

THE BLACK MAGICIAN

*Another Adventure of
"Secret Service Smith"*

BY

R. T. M. SCOTT

Author of "Secret Service Smith"



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SECRET SERVICE SMITH

"We have nominated *Secret Service Smith* for a top place among mystery fiction."

—*The San Francisco Argonaut*

"Detective stories, most of them excellent, all of them very good, . . . and the best that are likely to appear this season."

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THE AUTHOR DEDICATES THIS YARN TO
L. G. S.
WITH APPRECIATION FOR EXPERT ADVICE
UPON CERTAIN DEEPER POINTS
OF ARGUMENT

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CHAPTER I

THE OPENING SHOT

IT was toward the close of an afternoon in spring that Aurelius Smith, behind his great, flat-topped table, leaned back in his chair and softly tinkled an antique temple bell. Almost at once a Hindu servant appeared and stood silently waiting.

"*Cha lao, Langa Doonh,*" drawled the white man in the native tongue without turning his head. As the servant vanished, the same drawling tones were continued to a girl who sat behind a typewriter at one side of the room. "I have ordered tea, but the boy is late."

"He is very young to run about New York the way he does," returned the girl. "It would be a terrible blow to you if he were hurt, Mr. Smith." She paused. "Sometimes I think you love him—almost as much as your profession."

"I certainly am fond of the little beggar," agreed Smith, stretching his lanky body and running a hand over his close-cropped, light-brown hair. "He grew up to twelve as a newsboy without any relatives in Chicago. A kid like that can look after himself in New York or any other city. There's nothing to worry about except his language and I shall send him to school in the fall."

"Suppose," persisted the girl, "that somebody bumped Jimmie off."

"You mean one of my enemies?"

"Yes," answered the girl, raising large, dark eyes with peculiar intentness. "What would you do if an enemy attacked you through the youngster?"

"Shoot him, probably."

"I believe," continued the girl in a rather strained voice, "that Jimmie is the only human being you really love."

"I think, Bernice, that you are rather fond of Jimmie yourself," said Smith as Langa Doonh entered with the tea tray. "Just what is troubling you?"

The girl shuffled some papers nervously in a drawer of her desk. Her face, delicately formed and with a slightly foreign touch, wore a puzzled expression.

"I have a feeling of danger," she said finally. "Do you believe in intuition?"

"On the verandah of a ramshackle hotel," answered Smith, "a native told my fortune in 1908. It was at Tuticorin, the jumping-off place between India and Ceylon. He said that I would be shot, just above the heart, in the Great War of 1914."

Unconcernedly Smith unbuttoned vest and shirt and exposed the round, puckered mark of a bullet just above the heart. The girl's lips compressed as she looked at what must have been a desperately dangerous wound.

"Then, you do believe?" she asked.

"The fortune-teller said that I would die three days after receiving the wound."

"You mean that you are in doubt?" persisted Bernice.

Smith took a napkin from the tea tray, jerked it open in the air, and laid a hand under it upon the table.

"Stop this nonsense about danger for Jimmie!" he exclaimed rather sharply and watched her straighten

slightly at his words. "The truth is that you are losing your nerve." The healthy glow in the girl's cheeks began to deepen. "You are really afraid for yourself and not for Jimmie."

The girl's expression changed from blank astonishment to one of anger. Color flooded her face and the dark eyes seemed to flash. Never before had her employer spoken to her in this way.

"After all," continued Smith, "you are only a woman. You have reason to be afraid. What could you do to defend yourself?"

So fast that the eye could not follow it, the small hand of Bernice dropped to the open drawer and rose again. Over the top of her typewriter Aurelius Smith gazed into the muzzle of a short, blue-black revolver.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Smith in his former, careless manner. "I could not have drawn so quickly myself—but just a moment."

Langa Doonh, leaving the room and quite unmoved at the sudden pistol play, turned at some words in the native tongue from his master. Silently, he removed the napkin from Smith's covered hand and exposed a .45 Colt automatic, pointed straight at the top of the girl's typewriter.

Bernice dropped her revolver into the drawer with a gasp of genuine surprise. The anger faded from her face as she began to smile.

"What made me prepare in advance for your lightning draw?" queried Smith. "Was it intuition?"

"Just another of your ingenious tricks," she retorted with a bit of laughter. "You made me draw. Just the same, I am nervous and am going to look out of the window for Jimmie."

There was a peculiar expression of thought upon the face of Aurelius Smith as the girl departed. It was an expression that would have puzzled a clever face-reader and might, perhaps, denote keen interest mingled with utter indifference. For many years and in many countries that face had puzzled friends and foes alike. It was a long face, but not too long. The blue eyes were deep set and had a hint of gray, but they were not too deep set. The force of strong winds and hot suns had stamped the skin and the more one looked the less one knew if the man were thirty or fifty years of age. Something of the waiting strength of a lazy tiger shone from the eyes and mixed with the kindness of a dog for a little child. They were eyes for the beauty of a violet, for the test-tube of the laboratory, or the sights of a pistol.

“Take a cup of tea to Miss Asterley’s room.”

As the servant left the room, Smith drank his tea and stared thoughtfully through his cigarette smoke. A year earlier, Bernice Asterley had come to him at a time when he had just returned to his native land and had taken over the old two-story garage on Fenton Street, New York. She came in answer to an advertisement for a stenographer and she came an orphan, destitute and ragged. At a glance he had seen what a hundred other men would have missed and she was now one of the prettiest and cleverest actresses off the stage—an exceedingly valuable instrument in the detection of crime. Most men would have felt the influence of so charming a girl, but Smith did not love—never had loved—any woman. Like the girl and Jimmie, he, too, was an orphan. As for Langa Doonh, that majestic

servant had long since adopted Smith as his father, mother, and entire family.

In the great room of the old garage, Smith finished his tea and smoked on in silence. Large rugs from Eastern countries covered the floor and rich hangings of purple and gold alternated with Oriental weapons upon three of the walls. The fourth wall was covered with maps.

Aurelius Smith and Jimmie had their sleeping quarters upstairs. Langa Doonh slept in a small room at the back beside his kitchen. Bernice occupied two tiny rooms on one side of the short entrance hall and faced a reception-room upon the opposite side.

"Chaperone?" she had laughed when she had seen the rooms. "A luxurious farce for the rich! I rather think," she had added, looking into the serious eyes of the lanky man, "that I shall be safer here than with all the chaperones in New York."

A bell sounded and Langa Doonh entered the room with a card upon a tray. Smith glanced at the card and, with a slight gesture, indicated that the visitor was to be admitted.

A pompous little man, dressed most formally, entered the room. He drew a glove from his right hand and placed it, with his cane and silk hat, upon the table.

"You are—ah—Smith, the private detective?" he asked.

The man behind the table inclined his head and pressed a button by his hand. Bernice entered quickly and hurried to her desk, note-book in hand.

"Mr. J. H. Scranton calling," said Smith. "Take the usual notes."

"My wife had a twenty thousand dollar necklace snatched from her neck at the Hotel Magnifique," began Scranton, taking a chair toward which Smith pointed.

Again the bell sounded and Smith received another card from Langa Doonh. He laid the two cards together on the table and looked thoughtfully at his little visitor.

"I am offering five thousand dollars reward," continued Scranton, visibly annoyed at the slight interruption. "I don't suppose you often get a chance like that."

"Necklace an investment?" queried Smith. "Will you suffer if you don't get it back?"

"Certainly not!" retorted Scranton. "I could lose ten times as much and sleep well. I'm here because I never let anybody beat me and the police have failed. I'll tell you what I'll do. To make you work well, I'll offer ten thousand dollars reward."

"Case not desired," returned Smith, languidly. "Tear up the notes, Miss Asterley."

"What!" exclaimed the little man in indignation. "You won't take——"

He relapsed into astonished silence and walked sullenly out as, at a wave from the expressive hand, Langa Doonh suddenly approached and tendered the hat and cane.

There was no speech in the room until Langa Doonh returned with an old man who was quietly dressed and upon whose face was an expression of kindly observance. He was seventy, perhaps, but his eyes and skin showed that he retained much vigor. He hesitated while Smith rose and pointed to the chair in front of his table.

"Mr. Grayson," began Smith as the old man took the chair, "I know you by reputation. You are the head of the Grayson & Company department store. You have come to me with something you wish investigated?"

"Yes," replied the old man. "I have something to investigate—if it is humanly possible to do so."

"Pray proceed."

"I am an old man," began the visitor very gravely, "with many employees. I must guard my children."

"I shall accept the case," quietly returned Smith as his client hesitated.

There was a violent ringing of the bell followed by scampering feet as a young boy burst into the room.

"Gee! Mr. Smith!" he shouted, racing up to the table. "Dere's a swell guy croaked on de front steps wid a stovepipe lid!"

The door was still open when Smith reached it and looked down upon the body of Scranton, huddled at the bottom of the steps. A few loiterers were staring from a respectful distance and a policeman was already coming up the narrow street.

Swiftly the tall man, upon the steps, knelt and took up an inert hand to search for the pulse. He noted that the right hand was ungloved and remembered that the missing glove had been left upon his table. Rapidly the fingers dropped the pulseless wrist and flew to the face where they touched the eyelids and partially opened the mouth. Before the policeman arrived, he had again picked up the ungloved hand for a closer examination. A faint pin-prick appeared on the ball of the thumb.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the officer of the law as he arrived.

"Dead," said Smith standing up.

"Tired of life?" asked the officer, kneeling down.

"Murdered," said Smith opening his cigarette case and taking out a cigarette while he, very carefully and rather gingerly, slipped into the case something which glittered.

"Who are you?" demanded the policeman.

"Aurelius Smith."

The officer looked up in surprise and glanced at the number over the door.

"I've heard of you," he said. "That alters the case and makes your opinion worth listening to. Will you keep the crowd back while I use your telephone to make a report to Headquarters?"

As the policeman entered the door, the dainty figure of Bernice Asterley stole down the steps while Jimmie stood above in childish curiosity.

"Why—why did they kill him?" she asked, looking up at her tall companion.

"Because he forgot his glove," replied Smith unconcernedly but in tones that only the girl could hear. "Say nothing and see if Mr. Grayson will have some tea."

As the girl entered the door, Smith sat in a sprawling, indolent attitude upon the top step. There was not a quiver on his lips as he spoke with the art of a ventriloquist to the boy who was directly behind him.

"Jimmie, can you hear me?"

The boy shoved a small toe against his master's back.

"Get down to the street," continued Smith, "and watch for a man who may look for something on the

ground. Follow him if it takes all night. Get some money from Miss Asterley and go out through the back way."

The boy drew back slightly and stooped to fix his boot-lace. In rising he drew a little farther back and a second later the doorway was empty while the brown-haired man with the deep-blue eyes sat motionless, staring calmly at the dead man below.

CHAPTER II

PRIEST AND DOCTOR

WHEN the police had left, with their gruesome burden, Smith returned to his client and stretched himself lazily behind his table. In her accustomed place, Bernice poised a pencil above her note-book and Langa Doonh removed the tea things quite as unconcernedly as if sudden death had not just visited their very door. Smith's little household were accustomed to strange things and seldom showed any trace of excitement or alarm. Mr. Grayson's face was also calm and restful with just a touch of sadness in the eyes. He had not stirred from his chair and his lack of curiosity drew an opening remark from Smith.

"You did not care to see what happened?" he asked.

"I am not interested in such things," returned Mr. Grayson, "unless I can be of assistance and I rather think that you do not need my help in such matters."

Smith smiled and took up the telephone, calling a private chemical laboratory.

"I want a qualitative analysis made of a small specimen of poison," he spoke. "Send a reliable man. The specimen is very dangerous—and important. I must have the analysis tomorrow morning. Work all night if necessary. Expense? The expense need not be considered."

Miss Asterley's pencil stopped with the setting down of the telephone. It was her duty, when not other-

wise employed, to take complete notes of each new case. She took down every word that was uttered by every person in the room, even including herself if she spoke at all. In this way, every portion of an interview could, later, be examined with accuracy in the light of the knowledge gained from the whole. It is true that Smith seldom used these notes, but, occasionally, he called for them and studied them with the closest attention.

"Now, Mr. Grayson," said Smith, lighting a cigarette and settling back with half-closed eyes, "I will give you my best efforts if you will tell me your story and permit me to cross-examine at the conclusion."

"Six months ago," began the old man and paused. "It is all so vague. I have no definite charge to make against anybody. In fact, I am not sure that any crime has been committed."

Again the old man stopped as if debating something in his mind, and Smith, idly blowing smoke toward the ceiling, neither spoke nor moved. It was his habit, if time permitted, to say nothing until a case was stated. What a client said of his own free will and the way he said it was usually a mine of information to the deductive brain of the man who listened with such apparent indolence.

"Two months ago," recommenced Mr. Grayson with more determination, while the slender fingers of the listening man traced the figures six and two upon the blotter, "my personal stenographer, at the office, underwent a change. She became nervous and ill at ease in my presence. She has worked for me for five years and I am positive of her high character. I can read character, Mr. Smith, and this girl was of a high type

—good looking but not frivolous. I thought that her nervousness would pass away, but it continued to increase until yesterday she suddenly lost her mind and is now in the hospital.

“She broke down completely as she was opening some mail. An envelope, addressed to her in my care, was mixed with my letters and she opened it in its turn. It was a thick envelope and I happened to glance at her as she took out some tissue paper and unwrapped something. One look was all she gave before her eyes became fixed and her body stiffened. The next moment she fell to the floor before I could catch her. The doctor, whom I employ at the store, was puzzled and the hospital has been unable to send me any explanation. The girl quickly regained consciousness, but her memory seemed to be wiped out to an alarming degree. She remembered her name, but could not tell where she lived and she knew nothing of her regular office work.”

Mr. Grayson took an envelope from his pocket and removed from it a little tissue-paper package which he opened upon the table exposing a silver, five-pointed star in the center of which was set a small, blood-red stone.

Like a flash, Smith reached out and swept toward him the paper with its shining object. From a drawer he took a pair of forceps and, turning on a powerful table lamp, held the star in the strong light by means of the forceps while he examined it with the greatest attention. Not satisfied, he used a magnifying glass and it was several minutes before he laid the trinket down and looked silently but expectantly at Mr. Grayson.

"There is not much more to tell," continued the old man, "except to state that two other girls, of my personal office staff, have come to grief. One of them committed suicide without any apparent cause and the other is suffering from insomnia in a sanitarium where I placed her last week at my expense.

"My own detective force and the police fail to connect these three cases and think they are the result of coincidence, but I am not satisfied. My children must be protected and I have come to you, Mr. Smith."

