

Taft William Nelson

On Secret Service



William Taft
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Taft William Nelson

On Secret Service / Detective- Mystery Stories Based on Real Cases Solved by Government Agents

I

A FLASH IN THE NIGHT

We were sitting in the lobby of the Willard, Bill Quinn and I, watching the constant stream of politicians, pretty women, and petty office seekers who drift constantly through the heart of Washington.

Suddenly, under his breath, I heard Quinn mutter, "Hello!" and, following his eyes, I saw a trim, dapper, almost effeminate-looking chap of about twenty-five strolling through Peacock Alley as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"What's the matter?" I inquired. "Somebody who oughtn't to be here?"

"Not at all. He's got a perfect right to be anywhere he pleases, but I didn't know he was home. Last time I heard of him he was in Seattle, mixed up with those riots that Ole Hanson handled so well."

"Bolshevist?"

"Hardly," and Quinn smiled. "Don't you know Jimmy Callahan? Well, it's scarcely the province of a Secret Service man to impress his face upon everyone ... the secret wouldn't last long. No, Jimmy was working on the other end of the Seattle affair. Trying to locate the men behind the move – and I understand he did it fairly well, too. But what else would you expect from the man who solved that submarine tangle in Norfolk?"

Quinn must have read the look of interest in my face, for he continued, almost without a pause: "Did you ever hear the inside of that case? One of the most remarkable in the whole history of the Secret Service, and that's saying a good deal. I don't suppose it would do any harm to spill it, so let's move over there in a corner and I'll relate a few details of a case where the second hand of a watch played a leading role."

The whole thing started back in the spring of 1918 [said Quinn, who held down a soft berth in the Treasury Department as a reward for a game leg obtained during a counterfeiting raid on Long Island].

Along about then, if you remember, the Germans let loose a lot of boasting statements as to what they were going to do to American ships and American shipping. Transports were going to be sunk, commerce crippled and all that sort of thing. While not a word of it got into the papers, there were a bunch of people right here in Washington who took these threats seriously – for the Hun's most powerful weapon appeared to be in his submarines, and if a fleet of them once got going off the coast we'd lose a lot of valuable men and time landing them.

Then came the sinking of the *Carolina* and those other ships off the Jersey coast. Altogether it looked like a warm summer.

One afternoon the Chief sent for Callahan, who'd just come back from taking care of some job down on the border, and told him his troubles.

"Jimmy," said the Chief, "somebody on this side is giving those damn Huns a whole lot of information that they haven't any business getting. You know about those boats they've sunk already, of course. They're only small fry. What they're laying for is a transport, another *Tuscania* that they can stab in the dark and make their getaway. The point that's worrying us is that the U-boats must

be getting their information from some one over here. The sinking of the *Carolina* proves that. No submarine, operating on general cruising orders, could possibly have known when that ship was due or what course she was going to take. Every precaution was taken at San Juan to keep her sailing a secret, but of course you can't hide every detail of that kind. She got out. Some one saw her, wired the information up the coast here and the man we've got to nab tipped the U-boat off.

"Of course we could go at it from Porto Rico, but that would mean wasting a whole lot more time than we can afford. It's not so much a question of the other end of the cable as it is who transmitted the message to the submarine – and how!

"It's your job to find out before they score a real hit."

Callahan, knowing the way things are handled in the little suite on the west side of the Treasury Building, asked for the file containing the available information and found it very meager indeed.

Details of the sinking of the *Carolina* were included, among them the fact that the *U-37* had been waiting directly in the path of the steamer, though the latter was using a course entirely different from the one the New York and Porto Rico S. S. Company's boats generally took. The evidence of a number of passengers was that the submarine didn't appear a bit surprised at the size of her prey, but went about the whole affair in a businesslike manner. The meat of the report was contained in the final paragraph, stating that one of the German officers had boasted that they "would get a lot more ships in the same way," adding, "Don't worry – we'll be notified when they are going to sail."

Of course, Callahan reasoned, this might be simply a piece of Teutonic bravado – but there was more than an even chance that it was the truth, particularly when taken in conjunction with the sinking of the *Texel* and the *Pinar del Rio* and the fact that the *Carolina's* course was so accurately known.

But how in the name of Heaven had they gotten their information?

Callahan knew that the four principal ports of embarkation for troops – Boston, New York, Norfolk, and Charleston – were shrouded in a mantle of secrecy which it was almost impossible to penetrate. Some months before, when he had been working on the case which grew out of the disappearance of the plans of the battleship *Pennsylvania*, he had had occasion to make a number of guarded inquiries in naval circles in New York, and he recalled that it had been necessary not only to show his badge, but to submit to the most searching scrutiny before he was allowed to see the men he wished to reach. He therefore felt certain that no outsider could have dug up the specific information in the short space of time at their disposal.

But, arguing that it had been obtained, the way in which it had been passed on to the U-boat also presented a puzzle.

Was there a secret submarine base on the coast?

Had some German, more daring than the rest, actually come ashore and penetrated into the very lines of the Service?

Had he laid a plan whereby he could repeat this operation as often as necessary?

Or did the answer lie in a concealed wireless, operating upon information supplied through underground channels?

These were only a few of the questions which raced through Callahan's mind. The submarine base he dismissed as impracticable. He knew that the *Thor*, the *Unita*, the *Macedonia*, and nine other vessels had, at the beginning of the war, cleared from American ports under false papers with the intention of supplying German warships with oil, coal, and food. He also knew that, of the million and a half dollars' worth of supplies, less than one-sixth had ever been transshipped. Therefore, having failed so signally here, the Germans would hardly try the same scheme again.

The rumor that German officers had actually come into New York, where they were supposed to have been seen in a theater, was also rather far-fetched. So the wireless theory seemed to be the most tenable. But even a wireless cannot conceal its existence from the other stations indefinitely. Of course, it was possible that it might be located on some unfrequented part of the coast – but then how could the operator obtain the information which he transmitted to the U-boat?

Callahan gave it up in despair – for that night. He was tired and he felt that eight hours' sleep would do him more good than thrashing around with a problem for which there appeared to be no solution; a problem which, after all, he couldn't even be sure existed.

Maybe, he thought, drowsily, as he turned off the light – maybe the German on the U-boat was only boasting, after all – or, maybe...

The first thing Jimmy did the next morning was to call upon the head of the recently organized Intelligence Bureau of the War Department – not the Intelligence Division which has charge of censorship and the handling of news, but the bureau which bears the same relation to the army that the Secret Service does to the Treasury Department.

"From what ports are transports sailing within the next couple of weeks?" he inquired of the officer in charge.

"From Boston, New York, Norfolk, and Charleston," was the reply – merely confirming Callahan's previous belief. He had hoped that the ground would be more limited, because he wanted to have the honor of solving this problem by himself, and it was hardly possible for him to cover the entire Atlantic Coast.

"Where's the biggest ship sailing from?" was his next question.

"There's one that clears Norfolk at daylight on Monday morning with twelve thousand men aboard..."

"Norfolk?" interrupted Callahan. "I thought most of the big ones left from New York or Boston."

"So they do, generally. But these men are from Virginia and North Carolina. Therefore it's easier to ship them right out of Norfolk – saves time and congestion of the railroads. As it happens, the ship they're going on is one of the largest that will clear for ten days or more. All of the other big ones are on the other side."

"Then," cut in Callahan, "if the Germans wanted to make a ten-strike they'd lay for that boat?"

"They sure would – and one torpedo well placed would make the *Tuscania* look like a Sunday-school picnic. But what's the idea? Got a tip that the Huns are going to try to grab her?"

"No, not a tip," Callahan called back over his shoulder, for he was already halfway out of the door; "just a hunch – and I'm going to play it for all it's worth!"

The next morning, safely ensconced at the Monticello under the name of "Robert P. Oliver, of Williamsport, Pa." Callahan admitted to himself that he was indeed working on nothing more than a "hunch," and not a very well-defined one at that. The only point that appeared actually to back up his theory that the information was coming from Norfolk was the fact that the U-boat was known to be operating between New York and the Virginia capes. New York itself was well guarded and the surrounding country was continually patrolled by operatives of all kinds. It was the logical point to watch, and therefore it would be much more difficult to obtain and transmit information there than it would be in the vicinity of Norfolk, where military and naval operations were not conducted on as large a scale nor with as great an amount of secrecy.

Norfolk, Callahan found, was rather proud of her new-found glory. For years she had basked in the social prestige of the Chamberlin, the annual gathering of the Fleet at Hampton Roads and the military pomp and ceremony attendant upon the operations of Fortress Monroe. But the war had brought a new thrill. Norfolk was now one of the principal ports of embarkation for the men going abroad. Norfolk had finally taken her rank with New York and Boston – the rank to which her harbor entitled her.

Callahan reached Norfolk on Wednesday morning. The *America*, according to the information he had received from the War Department, would clear at daybreak Monday – but at noon on Saturday the Secret Service operative had very little more knowledge than when he arrived. He had found that there was a rumor to the effect that two U-boats were waiting off the Capes for the transport, which, of course, would have the benefit of the usual convoy.

"But," as one army officer phrased it, "what's the use of a convoy if they know just where you are? Germany would willingly lose a sub. or two to get us, and, with the sea that's been running for the past ten days, there'd be no hope of saving more than half the boys."

Spurred by the rapidity with which time was passing and the fact that he sensed a thrill of danger – an intuition of impending peril – around the *America*, Callahan spent the better part of Friday night and all Saturday morning running down tips that proved to be groundless. A man with a German name was reported to be working in secret upon some invention in an isolated house on Willoughby Spit; a woman, concerning whom little was known, had been seen frequently in the company of two lieutenants slated to sail on the *America*; a house in Newport News emitted strange "clacking" sounds at night.

But the alleged German proved to be a photographer of unassailable loyalty, putting in extra hours trying to develop a new process of color printing. The woman came from one of the oldest families in Richmond and had known the two lieutenants for years. The house in Newport News proved to be the residence of a young man who hoped some day to sell a photoplay scenario, the irregular clacking noise being made by a typewriter operated none too steadily.

"That's what happens to most of the 'clues' that people hand you," Callahan mused as he sat before his open window on Saturday evening, with less than thirty-six hours left before the *America* was scheduled to leave. "Some fellows have luck with them, but I'll be hanged if I ever did. Here I'm working in the dark on a case that I'm not even positive exists. That infernal submarine may be laying off Boston at this minute, waiting for the ship that leaves there Tuesday. Maybe they don't get any word from shore at all... Maybe they just..."

But here he was brought up with a sudden jar that concentrated all his mental faculties along an entirely different road.

Gazing out over the lights of the city, scarcely aware that he saw them, his subconscious mind had been following for the past three minutes something apparently usual, but in reality entirely out of the ordinary.

"By George!" he muttered, "I wonder..."

Then, taking his watch from his pocket, his eyes alternated between a point several blocks distant – a point over the roofs of the houses – and the second hand of his timepiece. Less than a minute elapsed before he reached for a pencil and commenced to jot down dots and dashes on the back of an envelope. When, a quarter of an hour later, he found that the dashes had become monotonous – as he expected they would – he reached for the telephone and asked to be connected with the private wire of the Navy Department in Washington.

"Let me speak to Mr. Thurber at once," he directed. "Operative Callahan, S. S., speaking... Hello! that you, Thurber?.. This is Callahan. I'm in Norfolk and I want to know whether you can read this code. You can figure it out if anybody can. Ready?.. Dash, dash, dash, dot, dash, dash, dot – " and he continued until he had repeated the entire series of symbols that he had plucked out of the night.

"Sounds like a variation of the International Morse," came the comment from the other end of the wire – from Thurber, librarian of the Navy Department and one of the leading American authorities on code and ciphers. "May take a little time to figure it out, but it doesn't look difficult. Where can I reach you?"

"I'm at the Monticello – name of Robert P. Oliver. Put in a call for me as soon as you see the light on it. I've got something important to do right now," and he hung up without another word.

A quick grab for his hat, a pat under his arm, to make sure that the holster holding the automatic was in place, and Callahan was on his way downstairs.

Once in the street, he quickened his pace and was soon gazing skyward at the corner of two deserted thoroughfares not many blocks from the Monticello. A few minutes' consultation with his watch confirmed his impression that everything was right again and he commenced his search for the night watchman.

"Who," he inquired of that individual, "has charge of the operation of that phonograph sign on the roof?"

"Doan know fuh certain, suh, but Ah think it's operated by a man down the street a piece. He's got charge of a bunch of them sort o' things. Mighty funny kinder way to earn a livin', Ah calls it – flashing on an' off all night long..."

"But where's he work from?" interrupted Callahan, fearful that the negro's garrulousness might delay him unduly.

"Straight down this street three blocks, suh. Then turn one block to yo' left and yo' cain't miss the place. Electrical Advertisin' Headquarters they calls it. Thank you, suh," and Callahan was gone almost before the watchman could grasp the fact that he held a five-dollar bill instead of a dollar, as he thought.

It didn't take the Secret Service man long to locate the place he sought, and on the top floor he found a dark, swarthy individual bending over the complicated apparatus which operated a number of the electric signs throughout the city. Before the other knew it, Callahan was in the room – his back to the door and his automatic ready for action.

"Up with your hands!" snapped Callahan. "Higher! That's better. Now tell me where you got that information you flashed out to sea to-night by means of that phonograph sign up the street. Quick! I haven't any time to waste."

"*Si, si, señor,*" stammered the man who faced him. "But I understand not the English very well."

"All right," countered Callahan. "Let's try it in Spanish," and he repeated his demands in that language.

Volubly the Spaniard – or Mexican, as he later turned out to be – maintained that he had received no information, nor had he transmitted any. He claimed his only duty was to watch the "drums" which operated the signs mechanically.

