was a little after eleven. The last thing in the world he wanted was to take part in a conference that night. But if he wanted anything less, it was to cross the colonel at this moment of crisis.

He walked through the dark vestibule and entered an automatic lift, which carried him to the third floor. Here, the landing and the corridor were illuminated by one small electric lamp sufficient to light him to the heavy walnut doors which led to the office of the Spillsbury Syndicate. He opened the door with a latchkey and found himself in a big lobby, carpeted and furnished in good style.

A man was sitting before a radiator, a paper pad upon his knees, and he was making notes with a pencil. He looked up startled as the other entered and nodded. It was Olaf Hanson, the colonel's clerk—and Olaf, with his flat expressionless face, and his stiff upstanding hair, always reminded Pinto of a Struwwelpeter which had been cropped.

"Hullo, Hanson, is the colonel inside?"

The man nodded.

"They're waiting for you," he said.

His voice was hard and unsympathetic, and his thin lips snapped out every syllable.

"Aren't you coming in?" asked Pinto in surprise, his hand upon the door.

The man called Hanson shook his head.

"I've got to go to the colonel's flat," he said, "to get some papers. Besides, they don't want me."

He smiled quickly and wanly. It was a grimace rather than an expression of amusement and Pinto eyed him narrowly. He had, however, the good sense to ask no further questions. Turning the handle of the door, he walked into the large, ornate apartment.

In the centre of the room was a big table and the chairs at its sides were, for the most part, filled.

He dropped into a seat on the colonel's right and nodded to the others at the table. Most of the principals were there—"Swell" Crewe, Jackson, Cresswell, and at the farther end of the table, Lollie Marsh with her baby face and her permanent expression of open-mouthed wonder.

"Where's White?" he asked.

The colonel was reading a letter and did not immediately reply. Presently he took off his pince-nez and put them into his pocket.

"Where's White?" he repeated. "White isn't here. No, White isn't here," he repeated significantly.

"What's wrong?" asked Pinto quickly.

The colonel scratched his chin and looked up to the ceiling.

"I'm settling up this Spillsbury business," he said. "White isn't in it."

"Why not?" asked Pinto.

"He never was in it," said the colonel evasively. "It was not the kind of business that White would like to be in. I guess he's getting religious or something, or maybe it's that daughter of his."

The eyelids of Pinto Silva narrowed at the reference to Maisie White and he was on the point of remarking that he had just left her, but changed his mind.

"Does she know anything about—about her father?" he asked.

The colonel smiled.

"Why, no—unless you've told her."

"I'm not on those terms," said Pinto savagely. "I'm getting tired of that girl's airs and graces, colonel, after what we've done for her!"

"You'll get tireder, Pinto," said a voice from the end of the table and he turned round to meet the laughing eyes of Lollie Marsh.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I've been out taking a look at her to-day," she said, and the colonel scowled at her.

"You were out taking a look at something else if I remember rightly," he said quietly. "I told you to get after Stafford King."

"And I got after him," she said, "and after the girl too."

"What do you mean?"

"That's a bit of news for you, isn't it?" She was delighted to drop the bombshell: "you can't shadow Stafford King without crossing the tracks of Maisie White."

The colonel uttered an exclamation.

"What do you mean?" he asked again.

"Didn't you know they were acquainted? Didn't you know that Stafford King goes down to Horsham to see her, and takes her to dinner twice a week?"

They looked at one another in consternation. Maisie White was the daughter of a man who, next to the colonel, had been the most daring member of the gang, who had organised more coups than any other man, save its leader. The news that the daughter of Solomon White was meeting the Chief of the Criminal Intelligence Department, was incredible and stunning.

"So that's it, is it?" said the colonel, licking his dry lips. "That's why Solomon White's fed up with the life and wants to break away."

He turned to Pinto Silva, whose face was set and hard.

"I thought you were keen on that girl, Pinto," he said coarsely. "We left the way open to you. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing," said the man shortly. "I don't believe it."

"Don't believe it," broke in the girl. "Listen! There was a matinée at the Orpheum to-day and King went there. I followed him in and got a seat next to him and tried to get friendly. But he had only eyes for the girl on the stage, and I might as well have been the paper on the wall for all the notice he took of me. After her turn, he went out and waited for her at the stage door. They went to Roymoyers for tea. I went back to the theatre and saw her dresser. She is the woman I recommended when Pinto put her on the stage."

"What sort of work is Maisie doing?" asked the saturnine Crewe.

"Male impersonations," said the girl. "Say! she looks dandy in a man's kit! She's the best male impersonator I've ever seen. Why, when she talks—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted the colonel, "what did you discover?"

"I discovered that Stafford King comes regularly to the theatre, that he takes her to dinner and that he visits the house at Horsham."

"Solly never told me that—the swine!" rapped the colonel, "he's going to double-cross us, that fellow."

"I don't believe it."

It was Crewe that spoke. "Swell" Crewe, whose boast it was that he had a suit for every day in the year.

"I know Solomon and I've known him for years," he said. "I know him as well as you, colonel. As far as we are concerned, Solly is straight. I'm not denying the possibility that he wants to break away, but that's only natural. He's a man with a daughter, and he's made his pile, but I'll stake my life that he'll never double-cross us."

"Double-cross us?" the colonel had recovered his wonted equanimity. "What has he to 'double-cross'?" he demanded almost jovially. "We have a straightforward business! I am not aware that any of us are guilty of dishonest actions. Double-cross! Bah!"

He brought his big hand down with a thump on the table, and they knew from experience that this was the gavel of the chairman that ended all discussions.

"Now, gentlemen," said the colonel, "let us get to business. Ask Hanson to come in—he's got the figures. It is the last lot of figures of ours that he'll ever handle," he added.

Somebody went to the door of the ante-room and called the secretary, but there was no reply.

"He's gone out."

"Gone out?" said the colonel and bent his brows. "Who told him to go out? Never mind, he'll be back in a minute. Shut the door."

He lifted a deed-box from the floor at his feet, placed it on the table, opened it with a key attached to his watch-chain and removed a bundle of documents.

"We're going to settle the Spillsbury business to-night," he said. "Spillsbury looks like squealing."

"Where is he?" asked Pinto.

"In an inebriates' home," said the colonel grimly; "it seems there are some trustees to his father's estate who are likely to question the legality of the transfers. But I've had the best legal opinion in London and there is no doubt that our position is safe. The only thing we've got to do to-night is to make absolutely sure that all those fool letters he wrote to Lollie have been destroyed."

"You've got them?" said the girl quickly.

"I had them?" said the colonel, "and I burnt them all except one when the transfer was completed. And the question is, gentlemen," he said, "shall we burn the last?"

He took from the bundle before him an envelope and held it up.

"I kept this in case there was anything coming, but if he's in a booze home, why, he's not going to be influenced by the threat of publishing a slushy letter to a girl. I guess his trustees are not going to be very much influenced either. On the other hand, if this letter were found among business documents, it would look pretty bad for us."

"Found by whom?" asked Pinto.

"By the police," said the colonel calmly.

"Police?"

The colonel nodded.

"They're getting after us, but you needn't be alarmed," he said. "King is working to get a case, and he is not above applying for a search warrant. But I'm not scared of the police so much." His voice slowed and he spoke with greater emphasis. "I guess there are enough court cards in the Boundary pack to beat that combination. It's the Jack—"

*"The Jack—ha! ha! ha!"*

It was a shrill bubble of laughter which cut into his speech and the colonel leapt to his feet, his hand dropping to his hip-pocket. The door had opened and closed so silently that none had heard it, and a figure stood confronting them.

It was clad from head to foot in a long coat of black silk, which shimmered in the half-light of the electrolier. The hands were gloved, the head covered with a soft slouch hat and the face hidden behind a white silk handkerchief.

The colonel's hand was in his hip-pocket when he thought better and raised both hands in the air. There was something peculiarly businesslike in the long-barrelled revolver which the intruder held, in spite of the silver-plating and the gold inlay along the chased barrel.

"Everybody's hands in the air," said the Jack shrilly, "right up to the beautiful sky! Yours too, Lollie. Stand away from the table, everybody, and back to the wall. For the Jack o' Judgment is amongst you and life is full of amazing possibilities!"

They backed from the table, peering helplessly at the two unwinking eyes which showed through the holes in the handkerchief.

"Back to the wall, my pretties," chuckled the Thing. "I'm going to make you laugh and you'll want some support. I'm going to make you rock with joy and merriment!"