"You have come to me too late to save one of your children, Mr. Grayson," returned Smith, "but I hope that you have come in time to save your own life."

"Then you believe that there is some criminal agency at work?"

"There is no doubt of it."

The words were drawled, but drawled with assurance and Mr. Grayson leaned forward eagerly.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"Nothing," answered Smith unexpectedly. After a pause he added: "Nothing, if you continue to withhold information."

A worried look came into the eyes of the old man.

"I do not quite understand," he said.

"Mr. Grayson," said Smith, tapping a slender finger upon the table, "there can be no secrets—I must be priest and doctor."

The old man rose from his chair and paced nervously up and down the room while the languid man, behind the table, again picked up the silver star for further examination. Finally, the pacing man halted before the table.

"Mr. Aurelius Smith," he said, "you were recom-

mended to me by powerful London business associates who know of your work in Europe during the War. Their recommendation could not be higher and—yet—there are some things which a man hesitates to speak of to anybody.”

Again the old man ceased speaking, but, receiving no answer, continued:

“Would you mind telling me how you knew that I was not telling everything?”

Smith smiled.

“It was really very simple,” he said. “In the first place, you commenced to tell me something which happened six months ago and emotion caused your hand to tighten upon the edge of the table. Then you changed your mind and told me something which took place two months ago while your fingers relaxed upon the removal of some mental strain.”

“I see that I can conceal nothing from you,” went on Mr. Grayson. “I hesitated to speak because I dislike to talk with any man about the affairs of my wife and, in addition, because what I have held back may have nothing to do with the case in question.”

“You will do your wife no harm by speaking,” said Smith very quietly, “and you may do her much good. The information may or may not bear upon the case, but I must be judge as well as priest and doctor.”

“Very well,” said the old man, “I will tell you what little more remains. It is only that, commencing six months ago, my wife has more than doubled the amount of money which she has withdrawn from her personal bank account. My banker has instructions to maintain a balance of ten thousand dollars to her credit, but twice he has diplomatically drawn my attention to the

increasing rate at which she is checking out the money."

"Have you spoken to your wife about this?" asked Smith.

"Certainly not!" ejaculated Grayson, striking his fist upon the table. "We have been married forty years and I owe everything I have to her loyal help and the inspiration of our married life. I would give her my last dollar without a question."

"I suppose," commented Smith, rather musingly, "that you have not examined her checks which the bank sends back after payment."

"Of course not," was the brief reply.

"Then there is not much use in my suggesting that you send me her checks for examination."

"I will not have my wife spied upon!" came the quick retort.

"Is Mrs. Grayson quite well?" asked Smith.

"Not very well, not so strong as she should be."

"Sleep well?"

"No," returned Mr. Grayson, looking anxiously at his questioner, "but what has her health to do with our problem?"

"Much or nothing," said Smith. "When a doctor calls upon a patient, he spies upon the patient to discover the nature of the attacking disease. So I must spy upon the victim of crime in order to discover the attacking criminal. It is only because I admire your sentiment that I do not throw up this case at once."

"I cannot believe that my wife is being attacked in any way," returned Mr. Grayson. "If such were the case she would tell me of it at once. I cannot allow you to spy upon my wife unless you give me good reason to believe that it is necessary."

It was a pleasant smile that overspread the face of the lazy man behind the large table—a smile that was good to see. It vanished quickly, however, with his next words.

“You have a large fortune, Mr. Grayson. How does your will dispose of that fortune?”

“Everything goes to my wife,” was the simple reply. “We have no living children. All I have is hers when I die.”

“In trust?”

“Certainly not!” Again there was emphasis in the speech. “My wife is my equal. I would not insult her by leaving my worldly possessions in trust.”

“Who knew that you were coming to consult me today?” was the next question. “Think well before you answer.”

“Nobody knew that I was coming here today,” answered the old merchant after a pause.

“How did you know my address?” persisted Smith.

“Looked it up in the telephone book.”

“Did you look it up yourself?”

“No, my stenographer looked it up—the one who is taking the place of the girl who lost her mind. I forgot about that. She might have known that I was coming here. I believe she heard me telephone the chauffeur and ask him how long it would take to drive here.”

“Then two people knew that you were coming here,” returned Smith dryly, “and you thought that nobody knew. Lives are often lost and fortunes stolen because of lack of attention to details. You very nearly died this afternoon.”

Mr. Grayson lifted his eyebrows enquiringly, but

showed no trace of alarm. It was evident that he had behind him the kind of life which banishes the fear of death.

Smith regarded his client thoughtfully before pushing forward the tissue paper upon which lay the five-pointed, silver star with its blood-red stone.

"Notice this star, Mr. Grayson," he said. "Your stenographer looked at it and lost her mind. The outline of this star is a curious arrangement of two isosceles triangles. Like the mysterious six-pointed design of King Solomon's seal, it dates into the dim past and its origin is not known. Through the ages its five points have carried a great message of peace for the deep student, but now it seems to have been used accidentally or intentionally for an evil purpose."

"You do not actually suggest," said Mr. Grayson, "that this trinket had any effect upon my stenographer?"

"Dear me, no!" returned Smith. "Neither do I suggest that it had not. Now look at this."

Carefully Smith opened his cigarette case and, with his forceps, lifted into view a second silver star with its tiny blood-red stone gleaming in the center. The two stars appeared exactly alike.

Mr. Grayson bent forward in astonishment and put out a hand to take the second star.

"Careful!" exclaimed Smith, drawing away the forceps. "This star, if I mistake not, has already killed one man today. It is slightly different from the one you brought. Examine the back of it."

With his free hand Smith extended a magnifying glass while he turned the star over for inspection.

"Do you see the tiny prongs of needle sharpness?"

he asked. "You will observe that these prongs are smeared with a gummy substance which is, I think, a most deadly poison. I know of only one man who can make such a poison and I have never been able to meet him. The man who died at my door picked this star off the sidewalk where it was lying with the prongs downward. In picking it up, he squeezed it between thumb and forefinger. One prong entered his thumb. The result was almost instant death. Mr. Grayson, that star was placed outside my door for you to pick up."

"How—how do you know?" gasped Mr. Grayson in frank astonishment.

"Five-pointed stars, set with rubies, do not follow a man about New York without a very good reason," returned Smith dryly.

Suddenly the old man sprang to his feet.

"Is my wife also in danger of death?" he demanded and, for the first time, fear showed upon his face.

"I think not," said Smith, "at least, not until after you have been killed."

"Then spare no expense to keep me alive," was the quick reply from the old man as he seated himself again. "When will you start work?"

"Boy!"

At Smith's call, Langa Doonh entered from his kitchen quarters and came silently over the Eastern rugs.

"See if Jimmie is on the street."

The servant was quick to return.

"Sahib, chokra not on street."

"I am already at work, Mr. Grayson," said Smith, "and I hope to have your would-be assassin behind the bars before midnight."

As he finished speaking, the telephone on the table commenced to ring. The conversation which followed was mostly from the other end and was finished by Smith with: "Good boy! Hold on to him till I reach you."

"The man who dropped the star on the sidewalk," explained Smith, hanging up the receiver, "came back to see if it was still there, hoping to destroy the evidence. My boy spotted him and followed. They are now at a small Italian restaurant on West 56th Street. I must go at once."

Without any order Langa Doonh appeared with a light coat, hat, and cane. Smith stood up and threw the coat over his arm. From a drawer he took a small automatic and slipped it into his side pocket.

"I will call at your office or communicate with you in the morning, Mr. Grayson," he said and turned to the door.

There was a slight interruption as Bernice sped across the room. She met her employer at the door. In her hand was a pair of gloves.

"You forgot these," she said.

For a moment the tall man looked down at the girl with a quizzical expression.

"You think it is cold?" he asked.

"You know why I brought them," she replied and stamped her foot.

"Thanks," said Smith and closed the door.

CHAPTER III

SMITH ATTACKS

FROM his door Aurelius Smith stepped to the pavement and swung his cane through the spring air with a slight cutting sound. He sauntered half of the one-block narrow street, and emerged upon lower Fifth Avenue. Evening had fallen and street lights were gleaming. Carelessly, he raised his cane and a yellow taxicab sheered in towards the sidewalk. The driver, leaning outward, heard the words "Broadway and 56th Street." The next instant the door slammed and the taxi gathered speed without having come to a stop. It was a little thing, but, in the back of his mind, the chauffeur several times wondered how so lazy a man managed to enter his cab so quickly without showing any sign of hurry.

It was the same thing at 56th Street. The cab was still in slow motion when the lanky passenger stepped upon the curb, gently tucked a dollar bill into a crevice of the wind-shield, and turned abruptly westward. The chauffeur indulged in the luxury of scratching his head and then noted that his unusual passenger had apparently vanished into thin air.

As a matter of fact, Smith had not disappeared by means of any kind of magic. He had simply stepped suddenly behind a news-stand and purchased a paper which he scanned for a minute and, at the same time, ran his eye over the pedestrians who were passing that

corner. Failing to note anything of significance, he moved westward on 56th Street with a long but lazy step. His progress would indicate that time was of no value and his manner was so indolent as almost to appear stupid. It was several blocks before he saw the object of his search. His pace did not slacken from the long stride, but instantly he dropped the newspaper into an ash-can.

Half a block farther on, a small boy, sitting on a hydrant, held out a newspaper and Smith halted. Under his arm the boy held more papers and he was about as dirty and shabby a street urchin as the streets afforded. Undoubtedly, it was Jimmie, but it was far from the Jimmie of a few hours back. His coat owned only one button and failed to match his trousers which were torn and dirty like his cap which might have come out of a passing garbage cart.

"Lost him?" asked Smith.

"Naw!" returned Jimmie indignantly. "A Sunday-school kid could trail dis guy. I had to wreck me clothes to be on de safe side, but I could of followed him on roller skates by hangin' ontuh his coat-tails."

"Good boy!" said Smith, smiling and handing back the paper. "You are right not to take chances. Where is he now?"

"In bed," was the surprising reply. "I was just goin' to get him a hot water bottle an' kiss him 'good night' when I sees yuh drop de paper intuh de ash-can an' I knows I got a customer."

Smith again reached for a paper and slipped a hand into his pocket as if searching for a coin.

"Better tell the story quickly," he said. "He may not sleep soundly without that hot water bag of yours."

"Well," said Jimmie, "as soon as de cops leaves our place wid de swell corpse, along comes a stoop-shouldered guy who drops a quarter outside our door an' stands on it while he kinda looks around on de steps an' sidewalk. Den he beats it faster den he came, an' I trails along after I pinch de quarter.

"Dis bird ain't hard to follow. He goes down to Tenth Avenue and hops a car. It's pretty crowded an' I does de same an' we both gets off at 56th Street an' my man hikes for some chow at de spaghetti joint over dere.

"I looks in an' sees him take a seat. Den I jumps intuh 'uncle's' on de corner an' hocks me good coat an' dresses tough just in case he'd lamped me on de car.

"I gets back quick but he don't eat much an' goes to de telephone. I leans against de talk-box to fix me shoe but he only says 'Yes' an' 'No' two or three times."

"What number did he call?" snapped Smith.

"Aw, Mr. Smith," answered Jimmie ruefully, "I didn't get dere in time to hear but he said it was Brown speaking."

"Good! That's something. What next?"

"He crosses de street an' goes intuh de house wid de three ash-cans in front. In about three minutes de top window, over de door, lights up an' I see me stoop-shouldered friend pull down de blind but he stands in front of de blind an' undresses. De light goes out just before you comes down de street. Dat's all, Mr. Smith."

Upon concluding, Jimmie looked up hopefully at his tall companion and it was plain that his eyes held something of awe and something of love. For a minute his master regarded the house across the street while Jim-

mie fidgeted nervously, not knowing whether he was to receive praise or a degree of criticism. He knew that he never received either without deserving it.

"Excellent!" said Smith, finally. "I shall call on our friend Brown while you get back to Fenton Street where I can reach you on the telephone if I need you. Look sharp now and be in bed at nine. Langa Doonh will waken you if anything turns up for you to do."

The little figure darted away among the shadows and, for a moment, Smith gazed after him a little proudly and with a hint of affection. It was not unusual for his eyes to express appreciation or even admiration, but affection was something different, something most unusual for him to evidence. Aurelius Smith, a wanderer in many countries, had never shunned his fellow men, but affection for anyone—man or woman—had never come to him until he had picked up the little waif in the streets of Chicago. Perhaps his heart had held a place for his old chief, Sir Oliver Haultain of the Criminal Intelligence Department of India, but never before had the sweet sense of affection and protectorship come to Aurelius Smith. A spectator, gazing at the tall man, would never have suspected that he was on the point of making a most impudent call upon a strange man in order that he might ascertain whether or not that man was actually a murderer.

Suddenly, and yet casually, Aurelius Smith turned and crossed the street. Languidly and indifferently he mounted some steps and found himself in a small vestibule just sufficiently lighted to expose a row of dingy letter-boxes and push-buttons. One box bore the name of H. P. Brown. Without the slightest hesitation,

Smith pressed the buttons of two other boxes. After a brief delay the door latch clicked and the unexpected visitor entered.

Inside, a flight of stairs in a narrow hall met his eye and Smith, looking neither to the right nor to the left, commenced to ascend. On the first floor a woman's head appeared at a partly opened door and Smith halted.

"Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"Top floor," the woman snapped. "Pity you couldn't ring the right bell!"

The door slammed and Smith ascended to the next floor where a poor gramophone or a radio loud-speaker was in operation. A man in shirt sleeves, with a towel over his arm, passed Smith on his way to a bathroom at the rear. Neither of the men spoke or even appeared to look at each other. It was apparently an ordinary rooming house with no pretension of luxury. Smith continued to ascend to the third and top floor, dragging one hand along the banister in a tired way.

On the top floor all the doors were closed, including the front one which undoubtedly belonged to the room in which Jimmie had seen the silhouette of the man as he undressed.

Smith walked straight to the door of the front room and the appearance of his lazy stride seemed not to change in the slightest, yet his feet were actually touching the floor almost noiselessly. There was no light within the room and his hand sought the door-knob softly, caressingly. It turned ever so little and the door moved inward for a quarter of an inch and then closed again. The fact was established that the door was not locked.

In his delicate profession, Aurelius Smith was accustomed to taking instant advantage of unexpected circumstances, depending upon his quickness of wit for the outcome. As he stood before the door he suddenly bent and applied his nose to the keyhole. Almost before he had straightened to his full height, he opened the door roughly and kicked it still further open, entering with a heavy step until he stood in the middle of the almost totally darkened room.

"Where's the fire?" he demanded.