"No drum in the world could make that sign flash like it did to-night," Callahan cut in. "For more than fifteen minutes you sent a variation of the Morse code seaward. Come on – I'll give you just one minute to tell me, or I'll bend this gun over your head."

Before the minute had elapsed, the Mexican commenced his confession. He had been paid a hundred dollars a week, he claimed, to flash a certain series of signals every Saturday night, precisely at nine o'clock. The message itself – a series of dots and dashes which he produced from his pocket as evidence of his truthfulness – had reached him on Saturday morning for the two preceding weeks. He didn't know what it meant. All he did was to disconnect the drum which operated the sign and move the switch himself. Payment for each week's work, he stated, was inclosed with the next week's message. Where it came from he didn't know, but the envelope was postmarked Washington.

With his revolver concealed in his coat pocket, but with its muzzle in the small of the Mexican's back, Callahan marched his captive back to the hotel and up into his room. As he opened the door the telephone rang out, and, ordering the other to stand with his face to the wall in a corner – "and be damn sure not to make a move" – the government agent answered the call. As he expected, it was Thurber.

"The code's a cinch," came the voice over the wire from Washington. "But the message is infernally important. It's in German, and evidently you picked it up about two sentences from the start. The part you gave me states that the transport *America*, with twelve thousand men aboard, will leave Norfolk at daylight Monday. The route the ship will take is distinctly stated, as is the personnel of her convoy. Where'd you get the message?"

"Flashes in the night," answered Callahan. "I noticed that an electric sign wasn't behaving regularly – so I jotted down its signals and passed them on to you. The next important point is whether the message is complete enough for you to reconstruct the code. Have you got all the letters?"

"Yes, every one of them."

"Then take down this message, put it into that dot-and-dash code and send it to me by special messenger on one of the navy torpedo boats to-night. It's a matter of life and death to thousands of men!" and Callahan dictated three sentences over the wire. "Got that?" he inquired. "Good! Get busy and hurry it down. I've got to have it in the morning."

"Turn around," he directed the Mexican, as he replaced the receiver. "Were you to send these messages only on Saturday night?"

"*Si, señor*. Save that I was told that there might be occasions when I had to do the same thing on Sunday night, too."

"At nine o'clock?"

"*Si, señor*."

Callahan smiled. Things were breaking better than he had dared hope. It meant that the U-boat would be watching for the signal the following night. Then, with proper emphasis of the automatic, he gave the Mexican his orders. He was to return to his office with Callahan and go about his business as usual, with the certainty that if he tried any foolishness the revolver could act more quickly than he. Accompanied by the government agent, he was to come back to the Monticello and spend the night in Callahan's room, remaining there until the next evening when he would – promptly at nine o'clock and under the direction of an expert in telegraphy – send the message which Callahan would hand him.

That's practically all there is to the story.

"All?" I echoed, when Quinn paused. "What do you mean, 'all'? What was the message Callahan sent? What happened to the Mexican? Who sent the letter and the money from Washington?"

"Nothing much happened to the Mexican," replied my informant, with a smile. "They found that he was telling the truth, so they just sent him over the border with instructions not to show himself north of the Rio Grande. As for the letter – that took the Post Office, the Department of Justice, and the Secret Service the better part of three months to trace. But they finally located the sender, two weeks after she (yes, it was a woman, and a darned pretty one at that) had made her getaway. I understand they got her in England and sentenced her to penal servitude for some twenty years or more. In spite of the war, the Anglo-Saxon race hasn't completely overcome its prejudice against the death penalty for women."

"But the message Callahan sent?" I persisted.

"That was short and to the point. As I recall it, it ran something like this: 'Urgent – Route of *America* changed. She clears at daylight, but takes a course exactly ten miles south of one previously stated. Be there.'"

"The U-boat was there, all right. But so were four hydroplanes and half a dozen destroyers, all carrying the Stars and Stripes!"

II

THE MINT MYSTERY

"Mr Drummond! Wire for Mr. Drummond! Mr. Drummond, please!"

It was the monotonous, oft-repeated call of a Western Union boy – according to my friend Bill Quinn, formerly of the United States Secret Service – that really was responsible for solving the mystery which surrounded the disappearance of \$130,000 in gold from the Philadelphia Mint.

"The boy himself didn't have a thing to do with the gold or the finding of it," admitted Quinn, "but his persistence was responsible for locating Drummond, of the Secret Service, just as he was about to start on a well-earned vacation in the Maine woods. Uncle Sam's sleuths don't get any too much time off, you know, and a month or so in a part of the world where they don't know anything about international intrigues and don't care about counterfeiting is a blessing not to be despised.

"That's the reason the boy had to be persistent when he was paging Drummond.

"The operative had a hunch that it was a summons to another case and he was dog tired. But the boy kept singing out the name through the train and finally landed his man, thus being indirectly responsible for the solution of a mystery that might have remained unsolved for weeks – and incidentally saved the government nearly every cent of the one hundred and thirty thousand dollars."

When Drummond opened the telegram [continued Quinn] he found that it was a summons to Philadelphia, signed by Hamlin, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

"Preston needs you at once. Extremely important," read the wire – and, as Drummond was fully aware that Preston was Director of the United States Mint, it didn't take much deduction to figure that something had gone wrong in the big building on Spring Garden Street where a large part of the country's money is coined.

But even the lure of the chase – something you read a lot about in detective stories, but find too seldom in the real hard work of tracing criminals – did not offset Drummond's disappointment in having to defer his vacation. Grumbling, he gathered his bags and cut across New York to the Pennsylvania Station, where he was fortunate enough to be able to make a train on the point of leaving for Philadelphia. At the Mint he found Director Preston and Superintendent Bosbyshell awaiting him.

"Mr. Hamlin wired that he had instructed you to come up at once," said the director. "But we had hardly hoped that you could make it so soon."

"Wire reached me on board a train that would have pulled out of Grand Central Station in another three minutes," growled Drummond. "I was on my way to Maine to forget all about work for a month. But," and his face broke into a smile, "since they did find me, what's the trouble?"

"Trouble enough," replied the director. "Some hundred and thirty thousand dollars in gold is missing from the Mint!"

"What!" Even Drummond was shaken out of his professional calm, not to mention his grouch. Robbery of the United States Treasury or one of the government Mints was a favorite dream with criminals, but – save for the memorable occasion when a gang was found trying to tunnel under Fifteenth Street in Washington – there had been no time when the scheme was more than visionary.

"Are you certain? Isn't there any chance for a mistake?"

The questions were perfunctory, rather than hopeful.

"Unfortunately, not the least," continued Preston. "Somebody has made away with a hundred and thirty thousand dollars worth of the government's money. Seven hundred pounds of gold is missing and there isn't a trace to show how or where it went. The vault doors haven't been tampered with. The combination of the grille inside the vault is intact. Everything, apparently, is as it should be – but fifty bars of gold are missing."

"And each bar," mused Drummond, "weighs – "

"Fourteen pounds," cut in the superintendent.

Drummond looked at him in surprise.

"I beg your pardon," said Preston. "This is Mr. Bosbyshell, superintendent of the Mint. This thing has gotten on my nerves so that I didn't have the common decency to introduce you. Mr. Bosbyshell was with me when we discovered that the gold was missing."

"When was that?"

"Yesterday afternoon," replied the director. "Every now and then – at irregular intervals – we weigh all the gold in the Mint, to make sure that everything is as it should be. Nothing wrong was discovered until we reached Vault Six, but there fifty bars were missing. There wasn't any chance of error. The records showed precisely how much should have been there and the scales showed how much there was, to the fraction of an ounce.

"But even if we had only counted the bars, instead of weighing each one separately, the theft would have been instantly discovered, for the vault contained exactly fifty bars less than it should have. It was then that I wired Washington and asked for assistance from the Secret Service."

"Thus spoiling my vacation," muttered Drummond. "How many men know the combination to the vault door?"

"Only two," replied the superintendent. "Cochrane, who is the official weigher, and myself. Cochrane is above suspicion. He's been here for the past thirty years and there hasn't been a single complaint against him in all that time."

Drummond looked as if he would like to ask Preston if the same could be said for the superintendent, but he contented himself with listening as Bosbyshell continued:

"But even if Cochrane or I – yes, I'm just as much to be suspected as he – could have managed to open the vault door unseen, we could not have gotten inside the iron grille which guards the gold in the interior of the vault. That is always kept locked, with a combination known to two other men only. There's too much gold in each one of these vaults to take any chance with, which is the reason for this double protection. Two men – Cochrane and I – handle the combination to the vault door and open it whenever necessary. Two others – Jamison and Strubel – are the only ones that know how to open the grille door. One of them has to be present whenever the bars are put in or taken away, for the men who can get inside the vault cannot enter the grille, and the men who can manipulate the grille door can't get into the vault."

"It certainly sounds like a burglar-proof combination," commented Drummond. "Is there any possibility for conspiracy between" – and he hesitated for the fraction of a second – "between Cochrane and either of the men who can open the grille door?"

"Apparently not the least in the world," replied Preston. "So far as we know they are all as honest as the day –"

"But the fact remains," Drummond interrupted, "that the gold is missing."

"Exactly – but the grille door was sealed with the official governmental stamp when we entered the vault yesterday. That stamp is applied only in the presence of both men who know the combination. So the conspiracy, if there be any, must have included Cochrane, Strubel, and Jamison – instead of being a two-man job."

"How much gold did you say was missing?" inquired the Treasury operative, taking another tack.

"Seven hundred pounds – fifty bars of fourteen pounds each," answered Bosbyshell. "That's another problem that defies explanation. How could one man carry away all that gold without being seen? He'd need a dray to cart it off, and we're very careful about what goes out of the Mint. There's a guard at the front door all the time, and no one is allowed to leave with a package of any kind until it has been examined and passed."

A grunt was Drummond's only comment – and those who knew the Secret Service man best would have interpreted the sound to mean studious digestion of facts, rather than admission of even temporary defeat.

It was one of the government detective's pet theories that every crime, no matter how puzzling, could be solved by application of common-sense principles and the rules of logic. "The criminal with brains," he was fond of saying, "will deliberately try to throw you off the scent. Then you've got to take your time and separate the wheat from the chaff – the false leads from the true. But the man who commits a crime on the spur of the moment – or who flatters himself that he hasn't left a single clue behind – is the one who's easy to catch. The cleverest crook in the world can't enter a room without leaving his visiting card in some way or other. It's up to you to find that card and read the name on it. And common sense is the best reading glass."

Requesting that his mission be kept secret, Drummond said that he would like to examine Vault No. Six.

"Let Cochrane open the vault for me and then have Jamison and Strubel open the grille," he directed.

"Unless Mr. Bosbyshell opened the vault door," Preston reminded him, "there's no one but Cochrane who could do it. It won't be necessary, however, to have either of the others open the grille – the door was taken from its hinges this morning in order the better to examine the place and it hasn't yet been replaced."

"All right," agreed Drummond. "Let's have Cochrane work the outer combination, then. I'll have a look at the other two later."

Accompanied by the director and the superintendent, Drummond made his way to the basement where they were joined by the official weigher, a man well over fifty, who was introduced by Preston to "Mr. Drummond, a visitor who is desirous of seeing the vaults."

"I understand that you are the only man who can open them," said the detective. "Suppose we look into this one," as he stopped, as if by accident, before Vault No. 6.

Cochrane, without a word, bent forward and commenced to twirl the combination. A few spins to the right, a few to the left, back to the right, to the left once more – and he pulled at the heavy door expectantly. But it failed to budge.

Again he bent over the combination, spinning it rapidly. Still the door refused to open.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to help me with this, Superintendent," Cochrane said, finally. "It doesn't seem to work, somehow."

But, under Bosbyshell's manipulation, the door swung back almost instantly.

"Nothing wrong with the combination," commented Preston.

Drummond smiled. "Has the combination been changed recently?" he asked.

"Not for the past month," Bosbyshell replied. "We usually switch all of them six times a year, just as a general precaution – but this has been the same for the past few weeks. Ever since the fifteenth of last month, to be precise."

Inside the vault Drummond found that, as Preston had stated, the door to the grille had been taken from its hinges, to facilitate the work of the men who had weighed the gold, and had not been replaced.

"Where are the gold bars?" asked the detective. "The place looks like it had been well looted."

"They were all taken out this morning, to be carefully weighed," was Preston's reply.

"I'd like to see some of them stacked up there along the side of the grille, if it isn't too much trouble."

"Surely," said Bosbyshell. "I'll have the men bring them in at once."

As soon as the superintendent had left the room, Drummond requested that the door of the grille be placed in its usual position, and Cochrane set it up level with the floor, leaning against the supports at the side.

"Is that the way it always stays?" inquired the Secret Service man.

"No, sir, but it's pretty heavy to handle, and I thought you just wanted to get a general idea of things."

"I'd like to see it in place, if you don't mind. Here, I'll help you with it – but we better slip our coats off, for it looks like a man's-sized job," and he removed his coat as he spoke.

After Cochrane had followed his example, the two of them hung the heavy door from its hinges and stepped back to get the effect. But Drummond's eyes were fixed, not upon the entrance to the grille, but on the middle of Cochrane's back, and, when the opportunity offered an instant later, he shifted his gaze to the waist of the elder man's trousers. Something that he saw there caused the shadow of a smile to flit across his face.

"Thanks," he said. "That will do nicely," and he made a quick gesture to Preston that he would like to have Cochrane leave the vault.

"Very much obliged, Mr. Cochrane," said the director. "We won't bother you any more. You might ask those men to hurry in with the bars, if you will."

And the weigher, pausing only to secure his coat, left the vault.

"Why all the stage setting?" inquired Preston. "You don't suspect..."

"I don't suspect a thing," Drummond smiled, searching for his own coat, "beyond the fact that the solution to the mystery is so simple as to be almost absurd. By the way, have you noticed those scratches on the bars of the grille, about four feet from the floor?"