The figure had moved to the table, and all the time it spoke its nimble fingers were turning over the piles of documents which the colonel had disgorged from the dispatch box.

"I'm going to tell you a comical tale about a gang of blackmailers."

"You're a liar," said the colonel hoarsely.

"About a gang of blackmailers," said the Jack with shrill laughter, "fellows who didn't work like common blackmailers, nor demand money. Oh, no! not naughty blackmailers! They got the fools and the vicious in their power and made them sell things for hundreds of pounds that were worth thousands. And they were such a wonderful crowd! They were such wonderfully amusing fellows. There was Dan Boundary who started life by robbing his dead mother, there was 'Swell' Crewe, who was once a gentleman and is now a thief!"

"Damn you!" said Crewe, lurching forward, but the gun swung round on him and he stopped.

"There was Lollie who would sell her own child—"

"I have no child," half-screamed the girl.

"Think again, Lollie darling—dear little soul!"

He stopped. The envelope that his fingers had been seeking was found. He slipped it beneath the black silk cloak and in two bounds was at the door.

"Send for the police," he mocked. "Send for the police, Dan! Get Stafford King, the eminent chief. Tell him I called! My card!"

With a dexterous flip of his fingers he sent a little pasteboard planing across the room. In an instant the door opened and closed upon the intruder and he was gone.

For a second there was silence, and then, with a little sob, Lollie Marsh collapsed in a heap on the floor. Colonel Dan Boundary looked from one white face to the other.

"There's a hundred thousand pounds for any one of you who gets that fellow," he said, breathing hard, "whether it is man or woman."

## CHAPTER III

### THE DECOY

Colonel Boundary, sitting at his desk the morning after, pushed a bell. It was answered by the thick-set Olaf. He was dressed, as usual, in black from head to foot and the colonel eyed him thoughtfully.

"Hanson," he said, "has Miss Marsh come?"

"Yes, she has come," said the other resentfully.

"Tell her I want her," said the colonel and then as the man was leaving the room: "Where did you get to last night when I wanted you?"

"I was out," said the man shortly. "I get some time for myself, I suppose?"

The colonel nodded slowly.

"Sure you do, Hanson."

His tone was mild, and that spelt danger to Hanson, had he known it. This was the third sign of rebellion which the man had shown in the past week.

"What's happened to your temper this morning, Hanson?" he asked.

"Everything," exploded the man and in his agitation his foreign origin was betrayed by his accent. "You tell me I shall haf plenty money, thousands of pounds! You say I go to my brother in America. Where is dot money? I go in March, I go in May, I go in July, still I am here!"

"My good friend," said the colonel, "you're too impatient. This is not a moment I can allow you to go away. You're getting nervous, that's what's the matter with you. Perhaps I'll let you have a holiday next week."

"Nervous!" roared the man. "Yes, I am. All the time I feel eyes on me! When I walk in the street, every man I meet is a policeman. When I go to bed, I hear nothing but footsteps creeping in the passage outside my room."

"Old Jack, eh?" said the colonel, eyeing him narrowly.

Hanson shivered.

He had seen the Jack o' Judgment once. A figure in gossamer silk who had stood beside the bed in which the Scandinavian lay and had talked wisdom whilst Olaf quaked in a muck sweat of fear.

The colonel did not know this. He was under the impression that the appearance of the previous night had constituted the first of this mysterious menace.

So he nodded again.

"Send Miss Marsh to me," he said.

Hanson would have got on his nerves if he had nerves. The man, at any rate, was becoming an intolerable nuisance. The colonel marked him down as one of the problems calling for early solution.

The secretary had not been gone more than a few seconds before the door opened again and the girl came in. She was tall, pretty in a doll-like way, with an aura of golden hair about her small head. She might have been more than pretty but for her eyes, which were too light a shade of blue to be beautiful. She was expensively gowned and walked with the easy swing of one whose position was assured.

"Good morning, Lollie," said the colonel. "Did you see him again?"

She nodded.

"I got a pretty good view of him," she said.

"Did he see you?"

She smiled.

"I don't think so," she said; "besides, what does it matter if he did?"

"Was the girl with him?"

She shook her head.

"Well?" asked the colonel after a pause. "Can you do anything with him?"

She pursed her lips.

If she had expected the colonel to refer to their terrifying experience of the night before, she was to be disappointed. The hard eyes of the man compelled her to keep to the matter under discussion.

"He looks pretty hard," said the girl. "He is not the man to fall for that heart-to-heart stuff."

"What do you mean?" asked the colonel.

"Just that," said the girl with a shrug. "I can't imagine his picking me up and taking me to dinner and pouring out the secrets of his young heart at the second bottle."

"Neither can I," said the colonel thoughtfully. "You're a pretty clever girl, Lollie, and I'm going to make it worth your while to get close to that fellow. He's the one man in Scotland Yard that we want to put out of business. Not that we've anything to be afraid of," he added vaguely, "but he's just interfering with—"

He paused for a word.

"With business," said the girl. "Oh, come off it, colonel! Just tell me how far you want me to go."

"You've got to go to the limit," said the other decidedly. "You've got to put him as wrong as you can. He must be compromised up to his neck."

"What about my young reputation?" asked the girl with a grimace.

"If you lose it, we'll buy you another," said the colonel drily, "and I reckon it's about time you had another one, Lollie."

The girl fingered her chin thoughtfully.

"It is not going to be easy," she said again. "It isn't going to be like young Spillsbury—Pinto Silva could have done that job without help—or Solomon White even."

"You can shut up about Spillsbury," growled the colonel. "I've told you to forget everything that has ever happened in our business! And I've told you a hundred times not to mention Pinto or any of the other men in this business! You can do as you're told! And take that look off your face!"

He rose with extraordinary agility and leant over, glowering at the girl.

"You've been getting a bit too fresh lately, Lollie, and giving yourself airs! You don't try any of that grand lady stuff with me, d'ye hear?"

There was nothing suave in the colonel's manner, nothing slow or ponderous or courtly. He spoke rapidly and harshly and revealed the brute that many suspected but few knew.

"I've no more respect for women than I have for men, understand! If you ever get gay with me, I'll take your neck in my hand like that," he clenched his two fists together with a horribly suggestive motion and the frightened girl watched him, fascinated. "I'll break you as if you were a bit of china! I'll tear you as if you were a rag! You needn't think you'll ever get away from me—I'll follow you to the ends of the earth. You're paid like a queen and treated like a queen and you play straight—there was a man called 'Snow' Gregory once—"

The trembling girl was on her feet now, her face ashen white.

"I'm sorry, colonel," she faltered. "I didn't intend giving you offence. I—I—"

She was on the verge of tears when the colonel, with a quick gesture, motioned her back to the chair. His rage subsided as suddenly as it had risen.

"Now do as you're told, Lollie," he said calmly. "Get after that young fellow and don't come back to me until you've got him."

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, and almost tiptoed from his dread presence.

At the door he stopped her.

"As to Maisie," he said, "why, you can leave Maisie to me."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MISSING HANSON

Colonel Dan Boundary descended slowly from the Ford taxi-cab which had brought him up from Horsham station and surveyed without emotion the domicile of his partner. It was Colonel Boundary's boast that he was in the act of lathering his face on the tenth floor of a Californian hotel when the earthquake began, and that he finished his shaving operations, took his bath and dressed himself before the earth had ceased to tremble.

"I shall want you again, so you had better wait," he said to the driver and passed through the wooden gates toward Rose Lodge.

He stopped half-way up the path, having now a better view of the house. It was a red brick villa, the home of a well-to-do man. The trim lawn with its border of rose trees, the little fountain playing over the rockery, the quality of the garden furniture within view and the general air of comfort which pervaded the place, suggested the home of a prosperous City man, one of those happy creatures who have never troubled to get themselves in line for millions, but have lived happily between the four and five figure mark.

Colonel Boundary grunted and continued his walk. A trim maid opened the door to him and by her blank look it was evident that he was not a frequent visitor.

"Boundary—just say Boundary," said the colonel in a deep voice which carried to the remotest part of the house.

He was shown to the drawing-room and again found much that interested him. He felt no twinge of pity at the thought that Solomon White would very soon exchange this almost luxury for the bleak discomfort of a prison cell, and not even the sight of the girl who came through the door to greet him brought him a qualm.

"You want to see my father, colonel?" she asked.