A bed creaked and a light snapped on, revealing a rather ordinary-looking young man half raised upon one elbow in bed as he gazed in surprise at the unexpected intruder. The room was poorly furnished and, upon a center table, something smoked from out of a china soap-dish.

"There isn't any fire," answered the owner of the room, rubbing his eyes.

"What's that?" challenged Smith, pointing at the smoking soap-dish.

"Ah, that's just incense," was the sulky reply. "What do you want anyway?"

"I won't live in a house where people are careless with fire," grumbled Smith, walking over to the table and opening a little box in which were black squares of incense. "H. P. B." he read from the box and turned angrily to the puzzled and rather irritated man in bed. "Your own initials on the box, too! You must burn a lot of it. It's dangerous and I won't stand for it."

Deliberately, Smith turned his back on the man in bed and ran his eyes over the room. His first glance had told him that the man was weak and would be far

from dangerous except, as in the case of all weak people, when quite cornered.

The man slipped a pair of thin legs out of bed and sat up.

"My name is H. P. Brown," he said, "but those aren't my initials on the box. I wish you'd get out."

"Whose initials are they?" demanded Smith so suddenly and wheeling about so quickly that Brown shrank backward.

Brown stuttered something, but quickly stopped and seemed to gain courage, perhaps because Smith had allowed himself to relapse into an indifferent manner.

"It's none of your business and I wish you'd get out!" exclaimed Brown, approaching the table and spilling some water from a glass on to the burning incense. "I gotta use incense to put me to sleep, but I won't use any more tonight if you will let me alone."

"Good!" grunted Smith and turned to the door.

Half-way across the room he halted and looked enquiringly at Brown.

"By the way," he went on, "haven't I seen you before?"

"I don't know and I don't care," was the impatient answer.

"Weren't you on Fenton Street this afternoon?" continued Smith.

Brown straightened his stooped shoulders a little and a subtle change began to come over him as if he were coming under the influence of a new and stronger motive.

"Will you get out?" he demanded.

"I thought I saw a man like you drop something on

Fenton Street this afternoon," stated Smith rather coldly.

Brown started slowly to move toward the head of his bed. Smith, too, took a step in that direction and then both men halted.

"Did you not drop a five-pointed star on Fenton Street this afternoon, Mr. Brown?"

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Brown, but alarm showed on his face and a wild look came into his eyes.

"So?" queried Smith with a smile and stepped swiftly forward as Brown leapt toward the head of his bed, hand outstretched toward the pillow.

That hand failed to reach the pillow for the very good reason that the other hand, out-flung behind, was grasped by Smith. The next moment Brown found himself jerked to the floor where he sprawled in his pajamas and made no effort to rise.

"So you keep your gun under the pillow," commented Smith as he tossed the pillow aside and exposed a small black revolver.

"Get up and get into bed again!" he ordered, slipping the revolver into his own pocket.

Brown did as he was ordered without a word. Undoubtedly, he was a weak man, both mentally and physically, but there was a stubborn blankness on his face that was different from the stubbornness of most weak people. There was something enigmatical about it.

Aurelius Smith sat on the side of the bed and looked intently at the prone man for almost a minute while neither spoke.

"You will answer my questions?" he asked finally.

"No!" replied Brown in a strained voice.

"Did you drop this?" pursued Smith and gingerly extracted from a vest pocket the silver star with its blood-red stone.

Brown raised his head from the pillow and stared miserably and with apparent terror at the trinket.

"Did you drop it?" demanded Smith a second time.

Brown's head sank back on the pillow and he covered his eyes with a hand.

Smith grasped the hand and pulled it down on the counterpane, holding it easily imprisoned while, with his free hand, he poised the star before the terror-stricken eyes of his captive.

"Did you drop it?" he repeated.

Brown closed his eyes, but shook his head in the negative.

"Then I shall press the prongs into the veins of your wrist," said Smith.

Brown's eyes opened and gazed in horror at the star, now within an inch of the back of his wrist. As he looked the star, held by two points between Smith's thumb and forefinger, descended slowly to half an inch and then to a quarter of an inch.

A low moan escaped from the lips of the suffering and tortured man.

"I dropped it," he breathed more than spoke.

"Good!" said Smith and gently pocketed the star, but kept his hold on Brown's wrist, the pulse of which he was noting in conjunction with the man's actions and statements. "Now you might just as well tell me who ordered you to drop this star on Fenton Street."

At these last words Brown's whole body trembled slightly and it was evident that he was experiencing new and increased terror.

"Impossible!" he murmured. "I ca—can't tell you."

"You must tell me," insisted Smith, "or receive the bite of this little death-star. Take your choice."

Once more the little star hovered above Brown's wrist and sank lower and lower. The searching eyes of Smith seemed more gray than blue and watched the terror of death battle with the terror of something else until speech came.

"Wait a minute," the little man gasped. "I will tell—something—anyway."

"Go ahead," commented Smith, but his grip was steel on the captured wrist and the star hovered, almost touching the skin.

"I will confess, at Police Headquarters"—Brown's voice was low and pitiful—"that I dropped the poisoned star. Isn't that enough?"

Smith took a full minute in which to study the face upon the pillow. He felt sure that something unusual lay behind the stubborn resistance of the weakling upon the bed. One delicate finger touched the pulse in the man's wrist and, as he detected the fluttering heart-beat, he resolved upon a supreme test.

"Who told you to drop the poison-star?" he demanded again very slowly. "While I count ten you will answer. On the word 'ten' I will press down the star if you have not answered."

During the first five numbers Brown twisted a little in agony and a cold perspiration broke out slowly over his forehead.

"It—it would be wor-worse than death to tell," he mumbled at the number seven.

At nine Smith dropped the wrist. The pulse had

almost stopped. There was no doubt that the man would have persisted to the end.

"You win," said Smith as Brown looked up weakly and enquiringly. "Now, instead of being your enemy, let me be your friend. You are in the greatest terror of some man. You need a friend. Let me be your friend."

There was something very pathetic in Brown's voice as he spoke in low tones.

"Nobody can help me. He is a devil!"

"Give me his name and address," suggested Smith in a surprisingly soft voice. "I will have him behind bars before morning and you will be safe."

"He would kill you or—or worse," returned Brown, his eyes wandering to and from the little star which Smith still held against the counterpane. "You could do nothing." There was a brief silence and then: "Take me to jail. I may have a little rest while I am locked up."

"What could he do to me that was worse than death?" asked Smith, still in very gentle tones and turning his head away for a moment.

Quick as a flash Brown seized the little star and pressed it hard against the back of Smith's hand.

"You little viper!" remarked Smith with a chuckle as he rose to his feet. "Do you think I would have given you that opportunity if this had really been the poison-star? Get up and get dressed. I shall take you to jail as you suggest. After all, I don't think it will take me long to run down your friend the devil."

CHAPTER IV

OUT OF THE PAST

It was late when Aurelius Smith returned to his diggings on Fenton Street—nearly midnight. He let himself in quietly with his latch-key and passed quickly down the passageway to the door of the large room. The reception room, on the right of the passage, was dark and no light shone from under the door of Bernice Asterley's quarters on the left, but the door at the end of the passage stood slightly ajar, showing a light upon the great work table within.

Smith's hand had scarcely touched the door, to open it farther, when he noticed a slight but unnatural resistance from within. There was just room for his lean frame to slip through the narrow opening and he did so with a quick sidestep while he held the door from opening any farther. On the inside the explanation was evident. A thin cord had been tied to the door-knob and ran cunningly to a table-leg and from there to the stairs leading to the sleeping quarters above.

The owner of the place regarded this arrangement musingly for a moment and then smiled to himself as he strolled over to the table and proceeded to fill an old briar pipe from a jar of tobacco. He was still smiling as his finger rammed home the tobacco and as he dragged a chair into position by the light and picked up a book. When all was ready, he reached for the

cord by the table-leg and gave it a hearty yank before settling back in his chair with book and pipe.

Upstairs there was a decided thump and then silence. Again, after an interval, the stairs creaked slightly and more silence followed. There was one more creak before a red mop of hair, close to the bottom step, showed dimly by the light from the table.

"Oh, Jimmie!"

A small bundle of blue pajamas projected itself across the room and came to an abrupt halt before the man with the book and pipe.

"Yes, sir! Any orders, sir?"

Smith laid down his book.

"Been asleep?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, but I—I fixed things to wake up. Know how I did it, Mr. Smith?"

"Nearly broke my neck over your rope," returned Smith with a chuckle. "What did you tie the other end to? Your toe?"

"Aw, gee! How did you know?"

"Read about it in a book and did it myself once when I was a kid."

"Hot dog! Honest? Yuh did it onct too?" demanded Jimmie, dropping all effort at good English. "Good night shirt! Yuh know more about de insides of a kid den—den—den a corpse catcher!"

At this moment Langa Doonh entered as fully dressed and as wide-awake as if it had been the middle of the day. In his hands was a tray with biscuits and cheese and a coffee percolator already beginning to bubble.

"And a cup of chocolate for Jimmie, please," directed Smith.

With a little yelp of glee, Jimmie jumped into the air before squatting on the floor at Smith's feet.

"An' will yuh tell me about de case?" he pleaded.

"Perhaps," said Smith, "but there is something else I would like to talk about first. How would you like to stop calling me Mr. Smith?"

Jimmie's eyes opened wide in astonishment as he looked up at the man above him.

"How d'ye mean?" he asked in a rather subdued voice.

"Well," drawled Smith, "how would you like to call me Uncle Aurelius?"

Jimmie sat very still and his muscles tensed so that his little body became rigid under the pajamas.

"Uncle Relius!" he said in a funny little voice.

"Uh-huh," said Smith.

The next moment Jimmie jumped into the big man's lap and his red hair was pressed hard against his new uncle's coat. He seemed to be crying for a few moments before he began to speak.

"Gee! I ain't never had no fader an' no mudder," he muttered to himself, "but I wouldn't give me Uncle Relius fer all de faders and all de mudders in New York City an'—an' Brooklyn."

It is quite possible that Aurelius Smith was glad that Langa Doonh came in again and had to be spoken to and directed to put the cheese here and the biscuits there and to pick out a small lump of sugar—things which Langa Doonh would have done just as well, or even better, if he had been left alone. As a matter of fact, Smith, man of experience as he was, had never before met with so ardent and genuine a manifestation of affection. It was not in his character, however, to

show much degree of emotion even when in the privacy of his rather unique family. With the coffee and the chocolate he commented briefly upon the present case while Jimmie, still in his lap, listened breathlessly.

"The case," he said, "has indications of being unusually interesting. The man I want must have a scientific training or he would not be using poisons which are, if I mistake not, almost unheard of. However, we will know more about that when we get the analysis tomorrow."

Smith reached for his pipe and turned to Langa Doonh.

"I suppose that Miss Asterley gave the little star to the messenger when he called?"

"*Han, sahib,*" was the quick answer. "Missie sahib give to man who call. Then Missie sahib burn cigarettes and boil master's cigarette case."

"Humph!" grunted Smith and turned his attention again to the boy in his lap. "You see, Jimmie, it's this way. The man you tracked down for me is plainly incapable of doing anything very clever himself. Of course, he dropped the poison-star and——"

"Den he *is de* murderer!" exclaimed Jimmie excitedly. "Did yuh croak him or jug him?"

"Wait a minute," went on Smith. "I took him down to the police station and he is now locked up. In a sense, he is a murderer, but there is another man who is much more dangerous and this other man made your man, Brown, do what he did. How he made him do it seems to be rather mysterious and I don't understand it yet. Brown would die rather than inform on his master. The police are trying to get it out of him, but I don't think they have a chance. The boarding-

house people say they know nothing about him except that he moved in two weeks ago. I searched his room and found absolutely nothing of any significance except a box of incense with 'H. P. B.' stamped on the cover."

Smith stopped talking and reached for more tobacco while Jimmie looked up anxiously.

"Watcha goin' to do now?" he questioned, fearing that he would be sent back to bed and hoping to prolong the conversation.

"Well," continued Smith, "I tipped off the morning papers that Brown has been arrested. There is a chance that somebody may call on him and that the police may be able to trace and identify the caller."

"An' get all de—de glory!" complained Jimmie.

"Jimmie"—Smith sucked at his pipe and looked down at the young eyes—"glory isn't worth fishing for. Work in a good cause is all that counts and glory is food for weaklings. Besides, I believe that, when we find Brown's master, we will only have taken the first step in the case."

"'Spose," suggested Jimmie, "dat no guy calls at de cop-house to see Brown."

"In that case," said Smith, "my only avenue of investigation is the box of incense with the letters 'H. P. B.' Brown said that those letters did not stand for his name and that, I believe, is the truth."

"What will you do next?" asked Jimmie, pronouncing his words very carefully and hoping desperately that his little heaven was not to be terminated by an order to go to bed.

"First, send you to bed," came the fatal words, "and then do some rather hard thinking."

Jimmie stirred slightly, but a small boy longs, some-

times, for a special sweet with a desperate longing.

"Wouldn't yuh tell me just one?"

"One what?" asked Smith as if he did not know.

"Just one little war story—Uncle Relius?"

"Well," said Smith musingly, "I want to think over old times and I'll tell you how I found a rat that may have something to do with the present case. It was in the fall of 1915 that I was ordered to investigate some very clever wire-tapping which was being carried out by the Germans on the Belgian front. They were continually reading our field telegraph system and it was particularly bad to the right of Ypres where the Canadians held a long, thin line of trenches. In order to study the problem, I joined a company of Canadians as a lieutenant and served several weeks with them.

"During the second week we got badly messed up so that there were only two officers left in the company—a captain and myself. The company frontage was a long one, nearly five hundred yards, and the two of us had to keep awake nearly all the time, both day and night. One night we had a gassing wind and there was good reason to expect an attack, but I was all in—couldn't stay awake another minute, I firmly believed. So I decided to lie down before I went to sleep and fell down.

"I had a wretched, little dugout at one end of the company trench. The roof was so low that I could not sit upright and a brazier, made out of a tin pail, gave off so much gas that I pushed it out into the mud and water of the trench. I ordered the non-commissioned officer, on duty, to report to me every half hour whether I was awake or asleep. Then I crawled into the dugout and lay on my ground-sheet, wet and muddy, with a sandbag for a pillow.

"I lay there for some time wide-awake, yet aching for sleep. As I waited for sleep, I listened. Every sound had a meaning. I heard the crack of the bullets from the enemy—only fifty yards away. I heard the bang of our own rifles as our night sentries, on the fire-steps, fired in reply. This was quite normal and I tried harder to sleep, but couldn't. I heard the stamping of feet on the trench matting and I knew that the men were cold. I heard a scratching in my dugout and I knew by its loudness that it was a rat and not a mouse. Besides, there was an occasional squeak that no mouse could produce. So I went on listening and listening and couldn't get to sleep simply because I was actually too tired to relax.