"No, I hadn't," admitted the director. "But what of them? These vaults aren't new, you know, and I dare say you'd find similar marks on the grille bars in any of the others."

"I hope not," Drummond replied, grimly, "for that would almost certainly mean a shortage of gold in other sections of the Mint. Incidentally, has all the rest of the gold been weighed?"

"Every ounce of it."

"Nothing missing?"

"Outside of the seven hundred pounds from this vault, not a particle."

"Good – then I'll be willing to lay a small wager that you can't find the duplicates of these scratches anywhere else in the Mint." And Drummond smiled at the director's perplexity.

When the men arrived with a truck loaded with gold bars, they stacked them – at the superintendent's direction – along the side of the grille nearest the vault entrance.

"Is that the way they are usually arranged?" inquired Drummond.

"Yes – the grille bars are of tempered steel and the openings between them are too small to permit anyone to put his hand through. Therefore, as we are somewhat pressed for space, we stack them up right along the outer wall of the grille and then work back. It saves time and labor in bringing them in."

"Is this the way the door of the grille ordinarily hangs?"

Bosbyshell inspected it a moment before he replied.

"Yes," he said. "It appears to be all right. It was purposely made to swing clear of the floor and the ceiling so that it might not become jammed. The combination and the use of the seal prevents its being opened by anyone who has no business in the grille."

"And the seal was intact when you came in yesterday afternoon?"

"It was."

"Thanks," said Drummond; "that was all I wanted to know," and he made his way upstairs with a smile which seemed to say that his vacation in the Maine woods had not been indefinitely postponed.

Once back in the director's office, the government operative asked permission to use the telephone, and, calling the Philadelphia office of the Secret Service, requested that three agents be assigned to meet him down town as soon as possible.

"Have you a record of the home address of the people employed in the Mint?" Drummond inquired of the director, as he hung up the receiver.

"Surely," said Preston, producing a typewritten list from the drawer of his desk.

"I'll borrow this for a while, if I may. I'll probably be back with it before three o'clock – and bring some news with me, too," and the operative was out of the room before Preston could frame a single question.

As a matter of fact, the clock in the director's office pointed to two-thirty when Drummond returned, accompanied by the three men who had been assigned to assist him.

"Have you discovered anything?" Preston demanded.

"Let's have Cochrane up here first," Drummond smiled. "I can't be positive until I've talked to him. You might have the superintendent in, too. He'll be interested in developments, I think."

Bosbyshell was the first to arrive, and, at Drummond's request, took up a position on the far side of the room. As soon as he had entered, two of the other Secret Service men ranged themselves on the other side of the doorway and, the moment Cochrane came in, closed the door behind him.

"Cochrane," said Drummond, "what did you do with the seven hundred pounds of gold that you took from Vault No. Six during the past few weeks?"

"What – what – " stammered the weigher.

"There's no use bluffing," continued the detective. "We've got the goods on you. The only thing missing is the gold itself, and the sooner you turn it over the more lenient the government will be with you. I know how you got the bars out of the grille – a piece of bent wire was sufficient to dislodge them from the top of the pile nearest the grille bars and it was easy to slip them under the door. No wonder the seal was never tampered with. It wasn't necessary for you to go inside the grille at all.

"But, more than that, I know how you carried the bars, one at a time, out of the Mint. It took these three men less than an hour this afternoon to find the tailor who fixed the false pocket in the front of your trousers – the next time you try a job of this kind you better attend to all these details yourself – and it needed only one look at your suspenders this morning to see that they were a good deal wider and heavier than necessary. That long coat you are in the habit of wearing is just the thing to cover up any suspicious bulge in your garments and the guard at the door, knowing you, would never think of telling you to stop unless you carried a package or something else contrary to orders.

"The people in your neighborhood say that they've seen queer bluish lights in the basement of your house on Woodland Avenue. So I suspect you've been melting that gold up and hiding it somewhere, ready for a quick getaway.

"Yes, Cochrane, we've got the goods on you and if you want to save half of a twenty-year sentence – which at your age means life – come across with the information. Where is the gold?"

"In the old sewer pipe," faltered the weigher, who appeared to have aged ten years while Drummond was speaking. "In the old sewer pipe that leads from my basement."

"Good!" exclaimed Drummond. "I think Mr. Preston will use his influence with the court to see that your sentence isn't any heavier than necessary. It's worth that much to guard the Mint against future losses of the same kind, isn't it, Mr. Director?"

"It surely is," replied Preston. "But how in the name of Heaven did you get the answer so quickly?"

Drummond delayed his answer until Cochrane, accompanied by the three Secret Service men, had left the room. Then —

"Nothing but common sense," he said. "You remember those scratches I called your attention to – the ones on the side of the grille bars? They were a clear indication of the way in which the gold had been taken from the grille – knocked down from the top of the pile with a piece of wire and pulled under the door of the grille. That eliminated Jamison and Strubel immediately. They needn't have gone to that trouble, even if it had been possible for them to get into the vault in the first place.

"But I had my suspicions of Cochrane when he was unable to open the vault door. That pointed to nervousness, and nervousness indicated a guilty conscience. I made the hanging of the grille door an excuse to get him to shed his coat – though I did want to see whether the door came all the way

down to the floor – and I noted that his suspenders were very broad and his trousers abnormally wide around the waist. He didn't want to take any chances with that extra fourteen pounds of gold, you know. It would never do to drop it in the street.

"The rest is merely corroborative. I found that bluish lights had been observed in the basement of Cochrane's house, and one of my men located the tailor who had enlarged his trousers. That's really all there was to it."

With that Drummond started to the door, only to be stopped by Director Preston's inquiry as to where he was going.

"On my vacation, which you interrupted this morning," replied the Secret Service man.

"It's a good thing I did," Preston called after him. "If Cochrane had really gotten away with that gold we might never have caught him."

"Which," as Bill Quinn said, when he finished his narrative, "is the reason I claim that the telegraph boy who persisted in paging Drummond is the one who was really responsible for the saving of some hundred and thirty thousand dollars that belonged to Uncle Sam."

"But, surely," I said, "that case was an exception. In rapidity of action, I mean. Don't governmental investigations usually take a long time?"

"Frequently," admitted Quinn, "they drag on and on for months – sometimes years. But it's seldom that Uncle Sam fails to land his man – even though the trail leads into the realms of royalty, as in the Ypiranga case. That happened before the World War opened, but it gave the State Department a mighty good line on what to expect from Germany."

III

THE YPIRANGA CASE

"Mexico," said Bill Quinn, who now holds a soft berth in the Treasury Department by virtue of an injury received in the line of duty – during a raid on counterfeiters a few years ago, to be precise – "is back on the first page of the papers again after being crowded off for some four years because of the World War. Funny coincidence, that, when you remember that it was this same Mexico that gave us our first indication of the way we might expect Germany to behave."

"Huh?" I said, a bit startled. "What do you mean? The first spark of the war was kindled in Serbia, not Mexico. Outside of the rumblings of the Algeciras case and one or two other minor affairs, there wasn't the slightest indication of the conflict to come."

"No?" and Quinn's eyebrows went up in interrogation. "How about the Ypiranga case?"

"The which?"

"The Ypiranga case – the one where Jack Stewart stumbled across a clue in a Mexico City café which led all the way to Berlin and back to Washington and threatened to precipitate a row before the Kaiser was quite ready for it?"

"No," I admitted, "that's a page of underground history that I haven't read – and I must confess that I don't know Stewart, either."

"Probably not," said the former Secret Service man. "He wasn't connected with any of the branches of the government that get into print very often. As a matter of fact, the very existence of the organization to which he belonged isn't given any too much publicity. Everyone knows of the Secret Service and the men who make the investigations for the Department of Justice and the Post-office Department – but the Department of State, for obvious reasons, conducts its inquiries in a rather more diplomatic manner. Its agents have to pose as commercial investigators, or something else equally as prosaic. Their salaries are, as a general thing, paid out of the President's private allowance or out of the fund given to the department 'for use as it may see fit.' Less than half a dozen people know the actual status of the organization or the names of its members at any one time, and its exploits are recorded only in the archives of the State Department."

"But who," I persisted, as Quinn stopped, "was Jack Stewart and what was the nature of the affair upon which he stumbled in Mexico City?"

Stewart [replied Quinn] was just a quiet, ordinary sort of chap, the kind that you'd expect to find behind a desk in the State Department, sorting out consular reports and handling routine stuff. Nothing exceptional about him at all – which was probably one reason for his being selected for work as a secret agent of the Department. It doesn't do, you know, to pick men who are conspicuous, either in their dress or manner. Too easy to spot and remember them. The chap who's swallowed up in the crowd is the one who can get by with a whole lot of quiet work without being suspected.

When they sent Jack down to Mexico they didn't have the slightest idea he'd uncover anything as big as he did. The country south of the Rio Grande, if you recall, had been none too quiet for some time prior to 1914. Taft had had his troubles with it ever since the end of the Diaz regime, and when Wilson came in the "Mexican question" was a legacy that caused the men in the State Department to spend a good many sleepless nights.

All sorts of rumors, most of them wild and bloody, floated up through official and unofficial channels. The one fact that seemed to be certain was that Mexico was none too friendly to the United States, and that some other nation was behind this feeling, keeping it constantly stirred up and overlooking no opportunity to add fuel to the flame. Three or four other members of the State Department's secret organization had been wandering around picking up leads for some months past and, upon the return of one of these to Washington, Stewart was sent to replace him.

His instructions were simple and delightfully indefinite. He was to proceed to Mexico City, posing as the investigator for a financial house in New York which was on the lookout for a soft concession from the Mexican government. This would give him an opportunity to seek the acquaintance of Mexican officials and lend an air of plausibility to practically any line that he found it necessary to follow. But, once at the capital with his alibis well established, he was to overlook nothing which might throw light upon the question that had been bothering Washington for some time past – just which one of the foreign powers was fanning the Mexican unrest and to what lengths it was prepared to go?

Of course, the State Department suspected – just as we now know – that Berlin was behind the movement, but at that time there was no indication of the reason. In the light of later events, however, the plan is plain. Germany, feeling certain that the greatest war Europe had ever known was a matter of the immediate future, was laying her plans to keep other nations out of the conflict. She figured that Mexico was the best foil for the United States and that our pitifully small army would have its hands full with troubles at home. If not, she intended to let Japan enter into the equation – as shown by the Zimmerman note some two years later.

When Stewart got to Mexico City, it did not take him long to discover that there was an undercurrent of animosity to the United States which made itself felt in numberless ways. Some of the Mexican papers, apparently on a stronger financial basis than ever before, were outspoken in their criticism of American dollars and American dealings. The people as a whole, long dominated by Diaz, were being stirred to resentment of the "Gringos," who "sought to purchase the soul of a nation as well as its mineral wealth." The improvements which American capital had made were entirely overlooked, and the spotlight of subsidized publicity was thrown upon the encroachments of the hated Yankees.

All this Stewart reported to Washington, and in reply was politely informed that, while interesting, it was hardly news. The State Department had known all this for months. The question was: Where was the money coming from and what was the immediate object of the game?

"Take your time and don't bother us unless you find something definite to report," was the substance of the instructions cabled to Stewart.

The secret agent, therefore, contented himself with lounging around the very inviting cafés of the Mexican capital and making friends with such officials as might be able to drop scraps of information.

It was November when he first hit Mexico City. It was nearly the middle of April before he picked up anything at all worth while. Of course, in the meantime he had uncovered a number of leads – but every one of them was blind. For a day or two, or a week at most, they would hold out glowing promise of something big just around the corner. Then, when he got to the end of the rainbow, he would find an empty pail in place of the pot of gold he had hoped for.

It wasn't surprising, therefore, that Stewart was growing tired of the life of continual mystery, of developments that never developed, of secrets that were empty and surprises that faded away into nothing.

It was on the 13th of April, while seated at a little table in front of a sidewalk café on the Calles de Victoria, that the American agent obtained his first real clue to the impending disaster.

When two Mexicans whom he knew by sight, but not by name, sat down at a table near his he pricked up his ears purely by instinct, rather than through any real hope of obtaining information of value.

The arrival of the usual sugared drinks was followed by a few words of guarded conversation, and then one of the Mexicans remarked, in a tone a trifle louder than necessary, that "the United States is a nation of cowardly women, dollar worshipers who are afraid to fight, and braggarts who would not dare to back up their threats."

It was an effort for Stewart to remain immersed in the newspaper propped up in front of him. Often as he had heard these sentiments expressed, his Southern blood still rose involuntarily – until his logic reminded him that his mission was not to start a quarrel, but to end one. He knew that no good could ensue from his taking up the challenge, and the very fact that the speaker had raised his voice gave him the tip that the words were uttered for his especial benefit, to find out whether he understood Spanish – for he made no attempt to disguise his nationality.

With a smile which did not show on his lips, Stewart summoned the waiter and in atrocious Spanish ordered another glass of lemonade. His complete knowledge of the language was the one thing which he had managed to keep entirely under cover ever since reaching Mexico, for he figured that the natives would speak more freely in his presence if they believed he could not gather what they were discussing.

The trick worked to perfection.

"Pig-headed Yankee," commented the Mexican who had first spoken. "Lemonade! Pah! – they haven't the nerve to take a man's drink!" and he drained his glass of *pulque* at a single gulp.

The other, who had not spoken above a whisper, raised his glass and regarded it in silence for a moment. Then – "Prosit," he said, and drank.

"*Nom di Dio*," warned his companion. "Be careful! The American hog does not speak Spanish well enough to understand those who use it fluently, but he may speak German."

Stewart smothered a smile behind his paper. Spanish had always been a hobby of his – but he only knew about three words in German!