Her tone was cold but polite. The colonel had never been a great favourite of Maisie White's, and now it required a considerable effort on her part to hide her deep aversion.

"Do I want to see your father?" said Colonel Boundary. "Why, yes, I think I do and I want to see you too, and I'd just as soon see you first, before I speak to Solly."

She sat down, a model of patient politeness, her hands folded on her lap. In the light of day she was pretty, straight of back, graceful as to figure and the clear grey eyes which met his faded blue, were very understanding.

"Miss White," he said, "we have been very good to you."

"We?" repeated the girl.

"We," nodded the colonel. "I speak for myself and my business associates. If Solomon had ever told you the truth you would know that you owe all your education, your beautiful home," he waved his hand, "to myself and my business associates." His tongue rolled round the last two words. They were favourites of his.

She nodded her head slightly.

"I was under the impression that I owed it to my father," she said, with a hint of irony in her voice, "for I suppose that he earned all he has."

"You suppose that he earned all that he has?" repeated the colonel. "Well, very likely you are right. He has earned more than he has got but pay-day is near at hand."

There was no mistaking the menace in his tone, but the girl made no comment. She knew that there had been trouble. She knew that her father had for days been locked in his study and had scarcely spoken a word to anybody.

"I saw you the other night," said the colonel, changing the direction of his attack. "I saw you at the Orpheum. Pinto Silva came with me. We were in the stage box."

"I saw you," said the girl quietly.

"A very good performance, considering you're a kid," said Boundary; "in fact, Pinto says you're the best mimic he has ever seen on the stage—" He paused—"Pinto got you your contracts."

She nodded.

"I am very grateful to Mr. Silva," she said.

"You have all the world before you, my girl," said Boundary in his slow, ponderous way, "a beautiful and bright future, plenty of money, pearls, diamonds," he waved his hand with a vague gesture, "and Pinto, who is the most valuable of my business associates, is very fond of you."

The girl sighed helplessly.

"I thought that matter had been finished and done with, colonel," she said. "I don't know how people in your world would regard such an offer, but in my world they would look upon it as an insult."

"And what the devil is your world?" asked the colonel, without any sign of irritation.

She rose to her feet.

"The clean, decent world," she said calmly, "the law-abiding world. The world that regards such arrangements as you suggest as infamous. It is not only the fact that Mr. Silva is already married—"

The colonel raised his hand.

"Pinto talks very seriously of getting a divorce," he said solemnly, "and when a gentleman like Pinto Silva gives his word, that ought to be sufficient for any girl. And now you have come to mention law-abiding worlds," he went on slowly, "I would like to speak of one of the law-abiders."

She knew what was coming and was silent.

"There's a young gentleman named Stafford King hanging round you." He saw her face flush but went on, "Mr. Stafford King is a policeman."

"He is an official of the Criminal Intelligence Department," said the girl, "but I don't think you would call him a policeman, would you, colonel?"

"All policemen are policemen to me," said Boundary, "and Mr. Stafford King is one of the worst of the policemen from my point of view, because he's trying to trump up a cock-and-bull story about me and get me into very serious trouble."

"I know Mr. King is connected with a great number of unpleasant cases," said the girl coolly. "It would be a coincidence if he was in a case which interested you."

"It would be a coincidence, would it?" said the colonel, nodding his huge head. "Perhaps it is a coincidence that my clerk, Hanson, has disappeared and has been seen in the company of your friend, eh? It is a coincidence that King is working on the Spillsbury case—the one case that Solly knows nothing about—eh?"

She faced him, puzzled and apprehensive.

"Where does all this lead?" she asked.

"It leads to trouble for Solly, that's all," said the colonel. "He's trying to put me away and put his business associates away, and he has got to go through the mill unless—"

"Unless what?" she asked.

"Pinto's a merciful man, I'm a merciful man. We don't want to make trouble with former business associates, but trouble there is going to be, believe me."

"What kind of trouble?" asked the girl. "If you mean that your so-called business association with my father will cease, I shall be happier. My father can earn his living and I have my stage work."

"You have your stage work," the colonel did not smile but his tone betrayed his amusement, "and your father can earn his living, eh? He can earn his living in Portland Gaol," he said, raising his voice.

"For the matter of that, so can you, colonel."

The colonel turned his head slowly and surveyed the spare figure in the doorway.

"Oh, you heard me, did you, Solly," he said not unpleasantly.

"I heard you," said Solomon White, his lean face a shade whiter than the girl had ever seen it and his breathing was a little laboured.

"If you are thinking of gaoling me," said White, "why, I think we shall make up a pretty jolly party."

"Meaning me?" said the colonel, raising his eyebrows.

"You amongst others. Pinto Silva, 'Swell' Crewe and Selby, to name a few."

Colonel Boundary permitted himself to chuckle.

"On what charge?" he asked, "tell me that, Solly? The cleverest men in Scotland Yard have been laying for me for years and they haven't got away with it. Maybe they have your assistance and that dog Hanson—"

"That's a lie," interrupted White, "so far as I am concerned—I know nothing about Hanson."

"Hanson," said the colonel slowly, "is a thief. He bolted with £300 of mine, as I've reported to the police."

"I see," said White with a little smile of contempt, "got your charge in first, eh, colonel—discredit the witness. And what have you framed for me?"

"Nothing," said the colonel, "except this. I've just had from the bank a cheque for £4,000 drawn in your favour on our joint account and purporting to be signed by Silva and myself."

"As it happens," said White, "it was signed by you fellows in my presence."

The colonel shook his head.

"Obdurate to the last, brazening it out to the end—why not make a frank confession to an old business associate, Solly? I came here to see you about that cheque."

"That's the game, is it?" said White. "You are going to charge me with forgery, and suppose I spill it?"

"Spill what?" asked the colonel innocently. "If by 'spill' you mean make a statement to the police derogatory to myself and my business associates, what can you tell? I can bring a dozen witnesses to prove that both Pinto and I were in Brighton the morning that cheque was signed."

"You came up by car at night," said White harshly. "We arranged to meet outside Guildford to split the loot."

"Loot?" said Colonel Boundary, puzzled. "I don't understand you."

"I'll put it plainer," said White, his eyes like smouldering fire: "a year ago you got young Balston the shipowner to put fifty thousand pounds into a fake company."

He heard Maisie gasp, but went on.

"How you did it I'm not going to tell before the girl, but it was blackmail which you and Pinto engineered. He paid his last instalment—the four thousand pounds was my share."

Colonel Boundary rose and looked at his watch.

"I have a taxi-cab waiting, and with a taxi-cab time is money. If you are going to bring in the name of an innocent young man, who will certainly deny that he had any connection with myself and my business associates, that is a matter for your own conscience. I tell you I know nothing about this cheque. I have made your daughter an offer."

"I can guess what it is," interrupted White, "and I can tell you this, Boundary, that if you are going to sell me, I'll be even with you, if I wait twenty years! If you imagine I am going to let my daughter into that filthy gang—" His voice broke, and it was some time before he could recover himself. "Do your worst. But I'll have you, Boundary! I don't doubt that you'll get a conviction, and you know the things that I can't talk about, and I'll have to take my medicine, but you are not going to escape."

"Wait, colonel." It was the girl who spoke in so low a voice that he would not have heard her, but that he was expecting her to speak. "Do you mean that you will—prosecute my father?"

"With law-abiding people," said the colonel profoundly, "the demands of justice come first. I must do my duty to the state, but if you should change your mind—"

"She won't change her mind," roared White.

With one stride he had passed between the colonel and the door. Only for a second he stood, and then he fell back.

"Do your worst," he said huskily, and Colonel Boundary passed out, pocketing the revolver which had come from nowhere into his hand, and presently they heard the purr of the departing motor.

He came to Horsham station in a thoughtful frame of mind. He was still thinking profoundly when he reached Victoria.

Then, as he stepped on the platform, a hand was laid on his arm, and he turned to meet the smiling face of Stafford King.

"Hullo," said the colonel, and something within him went cold.

"Sorry to break in on your reverie, colonel," said Stafford King, "but I've a warrant for your arrest."

"What is the charge?" asked the colonel, his face grey.

"Blackmail and conspiracy," said King, and saw with amazement the look of relief in the other's eyes.

Then:

"Boundary," he said between his teeth, "you thought I wanted you for 'Snow' Gregory!"

The colonel said nothing.