"I heard the deep roar of a flare and I knew that a listening-post or a night sentry had reported something suspicious in No Man's Land. I knew that an N. C. O. had fired the flare to investigate. I knew that, in all probability, an innocent stump had been exposed by the flare. Otherwise I would have been called at once. I heard the screech of a shell and, after quite a pause, I heard the distant explosion. I knew that our guns were worrying the back roads and dumps of the enemy. Every so often a gruff voice would come from the little door of my dugout.

"'Everything quiet, sir,' it said.

"'Right! Make me answer each time,' I would reply."

Jimmie stirred and his eyes closed a little more.

"Gee! I wisht I'd been there with yuh," he murmured.

"Away in the distance," continued Smith, "I heard the faint rumble of wheels on cobblestones. I knew that the enemy transport was bringing up food or ma-

terial of some kind. I heard several shells screech overhead and burst in the far distance. I knew that one of our batteries had heard the faint rumbling of the enemy transport wheels.

"I heard the faint whistling of a howitzer shell. My muscles contracted as I waited for the explosion. Was it for us? There was no sound. It had passed. I knew that the enemy was paying attention to our lines of communication.

"I heard the rattle of a tin cup. I knew that hot bovril was being served to the shivering men. A cup was shoved in to me. It was very good, but it did me most good to know that the N. C. O. thought enough of his officer to remember him when the hot drinks came around."

"Huh!" exclaimed Jimmie, although his eyes were closed. "Do you think anybody would forget *you!*"

"So it went on," continued Smith, "and I was just on the point of going to sleep when something came into my dugout. The rubber sheet had been half torn off the doorway and there was just enough light for me to see what appeared to be the most enormous rat carrying a tremendous mouse in its mouth. It came closer and I saw that it was a cat with a kitten in its mouth. Over to where I lay stalked the cat and inspected me. Then it placed the kitten, all muddy and wet, on one side of my neck and out the door, again, went Mrs. Cat. I was too surprised to move and, as I was quite as wet and dirty as the kitten, I just lay there while the little ball of fur snuggled up against my neck for warmth.

"Almost immediately the old cat returned with another kitten, equally soggy, and calmly placed the sec-

and one on the opposite side of my neck. Just as I was wondering how many more kittens were coming, the old cat climbed up on my chest and the whole three of them started purring or snoring. The old cat was pretty heavy and I was just about to heave her off when—I fell asleep. The warmth of the cat family or the hypnotic influence of their purring must finally have induced sleep.

“Suddenly I was wide-awake again and sure that I had been hit by a shell and that murder was being committed in my dugout. I sat up in great excitement, bruising my head against the corrugated iron roof. But it was very simple. My flashlight soon showed me what had happened. The old cat had jumped from my chest on to a huge rat. The shrieks of that rat had sounded in my ears as I wakened from the spring of the cat.”

In the low monotone of his recital Smith added :

“Langa Doonh.”

“Sahib?”

“Take the chhota sahib to bed.”

Swiftly, but gently, the native servant lifted the sleeping boy away. Aurelius Smith sat motionless, staring enigmatically into space. He might have been thirty, or forty, or fifty years of age as he sat there. Langa Doonh later, passing toward his kitchen, found him still motionless, but halted at a sudden wave of the hand.

“Langa Doonh.”

“Sahib?”

“Do you remember the plague rats in the Hindu cantonment in France during the War?”

“Sahib, one thousand of my countrymen die,” an-

swered the native with impressive utterance. "I remember."

"The man who did that escaped," returned Smith. "I believe him to be the greatest poisoner in the world today and I do not believe that any other man could make a poison-star like the one of yesterday. Sometime ago our old chief, Sir Oliver Haultain, wrote me from England that this man was supposed to be in America."

"Sahib, you think?" queried the native.

"I think so, Langa Doonh," replied Smith very slowly.

"*Khuddha bara hai!*" exclaimed Langa Doonh, his black eyes flashing.

"Yes, 'God is great!'" translated Smith. "And, if it is to be my last fight, I would not miss it."

Suddenly the huge Hindu knelt and pressed his master's hand against his forehead.

CHAPTER V

“I HAVE SEEN MANY MEN DIE—BUT ONLY ONE
MONKEY!”

LANGA DOONH was mouse-like in his kitchen—wide-awake, but very quiet—when Smith became active. Rising from his chair, he pressed a button at the side of his great table and the whole room was flooded with the brightest light. That table seemed very large, but it would have seemed tremendous had it been in a smaller room. It mastered the room just as the man, who sat behind it, was accustomed to controlling the occupants of the room.

Magically, Smith changed from repose to the keen hunter of criminals, to the man who matched his brains against the brains of any or all who transgressed the law. Before a large, new map of New York City, suspended from a picture molding, he placed himself and proceeded to pencil it heavily with circles and lines. His own place on Fenton Street he circled first and ran lines to Brown's boarding house on 56th Street, to the Police Station where Brown was now lodged, to Mr. Grayson's great department store on Broadway, and to Mr. Grayson's palatial house on Fifth Avenue. He connected all these points, each with each of the others, and examined the little network with reference to the different subway systems, elevated railroads, and surface car lines. It was to be his battle-ground and, as the case proceeded, it was probable that the network

of lines would become more and more intricate, more like a web until, at some point within, a poisonous human would become entangled and lose forever his power of carrying injury to his fellow men.

In the small hours of the morning, Langa Doonh—accustomed well to a master who, sometimes, forgot to sleep—entered quietly with more coffee and found Smith sprawled upon a lounge and surrounded by books, old and new, large and small, scattered here and there upon the floor. Cigarette ends and pipe ashes, too, were strewn about among the books. One large volume was held open by means of a broken bayonet.

At four in the morning Smith called the house doctor of the hospital where Mr. Grayson had sent his stenographer after her collapse upon beholding the five-pointed star. He put a strange question. Was there any interference with the nerves controlling the circulation in the capillary blood-vessels? The house doctor was not attending the case personally, but a report was promised later.

At six in the morning he lighted a cube of incense, from Brown's box, and gently inhaled the fumes as he read a long treatise on incense from an encyclopedia.

At seven he removed the soft collar that he had been wearing and lay back in a chair while Langa Doonh shaved him with strokes as skilful as those of the most accomplished barber.

It was at half-past seven that the little family met for breakfast. Smith usually breakfasted in bed where he often received an early caller and talked with him over eggs and coffee. This morning, however, he emerged from a cold bath and, wrapped in a blue dressing-gown, took his place at the head of the little

table which was always placed by Langa Doonh, with the persistent accuracy of the native of India, upon a lion skin in the very center of the large room.

Except for a slightly concentrated expression, Smith might just have arisen from a refreshing sleep. Jimmie, perhaps, was a trifle sleepy, but Bernice Asterley was very much awake. There was a sparkle in her eyes which came from anticipation of a new case. As for Langa Doonh, he was the same as ever—quiet and keenly alert, serving the bacon and eggs as if to royalty.

"I am glad to see that the case is not finished yet," remarked Bernice as she took her seat.

"You mean that I would be in bed and asleep if it were all over?" asked Smith with a short smile.

"Of course," she returned. "You usually lose interest in life when there is no work to do."

Smith handed her several sheets of scratch paper.

"That is the case to date," he said. "It has hardly commenced. After breakfast, you will report to Mr. Grayson at his store and take the position of his personal stenographer. Of course, you will always use your own initiative, but, at the start, you will have two objectives. In the first place, you will find out all you can about the habits of the office girls who seem to have been mentally affected, and particularly about the one who is now in hospital. In the second place, you must, so far as possible, try to guard Mr. Grayson."

Suddenly Jimmie blurted out:

"Would you mind telling me what became of the cat, Unc—Uncle Relius?"

Bernice glanced up quickly.

"Langa Doonh considers you to be his father and mother," she said, over her coffee cup, in the slightest

of bantering tones, "and now you are Jimmie's uncle. Am I the only one to be left out?"

"Gee! Yuh ain't old enough to be a real aunt," interrupted Jimmie, losing control of his English, "but yuh can be me sister."

"What do *you* think, Unc—Uncle Relius?" asked the girl in the manner that she might have used to an older brother of whom she was somewhat in awe.

"Uh-huh," said Smith, much as that same big brother might reply to a mere sister. "You and Jimmie can settle it, Bernice." Then, to Jimmie: "Here is the address of a place that sells incense. After breakfast you will go there and see if you can buy a box of incense with 'H. P. B.' printed on the cover."

At the close of breakfast, Smith returned immediately to his books among which he sat in a cloud of tobacco smoke until after the departure of Bernice and Jimmie upon their assignments. He was still in his blue dressing-gown when Langa Doonh ushered in a city policeman.

"You are Mr. Aurelius Smith?" asked the officer.

Smith nodded and pointed to a chair.

"I've heard of you, sir. My name is Monroe and the captain sent me down to see you about that man, Brown, you brought in last night."

"Yes?" questioned Smith.

"Brown is dead," stated the officer.

"Died suddenly?" drawled Smith. "Nobody knows how?"

"Did they telephone you about it, sir?"

"No," said Smith, "but I fancied that would be the way that Brown would pass out."

"He had a visitor as you predicted," went on Mon-

roe. "It was early this morning and the visitor talked a few low words to Brown through the bars with a guard in plain sight. From where he stood the guard couldn't see Brown, but he swears that nothing was passed through the bars and, for the matter of that, nothing was found afterwards inside the cell which could have been used to cause death. The visitor was out on the street with one of our men taking up the trail, as you suggested, when Brown was discovered stone dead in his cell. There wasn't a break any place in his skin, except for his head, which was rather scabby."

"And the visitor?" asked Smith. "You followed him?"

"Not me," returned Monroe quickly, "and I'm mighty glad of it, for he got away from one of our best men inside of two blocks."

"That's bad," commented Smith. "No hint at all as to his identity?"

"Well, yes, but not much," was the reply. "That's the reason I'm here. I think I ran into this man once about five years ago. I just got a glimpse of him this time as he went out, but I'll swear he is the same man."

"Five years is a long time to remember a casual face," said Smith. "Did something about the man impress you strongly when you first met him?"

"Did you ever see a monkey die?" came the surprising question and, as Smith shook his head: "I have seen many men die—but only one monkey! I don't think that I am mistaken in this man, sir."

There was a short interruption while Smith answered the telephone. It was a brief statement from the laboratory regarding the poison-star. Not enough of the poi-

son had been present to make a proper analysis. All that they could say was that it seemed to be a very unusual vegetable poison, similar, probably, to some little known concoctions of South America. Unconcernedly, Smith hung up the telephone and shoved a box of cigars toward his visitor.

"Let's have the story," he said.

"It was shortly after the close of the War," commenced Monroe, selecting a cigar, "that I returned from France and rejoined the New York force and was placed on plain clothes work.

"Almost my first job was to investigate a man about whom we had had two complaints. The first complaint came from a wealthy man who said that his wife was paying out large sums of money to some kind of a fake teacher of occultism. The second complaint came from a little old lady who was bugs on anti-vivisection and who said that this same fake occult teacher was practicing vivisection in New York City.

"Well, this man wasn't hiding and I had no difficulty in finding him. He called himself Jerome Cardan and he lived in a small bungalow on top of an uptown apartment house. I waited until I knew he was at home and then walked in on him without troubling to ring his bell or send up word.

"It's a funny thing, sir"—Monroe took a few thoughtful puffs from his cigar—"but this man, Cardan, didn't seem the least bit surprised to see me. He knew, straightaway, that I was from the police and said that it was a pleasure to receive such a visit. He was a queer man, bald and yellowed—but a white man—with a broken nose and the blackest eyes I ever saw. They were so black that you could hardly tell the

pupil from the iris. I had a gun in my pocket, but when he looked at me, that gun didn't seem to be worth much. There were two monkeys, a big one and a little one, in the room when I entered and he made a gurgling sound at them so that they went and laid at his feet like two quiet dogs—and that's unusual for a monkey.

"The first thing he did was to ask me to let him see the lines on my hand and, before I knew it, he was doing all the talking and asking all the questions. He told my past life from my hand so that I didn't know whether I was standing on my head or my feet—and he told me funny things that have happened during the last five years. Do you think there's anything in this looking into the future, Mr. Smith?"

"If you study a hill," returned Smith, stretching and taking up his pipe, "you can tell, pretty well, how a ball will roll down it."

"But the past! How about the past?"

"A wind, blowing to the west, comes from the east."

"Then you believe in fortune-telling, Mr. Smith?"

"I will parry your question slightly," returned Smith, "by saying that I have seen too much to disbelieve in it."

"Well, anyway," went on Monroe, "this man, Jerome Cardan, played with me like a child—I must confess it—until he suddenly turned nasty and began to slam the police force for a pack of fools. That made me angry and I got hold of myself and told him that he was a blankety-blank fake. He just laughed and said he would prove his art. The next minute he was making sounds at the monkeys just as if he was talking to them and they both jumped up on the table between us.

"Mr. Smith, it will be hard for you to believe what happened." Monroe looked doubtfully at the silent man before him and then continued. "Cardan took the hands—paws, I mean—of these monkeys and showed me the little lines, almost exactly like my own lines. He jibed at the police and police methods and, all the time, I was getting madder and madder—couldn't seem to help it.

"'Look!' he said. 'The big monkey will live five years and the little monkey will die soon. That's the reason I shaved the little fellow under the right fore leg and inoculated him for experiment. I knew that he must soon die and there is no object in shortening life without a definite reason.'"

"Shaved under the right fore leg!" exclaimed Smith in a low voice and rose to stride slowly up and down the room with head bent while the officer stopped his narration.

"Shaved under the right fore leg!" he repeated, halting before the man in blue. "Monroe, this case is connecting with the greatest failure of my life."

"Will you explain, sir?" asked the officer.

"Willingly," returned Smith with a certain quick acquiescence so attractive to those who knew him. "During the War an attempt was made to inoculate the rats in our trenches with a disease which would be transmitted to our men. It was made by certain vicious private interests and not, I am glad to say, by any Government. Fortunately, the attempt was only partly successful and I ran into it in a curious way. While I was serving a brief period in a front-line trench, a cat dragged a half-eaten rat into my sleeping-bag. That rat was shaved under the right foreleg. I sent it in to

the medical authorities and it was found to have been inoculated with disease germs."

"Many men contract disease?" asked Monroe, frowning.

"Not in the trenches," returned Smith. "The life was too open, but in cantonments—wait."

From a locked drawer Smith took a red portfolio and extracted a large photograph which he silently handed to Monroe.

"My God!" exclaimed the officer after a silence. "And the world never knew."