"I understand," continued the Mexican, "that Victoriano is preparing for the coup, just as I always figured he would" (Stewart knew that "Victoriano" was the familiar form in which the populace referred to Victoriano Huerta, self-appointed President of Mexico and the man who had steadfastly defied the American government in every way possible, taking care not to allow matters to reach such a hot stage that he could handle them through diplomatic promises to see that things "improved in the future").

"*El Presidente* has always been careful to protect himself" – the speaker went on – "but now that you have brought definite assurance from our friends that the money and the arms will be forthcoming within the fortnight there is nothing further to fear from the Yankee pigs. It will be easy to stir up sentiment against them here overnight, and before they can mass their handful of troops along the Rio Grande we will have retaken Texas and wiped out the insult of 'forty-eight. What is the latest news from the ship?"

"The – ?" inquired the man across the table, but his Teutonic intonation of what was evidently a Spanish name was so jumbled that all Stewart could catch was the first syllable – something that sounded like "*Eep*."

"Is that the name?" asked the Mexican.

"Yes," replied the other. "She sailed from Hamburg on the seventh. Allowing two weeks for the passage – she isn't fast, you know – that would bring her into Vera Cruz about the twenty-first. Once there, the arms can be landed and..."

The events of the next few minutes moved so rapidly that, when Stewart had time to catch his breath, he found it difficult to reconstruct the affair with accuracy.

He recalled that he had been so interested in the conversation at the next table that he had failed to notice the approach of the only other man he knew in the State Department's secret organization – Dawson, who had been prowling around the West Coast on an errand similar to his. Before he knew it Dawson had clapped him on the back and exclaimed: "Hello, Jack! Didn't expect to see you here – thought you'd be looking over things in the vicinity of the Palace."

The words themselves were innocent enough, but – they were spoken in fluent, rapid Spanish and Stewart had shown that he understood!

"*Sapristi!*" hissed the Mexican. "Did you see?" and he bent forward to whisper hurriedly to his companion.

Stewart recovered himself instantly, but the damage had been done.

"Hello, Dawson," he answered in English, trusting that the men at the next table had not noted his slip. "Sit down and have something? Rotten weather, isn't it? And not a lead in sight. These Mexicans seem to be afraid to enter into any contract that ties them up more than a year – and eighteen revolutions can happen in that time."

As Dawson seated himself, Stewart gave him a hasty sign to be careful. Watching the Mexican and his companion out of the corner of his eye, he steered the conversation into harmless channels, but a moment later the pair at the next table called the waiter, gave some whispered instructions, and left.

"What's the matter?" asked Dawson.

"Nothing – except that I involuntarily registered a knowledge of Spanish when you spoke to me just now, and I've spent several months building up a reputation for knowing less about the language than anyone in Mexico City. As luck would have it, there was a couple seated at the next table who were giving me what sounded like the first real dope I've had since I got here. I'll tell you about it later. The question now is to get back to the hotel before that precious pair get in their dirty work. A code message to Washington is all I ask – but, if I'm not mistaken, we are going to have our work cut out for us on the way back."

"Scott! Serious as that, is it?" muttered Dawson. "Well, there are two of us and I'd like to see their whole dam' army try to stop us. Let's go!"

"Wait a minute," counseled Stewart. "There's no real hurry, for they wouldn't dare try to start anything in the open. In case we get separated or – if anything should happen – wire the Department in code that a vessel with a Spanish name – something that begins with 'Eep' – has cleared Hamburg, loaded with guns and ammunition. Expected at Vera Cruz about the twenty-first. Germany's behind the whole plot. Now I'll settle up and we'll move."

But as he reached for his pocketbook a Mexican swaggering along the sidewalk deliberately stumbled against his chair and sent him sprawling. Dawson was on his feet in an instant, his fists clenched and ready for action.

But Stewart had noted that the Mexican had three companions and that one of the men who had occupied the adjoining table was watching the affair from a vantage point half a block away.

With a leap that was catlike in its agility, Stewart seized the swaggering native by the legs in a football tackle, and upset him against his assistants.

"Quick, this way!" he called to Dawson, starting up the street away from the watcher at the far corner. As he ran, his hand slipped into his coat pocket where the small, but extremely efficient, automatic with which all government agents are supplied usually rested. But the gun wasn't there! Apparently it had slipped out in the scuffle a moment before.

Hardly had he realized that he was unarmed before he and Dawson were confronted by five other natives coming from the opposite direction. The meager lighting system of the Mexican capital, however, was rather a help than a detriment, for in the struggle which followed it was practically impossible to tell friend from foe. The two Americans, standing shoulder to shoulder, had the added advantage of teamwork – something which the natives had never learned.

"Don't use your gun if you can help it," Stewart warned. "We don't want the police in on this!"

As he spoke his fist shot out and the leader of the attacking party sprawled in the street. No sound came from Dawson, beyond a grunt, as he landed on the man he had singled out of the bunch. The ten seconds that followed were jammed with action, punctuated with the shrill cries for reinforcements from the Mexicans, and brightened here and there by the dull light from down the street which glinted off the long knives – the favorite weapon of the Latin-American fighter.

Stewart and Dawson realized that they must not only fight, but fight fast. Every second brought closer the arrival of help from the rear, but Dawson waited until he could hear the reinforcements almost upon them before he gave the word to break through. Then —

"Come on, Jack!" he called. "Let's go!"

Heads down, fists moving with piston-like precision, the two Americans plowed their way through. Dawson swore later that he felt at least one rib give under the impact of the blows and he knew that he nursed a sore wrist for days, but Stewart claimed that his energies were concentrated solely on the scrap and that he didn't have time to receive any impression of what was going on. He knew that he had to fight his way out — that it was essential for one of them to reach the telegraph office or the embassy with the news they carried.

It was a case of fight like the devil and trust to luck and the darkness for aid.

Almost before they knew it, they had broken through the trio in front of them and had turned down the Calles Ancha, running in a form that would have done credit to a college track team. Behind them they heard the muffled oaths of their pursuers as they fell over the party they had just left.

"They don't want to attract the police any more than we do," gasped Dawson. "They don't dare shoot!"

But as he spoke there came the z-z-i-pp of a bullet, accompanied by the sharp crack of a revolver somewhere behind them.

"Careful," warned Stewart. "We've got to skirt that street light ahead. Duck and —"

But with that he crumpled up, a bullet through his hip.

Without an instant's hesitation Dawson stooped, swung his companion over his shoulder, and staggered on, his right hand groping for his automatic. Once out of the glare of the arc light, he felt that he would be safe, at least for a moment.

Then, clattering toward them, he heard a sound that spelled safety — one of the open nighthawk cabs that prowl around the streets of the Mexican capital.

Shifting Stewart so that his feet rested on the ground, he wheeled and raked the street behind him with a fusillade from his automatic. There was only a dull mass of whitish clothing some fifty yards away at which to aim, but he knew that the counter-attack would probably gain a few precious seconds of time — time sufficient to stop the cab and to put his plan into operation.

The moment the cab came into the circle of light from the street lamp Dawson dragged his companion toward it, seized the horse's bridle with his free hand and ordered the driver to halt.

Before the cabby had recovered his wits the two Americans were in the vehicle and Dawson had his revolver pressed none too gently into the small of the driver's back. The weapon was empty, but the Mexican didn't know that, and he responded instantly to Dawson's order to turn around and drive "as if seventy devils of Hades were after him!"

Outside of a few stray shots that followed as they disappeared up the street, the drive to the Embassy was uneventful, and, once under the shelter of the American flag, the rest was easy.

Stewart, it developed, had sustained only a flesh wound through the muscles of his hip — painful, but not dangerous. Within ten minutes after he had reached O'Shaughnessy's office he was dictating a code wire to Washington — a cable which stated that a vessel with a Spanish name, commencing with something that sounded like "Eep," had cleared Hamburg on the seventh, loaded with arms and ammunition destined to advance the interests of Mexican revolutionists and to hamper the efforts of the United States to preserve order south of the border.

The wire reached Washington at noon of the following day and was instantly transmitted to Berlin, with instructions to Ambassador Gerard to look into the matter and report immediately.

Vessel in question is probably the *Ypiranga* [stated a code the following morning]. Cleared Hamburg on date mentioned, presumably loaded with grain. Rumors here of large shipment of arms to some Latin American republic.

Practically certain that Wilhelmstrasse is behind the move, but impossible to obtain confirmation. Motive unknown.

Ten minutes after this message had been decoded the newspaper correspondents at the White House noted that a special Cabinet meeting had been called, but no announcement was made of its purpose or of the business transacted, beyond the admission that "the insult to the flag at Tampico had been considered."

Promptly at noon the great wireless station at Arlington flashed a message to Admiral Mayo, in command of the squadron off the Mexican coast. In effect, it read:

Proceed immediately to Vera Cruz. Await arrival of steamer *Ypiranga*, loaded with arms. Prevent landing at any cost. Blockade upon pretext of recent insult to flag. Atlantic Fleet ordered to your support.

"The rest of the story," concluded Quinn, "is a matter of history. How the fleet bottled up the harbor at Vera Cruz, how it was forced to send a landing party ashore under fire, and how seventeen American sailors lost their lives during the guerrilla attack which followed. All that was spread across the front pages of American papers in big black type – but the fact that a steamer named the *Ypiranga* had been held up by the American fleet and forced to anchor at a safe distance offshore, under the guns of the flagship, was given little space. Apparently it was a minor incident – but in reality it was the crux of the whole situation, an indication of Germany's rancor, which was to burst its bounds before four months had passed, another case in which the arm of Uncle Sam had been long enough to stretch halfway across a continent and nip impending disaster."

"But," I inquired, as he paused, "what became of Dawson and Stewart?"

"That I don't know," replied Quinn. "The last time I heard of Jack he had a captain's commission in France and was following up his feud with the Hun that started in Mexico City four months before the rest of the world dreamed of war. Dawson, I believe, is still in the Department, and rendered valuable assistance in combating German propaganda in Chile and Peru. He'll probably be rewarded with a consular job in some out-of-the-way hole, for, now that the war is over, the organization to which he belongs will gradually dwindle to its previous small proportions.

"Strange, wasn't it, how that pair stumbled across one of the first tentacles of the World War in front of a café in Mexico City? That's one beauty of government detective work – you never know when the monotony is going to be blown wide open by the biggest thing you ever happened upon.

"There was little Mary McNiless, who turned up the clue which prevented an explosion, compared to which the Black Tom affair would have been a Sunday-school party. She never dreamed that she would prevent the loss of millions of dollars' worth of property and at least a score of lives, but she did – without moving from her desk."

"How?" I asked.

But Quinn yawned, looked at his watch, and said: "That's entirely too long a story to spin right now. It's past my bedtime, and Mrs. Quinn's likely to be fussy if I'm not home by twelve at least. She says that now I have an office job she can at least count on my being round to guard the house – something that she never could do before. So let's leave Mary for another time. Goodnight" – and he was off.

IV THE CLUE ON SHELF 45

"Of course, it is possible that patriotism might have prompted Mary McNiless to locate the clue which prevented an explosion that would have seriously hampered the munitions industry of the United States – but the fact remains that she did it principally because she was in love with Dick Walters, and Dick happened to be in the Secret Service. It was one case where Cupid scored over Mars."

Bill Quinn eased the game leg which he won as the trophy of a counterfeiting raid some years before into a more comfortable position, reached for his pipe and tobacco pouch, and settled himself for another reminiscence of the Service with which he had formerly been actively connected.

"Mary was – and doubtless still is – one of those red-headed, blue-eyed Irish beauties whom nature has peppered with just enough freckles to make them alluring, evidences that the sun itself couldn't help kissing her. But, from all I've been able to gather, the sun was in a class by itself. Until Dick Walters came upon the scene, Miss McNiless held herself strictly aloof from masculine company and much preferred to spend an evening with her books than to take a trip to Coney or any of the other resorts where a girl's kisses pass as current coin in payment for three or four hours' outing.

"Dick was just the kind of chap that would have appealed to Mary, or to 'most any other girl, for that matter. Maybe you remember him. He used to be at the White House during Taft's regime, but they shifted most of the force soon after Wilson came in and Dick was sent out to the Coast on an opium hunt that kept him busy for more than a year. In fact, he came east just in time to be assigned to the von Ewald case – and, incidentally, to fall foul of Mary and Cupid, a pair that you couldn't tie, much less beat."

The von Ewald case [Quinn continued, after pausing a moment to repack his pipe] was one of the many exploits of the Secret Service that never got in the papers. To be strictly truthful, it wasn't as much a triumph for the S. S. as it was for Mary McNiless – and, besides, we weren't at war with Germany at that time, so it had to be kept rather dark.

But Germany was at war with us. You remember the Black Tom explosion in August, nineteen sixteen? Well, if the plans of von Ewald and his associates hadn't been frustrated by a little red-headed girl with exceptional powers of observation, there would have been a detonation in Wilmington, Delaware, that would have made the Black Tom affair, with its damage of thirty millions of dollars, sound like the college yell of a deaf-and-dumb institute.

As far back as January, nineteen sixteen, the Secret Service knew that there were a number of Germans in New York who desired nothing so much as to hinder the munitions industry of the United States, despite the fact that we were a neutral nation.

From Harry Newton, the leader in the second plot to destroy the Welland Canal, and from Paul Seib, who was implicated in the attempt to destroy shipping at Hoboken, they forced the information that the conspirators received their orders and drew their pay from a man of many aliases, known to his associates as "Number eight fifty-nine" and occasionally, to the world at large, as "von Ewald."

This much was known in Washington – but, when you came to analyze the information, it didn't amount to a whole lot. It's one thing to know that some one is plotting murder and arson on a wholesale scale, but discovering the identity of that individual is an entirely different proposition, one which called for all the finesse and obstinacy for which the governmental detective services are famous.