## CHAPTER V

### IN THE MAGISTRATE'S COURT

Never before in history had the dingy little street, in which North Lambeth Police Court stands, witnessed such scenes as were presented on that memorable 4th of December, when counsel for the Crown opened the case against Colonel Dan Boundary.

Long before the building was open the precincts of the court were besieged by people anxious to secure one of the very few seats which were available for the public. By nine o'clock it became necessary to summon a special force of police to clear a way for the numerous motor-cars which came bowling from every point of the compass and which were afterwards parked in the narrow side streets, to the intense amazement and interest of the curious denizens of the unsavoury neighbourhood in which the court is located.

Admission was by ticket. Even the reporters, those favoured servants of democracy, had need to produce a printed pass before the scrutinising policeman at the door allowed them to enter. Every available seat had been allotted. Even the magistrate's sacristy had been invaded, and chairs stood three-deep to left and right of him.

There were some who came out of sheer morbid curiosity, in order that they might boast that they were present when this remarkable case was heard. There were others who came, inwardly quaking at the revelations which were promised or hinted at in the daily Press, for the influence which the Boundary gang exercised was wide and far-reaching.

A young man stood upon the congested pavement, watching with evident impatience the arrival of belated cars. The magistrate had already come and had disappeared behind the slate-coloured gates which led to the courtyard. Stafford saw fashionably-dressed women and (with a smile) worried-looking men who were figures in the political and social world, and presently he involuntarily stepped forward into the roadway as though to meet the electric limousine which came noiselessly to the main entrance.

The solitary occupant of the car was a man of sixty—a grey-haired gentleman of medium height, dressed with scrupulous care, and wearing on his clean-shaven face a perpetual smile, as though life were an amusement which never palled.

Stafford King took the extended hand with a little twinkle in his eye.

"I was afraid we shouldn't be able to keep your place for you, Sir Stanley," he said.

Sir Stanley Belcom, First Commissioner of Criminal Intelligence, accentuated his smile.

"Well, Stafford," he drawled, "I've come to see the culminating triumph of your official career."

Stafford King made a little grimace.

"I hope so," he said dryly.

"I hope so, too," said the baronet, "yet—I'll tell you frankly, Stafford, I have a feeling that the ordinary processes of the law are inadequate to trap this organisation. The law has too wide a mesh to deal with the terror which this man exercises. Such men are the only justification of lynch law, the quick, sharp justice which is administered without subtlety and without quibble."

Stafford looked at the other and made no attempt to hide his astonishment.

"You believe in—the Jack o' Judgment?" he asked.

Sir Stanley shot a swift glance at him.

"That is the bugbear of the gang, isn't it?"

"So Hanson says," replied the other. "I verily believe that Hanson is more afraid of that mysterious person than he is of Boundary himself."

The Attorney-General had begun his opening speech when the two men made their way into the crowded court and found their seats at the end of the solicitors table.

In the dock sat Colonel Boundary, the least concerned of all that assembly. The colonel was leaning forward, his arms resting on the rails, his chin on the back of his hairy hand, his eyes glued upon the grey-haired lawyer who was dispassionately opening the case.

"The contention of the Crown," the Attorney-General was saying, "is that Colonel Boundary is at the head of a huge blackmailing organisation, and that in the course of the past twenty years, by such means as I shall suggest and as the principal witness for the Crown will tell you, he has built up his criminal practice until he now controls the most complex and the most iniquitous organisation that has been known in the long and sordid history of crime.

"Your Worship will doubtless hear," he went on, "of a bizarre and fantastic figure which flits through the pages of this story, a mysterious somebody who is called the 'Jack.' But I shall ask your Worship, as I shall ask the jury, when this case reaches, as it must reach ultimately, the Central Criminal Court, to disregard this apparition, which displayed no part in bringing Boundary to justice.

"The contention of the Crown is, as I say, that Boundary, by means of terrorisation and blackmail, through the medium and assistance of his creatures, has from time to time secured a hold over rich and foolish men and women, and from these has acquired the enormous wealth which is now his and his associates'. As to these latter, their prosecution depends very largely upon the fate of Boundary. There are, I believe, some of them in court at this moment, and though they are not arrested, it will be no news to them to learn that they are under police observation."

"Swell" Crewe, sitting at the back of the court, shifted uneasily and, turning his head, he met the careless gaze of the tall, military-looking man who had "detective" written all over him.

There had been a pause in the Attorney-General's speech whilst he examined, short-sightedly, the notes before him.

"In the presentation of this case, your Worship," he went on, "the Crown is in somewhat of a dilemma. We have secured one important and, I think, convincing witness—a man who has been closely associated with the prisoner, a Scandinavian named Hanson, who, considering himself badly treated by this gang, has been for a long time secretly getting together evidence of an incriminating character. As to his object we need not inquire. There is a possibility suggested by my learned friend, the counsel for the defence, that Hanson intended blackmailing the blackmailers, and presenting such a weight of evidence against Boundary that he could do no less than pay handsomely for his confederate's silence. That is as may be. The main fact is that Hanson has accumulated this documentary evidence, and that that documentary evidence is in existence in certain secret hiding-places in this country, which will be revealed in the course of his examination.

"We are at this disadvantage, that Hanson has not yet made anything but the most scanty of statements. Fearing for his life, since this gang will stick at nothing, he has been closely guarded by the police from the moment he made his preliminary statement. Every effort which has been made to induce him to commit his revelations to writing has been in vain, and we are compelled to take what is practically his affidavit in open court."

"Do I understand," interrupted the magistrate, in that weary tone which is the prerogative of magistrates, "that you are not as yet in possession of the evidence on which I am to be asked to commit the prisoner to the Old Bailey?"

"That is so, your Worship," said the counsel. "All we could procure from Hanson was the bald affidavit which was necessary to secure the man's arrest."

"So that if anything happened to your witness, there would be no case for the Crown?"

The Attorney-General nodded.

"Those are exactly the circumstances, your Worship," he said, "and that is why we have been careful to keep our witness in security. The man is in a highly nervous condition, and we have been obliged to humour him. But I do not think your Worship need have any apprehension as to the evidence which will be produced to-day, or that there will not be sufficient to justify a committal."

"I see," said the magistrate.

Sir Stanley turned to Stafford and whispered:

"Rather a queer proceeding."

Stafford nodded.

"It is the only thing we could do," he said. "Hanson refused to speak until he was in court—until, as he said, he saw Boundary under arrest."

"Does Boundary know this?"

"I suppose so," replied Stafford with a little smile, "he knows everything. He has a whole army of spies. Sir Stanley, you don't know how big this organisation is. He has roped in everybody. He has Members of Parliament, he has the best lawyers in London, and two of the big detective agencies are engaged exclusively on his work."

Sir Stanley pursed his lips thoughtfully and turned his attention to the prosecuting counsel. The address was not a long one, and presently the Attorney-General sat down, to be followed by a leading member of the Bar, retained for the defence. Presently he too had finished, and again the Attorney-General rose.

"Call Olaf Hanson," he said, and there was a stir of excitement.

The door leading to the cells opened, and two tall detectives came through, and two others followed. In the midst of the four walked the short, grey-faced man, in whose hands was the fate, and indeed the life, of Colonel Dan Boundary.

He did not as much as glance at the dock, but hurried across the floor of the court and was ushered to the witness stand, his four guardians disposing themselves behind and before him. The man seemed on the point of crumbling. His fear-full eyes ranged the court, always avoiding the gross figure in the railed dock. The lips of the witness were white and trembling. The hands which clutched the front of the box for support twitched spasmodically.

"Your name is Olaf Hanson?" asked the Attorney-General soothingly.

The witness tried to speak but his lips emitted no sound. He nodded.

"You are a native of Christiania?"

Again Hanson nodded.

"You must speak out," said Counsel kindly, "and you need have no fear. How long have you known Colonel Boundary?"

This time Hanson found his voice.

"For ten years," he said huskily.

An usher came forward from the press at the back of the court with a glass of water and handed it to the witness, who drank eagerly. Counsel waited until he had drained the glass before he spoke again.

"You have in your possession certain documentary evidence convicting Colonel Boundary of certain malpractices?"

"Yes," said the witness.

"You have promised the police that you will reveal in court where those documents have been stored?"

"Yes," said Hanson again.

"Will you tell the court now, in order that the police may lose as little time as possible, where you have hidden that evidence?"