"And never will know," returned Smith as he replaced the photograph.

"Ever find out who did it?" demanded Monroe.

"No," answered Smith, "although I got a description which resembles your man, Cardan. I penetrated two enemy countries in a search for him but failed, failed miserably."

"And the boys say you never fail," commented Monroe, relighting his cigar.

"A good reputation is usually as inaccurate as a bad one," laughed Smith. "Please go on with your story."

"Well, sir," continued the officer, "I twitted Cardan with his silly proof of his art and told him that I had something better to do than to wait five years for a monkey to die."

"'The little monkey will die today,' he answered, 'and the big one will live five years. Kill the big one and you will prove me a liar. You might shoot him if you are not afraid of the bang.'"

"It wasn't natural for me to lose my temper and I don't know why I did it, but those 'afraid of the bang' words had the effect of making me see red. The next

second I pulled my gun and, some way or other, both monkeys seemed to be jumping all over the room. I'm a decent shot, however, and I took a clean sight on the big fellow and fired. Just as I pulled the trigger the little monkey jumped straight at the muzzle of my gun and down it went at my feet—dying."

Monroe stopped talking and let his cigar go out again while Smith watched him in silence. Presently the story was taken up in a lower voice.

"I've seen many men die, sir—but only one monkey. I'll never shoot another monkey as long as I live. It—it's worse than a man. That monkey seemed quite human as it lay there, jerking with little moans. It was more helpless, more pitiful than any man. I have heard this said by hunters, but I never knew it before. It gets me yet, sometimes, to think of the pathetic appeal in that animal's eyes. There was no anger, but just a look of some kind of hunger—a kind of brotherly longing.

"That case nearly got me a reprimand. I went home and didn't report until the next day. I have never been able to understand my feelings or why I acted the way I did. The next day I went back to the roof bungalow and it was as empty as an old cigar box. Not a trace of anything was left and he has never been heard of since—but the man who called on Brown is Jerome Cardan, I'm sure."

As Monroe ceased speaking, Smith opened a reference book and, after a brief search, read:

"Cardan, Jerome. An astrologer, alchemist, kabbalist, and mystic, well known in literature. He was born at Pavia in 1501, and died at Rome in 1576."

"What do you make of that?" asked Monroe, puzzled.

"Nothing, yet," returned Smith, "but it may be useful information. By the way, I have a question to ask."

"Right! I'll answer if I can."

"After you shot the monkey, when did you reload your gun?"

Monroe sprang to his feet.

"You are a wizard!" he exclaimed. "What makes you ask that? As a matter of fact, I don't know when I reloaded it. I found it fully loaded when I got home. I was afraid that I had made an exhibition of myself by loading it on the street."

"No, you didn't do that," returned Smith quietly.

Monroe was about to speak when the telephone rang and Smith listened to a brief report regarding the stenographer who was in hospital. When he hung up, Monroe asked the question that the telephone had interrupted.

"When do you think I did load the gun after shooting the monkey? If you believe I didn't do it on the street you must have some theory."

"I have," said Smith. "You didn't shoot any monkey."

It was quite evident that the policeman was incredulous and Smith picked up a small, battered book from which, evidently translating, he slowly read:

It is a most dangerous practice, morally and physically, as it interferes with the nerve fluid and the nerves controlling the circulation in the capillary vessels.

"Now," continued Smith as Monroe sat in puzzled

silence, "I have just had a hospital report upon a young girl who is, I believe, one of Cardan's victims. The doctor states that there is something wrong with the nerves controlling the circulation in this girl's capillary blood-vessels."

"I don't get you," said Monroe. "What is this dangerous practice that the book talks about?"

"Hypnotism," said Smith.

There was a scampering of small feet and Jimmie burst suddenly into the room. He halted abruptly upon seeing the officer and would undoubtedly have growled if he had been a dog. The police were rivals of his master in the eyes of Jimmie.

"Come here, Jimmie, and shake hands with my friend, Mr. Monroe," said Smith.

The boy advanced quickly and held out his hand. If Aurelius Smith, the mighty knower of men, said that this officer was a friend, that altered everything.

"By the way, Jimmie, did you get the box of H. P. B. incense?" asked Smith.

"No, sir," said Jimmie, bashfully restraining from the "uncle" in front of the strange officer. "The man said he didn't sell sofa tickle incense."

Jimmie had spoken very slowly and pronounced each word most distinctly.

"Sofa tickle incense?" questioned Smith.

"Dat's what de guy spilled, Uncle Relius," persisted Jimmie emphatically.

"You are right!" exclaimed Smith suddenly. "Jimmie, you have scored a bull's eye. Sofa tickle incense is theosophical incense and H. P. B. stands for Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the celebrated founder of the modern theosophical movement."

CHAPTER VI

JEROME CARDAN

JEROME CARDAN slowly took his horn-ringed, black eyes from the book he was reading and turned them toward the door at the second knock. It was too early for his landlady to bring tea to her exceptional tenant on the ground floor and Cardan kept his jaundiced face toward the door in silent and expressionless observation. If the visitor persisted, he was ready to give any necessary attention, but if the visitor lost heart, that would be the end to something which mattered nothing. Once more there came a knock and Cardan shifted the unsightly reading spectacles upon his broken nose so that he could the more keenly observe the door-knob—which was slowly turning. Gently, the door opened and a tall man, angular, blue eyed, and careless, stepped into the room.

“Aurelius Smith?” asked Cardan, casually.

“Uh-huh,” was the equally casual reply.

“Expected you several years sooner,” returned Cardan. “You are not so quick as I thought. However, I am glad to meet you at last. I knew that it had to be—sooner or later. Sit down.”

Smith crossed the room, leisurely noting, with wandering glance, the well-filled bookcases and the luxurious but simple furnishings of what was evidently the front room of a suite which reached from front to rear of a one-time private residence. Deliberately, he

picked up the book which Cardan had been reading and looked at the title—*Theurgia or the Egyptian Mysteries*, by Iamblichus. Dropping the book upon the table, he lowered himself into a chair and picked up another book. This second book was in Latin—*Problemata Aristotelis*. It was a very old book and Smith, with the knowledge of old books, turned swiftly to the last page where he read: “Impreffa per Iohanem Reynhard de Eningen. A.M.CCCC. Lxxv. xiiii.calend.Iunii. Foeliciter. LAVS DEO.”

“Printed in 1475—a very rare book,” commented Smith.

“I have others—much rarer, before the art of printing,” said Cardan with a gleam of interest.

But Smith changed the subject.

“Last night,” he said, as if he were talking about the weather, “a man named Brown tried to lull himself to sleep by means of some H. P. B. incense. It was quite the best incense that I had ever smelled. I tried to buy some today and, after considerable search discovered that it was sold only by one of the theosophical societies and that H. P. B. stood for Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the late remarkable founder of present-day theosophical movements. At a local theosophical lodge a dear, old lady, who sold me some of this incense, happened to remark that a yellow-faced, black-eyed, bald-headed, broken-nosed man had been very impatiently waiting for a new shipment of this incense to arrive. Naturally, I recognized such a vivid description of you and, thinking that you might be having sleepless nights, offered to bring you a box at once. The lady said that you occasionally borrowed books from the lodge library although you were not a member

of the society, which latter fact did not seem to depress her in the slightest. I had little difficulty in obtaining your address."

Smith took a small box from his pocket and tossed it carelessly upon the table while he turned partly in his chair and deliberately began to observe the room and its contents.

"I am not childish enough to wish to know how you found me," returned Cardan, paying not the slightest attention to the box. "You are here and I shall handle the problem in the most advantageous way possible."

Smith lighted a cigarette, puffed the smoke before him, and fixed his eyes on the hands of the man who spoke so surely. They were brownish-yellow and slender, the hands of an artist. Like the same colored face, they might have belonged to a man of seventy, or sixty, but scarcely fifty. Smith, too, possessed the hands of an artist, but they also indicated a lean and sinewy strength and their owner, as he sat there, might have been thirty, or forty, but scarcely fifty.

During a brief silence Smith pondered the age of his vis-à-vis and shifted his thoughts to the question of nationality. There was no definite answer to be had. Age was extremely indefinite and there seemed to be hints of all races except the Negro. The man was a decided puzzle. Smith squirmed more deeply and more indolently into his chair—and waited.

"What are you going to do?" asked Cardan.

"Listen to what you have to say," was the cool reply, "and go home when you ask me to go."

"Then you admit that I can drive you out?"

"No," said Smith, "but, on this occasion, I shall go when you ask me to go—if I don't change my mind."

Cardan took up his book and commenced to read. There was silence in the room except for the faint turning of a page and the occasional striking of a match as Smith lighted a fresh cigarette. Perhaps half an hour had elapsed when there was a knock at the door and the landlady entered with a tray of tea and toast. Upon Cardan's request, she brought a second cup for Smith.

"If you will pour the tea," said Cardan, "you will remove from your mind any suspicion of poison."

"Thanks," said Smith and did as Cardan suggested.

With the tea, conversation was resumed between the two men. At times, it seemed almost friendly; indolently indifferent, perhaps, upon Smith's part; coolly confident, with a certain touch of contempt, upon the part of Cardan.

"Have you read any of the Blavatsky writings?" asked Cardan.

"Browsed in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*," answered Smith.

Cardan opened a drawer and took out a box of Russian cigarette tobacco. He passed it, with cigarette papers, to Smith.

"It has no equal in New York," he said. "Roll a cigarette—if you have the courage."

There was no hesitation in the way that Smith rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"No courage needed," he remarked with the first puff. "I would not have done this when I first came in, but now I know how to read you and I know that you have not yet decided to kill me."

"True," returned Cardan. "You are extremely clever with your limited amount of knowledge. I expect to use you to my own advantage, but, should you prove

too clever, I shall, of course, kill you as the easiest course to pursue."

"That will be quite satisfactory," returned Smith. "I shall try to be a second or two ahead of you when it comes to the killing business. In the meantime, what do you think of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*?"

"It is the only complete book of real knowledge in the English language."

"English?" queried Smith.

"Well, of course," returned Cardan, "Madam Blavatsky, herself, took her knowledge from the secret books of symbols in the East. I, too, have studied them in the recesses of India and Thibet."

"Then the *Secret Doctrine* is a true explanation of life and death?"

"It is the only explanation of divine justice before the public today," came the quite emphatic answer.

"And are you working for justice?" quickly demanded Smith, like a boxer who steps in to land a blow.

"I would advise you to read Socrates' argument of opposites," answered Cardan with a dry chuckle. "There can be no justice without injustice. Each comes from the other, like every other vice or virtue. Virtue and vice are one. Justice is the fourth cardinal virtue and there is no exception. All is cause and effect. There could be no cause without effect and no effect without cause. The law of Karma proves that all is one. God and the devil are the same. Otherwise, God could not be omnipotent. Are you answered?"

"Scarcely," returned Smith dryly. "Would Madam Blavatsky have agreed with you?"

"She could not have denied my words."

"But would she have done the things you do?"

"Certainly not," replied Cardan without hesitation. "She was positive and I am negative. She was on the side of good and I am on the side of evil. Neither one can exist without the other. It is the warfare between the two which permits growth or evolution. Siva destroys and Vishnu preserves. Blavatsky sought to save her brothers from suffering by teaching them some of the hidden laws of nature. I do not work that way."

"What do you gain," drawled Smith, "by being on the side of evil?"

"It is not a case of being on the side of evil in order to gain," returned Cardan. "Nothing can be lost and something must be gained as we progress through infinity. I am on the side of evil because it is my dharma—my lot in life."

"You are almost as fantastic as your namesake, Jerome Cardan, the Italian savant who died in Rome in 1576," remarked Smith, lazily rolling himself another cigarette without any invitation.

The yellowed fingers of the black-eyed man also sought the tobacco box and a cigarette was rolled by the fingers of one hand with astonishing dexterity. Smith watched the operation with apparent indifference. He seemed always to be watching his companion's hands, contrary to the custom of the fencer who regards the eyes of his adversary. After the first inhalation, Cardan spoke almost as if he were addressing a child.

"I am the Italian savant who died in Rome in 1576," he stated. "It was because my treatise, *De Subtilitate*, was so little understood that I ceased, by my own choice, to be a follower of Vishnu and entered the service of Siva."

"Uh-huh," said Smith, "and—I forgot to tell you that I am Santa Claus."

The hand of Cardan dropped, with an impatient slap, upon the table where it lay flat with fingers extended and slightly trembling.

"You may scoff!" he ejaculated. "Your words are only ignorant."

"Then they must become wise," parried Smith with no hesitation, "since wisdom is the opposite of ignorance, comes from it; both being one and the same thing."

"Bah!" said Cardan, taking up his book and relapsing into silence.

Smith withdrew his eyes from the hand upon the table and rose lazily to his feet to stroll indifferently across the room to the book-shelves. What a man read meant much to Smith. Two books he extracted at random for observation. One was *Pistis Sophia*—a gnostic gospel, and the other was a volume of the works of Cornelius Tacitus, printed in London in 1793. On the front page of the latter, in faded ink, was written: "Jerome Cardan, Hamburgh, February 4th, 1818."

Cardan, apparently intent upon his book, paid not the slightest outward attention to his visitor, and Smith circled the room until he stood directly behind its unusual tenant. In rear of Smith, as he faced the back of the reader at the table, was a heavy portière shutting off the next room in the suite. Upon the thick carpet Smith took one silent step backward toward that portière.

"I would advise you not to enter that room," spoke Cardan without turning his head.

"Thanks," said Smith, walking back to the table and seating himself. "That is exactly what you would have said if you had wanted me to enter that room." Smith lighted one of his own cigarettes and leaned back in his chair, looking squarely into the black eyes for the first time. "However," he added, "there is apparently no mirror in front of you and the back of your head was toward me when I took the silent step in the direction of the portière. If you had wanted me to enter the room, you would not have warned me against entering it *in the way you did*. As a matter of fact, you didn't care a tinker's dam whether I entered the room or not."

"Then why did I stop you?" asked Cardan.

"Wouldn't you like to know if I knew?" queried Smith with a grin and deliberately blew a cloud of smoke straight into the face of the man opposite.

Not for a moment did Cardan's expression change, but his yellowed fingers, by the tobacco box, splayed apart and trembled visibly. Out of the corner of his eye Smith watched the slightly trembling fingers become quiet. He reached for the box of Russian tobacco, but seemed to change his mind. Instead, his hand sought his half-finished cup of tea, and Cardan's fingers were again trembling slightly. While Smith had been circling the room, his back had been turned to the table on several occasions. He made as if to lift the cup to his lips and the fingers on the table trembled even more visibly. He set down the cup and laughed softly.