Another factor that complicated the situation was that speed was essential. The problem was entirely different from a counterfeiting or smuggling case, where you can be content to let the people on the other side of the table make as many moves as they wish, with the practical certainty that you'll land them sooner or later. "Give them plenty of rope and they'll land in Leavenworth" is a favorite

axiom in the Service – but here you had to conserve your rope to the uttermost. Every day that passed meant that some new plot was that much nearer completion – that millions of dollars in property and the lives of no-one-knew-how-many people were still in danger.

So the order went forward from the headquarters of the Service, "Get the man known as von Ewald and get him quick!"

Secret Service men, Postal inspectors, and Department of Justice agents were called in from all parts of the country and rushed to New York, until the metropolis looked like the headquarters of a convention of governmental detectives. Grogan, the chap that landed Perry, the master-counterfeiter, was there, as were George MacMasters and Sid Shields, who prevented the revolution in Cuba three or four years ago. Jimmy Reynolds was borrowed from the Internal Revenue Bureau, and Althouse, who spoke German like a native, was brought up from the border where he had been working on a propaganda case just across the line.

There must have been forty men turned loose on this assignment alone, and, in the course of the search for von Ewald, there were a number of other developments scarcely less important than the main issue. At least two of these – the Trenton taxicab tangle and the affair of the girl at the switchboard – are exploits worthy of separate mention.

But, in spite of the great array of detective talent, no one could get a line on von Ewald.

In April, when Dick Walters returned from the Coast, the other men in the Service were frankly skeptical as to whether there was a von Ewald at all. They had come to look upon him as a myth, a bugaboo. They couldn't deny that there must be some guiding spirit to the Teutonic plots, but they rather favored the theory that several men, rather than one, were to blame.

Walters' instructions were just like the rest – to go to New York and stick on the job until the German conspirator was apprehended.

"Maybe it's one man, maybe there're half a dozen," the chief admitted, "but we've got to nail 'em. The very fact that they haven't started anything of consequence since the early part of the year would appear to point to renewed activity very shortly. It's up to you and the other men already in New York to prevent the success of any of these plots."

Walters listened patiently to all the dope that had been gathered and then figured, as had every new man, that it was up to him to do a little sleuthing of his own.

The headquarters of the German agents was supposed to be somewhere in Greenwich Village, on one of those half-grown alleys that always threatens to meet itself coming back. But more than a score of government operatives had combed that part of the town without securing a trace of anything tangible. On the average of once a night the phone at headquarters would ring and some one at the other end would send in a hurry call for help up in the Bronx or in Harlem or some other distant part of the city where he thought he had turned up a clue. The men on duty would leap into the machine that always waited at the curb and fracture every speed law ever made – only to find, when they arrived, that it was a false alarm.

Finally, after several weeks of that sort of thing, conditions commenced to get on Dick's nerves.

"I'm going to tackle this thing on my own," he announced. "Luck is going to play as much of a part in landing von Ewald as anything else – and luck never hunted with more than one man. Good-by! See you fellows later."

But it was a good many weeks – August, to be precise – before the men in the Federal Building had the opportunity of talking to Walters. He would report over the phone, of course, and drop down there every few days – but he'd only stay long enough to find out if there was any real news or any orders from Washington. Then he'd disappear uptown.

"Dick's sure got a grouch these days," was the comment that went around after Walters had paid one of his flying visits.

"Yeh," grunted Barry, who was on duty that night, "either the von Ewald case's got on his nerves or he's found a girl that can't see him."

Neither supposition missed the mark very far.

Walters was getting sick and tired of the apparently fruitless chase after an elusive German. He had never been known to flinch in the face of danger – often went out of his way to find it, in fact – but this constant search for a man whom nobody knew, a man of whom there wasn't the slightest description, was nerve-racking, to say the least.

Then, too, he had met Mary McNillless.

He'd wandered into the Public Library one evening just before closing time, and, like many another man, had fallen victim to Mary's red hair and Mary's Irish eyes. But a brick wall was a soft proposition compared to Mary McNillless. Snubbing good-looking young men who thought that the tailors were missing an excellent model was part of the day's work with the little library girl – though she secretly admitted to herself that this one was a bit above the average.

Dick didn't get a rise that night, though, or for some days after. Every evening at seven found him at the desk over which Miss McNillless presided, framing some almost intelligent question about books in order to prolong the conversation. Mary would answer politely and – that was all.

But, almost imperceptibly, a bond of friendship sprang up between them. Maybe it was the fact that Dick's mother had been Irish, too, or possibly it was because he admitted to himself that this girl was different from the rest, and, admitting it, laid the foundation for a deep-souled respect that couldn't help but show in his manner.

Within the month Dick was taking her home, and in six weeks they were good pals, bumming around to queer, out-of-the-way restaurants and planning outings which Dick, in his heart, knew could never materialize – not until von Ewald had been run to cover, at any rate.

Several times Mary tried to find out her companion's profession – diplomatically, of course, but nevertheless she was curious. Naturally, Dick couldn't tell her. Said he had "just finished a job on the Coast and was taking a vacation in New York." But Mary had sense enough to know that he wasn't at leisure. Also that he was working on something that kept his mind constantly active – for several times he had excused himself in a hurry and then returned, anywhere from half an hour to an hour later, with a rather crestfallen expression.

After they had reached the "Dick and Mary" stage she came right out one night and asked him.

"Hon," he told her, "that's one thing that I've got to keep from you for a while. It's nothing that you would be ashamed of, though, but something that will make you mighty proud. At least," he added, "It'll make you proud if I don't fall down on the job almighty hard. Meanwhile, all I can do is to ask you to trust me. Will you?"

The tips of her fingers rested on the back of his hand for just a moment before she said, "You know I will, Dick" – and neither of them mentioned the subject from that time on.

On the night of the Black Tom explosion, early in August, Dick didn't show up at the Library at the usual hour, and, while this didn't worry Mary, because it had happened several times before, she began to be annoyed when three nights passed the same way. Of course, she had no way of knowing that the Service had received a tip from a stool pigeon on the pay roll of the New York police force that "a bunch of Germans were planning a big explosion of some kind" just a few hours before the earth rocked with the force of the blow-up in Jersey. Every government operative in the city had been informed of the rumor, but few of them had taken it seriously and not one had any reason to expect that the plot would culminate so close to New York. But the echo of the first blast had hardly died away before there were a dozen agents on the spot, weaving a network around the entire district. All they got for their pains, however, was a few suspects who very evidently didn't know a thing.

So it was a very tired and disgusted Dick who entered the Library four nights later and almost shambled up to Mary's desk.

"I'll be off duty in half an hour," she told him. "From the way you look, you need a little comforting."

"I do that," he admitted. "Don't make me wait any longer than you have to," and he amused himself by glancing over the late seekers after knowledge.

When they had finally seated themselves in a cozy corner of a little restaurant in the upper Forties, Dick threw caution to the winds and told Mary all about his troubles.

"I haven't the least business to do it," he confessed, "and if the chief found it out I'd be bounced so fast that it would make my head swim. But, in the first place, I want you to marry me, and I know you wouldn't think of doing that unless you knew something more about me."

There was just the flicker of a smile around Mary's mouth as she said, almost perfunctorily, "No, of course not!" But her intuition told her that this wasn't the time to joke, and, before Walters could go on, she added, "I know you well enough, Dick, not to worry about that end of it."

So Walters told her everything from the beginning – and it didn't take more than five minutes at that. Outside of the fact that his people lived in Des Moines, that he had been in the Secret Service for eight years, and that he hadn't been able to do a thing toward the apprehension of a certain German spy that the government was extremely anxious to locate, there was pitifully little to tell.

"The whole thing," he concluded, "came to a head the other night – the night I didn't show up. We knew that something was going to break, somewhere, but we couldn't discover where until it was too late to prevent the explosion across the river. Now that they've gotten away with that, they'll probably lay their lines for something even bigger."

"Well, now that I've told you, what d'you think?"

"You mean you'd like to marry me?" Mary asked with a smile.

"I don't know how to put it any plainer," Dick admitted – and what followed caused the waiter to wheel around and suddenly commence dusting off a table that already was bright enough to see your face in.

"There wasn't the slightest clue left after the Black Tom affair?" Mary asked, as she straightened her hat.

"Not one. We did find two of the bombs that hadn't exploded – devilishly clever arrangements, with a new combination of chemicals. Something was evidently wrong with the mixture, though, for they wouldn't go off, even when our experts started to play with them. The man who made them evidently wasn't quite sure of his ground. But there wasn't a thing about the bombs themselves that would provide any indication of where they came from."

"The man who made them must have had a pretty thorough knowledge of chemistry," Mary mused.

"Mighty near perfect," admitted Walters. "At least six exploded on time, and, from what I understand, they were loaded to the muzzle with a mixture that no one but an expert would dare handle."

"And," continued Mary, with just a hint of excitement in her voice, "the bomb-maker would continue to investigate the subject. He would want to get the latest information, the most recent books, the –"

"What are you driving at?" Walters interrupted.

"Just this," and Mary leaned across the table so that there was no possibility of being overheard. "We girls have a good deal of time on our hands, so we get into the habit of making conjectures and forming theories about the 'regulars' – the people who come into the Library often enough for us to know them by sight.

"Up to a month ago there was a man who dropped into the reference room nearly every day to consult books from Shelf Forty-five. Naturally he came up to my desk, and, as he usually arrived during the slack periods, I had plenty of time to study him. Maybe it was because I had been reading Lombroso, or possibly it's because I am just naturally observant, but I noticed that, in addition to each of his ears being practically lobeless, one of them was quite pointed at the top – almost like a fox's.

"For a week he didn't show up, and then one day another man came in and asked for a book from Shelf Forty-five. Just as he turned away I had a shock. Apparently he wasn't in the least like the other man in anything save height – but neither of his ears had any lobes to speak of and the top of them was pointed! When he returned the book I looked him over pretty thoroughly and came to the conclusion that, in spite of the fact that his general appearance differed entirely from the other man's, they were really one and the same!"

"But what," grumbled Walters, "has that to do with the Black Tom explosion?"

"The last time this man came to the Library," said Mary, "was two days before the night you failed to arrive – two days before the explosion. And – Do you know what books are kept on Shelf Forty-five?"

"No. What?"

"The latest works on the chemistry of explosives!"

Walters sat up with a jerk that threatened to overthrow the table.

"Mary," he said, in a whisper, "I've a hunch that you've succeeded where all the rest of us fell down! The disguises and the constant reference to books on explosives are certainly worth looking into. What name did this man give?"

"Names," she corrected. "I don't recall what they were or the addresses, either. But it would be easy to find them on the cards. We don't have very many calls for books from Shelf Forty-five."

"It doesn't matter, though," and Walters slipped back into his disconsolate mood. "He wouldn't leave a lead as open as that, of course."

"No, certainly not," agreed Mary. "But the last time he was there he asked for Professor Stevens's new book. It hadn't come in then, but I told him we expected it shortly. So, unless you men have scared him off, he'll be back in a day or two – possibly in a new disguise. Why don't you see the librarian, get a place as attendant in the reference room, and I'll tip you off the instant I spot that pointed ear. That's one thing he can't hide!"

The next morning there was a new employee in the reference room. No one knew where he came from and no one – save the librarian and Mary McNiless – knew what he was there for, because his principal occupation appeared to be lounging around inconspicuously in the neighborhood of the information desk. There he stayed for three days, wondering whether this clue, like all the rest, would dissolve into thin air.

About five o'clock on the afternoon of the third day a man strolled up to Mary's desk and asked if Professor Stevens's book had come in yet. It was reposing at that moment on Shelf Forty-five, as Mary well knew, but she said she'd see, and left the room, carefully arranging her hair at the back of her neck with her left hand – a signal which she and Dick had agreed upon the preceding evening.

Before she returned the new attendant had vanished, but Dick Walters, in his usual garb, was loitering around the only entrance to the reference room, watching the suspect out of the corner of his eye.

"I'm sorry," Mary reported, "but the Stevens book won't be in until to-morrow," and she was barely able to keep the anxiety out of her voice as she spoke.

Had Dick gotten her signal? Would he be able to trail his man? Could he capture him without being injured? These and a score of other questions rushed through her mind as she saw the German leave the room. Once outside – well, she'd have to wait for Dick to tell her what happened then.

The man who was interested in the chemistry of explosives apparently wasn't in the least afraid of being followed, for he took a bus uptown, alighted at Eighty-third Street, and vanished into one of the innumerable small apartment houses in that section of the city. Walters kept close behind him, and he entered the lobby of the apartment house in time to hear his quarry ascending to the fourth floor. Then he signaled to the four men who had followed him up the Avenue in a government-owned machine – men who had been stationed outside the Library in the event of just such an occurrence – and instructed two of them to guard the rear of the house, while the other two remained in front.

"I'm going to make this haul myself," Walters stated, "but I want you boys to cover up in case anything happens to me. No matter what occurs, don't let him get away. Shoot first and ask questions afterward!" and he had re-entered the house almost before he finished speaking.

On the landing at the third floor he paused long enough to give the men at the rear a chance to get located. Then – a quick ring at the bell on the fourth floor and he waited for action.

Nothing happened. Another ring – and still no response.

As he pressed the button for the third time the door swung slowly inward, affording only a glimpse of a dark, uninviting hall. But, once he was inside, the door closed silently and he heard a bolt slipped into place. Simultaneously a spot light, arranged over the doorway, flashed on and Dick was almost dazzled by the glare. Out of the darkness came the guttural inquiry:

"What do you want?"

"Not a thing in the world," replied Walters, "except to know if a man named Simpson lives here."

"No," came the voice, "he does not. Get out!"

"Sure I will if you'll pull back that bolt. What's the idea, anyhow? You're as mysterious as if you were running a bomb factory or something – "

As he spoke he ducked, for if the words had the effect he hoped, the other would realize that he was cornered and attempt to escape.