Colonel Boundary was showing the first signs of interest he had evinced in the proceedings. He leaned forward, his head craned round as though endeavouring to catch the eye of the witness.

Hanson was speaking, and speaking with difficulty.

"I haf—put those papers,"—he stopped and swayed—"I haf put those papers—" he began again, and then, without a second's warning, he fell limply forward.

"I am afraid he has fainted," said the magistrate.

Detectives were crowding round the witness, and had lifted him from the witness stand. One said something hurriedly, and Stafford King left his seat. He was bending over the prostrate figure, tearing open the collar from his throat, and presently was joined by the police surgeon, who was in court. There was a little whispered consultation, and then Stafford King straightened himself up and his face was pale and hard.

"I regret to inform your Worship," he said, "that the witness is dead."

## CHAPTER VI

### STAFFORD KING RESIGNS

A week later, Stafford King came into the office of the First Commissioner of the Criminal Intelligence Department, and Sir Stanley looked up with a kindly but pitying look in his eye.

"Well, Stafford," he said gently, "sit down, won't you. What has happened?"

Stafford King shrugged his shoulders.

"Boundary is discharged," he said shortly.

Sir Stanley nodded.

"It was inevitable," he said, "I suppose there's no hope of connecting him and his gang with the death of Hanson?"

"Not a ghost of a hope, I am afraid," said Stafford, shaking his head. "Hanson was undoubtedly murdered, and the poison which killed him was in the glass of water which the usher brought. I've been examining the usher again to-day, and all he can remember is that he saw somebody pushing through the crowd at the back of the court, who handed the glass over the heads of the people. Nobody seems to have seen the man who passed it. That was the method by which the gang got rid of their traitor."

"Clever," said Sir Stanley, putting his finger-tips together. "They knew just the condition of mind in which Hanson would be when he came into court. They had the dope ready, and they knew that the detectives would allow the usher to bring the man water, when they would not allow anybody else to approach him. This is a pretty bad business, Stafford."

"I realise that," said the young chief. "Of course, I shall resign. There's nothing else to do. I thought we had him this time, especially with the evidence we had in relation to the Spillsbury case."

"You mean the letter which Spillsbury wrote to the woman Marsh? How did that come, by the way?"

"It reached Scotland Yard by post."

"Do you know who sent it?"

"There was no covering note at all," replied Stafford. "It was in a plain envelope with a typewritten address and was sent to me personally. The letter, of course, was valueless by itself."

"Have you made any search to discover the documents which Hanson spoke about?"

"We have searched everywhere," said the other a little wearily, "but it is a pretty hopeless business looking through London for a handful of documents. Anyway, friend Boundary is free."

The other was watching him closely.

"It is a bitter disappointment to you, my young friend," he said; "you've been working on the case for years. I fear you'll never have another such chance of putting Boundary in the dock. He's got a lot of public sympathy, too. Your thorough-paced rascal who escapes from the hands of the police has always a large following amongst the public, and I doubt whether the Home Secretary will sanction any further proceedings, unless we have most convincing proof. What's this?"

Stafford had laid a letter on the table.

"My resignation," said that young man grimly.

The First Commissioner took up the envelope and tore it in four pieces.

"It is not accepted," he said cheerfully; "you did your best, and you're no more responsible than I am. If you resign, I ought to resign, and so ought every officer who has been on this game. A few years ago I took exactly the same step—offered my resignation over a purely private and personal matter, and it was not accepted. I have been glad since, and so will you be. Go on with your work and give Boundary a rest for awhile."

Stafford was looking down at him abstractedly.

"Do you think we shall ever catch the fellow, sir?"

Sir Stanley smiled.

"Frankly, I don't," he admitted. "As I said before, the only danger I see to Boundary is this mysterious individual who apparently crops up now and again in his daily life, and who, I suspect, was the person who sent you the Spillsbury letter—the Jack o' Judgment, doesn't he call himself? Do you know what I think?" he asked quietly. "I think that if you found the 'Jack,' if you ran him to earth, stripped him of his mystic guise, you would discover somebody who has a greater grudge against Boundary than the police."

Stafford smiled.

"We can't run about after phantoms, sir," he said, with a touch of asperity in his voice.

The chief looked at him curiously.

"I hear you do quite a lot of running about," he said carelessly, as he began to arrange the papers on his table. "By the way, how is Miss White?"

Stafford flushed.

"She was very well when I saw her last night," he said stiffly; "she is leaving the stage."

"And her father?"

Stafford was silent for a second.

"He left his home a week before the case came into court and has not been seen since," he said.

The chief nodded.

"Whilst White is away and until he turns up I should keep a watchful eye on his daughter," he said.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Stafford.

"I'm just making a suggestion," said the other. "Think it over."

Stafford thought it over on his way to meet the girl, who was waiting for him on a sunny seat in Temple Gardens, for the day was fine and even warm, and, two hours before luncheon, the place was comparatively empty of people.

She saw the trouble in his face and rose to meet him, and for a moment forgot her own distress of mind, her doubts and fears. Evidently she knew the reason for his attendance at Scotland Yard, and something of the interview which he had had.

"I offered my resignation," he replied, in answer to her unspoken question, "and Sir Stanley refused it."

"I think he was just," she said. "Why, it would be simply monstrous if your career were spoilt through no fault of your own."

He laughed.

"Don't let us talk about me," he said. "What have you done?"

"I've cancelled all my contracts; I have other work to do."

"How are—" He hesitated, but she knew just what he meant, and patted his arm gratefully.

"Thank you, I have all the money I want," she said. "Father left me quite a respectable balance. I am closing the house at Horsham and storing the furniture, and shall keep just sufficient to fill a little flat I have taken in Bloomsbury."

"But what are you going to do?" he asked curiously.

She shook her head.

"Oh, there are lots of things that a girl can do," she said vaguely, "besides going on the stage."

"But isn't it a sacrifice? Didn't you love your work?"

She hesitated.

"I thought I did at first," she said. "You see, I was always a very good mimic. When I was quite a little girl I could imitate the colonel. Listen!"

Suddenly to his amazement he heard the drawling growl of Dan Boundary. She laughed with glee at his amazement, but the smile vanished and she sighed.

"I want you to tell me one thing, Mr. King—"

"Stafford—you promised me," he began.

She reddened.

"I hardly like calling you by your christian name but it sounds so like a surname that perhaps it won't be so bad."

"What do you want to ask?" he demanded.

She was silent for a moment, then she said:

"How far was my father implicated in this terrible business?"

"In the gang?"

She nodded.

He was in a dilemma. Solomon White was implicated as deeply as any save the colonel. In his younger days he had been the genius who was responsible for the organisation and had been for years the colonel's right-hand man until the more subtle villainy of Pinto Silva, that Portuguese adventurer, had ousted him, and, if the truth be told, until the sight of his girl growing to womanhood had brought qualms to the heart of this man, who, whatever his faults, loved the girl dearly.

"You don't answer me," she said, "but I think I am answered by your silence. Was my father—a bad man?"

"I would not judge your father," he said. "I can tell you this, that for the past few years he has played a very small part in the affairs of the gang. But what are you going to do?"

"How persistent you are!" she laughed. "Why, there are so many things I am going to do that I haven't time to tell you. For one thing, I am going to work to undo some of the mischief which the gang have wrought. I am going to make such reparation as I can," she said, her lips trembling, "for the evil deeds my father has committed."

"You have a mission, eh?" he said with a little smile.

"Don't laugh at me," she pleaded. "I feel it here." She put her hand on her heart. "There's something which tells me that, even if my father built up this gang, as you told me once he did—ah! you had forgotten that."

Stafford King had indeed forgotten the statement.

"Yes?" he said. "You intend to pull it down?"

She nodded.

"I feel, too, that I am at bay. I am the daughter of Solomon White, and Solomon White is regarded by the colonel as a traitor. Do you think they will leave me alone? Don't you think they are going to watch me day and night and get me in their power just as soon as they can? Think of the lever that would be, the lever to force my father back to them!"

"Oh, you'll be watched all right," he said easily, and remembered the commissioner's warning. "In fact, you're being watched now. Do you mind?"

"Now?" she asked in surprise.

He nodded towards a lady who sat a dozen yards away and whose face was carefully shaded by a parasol.

"Who is she?" asked the girl curiously.

"A young person called Lollie Marsh," laughed Stafford. "At present she has a mission too, which is to entangle me into a compromising position."

The girl looked towards the spy with a new interest and a new resentment.