"You are a clever thief and a cold-blooded murderer, Cardan," he remarked, "but you are also an egotistic bluff."

"Do you really think I am a bluff?" asked Cardan, calmly.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" jibed Smith and blew another cloud of smoke straight into the black eyes.

"This case of Grayson and his wife will be your last case, Mr. Aurelius Smith," said Cardan.

"Uh-huh?" said Smith. "The Grayson case is, comparatively, a small matter. I am striking you for what you did to India."

"Bah!" exclaimed Cardan. "You are mentally deranged to become sentimental over a pack of filthy coolies. If you knew anything of life after death, you would know that they were much better off where they went. However, you will never get enough evidence to hold me without bail in either the Grayson or the Hindu case. What is more, I shall bring you to my feet like a whipped dog. You will be quite helpless."

"I don't begin to feel that helpless sensation," retorted Smith. "Just another bluff, my dear chap."

"I see that I must convince you," said Cardan, a trifle irritably and opened a drawer upon his side of the table.

Smith watched him narrowly as he took out a box which proved to contain modeling wax of various colors. Selecting a gray color, Cardan quickly erected a small figure and, with surprising ability, modeled it hurriedly into the shape of a woman. With a match he formed the features of the face and succeeded in making a very good job of it. The little figure was placed in the center of the table between the two men.

"Now," said Cardan, "I shall consider that this little figure is Mrs. Grayson and, through it, I shall fix my attention upon her."

"Voodooism?" queried Smith.

"Yes," returned Cardan. "That is what it is called when it is done by New Orleans Negroes and by certain natives of Africa and South America. They work the magic ignorantly, but I have full control and know exactly what I am doing. This exhibition is merely to show you what power I have and how utterly helpless you are."

Cardan folded his arms and his head sank forward while his eyes, half shut, gleamed upon the little image. He did not remain long so.

"It is done," he said, sweeping the figure back into the box. "I have commanded Mrs. Grayson to go to sleep and to remain asleep long enough to convince you. I have done this, through concentration of mind, by projecting my will through the universal life fluid."

"Very interesting, indeed," commented Smith, raising his cup in an absent-minded manner. "Very interesting—if she goes to sleep."

Cardan did not speak as Smith held the cup poised half-way to his mouth. Instead of raising it any farther, he picked up a small blotter from the table and crumpled it into a ball with his free hand.

"I had my back turned several times," he said, "and this tea may not be quite as healthy as it was when I poured it."

Setting down the cup, he dropped the blotter into the tea, extracted the dripping wad and wrapped it in his handkerchief as he backed toward the door.

"I think I shall take a sample for analysis," he added.

"Damn you!" exclaimed Cardan.

"Thank you for that compliment," answered Smith as he closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER VII

SMITH TALKS IT OVER

MARY MONROE turned impatiently with a dripping dish in her hand as the door-bell sounded.

"I've a notion to let them ring," she said. "Don't forget that we are going to the movies tonight and I'm not going to be cheated out of it. Who do you think it is?"

Officer Monroe continued to wipe the dish that he was holding and smiled reassuringly at his attractive partner in life.

"I suppose," he said, "that if I had half the brains of that man, Aurelius Smith, I could draw a picture of our visitor just by the way he rang the bell."

"You have plenty of brains," maintained Mary, stoutly. "You had to have them to get me. Use them to tell who is at the door and then go and open it."

"Well, it's Aurelius Smith himself," returned Monroe with a laugh and proceeded to do as he was told.

Mary, in the kitchen, heard an exclamation of surprise from her husband and shoved the door open.

"Who is it?" she called.

"Mr. Aurelius Smith," replied Monroe, ushering in that very person.

Mary's face was a mixture of surprise and disappointment as she stood in the kitchen doorway.

"Been talking about me, eh?" said Smith. "And

afraid that I may keep you from going out for the evening?"

But Smith did not intend to stay long and his manner was so disarming that harmony seemed to descend at once. Besides, the tall visitor took a kitten from his pocket, and Mary loved kittens. He said he had picked it out of an ash-can where it had been calling for help. It is true that it was a bit dirty, but that didn't seem to bother Mary any more than Smith. Mary deliberately turned the dishes under the tap as soon as she discovered that Smith had no objection to her presence.

"I know I can trust you both," he said, "and I need to talk things over with a couple of friends. I want to get your husband's advice, Mrs. Monroe."

That settled it for Mary. Anybody who wanted her husband's advice was, in her estimation, a very sensible person. Still, she couldn't understand why Smith would not let her give the kitten some milk. It is quite possible that she would not have liked him so well if she had known.

"I have just had an interview with your old friend, Jerome Cardan," commenced Smith.

"Is he under arrest?" asked Monroe.

"No," said Smith. "There is absolutely no evidence. Let us run over the case.

"Mr. Grayson's stenographer beholds a five-pointed star, set with a ruby, and loses her mind to a considerable extent. A man is killed on my door-step by picking up a similar star to which had been added some tiny, poisonous prongs. At the same time, Mr. Grayson calls upon me and might easily have been the one to pick up the fatal star. My conclusion is that somebody wishes to kill Mr. Grayson."

"But how could a little star drive a girl crazy?" asked Mary.

"That point is still in doubt," answered Smith, "but it may have been done by post-hypnotic suggestion."

"Such things can be done," said Monroe, nodding his head gravely. "A fellow down at Headquarters gave us an exhibition once. It makes me feel creepy."

"The next thing to determine," said Smith, "is why anybody wishes to kill Mr. Grayson. Two facts are significant. Mrs. Grayson is paying out large sums of money which puzzle Mr. Grayson, and Mr. Grayson's large fortune is left, according to his will, outright to Mrs. Grayson. I conclude, pending more information, that somebody is bleeding Mrs. Grayson and wishes to seize the whole fortune by first getting it into her control through the death of her husband."

"That's reasonable," said Monroe.

"I next run down the man who dropped the poison-star at my door," continued Smith. "He is a weak man in a very nervous state of mind and quite incapable of doing anything very brainy. Obviously, he is a mere instrument, but my observation leads me to believe that he is controlled in a most unusual way, as, for instance, by hypnotism. Placed behind the bars, he is visited by a certain man and drops dead from no apparent cause. I conclude that the visitor is the great criminal and that he kills this weak tool to make certain that the police do not obtain incriminating evidence."

"But how did he kill him?" demanded Monroe. "There was absolutely no trace of anything to show how it was done."

"I do not know how it was done," said Smith. "I refuse to believe that any man has the power to produce

death by any hypnotic art and without physical contact in that space of time. Poison of the most subtle and vanishing kind seems to be the only alternative. How that poison was administered remains a mystery for the present."

"Perhaps he threw something into the prisoner's mouth," suggested Mary.

"Just possible," admitted Smith, "and rather a clever idea, as that would not necessitate the breaking of the skin, and we must remember that there was no break in the skin except for the head, which was considerably scabby."

Smith paused and consulted his watch.

"I have an engagement with Mr. Grayson at seven," he said, "and must hurry, although this talking things over is very refreshing.

"Well, to continue, this case seemed to involve an exceedingly clever poisoner, and my mind began to dwell more and more on a war case in which a human fiend inoculated the rats in the trenches and finally worked untold horror in a large Indian troop cantonment. Then you came along and gave me a description of this man Cardan. The description confirmed a strong suspicion which had been growing out of war reminiscence. I set out to find this man and, by a bit of luck, ran him down at once. I am convinced that he is the man who tried to have Mr. Grayson killed, who controls Mrs. Grayson in some unknown manner, who killed Brown in his cell, and who poisoned the rats in France. Two avenues open up before me. I must obtain enough evidence to hand Cardan to a jury or"—very slowly—"I must kill him, myself, in some legal manner."

"I suppose, at the worst, we could 'frame' him," remarked Monroe.

"That would rather hurt my pride," rejoined Smith, dryly, "and besides, Mrs. Monroe wouldn't allow you to have a hand in it."

"George never framed anybody!" burst out Mary indignantly and forgetting to stroke the kitten.

"Uh-huh," said Smith. "I know it. I wouldn't be talking in this way if I thought there was anything crooked in him. But Jerome Cardan is a dangerous man, abnormally brilliant minded and eccentric. He is sure of himself and he controls his face so that it is just about unreadable. Fortunately, like everybody else, he has a weakness by means of which the condition of his mind can be gauged to a certain extent. After a long interview, I perceived that his fingers separated slightly and trembled a little under insult and, I think, upon the approach of a climax."

Smith reached for the kitten which he placed upon his knee and proceeded to stroke its back. The little animal purred loudly and looked around at its new friends under the gentle touch of the long fingers.

"You know," said Smith, turning directly to Monroe, "the description of your meeting with Cardan really gave me quite a scare. Did you ever tell Mrs. Monroe about it?"

Monroe nodded his head, but he did not seem to be quite comfortable.

"That's good," said Smith, continuing to stroke the kitten, which was purring more loudly than ever. "I need not go over your visit in detail. In your description, one startling and very alarming feature seemed to be indicated. You said that you shot a monkey. I did

not believe this, and yet I was sure that you were telling me what you, yourself, believed. I could explain such a situation only by the supposition that Cardan, when you visited him, exerted an influence over your mind so that you believed things which were not so, and forgot things which actually occurred. Now there are different methods of affecting the brain and the mind which functions through it. I have studied such things very deeply in India where the art is at its height."

Smith looked down at the kitten on his knee and pointed a finger toward it.

"This little ball of fur," he said, "is wide-awake, purring, and looking about. Notice what I may be able to do to it."

"You are not going to hurt it?" questioned Mary anxiously.

"Not just now," partly assured Smith, "and perhaps not at all."

As he spoke, his hand stopped stroking the kitten's back and his delicate fingers sought the little head. Slowly, he began to rub a finger-tip just above the eyes, running the movement back to the ears and circling them. Over and over again he repeated the gentle rubbing from above the eyes to the ears and to various points of the head. At the end of a full minute, the head was partly lowered, the purring had almost ceased, and the eyes were half closed. At the end of the next minute, the purring had ceased altogether, the eyes were closed, and the small head was resting, quite inert, between the tiny paws.

"Now," said Smith, "that is mesmerism, originated by Mesmer, who claimed that a magnetic fluid left the

fingers in such a process. If the kitten had a mind capable of understanding words, I could make it believe that it was now killing a monkey and I could remove, from the objective portion of its mind, all memory of having been upon my knee and of having had its head rubbed in such a peculiar way."

Smith looked at Monroe.

"It doesn't seem reasonable," he said, "that a man of your type would permit a strange man, like Cardan, to make free with your head in a similar way."

"It does not, Mr. Smith," said Monroe emphatically and his wife's expression was in total agreement.

"Very well," returned Smith. "We must consider another method and see whether or not ordinary hypnotism can explain the puzzle. The hypnotic trance is much the same as the mesmeric trance and will permit the same phenomena. In both cases the final results are obtained by means of suggestion. Hypnotism, however, is commenced in a somewhat different manner. It is based on the monotonous irritation of one of the five senses, and the quickest result may be obtained from the sense of sight, although a monotonous sound is quite hypnotic, and strong perfumes, or incenses have been used for such purposes in very old religious ceremonies. If Cardan hypnotized you, however, I think he must have done it by inducing you to gaze at some glittering object so close to your eyes that they were out of focus. I do not ask if you did gaze at such a glittering object, because your objective mind might now be wiped clean of any such memory. I do ask, however, if you honestly think that you *might* have done so?"

"No," replied Monroe. "I have seen that kind of hypnotism performed and I would have known what he was up to."

"Yes," said Smith, "I am very much inclined to agree with you and I think we must look farther still and examine something else, something which really alarmed me, although I could not quite bring myself to believe that it was possible—in America. I refer to what, in English, is called *glamour*."

Before continuing, the speaker laid the kitten, still sleeping, upon an empty chair and took a turn about the room. Monroe watched him in interested silence, and it was evident that Mary had forgotten all about the movies.

"You know," went on Smith, coming to a halt and leaning lazily against the piano in the little sitting-room, "there is a famous trick in India called the rope trick. In this trick the conjurer throws a rope up into the open sky, where it remains, with one end on the ground. A chokra, or small boy, then climbs up the rope and disappears into the blue. The conjurer orders the boy to descend and the boy refuses. In anger, the conjurer climbs up after the boy and also disappears. Screams are heard and pieces of the boy—arms, legs, and head—fall to the ground. The conjurer climbs down again with a big knife and puts the pieces of the boy into a basket. He pulls down the rope, opens the basket, and the boy steps out, perfectly well.

"This is the famous rope trick which is talked about so much," continued Smith, after a pause, "but which is very rarely seen. You must travel a long time before you find a man who has actually seen it, and that is

because there are few who have the power to do it and fewer still who will use the power for such a purpose. I am one of the few who have witnessed the performance, and I have done so only once during a number of years in India. There were a dozen white men in a group when I saw this trick, but I was the only one sufficiently investigating to conceal a camera and to take several photographs while the performance was going on. The photographs proved that neither the conjurer nor the chokra ever left the ground and that no rope hung miraculously from the sky. The trick is done by *glamour*, a magic power of imposing upon the eyesight of the spectators and sometimes called mass-hypnotism."

"But if this man has such a power as that, how can you ever get him?" questioned Mary.

"I don't think he has the power," returned Smith, "and I am mighty glad of it. If he had it, he would have used it on me instead of swearing at me as I went out the door." Smith hesitated. "No doubt, Cardan understands ordinary hypnotism, but so do I, and there we are evenly matched."

"You haven't proved anything, yet, about the monkey shooting business," commented Monroe.

"No," answered Smith, "but I shall now go a little deeper into the subject. What I am going to do may, possibly, not be very pleasant. Perhaps Mrs. Monroe might like to get her hat and coat so as to be ready for the movies."

Mary Monroe sprang up in alarm.

"You are not going to do any hypnotism on my husband?" she demanded.

"Dear me, no!" Smith assured her. "Your idea is a good one, though. I won't use it, however, without your permission."

Monroe, himself, looked relieved at this answer.

"Please!" remonstrated Smith as Mary moved to take the kitten.

"Then it's the kitten!" she exclaimed.

"Madam!" retorted Smith, gravely, "this kitten will suffer no risk that I did not run this afternoon and that I am not almost sure to take tomorrow."

Nevertheless, Mary was troubled as she closed the door.

"Get me a saucer of milk," requested Smith as soon as the two men were alone.

"This afternoon," explained Smith when Monroe had returned with the milk, "Jerome Cardan tried, I believe, to do to me what he did to you. Of course, I am not certain, and he may have tried to kill me, and then, again, he may have tried to do nothing at all. We had tea together and I turned my back to examine some books. On returning to the table, his telltale fingers indicated mental excitement as I picked up my half-empty cup. Did it contain poison? Naturally, I did not drink it, but secured a specimen by soaking a blotter in it, which seemed rather to annoy him."