A guttural German oath, followed by a rapid movement of the man's hand toward his hip pocket was the reply. In a flash Dick slipped forward, bending low to avoid the expected attack, and seized the German in a half nelson that defied movement. Backing out of the circle of light, he held the helpless man in front of him – as a shelter in case of an attack from other occupants of the apartment – and called for assistance. The crash of glass at the rear told him that reinforcements had made their way up the fire escape and had broken in through the window. A moment later came the sound of feet on the stairs and the other two operatives were at the door, revolvers drawn and ready for action.

But there wasn't any further struggle. Von Ewald – or whatever his real name was, for that was never decided – was alone and evidently realized that the odds were overwhelming. Meekly, almost placidly, he allowed the handcuffs to be slipped over his wrists and stood by as the Secret Service men searched the apartment. Not a line or record was found to implicate anyone else – but what they did discover was a box filled with bombs precisely like those picked up on the scene of the Black Tom explosion, proof sufficient to send the German to the penitentiary for ten years – for our laws, unfortunately, do not permit of the death penalty for spies unless caught red-handed by the military authorities.

That he was the man for whom they were searching – the mysterious "No. 859" – was apparent from the fact that papers concealed in his desk contained full details as to the arrangement of the Nemours plant at Wilmington, Delaware, with a dozen red dots indicative of the best places to plant bombs. Of his associates and the manner in which he managed his organization there wasn't the slightest trace. But the Black Tom explosion, if you recall, was the last big catastrophe of its kind in America – and the capture of von Ewald was the reason that more of the German plots didn't succeed.

The Treasury Department realized this fact when Mary McNilless, on the morning of the day she was to be married to Dick Walters, U. S. S. S., received a very handsome chest of silver, including a platter engraved, "To Miss Mary McNilless, whose cleverness and keen perception saved property valued at millions of dollars."

No one ever found out who sent it, but it's a safe bet that the order came from Washington by way of Wilmington, where the Nemours plant still stands – thanks to the quickness of Mary's Irish eyes.

V

PHYLLIS DODGE, SMUGGLER EXTRAORDINARY

Bill Quinn tossed aside his evening paper and, cocking his feet upon a convenient chair, remarked that, now that peace was finally signed, sealed, and delivered, there ought to be a big boom in the favorite pastime of the idle rich.

"Meaning what?" I inquired.

"Smuggling, of course," said Quinn, who only retired from Secret Service when an injury received in action forced him to do so.

"Did you ever travel on a liner when four out of every five people on board didn't admit that they were trying to beat the customs officials one way or another – and the only reason the other one didn't follow suit was because he knew enough to keep his mouth shut. That's how Uncle Sam's detectives pick up a lot of clues. The amateur crook never realizes that silence is golden and that oftentimes speech leads to a heavy fine.

"Now that the freedom of the seas is an accomplished fact the whole crew of would-be smugglers will doubtless get to work again, only to be nabbed in port. Inasmuch as ocean travel has gone up with the rest of the cost of living, it'll probably be a sport confined to the comparatively rich, for a couple of years anyhow.

"It was different in the old days. Every steamer that came in was loaded to the eyes and you never knew when you were going to spot a hidden necklace or a packet of diamonds that wasn't destined to pay duty. There were thrills to the game, too, believe me.

"Why, just take the case of Phyllis Dodge..."

Mrs. Dodge [Quinn continued, after he had packed his pipe to a condition where it was reasonably sure to remain lighted for some time] was, theoretically at least, a widow. Her full name, as it appeared on many passenger lists during the early part of 1913, was Mrs. Mortimer C. Dodge, of Cleveland, Ohio. When the customs officials came to look into the matter they weren't able to find anyone in Cleveland who knew her, but then it's no penal offense to give the purser a wrong address, or even a wrong name, for that matter.

While there may have been doubts about Mrs. Dodge's widowhood – or whether she had ever been married, for that matter – there could be none about her beauty. In the language of the classics, she was there. Black hair, brown eyes, a peaches-and-cream complexion that came and went while you watched it, and a figure that would have made her fortune in the Follies. Joe Gregory said afterward that trailing her was one of the easiest things he had ever done.

To get the whole story of Phyllis and her extraordinary cleverness – extraordinary because it was so perfectly obvious – we'll have to cut back a few months before she came on the scene.

For some time the Treasury Department had been well aware that a number of precious stones, principally pearl necklaces, were being smuggled into the country. Agents abroad – the department maintains a regular force in Paris, London, Rotterdam, and other European points, you know – had reported the sale of the jewels and they had turned up a few weeks later in New York or Chicago. But the Customs Service never considers it wise to trace stones back from their owners on this side. There are too many ramifications to any well-planned smuggling scheme, and it is too easy for some one to claim that he had found them in a long-forgotten chest in the attic or some such story as that. The burden of proof rests upon the government in a case of this kind and, except in the last extremity, it always tries to follow the chase from the other end – to nab the smuggler in the act and thus build up a jury-proof case.

Reports of the smuggling cases had been filtered into the department half a dozen times in as many months, and the matter finally got on the chief's nerves to such a degree that he determined to thrash it out if it took every man he had.

In practically every case the procedure was the same – though the only principals known were different each time.

Rotterdam, for example, would report: "Pearl necklace valued at \$40,000, sold to-day to man named Silverburg. Have reason to believe it is destined for States" – and then would follow a technical description of the necklace. Anywhere from six weeks to three months later the necklace would turn up in the possession of a jeweler who bore a shady reputation. Sometimes the article wouldn't appear at all, which might have been due to the fact that they weren't brought into this country or that the receivers had altered them beyond recognition. However, the European advices pointed to the latter supposition – which didn't soothe the chief's nerves the least bit.

Finally, along in the middle of the spring of nineteen thirteen, there came a cable from Paris announcing the sale of the famous Yquem emerald – a gorgeous stone that you couldn't help recognizing once you got the description. The purchaser was reported to be an American named Williamson. He paid cash for it, so his references and his antecedents were not investigated at the time.

Sure enough, it wasn't two months later when a report came in from Chicago that a pork-made millionaire had added to his collection a stone which tallied to the description of the Yquem emerald.

"Shall we go after it from this end, Chief?" inquired one of the men on the job in Washington. "We can make the man who bought it tell us where he got it and then sweat the rest of the game out of the go-betweens."

"Yes," snorted the chief, "and he laughed out of court on some trumped-up story framed by a well-paid lawyer. Not a chance! I'm going to land those birds and land 'em with the goods. We can't afford to take any chances with this crowd. They've evidently got money and brains, a combination that you've got to stay awake nights to beat. No – we'll nail 'em in New York just as they're bringing the stones in."

"Send a wire to Gregory to get on the job at once and tell New York to turn loose every man they've got – though they've been working on the case long enough, Heaven knows!"

The next morning when Gregory and his society manner strolled into the customhouse in New York he found the place buzzing. Evidently the instructions from Washington had been such as to make the entire force fear for their jobs unless the smuggling combination was broken up quickly. It didn't take Joe very long to get the details. They weren't many and he immediately discarded the idea of possible collusion between the buyers of the stones abroad. It looked to be a certainty on the face of it, but, once you had discovered that, what good did it do you? It wasn't possible to jail a man just because he bought some jewels in Europe – and, besides, the orders from Washington were very clear that the case was to be handled strictly from this side – at least, the final arrest was to be made on American soil, to avoid extradition complications and the like.

So when Joe got all the facts they simply were that some valuable jewels had been purchased in Europe and had turned up in America, without going through the formality of visiting the customhouse, anywhere from six weeks to three months later.

"Not much to work on," grumbled Gregory, "and I suppose, as usual, that the chief will be as peevish as Hades if we don't nab the guilty party within the week."

"It's more than possible," admitted one of the men who had handled the case.

Gregory studied the dates on which the jewels had been purchased and those on which they had been located in this country for a few moments in silence. Then:

"Get me copies of the passenger lists of every steamer that has docked here in the past year," he directed. "Of course it's possible that these things might have been landed at Boston or Philadelphia, but New York's the most likely port."

When the lists had been secured Gregory stuffed them into his suit case and started for the door.

"Where you going?" inquired McMahon, the man in charge of the New York office.

"Up to the Adirondacks for a few days," Gregory replied.

"What's the idea? Think the stuff is being brought over by airplane and landed inland? Liners don't dock upstate, you know."

"No," said Gregory, "but that's where I'm going to dock until I can digest this stuff," and he tapped his suit case. "Somewhere in this bunch of booklets there's a clue to this case and it's up to me to spot it. Good-by."

Five days later when he sauntered back into the New York office the suit case was surprisingly light. Apparently every one of the passenger lists had vanished. As a matter of fact, they had been boiled down to three names which were carefully inscribed in Joe's notebook.

"Did you pick up any jewels in the Catskills?" was the question that greeted him when he entered.

"Wasn't in the Catskills," he growled. "Went up to a camp in the Adirondacks – colder'n blazes. Any more stuff turn up?"

"No, but a wire came from Washington just after you left to watch out for a hundred-thousand-dollar string of pearls sold at a private auction in London last week to an American named –"

"I don't care what *his* name was," Gregory cut in. "What was the date they were sold?"

"The sixteenth."

Gregory glanced at the calendar.

"And to-day is the twenty-second," he mused. "What boats are due in the next three days?"

"The *Cretic* docks this afternoon and the *Tasmania* ought to get in to-morrow. That'll be all until the end of the week."

"Right!" snapped Gregory. "Don't let a soul off the *Cretic* until I've had a look at her passenger list. It's too late to go down the harbor now, but not a person's to get off that ship until I've had a chance to look 'em over. Also cable for a copy of the *Tasmania's* passenger list. Hurry it up!"

Less than ten minutes after he had slipped on board the *Cretic*, however, Gregory gave the signal which permitted the gangplank to be lowered and the passengers to proceed as usual – except for the fact that the luggage of everyone and the persons of not a few were searched with more than the average carefulness. But not a trace of the pearls was found, as Joe had anticipated. A careful inspection of the passenger list and a few moments with the purser had convinced him that none of his three suspects were on board.

Shortly after he returned to the office, the list of the *Tasmania's* passengers began to come over the cables. Less than half a page had been received when Gregory uttered a sudden exclamation, reached for his notebook, compared a name in it with one which appeared on the cabled report, and indulged in the luxury of a deep-throated chuckle.

"Greg's got a nibble somewhere," commented one of the bystanders.

"Yes," admitted his companion, "but landin' the fish is a different matter. Whoever's on the other end of that line is a mighty cagy individual."

But, though he undoubtedly overheard the remark, Gregory didn't seem to be the least bit worried. In fact, his hat was at a more rakish angle than usual and his cane fairly whistled through the air as he wandered up the Avenue half an hour later.

The next the customs force heard of him was when he boarded the quarantine boat the next morning, clambering on the liner a little later with all the skill of a pilot.

"You have a passenger on board by the name of Dodge," he informed the purser, after he had shown his badge. "Mrs. Mortimer C. Dodge. What do you know about her?"

"Not a thing in the world," said the purser, "except that she is a most beautiful and apparently attractive woman. Crossed with us once before –"

"Twice," corrected Gregory. "Came over in January and went right back."

"That's right," said the purser, "so she did. I'd forgotten that. But, beyond that fact, there isn't anything that I can add."

"Seem to be familiar with anyone on board?"

"Not particularly. Mixes with the younger married set and I've noticed her on deck with the Mortons quite frequently. Probably met them on her return trip last winter. They were along then, if I remember rightly."

"Thanks," said the customs operative. "You needn't mention anything about my inquiries, of course," and he mixed with the throng of newspaper reporters who were picking up news in various sections of the big vessel.

When the *Tasmania* docked, Gregory was the first one off.

"Search Mrs. Mortimer C. Dodge to the skin," he directed the matron. "Take down her hair, tap the heels of her shoes, and go through all the usual stunts, but be as gentle as you can about it. Say that we've received word that some uncut diamonds – not pearls, mind you – are concealed on the *Tasmania* and that orders have been given to go over everybody thoroughly. Pass the word along the line to give out the same information, so she won't be suspicious. I don't think you'll find anything, but you never can tell."

At that, Joe was right. The matron didn't locate a blessed thing out of the way. Mrs. Dodge had brought in a few dutiable trinkets, but they were all down on her declaration, and within the hour she was headed uptown in a taxi, accompanied by a maid who had met her as she stepped out of the customs office.

Not far behind them trailed another taxi, top up and Gregory's eyes glued to the window behind the chauffeur.

The first machine finally drew up at the Astor, and Mrs. Dodge and the maid went in, followed by a pile of luggage which had been searched until it was a moral certainty that not a needle would have been concealed in it.

Gregory waited until they were out of sight and then followed.

In answer to his inquiries at the desk he learned that Mrs. Dodge had stopped at the hotel several times before and the house detective assured him that there was nothing suspicious about her conduct.

"How about the maid?" inquired Gregory.

"Don't know a thing about her, either, except that she is the same one she had before. Pretty little thing, too – though not as good-looking as her mistress."

For the next three days Joe hung around the hotel or followed the lady from the *Tasmania* wherever she went. Something in the back of his head – call it intuition or a hunch or whatever you please, but it's the feeling that a good operative gets when he's on the right trail – told him that he was "warm," as the kids say. Appearances seemed to deny that fact. Mrs. Dodge went only to the most natural places – a few visits to the stores, a couple to fashionable modistes and milliners, and some drives through the Park, always accompanied by her maid and always in the most sedate and open manner.

But on the evening of the third day the house detective tipped Joe off that his prey was leaving in the morning.

"Guess she's going back to Europe," reported the house man. "Gave orders to have a taxi ready at nine and her trunks taken down to the docks before then. Better get busy if you want to land her."