"She has been trailing me for weeks," he went on, "and it would be embarrassing to tell you the number of times we have been literally thrown into one another's arms. Poor girl!" he said, with mock concern, "she must be bored with sitting there so long. Let us take a stroll."

If he expected Lollie to follow, he was to be disappointed. She stayed on watching the disappearing figures, without attempting to rise, and waiting until they were out of sight, she walked out on to the Embankment and hailed a passing taxi. She seemed quite satisfied in her mind that the plan she had evolved for the trapping of Stafford King could not fail to succeed.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE COLONEL CONDUCTS HIS BUSINESS

A merry little dinner party was assembled that night in a luxurious flat in Albemarle House. It was a bachelor party, and consisted of three—the colonel, resplendent in evening dress, "Swell" Crewe and a middle-aged man whose antique dress coat and none too spotless linen certainly did not advertise their owner's prosperity. Yet this man with the stubbly moustache and the bald head could write his cheque for seven figures, being Mr. Thomas Crotin, of the firm of Crotin and Principle, whose swollen mills occupy a respectable acreage in Huddersfield and Dewsbury.

"You're Colonel Boundary, are you?" he said admiringly, and for about the seventh time since the meal started.

The colonel nodded with a good-humoured twinkle in his eye.

"Well, fancy that!" said Mr. Crotin. "I'll have something to talk about when I go back to Yorkshire. It is lucky I met your friend, Captain Crewe, at our club in Huddersfield."

There was something more than luck in that meeting, as the colonel well knew.

"I read about the trial and all," said the Yorkshireman; "I must say it looked very black against you, colonel."

The colonel smiled again and lifted a bottle towards the other.

"Nay, nay!" said the spinner. "I'll have nowt more. I've got as much as I can carry, and I know when I've had enough."

The colonel replaced the bottle by his side.

"So you read of the trial, did you?"

"I did and all," said the other, "and I said to my missus: 'Yon's a clever fellow, I'd like to meet him.'"

"You have an admiration for the criminal classes, eh?" said the colonel good-humouredly.

"Well, I'm not saying you're a criminal," said the other, taking his host literally, "but being a J.P. and on the bench of magistrates, I naturally take an interest in these cases. You never know what you can learn."

"And what did your lady wife say?" asked Boundary.

The Yorkshireman smiled broadly.

"Well, she doesn't take any interest in these things. She's a proper London lady, my wife. She was in a high position when I married."

"Five years ago," said Boundary, "you married the daughter of Lord Westsevern. It cost you a hundred thousand pounds to pay the old man's debts."

The Yorkshireman stared at him.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"You're nominated for Parliament, too, aren't you. And you're to be Mayor of Little Thornhill?"

Mr. Crotin laughed uproariously.

"Well, you've got me properly taped," he said admiringly, and the colonel agreed with a gesture.

"So you're interested in the criminal classes?"

Mr. Crotin waved a protesting hand.

"I'm not saying you're a member of the criminal classes, colonel," he said. "My friend Crewe here wouldn't think I would be so rude. Of course, I know the charge was all wrong."

"That's where you're mistaken," interrupted the colonel calmly; "it was all right."

"Eh?"

The man stared.

"The charge was perfectly sound," said the colonel, playing with his fruit knife; "for twenty years I have been making money by buying businesses at about a twentieth of their value and selling them again."

"But how—" began the other.

"Wait, I'll tell you. I've got men working for me all over the country, agents and sub-agents, who are constantly on the look-out for scandal. Housekeepers, servants, valets—you know the sort of people who get hold of information."

Mr. Crotin was speechless.

"Sooner or later I find a very incriminating fact which concerns a gentleman of property. I prefer those scandals which verge on the criminal," the colonel went on.

The outraged Mr. Crotin was rolling his serviette.

"Where are you going? What are you going to do? The night's young," said the colonel innocently.

"I'm going," said Mr. Crotin, very red of face. "A joke's a joke, and when friend Crewe introduced me to you, I hadn't any idea that you were that kind of man. You don't suppose that I'm going to sit here in your society—me with my high connections—after what you've said?"

"Why not?" asked the colonel; "after all, business is business, and as I'm making an offer to you for the Riverborne Mill—"

"The Riverborne Mill?" roared the spinner. "Ah! that's a joke of yours! You'll buy no Riverborne Mill of me, sitha!"

"On the contrary, I shall buy the Riverborne Mill from you. In fact, I have all the papers and transfers ready for you to sign."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said the man grimly. "And what might you be offering me for the Riverborne?"

"I'm offering you thirty thousand pounds cash," said the colonel, and his bearer was stricken speechless.

"Thirty thousand pounds cash!" he said after awhile. "Why, man, that property is worth two hundred thousand pounds."

"I thought it was worth a little more," said the colonel carelessly.

"You're a fool or a madman," said the angry Yorkshireman. "It isn't my mill, it is a limited company."

"But you hold the majority of the shares—ninety-five per cent., I think," said the colonel. "Those are the shares which you will transfer to me at the price I suggest."

"I'll see you damned first," roared Crotin, bringing his hand down smash on the table.

"Sit down again for one moment." The colonel's voice was gentle but insistent. "Do you know Maggie Delman?"

Suddenly Crotin's face went white.

"She was one of your father's mill-girls when you were little more than a boy," the colonel proceeded, "and you were rather in love with her, and one Easter you went away together to Blackpool. Do you remember?"

Still Crotin did not speak.

"You married the young lady and the marriage was kept secret because you were afraid of your father, and as the years went on and the girl was content with the little home you had made for her and the allowance you gave her, there seemed to be no need to admit your marriage, especially as there were no children. Then you began to take part in local politics and to accumulate ambitions. You dared not divorce your wife and you thought there was no necessity for it. You had a chance of improving yourself socially by marrying the daughter of an English lord, and you jumped at it."

"You've got to prove that," he said huskily.

The man found his voice.

"I can prove it all right. Oh, no, your wife hasn't betrayed you—your real wife, I mean. You've betrayed yourself by insisting on paying her by telegraphic money orders. We heard of these mysterious payments but suspected nothing beyond a vulgar love affair. Then one night, whilst your placid and complacent wife was in a cinema, one of my people searched her box and came upon the certificate of marriage. Would you like to see it?"

"I've nothing to say," said Crotin thickly. "You've got me, mister. So that is how you do it!"

"That is how I do it," said the colonel. "I believe in being frank with people like you. Here are the transfers. You see the place for your signature marked with a pencil."

Suddenly Crotin leaped at him in a blind fury, but the colonel gripped him by the throat with a hand like a steel vice, and shook him as a dog would shake a rat. And the gentle tone in his voice changed as quickly.

"Sit down and sign!" snarled Boundary. "If you play that game, I'll break your damned neck! Come any of those tricks with me and I'll smash you. Give him the pen, Crewe."

"I'll see you in gaol for this," said the white-faced man shakily.

"That's about the place you will see me, if you don't sign, and it is the inside of that gaol you'll be to see me."

The man rose up unsteadily, flinging down the pen as he did so.

"You'll suffer for this," he said between his teeth.

"Not unduly," said the colonel.

There was a tap at the door and the colonel swung round.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Can I come in?" said a voice.

Crewe was frowning.

"Who is it?" asked the colonel.

The door opened slowly. A gloved hand, and then a white, hooded face, slipped through the narrow entry.

"Jack o' Judgment! Poor old Jack o' Judgment come to make a call," chuckled the hateful voice. "Down, dog; down!" He flourished the long-barrelled revolver theatrically, then turned with a chuckle of laughter to the gaping Mr. Crotin.

"Poor Jacob!" he crooned, "he has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage! Don't touch that paper, Crewe, or you die the death!"

His hand leapt out and snatched the transfer, which he thrust into the hand of the wool-spinner.

"Get out and go home, my poor sheep," he said, "back to the blankets! Do you think they'd be satisfied with one mill? They'd come for a mill every year and they'd never leave you till you were dead or broke. Go to the police, my poor lamb, and tell them your sad story. Go to the admirable Mr. Stafford King—he'll fall on your neck. You won't, I see you won't!"

The laughter rose again, and then swiftly with one arm he swung back the merchant and stood in silence till the door of the flat slammed.

The colonel found his voice.

"I don't know who you are," he said, breathing heavily, "but I'll make a bargain with you. I've offered a hundred thousand pounds to anybody who gets you. I'll offer you the same amount to leave me alone."