Smith took a large handkerchief from his pocket and unwrapped a small ball of damp blotting paper. Carefully, he placed the blotting paper in the saucer of milk and squeezed the milk in and out of it a number of times.

"Now," continued Smith, playfully slapping the kitten's ears till it woke up, "if the kitten dies or has any appearance of commencing to suffer, I shall believe

that our friend, Cardan, tried to poison me, which won't prove anything about your shooting of the monkey. On the other hand, if nothing happens to the kitten, I shall, likewise, be left in doubt regarding a number of things."

The kitten needed no coaxing to sample the milk. Its little tongue dashed in and out at great speed, but Smith held it back several times and slowed it up while Monroe watched intently. After a short time, the animal seemed to lose its appetite. It took a few steps, wobbled a little, and laid itself upon the floor, where it remained motionless.

Smith placed his fingers upon the kitten and then looked up at Monroe.

"By the way," he drawled, "when did you stop drinking?"

Monroe turned a furious red.

"Is there nothing you don't know or can't find out?" he asked sheepishly.

"Plenty," was the dry reply, "but you could have saved me a lot of trouble if you had told me that Cardan gave you some liquid refreshment when you visited him five years ago. It was doped and you went to sleep and became an easy victim for any clever hypnotist. He tried to do the same thing to me. I suspected this, but I like to know things. Perhaps Mrs. Monroe might like the kitten when it wakes up."

CHAPTER VIII

THE AWAKENING

IT was seven o'clock when Aurelius Smith reached the Fifth Avenue house of Richard Grayson and was conducted directly to the library. Always professionally observant, during the few minutes that he was alone, he examined the well-chosen contents of the costly room and sauntered to a window through the heavy curtains of which could be observed the lessening traffic of the great avenue. For a moment his fingers touched, with a kind of caressing inquiry, a bit of shining copper wire near the window catch. He was leaning lazily against the mantelpiece, with his back to a log fire, when Mr. Grayson entered.

Smith's first words were a blunt request for food and drink, having been at work for more than twenty-four hours without any sleep and with no food since breakfast. Mr. Grayson reached immediately toward a bell, but remarked that he had no alcoholic beverages in the house.

"Why?" asked Smith succinctly, still leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Because drinking has done untold harm in the world, and I will not countenance it," was the simple reply.

Smith seemed to turn this remark over in his mind, but did not exert himself to reply to it. Instead, after

a moment, he asked regarding Bernice, whom he had sent to act as Mr. Grayson's stenographer.

"I found her very clever and quick," answered Mr. Grayson, "but she became ill in the afternoon and had to leave hurriedly."

"Ill?" asked Smith quickly. "What kind of illness?"

"Toothache," said Mr. Grayson.

Smith smiled.

"Now that *is* clever," he mused. "Any other kind of illness might have given me a wrong impression under the very unusual circumstances of the present case. However, I happen to know that she has perfect teeth."

"You mean that she pretended to have the toothache?" asked Mr. Grayson.

"Undoubtedly," returned Smith. "She discovered something which needed investigation and wished to leave without exciting suspicion."

"Dear me, dear me," returned the old man. "I cannot help thinking that all this mystery is just a tangle of our imagination."

"And yet two men have already died," said Smith rather dryly, "and you and I are in the very shadow of death."

"I can't believe that I am really connected with any such things," persisted Mr. Grayson doggedly.

Smith, perhaps because he was tired, shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"You believe sufficiently to have new burglar alarms placed upon your windows," he remarked.

"Only ordinary precaution," said Mr. Grayson.

A tray of sandwiches and coffee arriving at the

moment, Smith turned to it as if nothing else mattered. Like his namesake, Marcus Aurelius, he seemed often to act as if whatever he was doing, great or small, had best be done as though the entire universe depended upon it. In reality, it evidenced an ability to concentrate, instantly, upon anything and to shift that concentration of mind from point to point as occasion required.

When the sandwiches were finished and with coffee cup still in hand, he turned his attention once more to his host. Briefly he outlined the case as far as it had developed and indicated the hopelessness, at present, of attempting to have Jerome Cardan placed under arrest. He omitted only the incident of the little wax figure which Cardan had modeled and placed upon the table to represent Mrs. Grayson. If that proved to be pure bluff, on the part of Cardan, it would only serve to increase Mr. Grayson's skepticism.

"But if this is really the man who infected the native troops during the War," argued Mr. Grayson, "why can't you arrange to have him sent back to Europe for trial and punishment?"

"I have cabled to my old chief, Sir Oliver Haultain," returned Smith, "but I feel certain that Cardan has left no damaging evidence behind him."

Smith scribbled something upon a card and laid it, face downward upon the table.

"By the way," he said, "how is Mrs. Grayson?"

"A little tired, perhaps, but fairly well."

"I am glad of that," answered Smith, and continued after a thoughtful pause. "Mr. Grayson, you will do yourself a great service, and your wife a greater one,

if you will telephone your lawyer to come down here tonight and alter your will so that your fortune is left to your wife in trust instead of outright."

Mr. Grayson smiled, but it was evident that there was no bending of his determination.

"No," he said. "Mrs. Grayson is in full control of her mind and we are living in the United States, guarded by the police and the laws of the country. I will not treat her like a child. What you have told me hints at supernatural powers, and I do not believe in the supernatural."

"Superphysical, possibly," corrected Smith, "but not supernatural. Supernatural is impossible, since nature is all-embracing and could not be omnipotent if there were anything above it. I do not even claim that there is anything superphysical in this case, unless you argue that hypnotism is superphysical."

"When you speak of nature," answered Mr. Grayson, "you are simply naming what you cannot define."

"Do you believe in God?" questioned Smith abruptly.

Mr. Grayson slowly shook his head in the negative.

"A just and omnipotent ruler"—Mr. Grayson spoke very slowly—"would scarcely give more legs to the little fly than he gave to the heavy ostrich. There is no justice except the justice we make for ourselves during a few years of life."

"Not at all!" returned Smith with a slight emphasis. "If a fly had only two feet, it could not stick to a surface in a current of air."

Mr. Grayson appeared somewhat startled at the quick smashing of his argument.

"It is strange that I never thought of that," he said.

"I used a trivial argument, but your simple explanation never entered my mind. Do you, yourself, believe in God?"

"Yes," said Smith, picking up the card which he had laid face downward upon the table and holding it thoughtfully between his fingers. "Not a personal God, perhaps, but an omnipotent power for good."

"There is too much injustice in the world for me to believe any such thing," quietly argued Mr. Grayson.

"Seeming injustice, my dear sir," returned Smith.

"There can be no possible justice in the birth of a cripple or an idiot," was the retort. "Such a thing is harsh injustice."

"You cannot judge the last letter in a file of business correspondence," returned Smith, "without reading the earlier letters."

Mr. Grayson was quick to perceive the argument.

"You mean," he said, "that a man may deserve to be born a cripple because of something he did before he was born?"

"Well," replied Smith, "it is stupid to believe in life after death if you don't believe in life before birth. It is not reasonable that anything which has no end can possibly have had a beginning."

"I do not happen to believe in any life after death," answered Mr. Grayson gravely.

Smith rose suddenly to his feet.

"At last, I am beginning to see light in a dark place!" he exclaimed. "I feel quite confident that Mrs. Grayson believes in God and in a life after death."

"She believes in both," was the quiet answer.

"And that is the rift which has opened between you," returned Smith calmly.

"You are wrong," said Grayson a trifle coldly. "We never discuss the subject."

"And thereby," argued Smith, "you have increased the rift to an unknown degree. There is nothing more dangerous to married life than to have a subject which is never discussed."

"It seems to me," retorted Mr. Grayson, "that all this has nothing to do with the case and that it is—er—quite uncalled for."

"A bit impertinent?"

"Well, yes."

"Humph!" grunted Smith. "I suppose it does seem so to you. However, I assure you that it must be on account of this rift between you that Cardan has been able to menace—is now menacing—your wife. I have been guilty of no impertinence and I believe that I can prove this to you if you will permit me to talk with Mrs. Grayson."

"Mrs. Grayson is asleep, just now."

"Asleep?" queried Smith sharply. "When did she go to sleep?"

"About an hour before dinner. She was sleeping so soundly that I advised her maid not to waken her, but to take her some dinner when she woke up."

Smith tossed the scribbled card upon the table and strode over to the fire, where he stood drumming his fingers on the mantelpiece.

"Read the card," he said.

Mr. Grayson read: "This afternoon at half past five Jerome Cardan boasted that he would will Mrs. Grayson to go to sleep as an indication of his power."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Grayson, but he left the room rather hurriedly without another word.

Aurelius Smith, left alone, poured himself another cup of coffee, lighted a cigarette, and threw himself into a chair by the fire, where he proceeded to stare into the embers. Several minutes elapsed before Mr. Grayson's return, and Smith looked up into the face of an old man made still older by sudden fear. Indeed, Mr. Grayson was trembling slightly as he advanced across the room.

"She—she won't waken," he stated, with a note in his voice that had not been there before.

Smith neither spoke nor stirred as the old man hesitated in the center of the room, and slowly Mr. Grayson moved to a table upon which stood a telephone. As his hand reached for the instrument, Smith swung around in his chair. He did not rise, but bent forward earnestly pointing a finger at the hesitating man.

"Wait!" he almost commanded. "A doctor, at present, is apt to do more harm than good. The time has come when you must trust me implicitly and do exactly what I say or suffer destruction and leave your wife to equal misfortune. I have been highly recommended to you. Consider well and make your decision."

The words had been vibrant with a force that few men could exert and the pointing finger, together with the searching gaze, had carried an unexpected power of suggestion. For the moment the lanky, indolent investigator had been a transformed man, a man with a will capable of beating upon other men's brains.

Suddenly the old man weakened and sank into a chair.

"I give you my promise," he answered. "I will do as you wish."

With the promise, Smith's outstretched arm dropped

and he rose from his chair with the lazy indifference that was so habitual a mannerism with him. Yet his indifferent manner was not lacking in kindness as he handed the telephone to Mr. Grayson. The lawyer was to be the first business, and Mr. Grayson, without any further appearance of reluctance, requested his legal adviser to come over at once for the purpose of drawing up a temporary will that would throw his entire fortune into the hands of a great trust company for the benefit of his wife.

"Such a will," commented Smith, "will rob Jerome Cardan of all interest in your death. Now, I wish to see Mrs. Grayson."

Mrs. Grayson had not retired for the night, but had fallen asleep in a small sitting-room, quite expecting, it would seem, to rest only for a short time before dinner. As the two men were leaving the library, to ascend one flight of broad stairs to this sitting-room, the library telephone rang and Mr. Grayson returned to answer it. He called back excitedly to Smith.

"Jerome Cardan to speak to you," he said.

Smith's voice was quiet and assured as he spoke into the telephone. Mr. Aurelius Smith presented his compliments and wished to know what he could do for Mr. Jerome Cardan. Mr. Cardan hoped that Mr. Smith was satisfied with the way that Mrs. Grayson was sleeping. Mr. Smith acknowledged that he was quite satisfied. Mr. Cardan wished to know if it would be quite satisfactory if Mrs. Grayson awoke at nine o'clock. Mr. Smith seemed to prefer half past eight for the awakening. This seemed to be agreeable to Mr. Cardan and the telephone conversation ended.

"Quick!" exclaimed Smith, upon hanging up the

telephone. "Where else does this telephone connect?"

"It is my private, unlisted telephone," answered Mr. Grayson.

"Yes, yes, but in this house, man," urged Smith, "where else does it connect? Quick!"

"There is a branch telephone in the little sitting-room, just off our bedroom, where my wife is now sleeping," replied Mr. Grayson, a bit flustered by the urgent questioning.

It was impossible for Smith to reach this sitting-room as fast as he would like to have done, since it was necessary for the old man to go first and indicate the way. Nevertheless, the two of them reached the room in a fairly short space of time. They passed a maid in the hall, but the sitting-room, when they reached it, was unoccupied save for the old lady asleep upon a lounge. With one glance about the room, Smith knelt at a telephone which stood upon a low stand by a large upholstered chair. He picked the receiver from the hook and gently touched it to his lips to note the temperature.

"Slightly warm," he murmured. "Been placed against a warm ear a minute or so ago." Turning to Mr. Grayson: "I heard somebody lift this receiver when I was talking to Cardan. Somebody was listening in."

The next minute Smith was using his nose and smelling the telephone very carefully. He turned to the big chair and sniffed at that before rising to his feet. It would almost seem as if the sleeper on the lounge had no interest for him.

"Your wife's bedroom! Quick!" he exclaimed, and was led, by the somewhat bewildered Mr. Grayson, into a large room which opened off the little sitting-room.

The dressing-table was what Smith sought, and he examined the array of cut glass and silver with a rapid eye. There was but one bottle of perfume—violet.

"A lady's perfume," he said. "I might have known it. Somebody has used the telephone, and that person is contaminated with one of those nameless atrocities which you pass on Broadway. Assemble every maid servant in the house, please, for me to question."

There were only four maids in the house at the time and these were assembled in the hall by the butler. Smith examined them quickly.

"Who was with your mistress just before she went to sleep?" he asked.

"I was, sir," replied a young girl, very smart in cap and apron. "I am lady's maid to Mrs. Grayson, and came up to dress her before dinner."

"And you, and you, and you?" he questioned each of the others, coming very close to each in turn.

The three others had not seen Mrs. Grayson since noon, and Smith dismissed them, but stood so that they had to pass very close to him as they went down stairs.

"Your name?" he asked of the lady's maid.

"Elinor Dee, sir," she replied.

"Well, Elinor," he asked, "where did you get the perfume that you are using?"

"From Mrs. Grayson's dressing-table," the girl replied. "Mrs. Grayson lets me take some whenever I like, but, of course, I don't often take any."

"It is good perfume and I admire your taste, Elinor," remarked Smith in a friendly way. "Do you happen to know of anybody who uses any of those terrible perfumes that you pass on the street?"

"Oh, no, sir. Not in this house."

"Just when did your mistress go to sleep?"

"Between half past five and six, sir."

"What was the last thing she did before she went to sleep?"

"We dine early here, sir," replied the girl without any hesitation, "and about half past five I looked for my mistress to see if she was ready to dress. I found her downstairs in the library. I remember that it was a little after half past five, because she answered the telephone as I went into the library and I waited in the hall by the clock until she finished."

"Then you didn't hear anything she said over the telephone?" interrupted Smith.