"I'm not ready for that just yet," Gregory admitted with a scowl.

When Mrs. Dodge's taxi drove off the following morning Joe wasn't far away, and, acting on orders which he had delivered over the phone, no less than half a dozen operatives watched the lady and the maid very closely when they reached the dock.

Not a thing came of it, however. Both of them went to the stateroom which had been reserved and the maid remained to help with the unpacking until the "All-ashore-that-'re-going-ashore" was bellowed through the boat. Then she left and stood on the pier until the ship had cleared the dock.

"It beats me," muttered Gregory. "But I'm willing to gamble my job that I'm right." And that night he wired to Washington to keep a close lookout for the London pearls, adding that he felt certain they would turn up before long.

"In that case," muttered the chief at the other end of the wire, "why in Heaven's name didn't he get them when they came in?"

Sure enough, not a fortnight had passed before St. Louis reported that a string of pearls, perfectly matched, answering to the description of the missing jewels, had been offered for sale there through private channels.

The first reaction was a telegram to Gregory that fairly burned the wires, short but to the point. "Either the man who smuggled that necklace or your job in ten days," it read.

And Gregory replied, "Give me three weeks and you'll have one or the other."

Meanwhile he had been far from inactive. Still playing his hunch that Phyllis Dodge had something to do with the smuggling game, he had put in time cultivating the only person on this side that appeared to know her – the maid.

It was far from a thankless task, for Alyce – she spelled it with a "y" – was pretty and knew it. Furthermore, she appeared to be entirely out of her element in a cheap room on Twenty-fourth Street. Most of the time she spent in wandering up the Avenue, and it was there that Gregory made her acquaintance – through the expedient of bumping her bag out of her hands and restoring it with one of his courtly bows. The next minute he was strolling alongside, remarking on the beauty of the weather.

But, although he soon got to know Alyce well enough to take her to the theater and to the cabarets, it didn't seem to get him anywhere. She was perfectly frank about her position. Said she was a hair dresser by trade and that she acted as lady's maid to a Mrs. Dodge, who spent the better part of her time abroad.

"In fact," she said, "Mrs. Dodge is only here three or four days every two months or so."

"And she pays you for your time in between?"

"Oh yes," Alyce replied; "she's more than generous."

"I should say she was," Gregory thought to himself – but he considered it best to change the subject.

During the days that followed, Joe exerted every ounce of his personality in order to make the best possible impression. Posing as a man who had made money in the West, he took Alyce everywhere and treated her royally. Finally, when he considered the time ripe, he injected a little love into the equation and hinted that he thought it was about time to settle down and that he appeared to have found the proper person to settle with.

But there, for the first time, Alyce balked. She didn't refuse him, but she stated in so many words that she had a place that suited her for the time being, and that, until the fall, at least, she preferred to keep on with it.

"That suits me all right," declared Gregory. "Take your time about it. Meanwhile we'll continue to be good friends and trail around together, eh?"

"Certainly," said Alyce, "er – that is – until Tuesday."

"Tuesday?" inquired Joe. "What's coming off Tuesday?"

"Mrs. Dodge will arrive on the *Atlantic*," was the reply, "and I'll have to be with her for three days at least."

"Three days – " commenced Gregory, and halted himself. It wasn't wise to show too much interest. But that night he called the chief on long distance and inquired if there had been any recent reports of suspicious jewel sales abroad. "Yes," came the voice from Washington, "pearls again. Loose ones, this time. And your three weeks' grace is up at noon Saturday." The click that followed as the receiver hung up was finality itself.

The same procedure, altered in a few minor details, was followed when Mrs. Dodge landed. Again she was searched to the skin; again her luggage was gone over with microscopic care, and again nothing was found.

This time she stayed at the Knickerbocker, but Alyce was with her as usual.

Deprived of his usual company and left to his own devices, Gregory took a long walk up the Drive and tried to thrash out the problem.

"Comes over on a different boat almost every trip," he thought, "so that eliminates collusion with any of the crew. Doesn't stay at the same hotel two times running, so there's nothing there. Has the same maid and always returns – "

Then it was that motorists on Riverside Drive were treated to the sight of a young and extremely prepossessing man, dressed in the height of fashion, throwing his hat in the air and uttering a yell that could be heard for blocks. After which he disappeared hurriedly in the direction of the nearest drug store.

A hasty search through the phone book gave him the number he wanted – the offices of the Black Star line.

"Is Mr. MacPherson, the purser of the *Atlantic*, there?" he inquired. Then: "Hello! Mr. MacPherson? This is Gregory, Customs Division. You remember me, don't you? Worked on the Maitland diamond case with you two years ago... Wonder if you could tell me something I want to know – is Mrs. Mortimer C. Dodge booked to go back with you to-morrow?.. She is? What's the number of her stateroom? And – er – what was the number of the room she had coming over?.. I thank you."

If the motorists whom Gregory had startled on the Drive had seen him emerge from the phone booth they would have marveled at the look of keen satisfaction and relief that was spread over his face. The cat that swallowed the canary was tired of life, compared with Joe at that moment.

Next morning the Customs operatives were rather surprised to see Gregory stroll down to the *Atlantic* dock about ten o'clock.

"Thought you were somewhere uptown on the chief's pet case," said one of them.

"So I was," answered Joe. "But that's practically cleaned up."

With that he went aboard, and no one saw him until just before the "All-ashore" call. Then he took up his place beside the gangplank, with three other men placed near by in case of accident.

"Follow my lead," he directed. "I'll speak to the girl. Two of you stick here to make certain that she doesn't get away, and you, Bill, beat it on board then and tell the captain that the boat's not to clear until we give the word. We won't delay him more than ten minutes at the outside."

When Alyce came down the gangplank a few minutes later, in the midst of people who had been saying good-by to friends and relatives, she spotted Joe waiting for her, and started to move hurriedly away. Gregory caught up with her before she had gone a dozen feet.

"Good morning, Alyce," he said. "Thought I'd come down to meet you. What've you got in the bag there?" indicating her maid's handbag.

"Not – not a thing," said the girl, flushing. Just then the matron joined the party, as previously arranged, and Joe's tone took on its official hardness.

"Hurry up and search her! We don't want to keep the boat any longer than we have to."

Less than a minute later the matron thrust her head out of the door long enough to report: "We found 'em – the pearls. She had 'em in the front of her dress."

Gregory was up the gangplank in a single bound. A moment later he was knocking at the door of Mrs. Dodge's stateroom. The instant the knob turned he was inside, informing Phyllis that she was under arrest on a charge of bringing jewels into the United States without the formality of paying duty. Of course, the lady protested – but the *Atlantic* sailed, less than ten minutes behind schedule time, without her.

Promptly at twelve the phone on the desk of the chief of the Customs Division in Washington buzzed noisily.

"Gregory speaking," came through the receiver. "My time's up – and I've got the party you want. Claims to be from Cleveland and sails under the name of Mrs. Mortimer C. Dodge – first name Phyllis. She's confessed and promises to turn state's evidence if we'll go light with her."

"That," added Quinn, "was the finish of Mrs. Dodge, so far as the government was concerned. In order to land the whole crew – the people who were handling the stuff on this side as well as the ones who were mixed up in the scheme abroad – they let her go scot-free, with the proviso that she's to be rushed to Atlanta if she ever pokes her nose into the United States again. The last I heard of her she was in Monaco, tangled up in a blackmail case there.

"Gregory told me all about it sometime later. Said that the first hunch had come to him when he studied the passengers' lists in the wilds of the Adirondacks. Went there to be alone and concentrate. He found that of all the people listed, only three – two men and a Mrs. Dodge – had made the trip frequently in the past six months. The frequency of Mrs. Dodge's travel evidently made it impracticable for her to use different aliases. Some one would be sure to spot her.

"But it wasn't until that night on Riverside Drive that the significance of the data struck him. Each time she took the same boat on which she had come over! Did she have the same stateroom? The phone call to MacPherson established the fact that she did – this time at least. The rest was almost as obvious as the original plan. The jewels were brought aboard, passed on to Phyllis, and she tucked them away somewhere in her stateroom. Her bags and her person could, of course, be searched with perfect safety. Then, what was more natural than that her maid should accompany her on board when she was leaving? Nobody ever pays any attention to people who board the boat at *this* end, so Alyce was able to walk off with the stuff under the very eyes of the customs authorities – and they found later that she had the nerve to place it in the hands of the government for the next twenty-four hours. She sent it by registered mail to Pittsburgh and it was passed along through an underground "fence" channel until a prospective purchaser appeared.

"Perfectly obvious and perfectly simple – that's why the plan succeeded until Gregory began to make love to Alyce and got the idea that Mrs. Dodge was going right back to Europe hammered into his head. It had occurred to him before, but he hadn't placed much value on it...

"O-o-o-o!" yawned Quinn. "I'm getting dry. Trot out some grape juice and put on that Kreisler record – 'Drigo's Serenade.' I love to hear it. Makes me think of the time when they landed that scoundrel Weimar."

VI

A MATTER OF RECORD

"What was that you mentioned last week – something about the record of Kreisler's 'Drigo's Serenade' reminding you of the capture of some one?" I asked Bill Quinn one summer evening as he painfully hoisted his game leg upon the porch railing.

"Sure it does," replied Quinn. "Never fails. Put it on again so I can get the necessary atmosphere, as you writers call it, and possibly I'll spill the yarn – provided you guarantee to keep the ginger ale flowing freely. That and olive oil are about the only throat lubricants left us."

So I slipped on the record, rustled a couple of bottles from the ice box, and settled back comfortably, for when Quinn once started on one of his reminiscences of government detective work he didn't like to be interrupted.

"That's the piece, all right," Bill remarked, as the strains of the violin drifted off into the night. "Funny how a few notes of music like that could nail a criminal while at the same time it was saving the lives of nobody knows how many other people –"

Remember Paul Weimar [continued Quinn, picking up the thread of his story]. He was the most dangerous of the entire gang that helped von Bernstorff, von Papen, and the rest of that crew plot against the United States at a time when we were supposed to be entirely neutral.

An Austrian by birth, Weimar was as thoroughly a Hun at heart as anyone who ever served the Hohenzollerns and, in spite of his size, he was as slippery as they make 'em. Back in the past somewhere he had been a detective in the service of the Atlas Line, but for some years before the war was superintendent of the police attached to the Hamburg-American boats. That, of course, gave him the inside track in every bit of devilry he wanted to be mixed up in, for he had made it his business to cultivate the acquaintance of wharf rats, dive keepers, and all the rest of the scum of the Seven Seas that haunts the docks.

Standing well over six feet, Weimar had a pair of fists that came in mighty handy in a scuffle, and a tongue that could curl itself around all the blasphemies of a dozen languages. There wasn't a water front where they didn't hate him – neither was there a water front where they didn't fear him.

Of course, when the war broke in August, 1914, the Hamburg-American line didn't have any further official use for Weimar. Their ships were tied up in neutral or home ports and Herr Paul was out of a job – for at least ten minutes. But he was entirely too valuable a man for the German organization to overlook for longer than that, and von Papen, in Washington, immediately added him to his organization – with blanket instructions to go the limit on any dirty work he cared to undertake. Later, he worked for von Bernstorff; Doctor Dumba, the Austrian ambassador; and Doctor von Nuber, the Austrian consul in New York – but von Papen had first claim upon his services and did not hesitate to press them, as proven by certain entries in the checkbook of the military attaché during the spring and summer of 1915.

Of course, it didn't take the Secret Service and the men from the Department of Justice very long to get on to the fact that Weimar was altogether too close to the German embassy for the safety and comfort of the United States government. But what were they to do about it? We weren't at war then and you couldn't arrest a man merely because he happened to know von Papen and the rest of his precious companions. You had to have something on him – something that would stand up in court – and Paul Weimar was too almighty clever to let that happen.

When you remember that it took precisely one year to land this Austrian – one year of constant watching and unceasing espionage – you will see how well he conducted himself.

And the government's sleuths weren't the only ones who were after him, either.

Captain Kenney, of the New York Police Force, lent mighty efficient aid and actually invented a new system of trailing in order to find out just what he was up to.

In the old days, you told a man to go out and follow a suspect and that was all there was to it. The "shadow" would trail along half a block or so in the rear, keeping his man always in view, and bring home a full account of what he had done all day. But you couldn't do that with Weimar – he was too foxy. From what some of the boys have told me, I think he took a positive delight in throwing them off the scent, whether he had anything up his sleeve or not.

One day, for example, you could have seen his big bulk swinging nonchalantly up Broadway, as if he didn't have a care in the world. A hundred feet or more behind him was Bob Dugan, one of Kenney's men. When Weimar disappeared into the Subway station at Times Square, Dugan was right behind him, and when the Austrian boarded the local for Grand Central Station, Dugan was on the same train – on the same car, in fact. But when they reached the station, things began to happen. Weimar left the local and commenced to stroll up and down the platform, waiting until a local train and an express arrived at the same time. That was his opportunity. He made a step or two forward, as if to board the express, and Dugan – not wishing to make himself too conspicuous – slipped on board just as the doors were closing, only to see Weimar push back and jam his way on the local!

Variations of that stunt occurred time after time. Even the detailing of two men to follow him failed in its purpose, for the Austrian would enter a big office building, leap into an express elevator just as it was about to ascend, slip the operator a dollar to stop at one of the lower floors, and be lost for the day or until some one picked him up by accident.

So Cap Kenney called in four of his best men and told them that it was essential that Weimar be watched.

"Two of you," he directed, "stick with him all the time. Suppose you locate him the first thing in the morning at his house on Twenty-fourth Street, for example. You, Cottrell, station yourself two blocks up the street. Gary, you go the same distance down. Then, no matter which way he starts he'll have one of you in front of him and one behind. The man in front will have to use his wits to guess which way he intends to go and to beat him to it. If he boards a car, the man in front can pick him up with the certainty that the other will cover the trail in the rear. In that way you ought to be able to find out where he is going and, possibly, what he is doing there."