"Make it a hundred thousand millions!" said Jack o' Judgment in his curious, squeaky voice, "give me the moon and an apple, and I'm yours!"

He was gone before they could realise he had passed through the door, and he had left the flat before either moved.

"Quick! The window!" said the colonel.

The window commanded a view of the front entrance of Albemarle House, and the entry was well lighted. They reached the window in time to see the Yorkshireman emerge with unsteady steps

and stride into the night. They waited for their visitor to follow. A minute, two minutes passed, and then somebody walked down the steps to the light. It was a woman, and as she turned her face the colonel gasped.

"Maisie White!" he said in a wondering voice. "What the devil is she doing here?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LISTENER AT THE DOOR

Maisie White had taken up her abode in a modest flat in Doughty Street, Bloomsbury. The building had been originally intended for a dwelling house, but its enterprising owner had fitted a kitchenette and a bathroom to every floor and had made each suite self-contained.

She found the one bedroom and a sitting-room quite sufficient for her needs. Since the day of her father's departure she had not heard from him, and she had resolutely refused to worry. What was Solomon White's association with the Boundary gang, she could only guess. She knew it had been an important one, but her fears on his behalf had less to do with the action the police might take against him than with Boundary's sinister threat.

She had other reasons for leaving the stage than she had told Stafford King. On the stage she was a marked woman and her movements could be followed for at least three hours in the day, and she was anxious for more anonymity. She was conscious of two facts as she opened the outer door that night to let herself into the hallway, and hurried up to her apartments. The first was that she had been followed home, and that impression was the more important of the two. She did not switch on the light when she entered her room, but bolting the door behind her, she moved swiftly to the window and raised it noiselessly. Looking out, she saw two men on the opposite side of the street, standing together in consultation. It was too dark to recognise them, but she thought that one figure was Pinto Silva.

She was not frightened, but nevertheless she looked thoughtfully at the telephone, and her hand was on the receiver before she changed her mind. After all, they would know where she lived and an inquiry at her agents or even at the theatre would tell them to where her letters had been readdressed. She hesitated a moment, then pulled down the blinds and switched on the light.

Outside the two men saw the light flash up and watched her shadow cross the blind.

"It is Maisie all right," said Pinto. "Now tell me what happened."

In a few words Crewe described the scene which he had witnessed in the Albemarle flat.

"Impossible!" said Pinto; "are you suggesting that Maisie is Jack o' Judgment?"

Crewe shrugged.

"I know nothing about it," he said; "there are the facts."

Pinto looked up at the light again.

"I'm going across to see her," he said, and Crewe made a grimace.

"Is that wise?" he asked; "she doesn't know we have followed her home. Won't she be suspicious?"

Pinto shrugged.

"She's a pretty clever girl that," he said, "and if she doesn't know we're outside, there's nothing of Solomon White in her composition."

He crossed the road and struck a match to discover which was her bell. He guessed right the first time. Maisie heard the tinkle and knew what it portended. She had not started to disrobe, and after a few moments' hesitation she went down the stairs and opened the door.

"It is rather a late hour to call on you," said Pinto pleasantly, "but we saw you going away from Albemarle Place, and could not overtake you."

There was a question in his voice, though he did not give it actual words.

"It is rather late for small talk," she said coolly. "Is there any reason for your call?"

"Well, Miss White, there were several things I wanted to talk to you about," said Pinto, taken aback by her calm. "Have you heard from your father?"

"Don't you think," she said, "it would be better if you came at a more conventional hour? I don't feel inclined to gossip on the doorstep and I'm afraid I can't ask you in."

"The colonel is worrying," Pinto hastened to explain. "You see, Solly's one of his best friends." The girl laughed softly.

"I know," she said. "I heard the colonel talking to my father at Horsham," she added meaningly.

"You've got to make allowances for the colonel," urged Pinto; "he lost his temper, but he's feeling all right now. Couldn't you persuade your father to communicate with us—with him?"

She shook her head.

"I am not in a position to communicate with my father," she replied quietly. "I am just as ignorant of his whereabouts as you are. If anybody is anxious it is surely myself, Mr. Silva."

"And another point," Silva went on, so that there should be no gap in the conversation, "why did you give up your theatrical engagements, Maisie? I took a lot of trouble to get them for you, and it is stupid to jeopardise your career. I have plenty of influence, but managers will not stand that kind of treatment, and when you go back—"

"I am not going back," she said. "Really, Mr. Silva, you must excuse me to-night. I am very tired after a hard day's work—" she checked herself.

"What are you doing now, Maisie?" asked Silva curiously.

"I have no wish to prolong this conversation," said the girl, "but there is one thing I should like to say, and that is that I would prefer you to call me Miss White."

"All right, all right," said Silva genially, "and what were you doing at the flat to-night, Mai—Miss White?"

"Good night," said the girl and closed the door in his face.

He cursed angrily in the dark and raised his hand to rap on the panel of the door, but thought better of it and, turning, walked back to the interested Crewe, who stood in the shadow of a lamp-post watching the scene.

"Well?" asked Crewe.

"Confound the girl, she won't talk," grumbled Silva. "I'd give something to break that pride of hers, Crewe. By jove, I'll do it one of these days," he added between his teeth.

Crewe laughed.

"There's no sense in going off the deep end because a girl turns you down," he said. "What did she say about the flat? And what did she say about her visit to Albemarle Place?"

"She said nothing," said the other shortly. "Come along, let's go back to the colonel."

On the return journey he declined to be drawn into any kind of conversation, and Crewe, after one or two attempts to procure enlightenment as to the result of the interview, relapsed into silence.

They found the colonel waiting for them, and to all appearances the colonel was undisturbed by the happenings of the evening.

"Well?" he asked.

"She admits she was here," said Pinto.

"What was she doing?"

"You'd better ask her yourself," said the other with some asperity. "I tell you, colonel, I can't handle that woman."

"Nobody ever thought you could," said the colonel. "Did she give you any idea as to what her business was?"

Pinto shook his head and the colonel paced the big room thoughtfully, his big hands in his pockets.

"Here's a situation," he said. "There's some outsider who's following every movement we make, who knew that boob from Huddersfield was coming, and who knew what our business was. That somebody was this infernal Jack o' Judgment, but who is Jack o' Judgment, hey?"

He looked round fiercely.

"I'll tell you who he is," he went on, speaking slowly "He's somebody who knows our gang as well as we know it ourselves, somebody who has been on the inside, somebody who has access, or who has had access, to our working methods. In fact," he said using his pet phrase, "a business associate."

"Rubbish!" said Pinto.

This polished man of Portugal, who had come into the gang very late in the day, was one of the few people who were privileged to offer blunt opposition to the leader of the Boundary Gang.

"You might as well say it is I, or that it is Crewe, or Dempsey, or Selby—"

"Or White," said the colonel slowly; "don't forget White."

They stared at him.

"What do you mean?" asked Crewe with a frown.

White had been a favourite of his.

"How could it be White?"

"Why shouldn't it be White?" said the colonel. "When did Jack o' Judgment make his first appearance? I'll tell you. About the time we started getting busy framing up something against White. Did we ever see him when White was with us—no! Isn't it obviously somebody who has been a business associate and knows our little ways? Why, of course it is. Tell me somebody else?"

"You don't suggest it is 'Snow' Gregory, anyway?" he added sarcastically.

Crewe shivered and half-closed his eyes.

"For heaven's sake don't mention 'Snow' Gregory," he said irritably.

"Why shouldn't I?" snarled the colonel. "He's worth money and life and liberty to us, Crewe. He's an awful example that keeps some of our business associates on the straight path. Not," he added with elaborate care, "not that we were in any way responsible for his untimely end. But he died—providentially. A doper's bad enough, but a doper who talks and boasts and tells me, as he told me in this very room, just where he'd put me, is a mighty dangerous man, Crewe."

"Did he do that?" asked Crewe with interest.

The colonel nodded.

"In this very room where you're standing," he said impressively, "at the end of that table he stood, all lit up with 'coco' and he told me things about our organisation that I thought nobody knew but myself. That's the worst of drugs," he said, shaking his head reprovingly; "you never know how clever they'll make a man, and they made 'Snow' a bit too clever. I'm not saying that I regretted his death—far from it. I don't know how he got mixed up in the affair—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Pinto; "why go on acting before us? We were all in it."

"Hush!" said the colonel with a glance at the door.