The scheme, thanks to the quick thinking of the men assigned to the job, worked splendidly for months – at least it worked in so far as keeping a watch on Weimar was concerned. But that was all. In the summer of 1915 the government knew precisely where Weimar had been for the past six months, with whom he had talked, and so on – but the kernel of the nut was missing. There wasn't the least clue to what he had talked about and what devilry he had planned!

Without that information, all the dope the government had was about as useful as a movie to a blind man.

Washington was so certain that Weimar had the key to a number of very important developments – among them the first attempt to blow up the Welland Canal – that the chief of the Secret Service made a special trip to New York to talk to Kenney.

"Isn't it possible," he suggested, "to plant your men close enough to Weimar to find out, for example, what he talks about over the phone?"

Kenney smiled, grimly.

"Chief," he said, "that's been done. We've tapped every phone that Weimar's likely to use in the neighborhood of his house and every time he talks from a public station one of our men cuts in from near-by – by an arrangement with Central – and gets every word. But that bird is too wary to be caught with chaff of that kind. He's evidently worked out a verbal code of some kind that changes every day. He tells the man at the other end, for example, to be at the drug store on the corner of Seventy-third and Broadway at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon and wait for a phone call in the name of Williams. Our man is always at the place at the appointed hour, but no call ever arrives.

'Seventy-third and Broadway' very evidently means some other address, but it's useless to try and guess which one. You'd have to have a man at every pay station in town to follow that lead."

"How about overhearing his directions to the men he meets in the open?"

"Not a chance in the world. His rendezvous are always public places – the Pennsylvania or Grand Central Station, a movie theater, a hotel lobby, or the like. There he can put his back against the wall and make sure that no one is listening in. He's on to all the tricks of the trade and it will take a mighty clever man – or a bunch of them – to nail him."

"H-m-m!" mused the chief. "Well, at that, I believe I've got the man."

"Anyone I know?"

"Yes, I think you do – Morton Maxwell. Remember him? Worked on the Castleman diamond case here a couple of years ago for the customs people and was also responsible for uncovering the men behind the sugar-tax fraud. He isn't in the Service, but he's working for the Department of Justice, and I'm certain they'll turn him loose on this if I ask them to. Maxwell can get to the bottom of Weimar's business, if anyone can. Let me talk to Washington – "

And within an hour after the chief had hung up the receiver Morton Maxwell, better known as "Mort," was headed toward New York with instructions to report at Secret Service headquarters in that city.

Once there, the chief and Kenney went over the whole affair with him. Cottrell and Gary and the other men who had been engaged in shadowing the elusive Weimar were called in to tell their part of the story, and every card was laid upon the table.

When the conference concluded, sometime after midnight, the chief turned to Maxwell and inquired:

"Well, what's your idea about it?"

For a full minute Mort smoked on in silence and gazed off into space. Men who had just met him were apt to think this a pose, a play to the grand stand – but those who knew him best realized that Maxwell's alert mind was working fastest in such moments and that he much preferred not to make any decision until he had turned things over in his head.

"There's just one point which doesn't appear to have been covered," he replied. Then, as Kenney started to cut in, "No, Chief, I said *appeared* not to have been covered. Very possibly you have all the information on it and forgot to hand it out. Who does this Weimar live with?"

"He lives by himself in a house on Twenty-fourth Street, near Seventh Avenue – boards there, but has the entire second floor. So far as we've been able to find out he has never been married. No trace of any wife on this side, anyhow. Never travels with women – probably afraid they'd talk too much."

"Has he any relatives?"

"None that I know of – "

"Wait a minute," Cottrell interrupted. "I dug back into Weimar's record before the war ended his official connection with the steamship company, and one of the points I picked up was that he had a cousin – a man named George Buch – formerly employed on one of the boats."

"Where is Buch now?" asked Maxwell.

"We haven't been able to locate him," admitted the police detective. "Not that we've tried very hard, because the trail didn't lead in his direction. I don't even know that he is in this country, but it's likely that he is because he was on one of the boats that was interned here when the war broke."

Again it was a full minute before Maxwell spoke.

"Buch," he said, finally, "appears to be the only link between Weimar and the outer world. It's barely possible that he knows something, and, as we can't afford to overlook any clue, suppose we start work along that line. I'll dig into it myself the first thing in the morning, and I certainly would appreciate any assistance that your men could give me, Chief. Tell them to make discreet inquiries

about Buch, his appearance, habits, etc., and to try and find out whether he is on this side. Now I'm going to turn in, for something seems to tell me that the busy season has arrived."

At that Maxwell wasn't far wrong. The weeks that followed were well filled with work, but it was entirely unproductive of results. Weimar was shadowed day and night, his telephones tapped and his mail examined. But, save for the fact that his connection with the German embassy became increasingly apparent, no further evidence was forthcoming.

The search for Buch was evidently futile, for that personage appeared to have disappeared from the face of the earth. All that Maxwell and the other men who worked on the matter could discover was that Buch – a young Austrian whose description they secured – had formerly been an intimate of Weimar. The latter had obtained his appointment to a minor office in the Hamburg-American line and Buch was commonly supposed to be a stool pigeon for the master plotter.

But right there the trail stopped.

No one appeared to know whether the Austrian was in New York, or the United States, for that matter, though one informant did admit that it was quite probable.

"Buch and the big fellow had a row the last time over," was the information Maxwell secured at the cost of a few drinks. "Something about some money that Weimar is supposed to have owed him – fifteen dollars or some such amount. I didn't hear about it until afterward, but it appears to have been a pretty lively scrap while it lasted. Of course, Buch didn't have a chance against the big fellow – he could handle a bull. But the young Austrian threatened to tip his hand – said he knew a lot of stuff that would be worth a good deal more money than was coming to him, and all that sort of thing. But the ship docked the next day and I haven't seen or heard of him since."

The idea of foul play at once leaped into Maxwell's mind, but investigation of police records failed to disclose the discovery of anybody answering to the description of George Buch and, as Captain Kenney pointed out, it is a decidedly difficult matter to dispose of a corpse in such a way as not to arouse at least the suspicions of the police.

As a last resort, about the middle of September, Maxwell had a reward posted on the bulletin board of every police station in New York and the surrounding country for the "apprehension of George Buch, Austrian, age about twenty-four. Height, five feet eight inches. Hair, blond. Complexion, fair. Eyes, blue. Sandy mustache."

As Captain Kenney pointed out, though, the description would apply to several thousand men of German parentage in the city, and to a good many more who didn't have a drop of Teutonic blood in their veins.

"True enough," Maxwell was forced to admit, "but we can't afford to overlook a bet – even if it is a thousand-to-one shot."

As luck would have it, the thousand-to-one shot won!

On September 25, 1917, Detective Gary returned to headquarters, distinctly crestfallen. Weimar had given him the slip.

In company with another man, whom the detective did not know, the Austrian had been walking up Sixth Avenue that afternoon when a machine swung in from Thirty-sixth Street and the Austrian had leaped aboard without waiting for it to come to a full stop.

"Of course, there wasn't a taxi in sight," said Gary, ruefully, "and before I could convince the nearest chauffeur that my badge wasn't phony they'd gone!"

"That's the first time in months," Gary replied. "He knows that he's followed, all right, and he's cagy enough to keep in the open and pretend to be aboveboard."

"Right," commented the Department of Justice operative, "and this move would appear to indicate that something was doing. Better phone all your stations to watch out for him, Cap."

But nothing more was seen or heard of Herr Weimar for five days.

Meanwhile events moved rapidly for Maxwell.

On September 26th, the day after the Austrian disappeared, one of the policemen whose beat lay along Fourteenth Street, near Third Avenue, asked to see the government detective.

"My name's Riley," announced the copper, with a brogue as broad as the toes of his shoes. "Does this Austrian, this here Buch feller ye're lookin' for, like music? Is he nuts about it?"

"Music?" echoed Maxwell. "I'm sure I don't know... But wait a minute! Yes, that's what that chap who used to know him on the boat told me. Saying he was forever playing a fiddle when he was off duty and that Weimar threw it overboard one day in a fit of rage. Why? What's the connection?"

"Nothin' in particular, save that a little girl I'm rather sweet on wurruks in a music store on Fourteenth Street an' she an' I was talkin' things over last night an' I happened to mention th' reward offered for this Buch feller. 'Why!' says she, 'that sounds just like the Dutchy that used to come into th' shop a whole lot a year or so ago. He was crazy about music an' kep' himself pretty nigh broke a-buyin' those expensive new records. Got me to save him every violin one that came out.'"

"Um, yes," muttered Maxwell, "but has the young lady seen anything of this chap lately?"

"That she has not," Riley replied, "an' right there's th' big idear. Once a week, regular, another Dutchman comes in an' buys a record, an' he told Katy – that's me gurrul's name – last winter that th' selections were for a man that used to be a stiddy customer of hers but who was now laid up in bed."

"In bed for over a year!" exclaimed Maxwell, his face lighting up. "Held prisoner somewhere in the neighborhood of that shop on Fourteenth Street, because the big Austrian hasn't the nerve to make away with him and yet fears that he knows too much! Look here, Riley – suppose you and Miss Katy take a few nights off – I'll substitute for her and make it all right with the man who owns the store. Then I can get a line on this buyer of records for sick men."

"Wouldn't it be better, sir, if we hung around outside th' store an' let Katy give us the high sign when he come in? Then we could both trail him back to where he lives."

"You're right, Riley, it would! Where'll I meet you to-night?"

"At the corner of Fourteenth Street and Thoid Av'nue, at eight o'clock. Katy says th' man never gets there before nine."

"I'll be there," said Maxwell – and he was.

But nothing out of the ordinary rewarded their vigil the first night, nor the second. On the third night, however, just after the clock in the Metropolitan Tower had boomed nine times, a rather nondescript individual sauntered into the music store, and Riley's quick eyes saw the girl behind the counter put her left hand to her chest. Then she coughed.

"That's th' signal, sir," warned the policeman in a whisper. "An' that's the guy we're after."

Had the man turned around as he made his way toward a dark and forbidding house on Thirteenth Street, not far from Fourth Avenue, he might have caught sight of two shadows skulking along not fifty feet behind him. But, at that, he would have to have been pretty quick – for Maxwell was taking no chances on losing his prey and he had cautioned the policeman not to make a sound.

When their quarry ascended the steps of No. 247 Riley started to move after him, but the Department of Justice operative halted him.

"There's no hurry," stated Maxwell. "He doesn't suspect we're here, and, besides, it doesn't make any difference if he does lock the door – I've got a skeleton key handy that's guaranteed to open anything."

Riley grunted, but stayed where he was until Maxwell gave the signal to advance.

Once inside the door, which responded to a single turn to the key, the policeman and the government agent halted in the pitch-black darkness and listened. Then from an upper floor came the sound for which Maxwell had been waiting – the first golden notes of a violin played by a master hand. The distance and the closed doorway which intervened killed all the harsh mechanical tone of the phonograph and only the wonderful melody of "Drigo's Serenade" came down to them.

On tiptoe, though they knew their movements would be masked by the sounds of the music, Riley and Maxwell crept up to the third floor and halted outside the door from which the sounds came.

"Wait until the record is over," directed Maxwell, "and then break down that door. Have your gun handy and don't hesitate to shoot anyone who tries to injure Buch. I'm certain he's held prisoner here and it may be that the men who are guarding him have instructions not to let him escape at any cost. Ready? Let's go!"

The final note of the Kreisler record had not died away before Riley's shoulder hit the flimsy door and the two detectives were in the room.

Maxwell barely had time to catch a glimpse of a pale, wan figure on the bed and to sense the fact that there were two other men in the room, when there was a shout from Riley and a spurt of flame from his revolver. With a cry, the man nearest the bed dropped his arm and a pistol clattered to the floor – the barrel still singing from the impact of the policeman's bullet. The second man, realizing that time was precious, leaped straight toward Maxwell, his fingers reaching for the agent's throat. With a half laugh Mort clubbed his automatic and brought the butt down with sickening force on his assailant's head. Then he swung around and covered the man whom Riley had disarmed.

"Don't worry about him, sir," said the policeman. "His arm'll be numb half an hour from now. What do you want to do with th' lad in th' bed?"

"Get him out of here as quickly as we can. We won't bother with these swine. They have the law on their side, anyway, because we broke in here without a warrant. I only want Buch."

When he had propped the young Austrian up in a comfortable chair in the Federal Building and had given him a glass of brandy to strengthen his nerves – the Lord only knows that they'll have to do in the future – Maxwell got the whole story and more than he had dared hoped for. Buch, following his quarrel with Weimar, had been held prisoner in the house on Thirteenth Street for over a year because, as Maxwell had figured, the Austrian didn't have the nerve to kill him and didn't dare let him loose. Barely enough food was allowed to keep him alive, and the only weakness that his cousin had shown was in permitting the purchase of one phonograph record a week in order to cheer him up a little.

"Naturally," said Buch, "I chose the Kreisler records, because he's an Austrian and a marvelous violinist."

"Did Weimar ever come to see you?" inquired Maxwell.

"He came in every now and then to taunt me and to say that he was going to have me thrown in the river some day soon. That didn't frighten me, but there were other things that did. He came in last week, for example, and boasted that he was going to blow up a big canal and I was afraid he might be caught or killed. That would have meant no more money for the men who were guarding me and I was too weak to walk even to the window to call for help..."

"A big canal!" Maxwell repeated. "He couldn't mean the Panama! No, that's impossible. I have it! The Welland Canal!" And in an instant he was calling the Niagara police on the long-distance phone, giving a detailed description of Weimar and his companions.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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