There was a silence. All eyes were fixed on the door.

"Did you hear anything?" asked the colonel under his breath.

His face was a shade paler than they had ever remembered seeing it.

"It is nothing," said Pinto; "that fellow's got on your nerves."

The colonel walked to the sideboard and poured out a generous portion of whisky and drank it at a gulp.

"Lots of things are getting on my nerves," he said, "but nothing gets on my nerves so much as losing money. Crewe, we've got to go after that Yorkshireman again—at least somebody has got to go after him."

"And that somebody is not going to be me," said Crewe quietly. "I did my part of the business. Let Pinto have a cut."

Pinto Silva shook his head.

"We'll drop him," he said decisively, and for the first time Crewe realised how dominating a factor Pinto had become in the government of the band.

"We'll drop him—"

Suddenly he stopped and craned his head round.

It was he who had heard something near the door, and now with noiseless steps he tiptoed across the room to the door, and gripping the handle, opened it suddenly. A gun had appeared in his hand, but he did not use it. Instead, he darted through the open doorway and they heard the sound of a struggle. Presently he came back, dragging by the collar a man.

"Got him!" he said triumphantly, and hurled his captive into the nearest chair.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE COLONEL EMPLOYS A DETECTIVE

Their prisoner was a stranger. He was a lean, furtive-looking man of thirty-five, below middle height, respectably dressed, and at first glance, the colonel, whose hobby was distinguishing at a look the social standing of humanity, was unable to place him.

Crewe locked the door.

"Now then," said the colonel, "what the devil were you doing listening at my door? Was that his game, Mr. Silva?"

"That was his game," said the other, brushing his hands.

"What have you got to say before I send for the police?" asked the colonel virtuously. "What have you got to say for yourself? Sneaking about a gentleman's flat, listening at keyholes!"

The man, who had been roughly handled, had risen and was putting his collar straight. If he had been taken aback by the sudden onslaught, he was completely self-possessed now.

"If you want to send for the police, you'd better start right away," he said; "you've got a telephone, haven't you? Perhaps I'll have a job for the policeman, too. You've no right to assault me, my friend," he said, addressing Pinto resentfully.

"What were you doing?" asked the colonel.

"Find out," said the man sharply.

The colonel stroked his long moustache, and his manner underwent a change.

"Now look here, old man," he said almost jovially; "we're all friends here, and we don't want any trouble. I daresay you've made a mistake, and my friend has made a mistake. Have a whisky and soda?"

The man grinned crooked.

"Not me, thank you," he said emphatically; "if I remember rightly, there was a young gentleman who took a glass of water in North Lambeth Police Court the other day, and—"

The colonel's eyes narrowed.

"Well, sit down and be sociable. If you're suggesting that I'm going to poison you, you're also suggesting that you know something which I don't want you to tell. Or that you have discovered one of those terrible secrets that the newspapers are all writing about. Now be a sensible man; have a drink."

The man hesitated.

"You have a drink of whisky out of the same bottle, and I'll join you."

"Help yourself," said the colonel good-naturedly. "Give me any glass you like."

The man went to the sideboard, poured out two pegs and sent the soda-water sizzling into the long glasses.

"Here's yours and here's mine," he said; "good luck!"

He drank the whisky off, after he had seen the colonel drink his, and wiped his mouth with a gaudy handkerchief.

"I'm taking it for granted," said the colonel, "that we've made no mistake and that you were listening at our door. Now we want no unpleasantness, and we'll talk about this matter as sensible human beings and man to man."

"That's the way to talk," said the other, smacking his lips.

"You've been sent here to watch me."

"I may have and I may not have," said the other.

Pinto shifted impatiently, but the colonel stopped him with a look.

"Now let me see what you are," mused the colonel, still wearing that benevolent smile of his. "You're not an ordinary tradesman. You've got a look of the book canvasser about you. I have it—you're a private detective!"

The man smirked.

"Perhaps I am," said he, "and," he added, "perhaps I'm not."

The colonel slapped him on the shoulder.

"Of course you are," he said confidently; "we don't see shrewd-looking fellows like you every day. You're a split!"

"Not official," said the man quickly.

He had all the English private detective's fear of posing as the genuine article.

"Now look here," said the colonel, "I'm going to be perfectly straight with you, and you've got to be straight with me. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Quite fair," said the man; "if I've been misconducting myself in any manner—"

"Don't mention it," said the colonel politely, "my friend here will apologise for handling you roughly, I'm sure; won't you, Mr. Silva?"

"Sure!" said the other, without any great heartiness.

He was tired of this conversation and was anxious to know where it was leading.

"You're not in the private detective business for your health," said the colonel, and the man shook his head.

"I bet you're working for a firm that's paying you about three pounds a week and your miserable expenses—a perfect dog's life."

"You're quite right there," said the man, and he spoke with the earnestness of the ill-used wage-earner, "it is a dog's life; out in all kinds of weather, all hours of the day and night, and never so much as 'thank you' for any work you do. Why, we get no credit at all, sir. If we go into the witness-box, the lawyers treat us like dirt."

"I absolutely agree with you," said the colonel, shaking his head. "I think the private detective business in this country isn't appreciated as it ought to be. And it is very curious we should have met you," he went on; "only this evening I was saying to my friends here, that we ought to get a good man to look after our interests. You've heard about me, I'm sure, Mr.—"

"Snakit," said the other; "here's my card."

He produced a card from his waistcoat pocket, and the colonel read it.

"Mr. Horace Snakit," he said, "of Dooby and Somes. Now what do you say to coming into our service?"

The man blinked.

"I've got a good job—" he began inconsistently.

"I'll give you a better—six pounds a week, regular expenses and an allowance for dressing."

"It's a bet!" said Mr. Snakit promptly.

"Well, you can consider yourself engaged right away. Now, Mr. Snakit, as frankness is the basis of our intercourse, you will tell me straight away whether you were engaged in watching me?"

"I'll admit that, sir," said the man readily. "I had a job to watch you and to discover if you knew the whereabouts of a certain person."

"Who engaged you?"

"Well—" the man hesitated. "I don't know whether it isn't betraying the confidence of a client," he waited for some encouragement to pursue the path of rectitude and honour, but received none. "Well, I'll tell you candidly, our firm has been engaged by a young lady. She brought me here to-night—"

"Miss White, eh?" said the colonel quickly.

"Miss White it was, sir," said Snakit.

"So that was why she was here? She wanted to show you—"

"Just where your rooms were, sir," said the man. "She also wanted to show me the back stairs by which I could get out of the building if I wanted to."

"What were your general instructions?"

"Just to watch you, sir, and if I had an opportunity when you were out, of sneaking in and nosing round."

"I see," said the colonel. "Crewe, just take Mr. Snakit downstairs and tell him where to report. Fix up his pay—you know," he gave a significant sideways jerk of his head, and Crewe escorted the gratified little detective from the apartment.

When the door had closed, the colonel turned on Silva.

"Pinto," he said and there was a rumble in his voice which betrayed his anger, "that girl is dangerous. She may or may not know where her father is—this detective business may be a blind. Probably Snakit was sent here knowing that he would be captured and spill the beans."

"That struck me, too," said Pinto.

"She's dangerous," repeated the colonel.

He resumed his promenade up and down the room.

"She's an active worker and she's working against us. Now, I'm going to settle with Miss White," he said gratingly. "I'm going to settle with her for good and all. I don't care what she knows, but she probably knows too much. She's hand in glove with the police and maybe she's working with her father. You'll get Phillopolis here to-morrow morning—"

The other's eyes opened.

"Phillopolis?" he almost gasped. "Good heavens! You're not going to—"

The colonel faced him squarely.

"You've had your chance with the girl and you've missed it," he said. "You've tried your fancy method of courting and you've fallen down."

"But I'm not going to stand for Phillopolis," said the other, with tense face. "I tell you I like the girl. There's going to be none of that—"

"Oh, there isn't, isn't there?" said the colonel in his silkiest tone.

Then suddenly he leaned forward across the table and his face was the face of a devil.

"There's only one Boundary Gang, Pinto, and this is it," he said between his clenched white teeth, "and there's only one Dan Boundary and that's me. Do you get me, Pinto? You can go a long way with me if I happen to be going that way. But you stand in the road and you're going to get what's coming. I've been good to you, Pinto. I've stood your interference because it amused me. But you come up against me, really up against me, and by the Lord Harry! you'll know it. Did you get that?"

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.