"Oh, no, sir! Of course not," replied Elinor in some surprise.

"Go on," said Smith. "What happened next?"

"Well, sir," continued the girl, "we went upstairs together and my mistress complained of being drowsy and said she would lie down for half an hour. I went into the bedroom to arrange some things and when I came back she was sleeping soundly on the lounge in the sitting-room and Mr. Grayson advised me not to waken her. That's all I know, sir, and I do hope that nothing is wrong."

That was all that Smith wanted with the lady's maid and he entered the sitting-room once more with Mr. Grayson, closing the door behind them.

"I have drawn a blank as far as the perfume is concerned," he said, kneeling once more by the little stand on which the telephone stood. "I see that this telephone has no bell."

"No," explained Mr. Grayson, "the only bell on this particular line is on the telephone in the library. If

anybody calls, while we are upstairs, a servant notifies us."

It seemed as if Smith were devoting an extra amount of attention to the telephone, but just what he was doing was not evident to Mr. Grayson.

"Anyway," said Smith, rising, "I can assure you that Mrs. Grayson is in no immediate danger and I know exactly what put her to sleep."

"For God's sake, explain!" exclaimed the old man.

"I am no preacher," answered Smith, "but if you use that name more frequently in the presence of Mrs. Grayson, you will add to her happiness."

Before Mr. Grayson could make any reply, Smith continued:

"I might as well tell you that Mrs. Grayson was put to sleep by post-hypnotic suggestion. In some way and at some time, regarding which you and I are both in ignorance, Cardan has contacted your wife and placed her under such a strong hypnotic control that his voice is now an absolute law to her. He tried to make me believe that he could send the power of his will to her through space, but as soon as I left, he called her on the telephone and ordered her to go to sleep. His voice had the required effect, and you see the result."

"I am not going to doubt you any longer," said Mr. Grayson, looking down nervously at his sleeping wife, "but what can we do?"

"He has promised to waken her at half past eight," returned Smith, consulting his watch and drawing a chair up to the lounge where Mrs. Grayson lay. "I am inclined to believe that he will keep his promise."

"But how can he do it?" asked Mr. Grayson. "He can't call her to the telephone while she is asleep."

"It may be that he has ordered her to sleep for a certain length of time," replied Smith. "I doubt it, however, because he suggested nine o'clock for the awakening, and seemed quite agreeable to half past eight when I purposely changed the time for him to exhibit his power. I rather think that something will happen in this house and that she has been commanded to awaken when it happens. I must wait and see what happens at half past eight before making any further move of importance."

Smith took his seat in the chair by Mrs. Grayson's head, after carefully inspecting the windows and turning out all but one table lamp.

"We have twenty-five minutes to wait," he said. "Whatever may happen, I do not want you to leave the room until I give you permission. I am confident that no harm will come to Mrs. Grayson, but I cannot be sure about you until you have altered your will. Are you armed?"

Mr. Grayson shook his head and it was quite evident that he was worried only on account of his wife.

Smith handed him a small revolver.

"There is little chance of your needing it," he said, "but I never take more chances than are necessary with other people's lives."

Conversation ceased for a time and Smith picked up a wrist of the sleeping woman and tested the pulse. Satisfied, he examined her face carefully and spoke her name in a low voice. There was no response. He placed his finger-tips on her forehead and drew them over her temples and down the length of her arms.

"Mesmerism is laughed at by science," he said, turning to Mr. Grayson, who was watching anxiously in a

chair nearby, "but science laughed at many things yesterday and regards those same things seriously today. Suggestion is the real power that goes with so-called mesmerism and with hypnotism."

Several times Smith again passed his hand over the sleeping woman and called her gently by name.

"It is not generally known," he continued to Mr. Grayson, "that the discredited mesmeric process will influence a sleeper."

Again Smith passed his hands over the face and called the sleeper gently by name. There was a slight stirring and the lips opened a trifle.

"Josephine," came faintly to Smith's lowered ear.

"Josephine?" he asked of Mr. Grayson. "Who is Josephine?"

"Our daughter," said Mr. Grayson in a trembling voice.

"But I thought you had no children?" said Smith with questioning accent.

"She died when she was a little tot," said the old man.

"Ah!" ejaculated Smith with low emphasis. "At last, I am beginning to discover the method of Jerome Cardan. Your lack of faith, Mr. Grayson, has driven you out of your wife's tenderest thoughts, and without your knowledge she has gone elsewhere for consolation, with the result that she has fallen a victim of this mental fiend."

For a while the two men sat in silence, Mr. Grayson with bowed head and Smith glancing to and fro from the sleeping woman to his watch. Once Smith went to the window and pulled the curtain a trifle so that he could peer out. He also opened the door rather quickly and closed it again before resuming his seat.

"One more minute," he finally said, "and if nothing happens, it will be best for me to waken Mrs. Grayson by means of my own power."

Mr. Grayson was trembling so much that Smith quietly took the revolver out of his shaking hand.

Suddenly the ordered silence of the well-managed house was disturbed by violent discordance. The clanging of great bells burst forth and the sounds of cries and running feet came from the hall and stairway. Smith leaped to the door and threw it open, but he did not leave the room. As Mr. Grayson struggled excitedly to rise, the tall man at the door pointed back to the lounge.

"The signal!" he exclaimed. "It was the burglar alarm."

Mr. Grayson turned to see his wife sitting up and looking sleepily about her.

Elinor Dee came running.

"Elinor," snapped Smith, "get your mistress to her bedroom and tell Mr. Grayson that I shall wait for him in the library."

The next instant Smith dashed away in search of the butler.

"Quick! The alarm indicator!" he demanded and rushed the butler to a back hall where the indicator was located.

Smith's examination was careful, but very rapid. The indicator showed that a back window had been tampered with, but the window, upon examination, proved not to have been opened.

"Inside work," muttered Smith to himself. "A knife-blade, laid across the two wires, would have done the trick."

Later, in the library, Mr. Grayson found Smith beside the telephone. Mr. Grayson's lawyer arrived at the same moment, and a policeman, who came in response to the electric alarm, was dismissed upon Smith's advice.

Smith took up the telephone.

"Please pardon me for a moment," he said to Mr. Grayson and the lawyer before calling his own number.

Langa Doonh answered the telephone and Smith spoke for a minute or so—but he spoke in Hindustani. Nobody knew that he was ordering a hot bath and that he was advising his servant that he was coming home and going to bed.

"Now Mr. Grayson," he said, upon replacing the telephone, "one of your servants set off the burglar alarm under directions from Jerome Cardan. That same servant, from the sitting-room upstairs, has just been listening in on my conversation with Langa Doonh. I heard the click of the upstairs receiver. Please assemble all the servants in this room."

The three maids, a chauffeur, and a second man were soon brought into the library by the butler. Smith placed them in line and inspected them as if he were an officer on parade, looking keenly into each face as he passed down the line.

"Which one of you," he asked, "has been in the upstairs sitting-room since the burglar alarm sounded?"

Nobody answered.

Again Smith searched the faces before walking over to the chauffeur.

"That dressing on your hair is very strong," he remarked.

"The barber put it on, sir," replied the chauffeur

quickly, "and I haven't had time to wash it out. I hope Mr. Grayson will excuse me."

"Mr. Grayson," said Smith, turning away from the line of servants, "in these days, nearly every lady keeps a little rouge upon her dressing-table, and I took the liberty, when you weren't looking, of stealing a box from Mrs. Grayson's dressing-table. I did this so that I could rub some of it on the upstairs telephone receiver."

Smith turned on his heel and, with conjuring speed, rubbed a white handkerchief over the chauffeur's left ear. The expression on the man's face and the reddish smudge on the handkerchief left no doubt in anybody's mind.

"Nothing to do but to dismiss him," said Smith, breaking the astonished silence. "No evidence for an arrest, and, besides, I want this man to toddle around and give my compliments to Jerome Cardan, his master."

CHAPTER IX

CARDAN MAKES A MOVE

BERNICE ASTERLEY met Smith at his door upon his return to Fenton Street.

"Have you had anything to eat?" she asked, looking at him keenly and, perhaps, a bit anxiously.

"Uh-huh," was the casual answer. "Have you anything to report?"

"Yes," she answered very firmly, "but it will wait till morning, and sleep is what you need."

The blue eyes of the tired man closed for a moment as he leaned against the wall, and the brown ones, watching him, lost some of the firmness they had assumed. He stared down again, finally, admitting sleep was the best thing, but waiting long enough to mention that Langa Doonh had some toothache medicine.

"You do keep tabs on your people, don't you?" Bernice called after him as he moved toward the stairs. "I had quite a time to convince Mr. Grayson that my toothache was not the work of the devil."

Upstairs Langa Doonh stood among many bath towels while he continually tested the temperature of the bath with his dark fingers. Exactitude was more or less habitual with Langa Doonh, but, in the service of his master, exactitude became a religion.

Upon a cot, in an adjoining room, Jimmie's red mop of hair lay motionless upon a pillow. One arm fell to the floor where small fingers twined about the collar of

a yellow dog, mongrel beyond a doubt, but with a head that betokened much dog intelligence. A year earlier, in Chicago, Smith had saved the dog's life at the risk of his own. The incident had introduced him to Jimmie, the ragged newsboy, and had won forever that youngster's heart. The boy did not stir as Smith snapped on the light for a brief inspection, but the dog looked up and wagged a stubby tail without moving away from his master's small hand.

Eight hours of dreamless sleep passed for Smith between his hot bath and the reiterated "Sahib, *sat baje!*" of Langa Doonh in the morning.

"Seven o'clock, already!" he exclaimed, and proceeded to splash his way through a cold bath before arriving, in the blue dressing-gown, for the breakfast ceremony upon the lion skin in the very center of the great room downstairs.

Upon his plate was a cablegram from his old chief, Sir Oliver Haultain, in London. He read the message aloud for the benefit of his little "family."

NO EVIDENCE AGAINST CARDAN POSSIBLE FROM THIS SIDE BUT FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE CLEAN THE EARTH OF SUCH A SCOURGE. WILL RUN ACROSS IF YOU NEED ME. HAULTAIN.

The cablegram was no surprise to Smith, and he attacked his bacon and eggs in a leisurely manner as he outlined the events which had occurred up to the previous night.

"Remember," he cautioned Jimmie, "never a word of any of these things except to me, to Langa Doonh or—your new sister."

"Nope!" answered Jimmie, with his mouth full of

porridge. "De world gets nuttin out o' me and me dog, Lemon, more den a bark an' a growl."

Smith, lighting a cigarette and receiving a second cup of coffee from Langa Doonh, turned to Bernice Asterly.

"Does your report help matters?" he asked.

Bernice did not have a great deal to report, but what she said held Smith's attention. At the Grayson offices she had soon discovered that a fad of going to fortune-tellers had broken out and there was a Mrs. Wilkins, on West Nth Street, to whom a number of girls had gone to have their palms read. As far as she could ascertain, the three girls, who had been so mysteriously affected, had been among those who had visited Mrs. Wilkins. Bernice had felt that Mrs. Wilkins should be investigated, had invented the excuse of toothache, and had called on that fortune-teller. Fortune-telling is contrary to police regulations, but, nevertheless, New York is well sprinkled with such a profession, and Bernice needed but little ingenuity to dispel any apprehension on the part of Mrs. Wilkins and to obtain a sitting.

Smith crossed the room and located the position of the house on his map by means of a circle.

"Was the woman clever?" he asked. "Did she do anything startling?"

Bernice shook her head.

"Usual Indian stuff," she answered. "White Feather proclaimed his presence after she got tired of reading my hand. He said that my mother was standing behind my chair. I let it slip out that my mother was tall and had white hair when she died, and White Feather said

he knew it and that the lady behind my chair was tall and had white hair. White Feather said that mother sent me a message not to grieve about her and to jazz up a bit and do some fox-trotting."

"I can imagine your pathetic little figure during the interview," interrupted Smith, smiling.

"Do you know," returned Bernice, "it didn't require much acting on my part. Mother was French and spoke only a few words of English up to the time that she died when I was a baby. Father always talked to me about her in French and he created a thought mother for me that was all charm and romance. His last words were about her: '*Elle est si belle—comme une fleur.*'"

Jimmie was trying not to cry and to get hold of his new sister's hand at the same time, when Smith, the smile wiped from his face, spoke.

"She *is* so beautiful—like a flower," he translated. "Do you notice that he used the present tense?"

"Yes," said Bernice. "I have often thought of that. I do not believe that he ever admitted to himself that she was really dead."

"And perhaps, at last, he *saw!*" rejoined Smith.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Bernice vehemently. "How much do you believe? I would value your opinion more than the opinion of any other person in the world."

"I have seen some strange things, Bernice," replied Smith, "and I believe that nothing—much less anybody—is ever lost. We must believe many things before we know them, but it is foolish to believe anything that contradicts the knowledge we have already gained. Happy people believe wisely and in the beautiful only."

"Thank you," said Bernice, and spoke again after a

pause: "Of course, this Wilkins woman is a cruel and heartless fake."

"Probably," said Smith, "but, on the other hand, she may be deluded by forces which she contacts slightly and does not understand."

"She had been drinking gin."

"Drinking brings on what is termed mediumship."

At that moment Langa Doonh entered with a special delivery letter. It was very brief and Smith read aloud: "Mr. Jerome Cardan invites Mr. Aurelius Smith to tea this afternoon at five o'clock."

"Sounds friendly," mused Smith, "but it is undoubtedly a challenge to mortal combat. I appear to have checkmated Cardan in the Grayson case by altering the Grayson will and the poor man's pride has been so deeply touched that he seeks the solace of pistols, or poisons, for two."

"Of course, you will go," said Bernice.

"Certainly."

"You have never taken me out to tea," the girl replied. "What kind of a dress would you like me to wear? On account of our profession, I have quite an extensive wardrobe, you know."

Smith regarded the girl seriously before replying.

"That's nice of you, Bernice," he said, finally, "but there is no object in risking two lives. I want you to run over to the Grayson offices and plead more toothache. Spend the rest of the morning calling on the stenographer in hospital. Try another go at Mrs. Wilkins in the afternoon."

"Watcha want me to do about de pink tea?" demanded Jimmie, as Bernice folded her napkin with a sober face.

Smith picked up one of the boy's hands and examined the knuckles.

"Playing marbles a lot?" he asked.

"Kinda."

"You haven't washed all of the sidewalk off your knuckles," continued Smith. "Well, I'll give you a chance to play marbles all day. Go over to West Nth Street, where Mrs. Wilkins lives, and make friends with all the kids on the street. Buy some candy and play marbles all day long. While you are doing it, you will also find out all you can about that particular block in which Mrs. Wilkins is located. Cram your head so that you know all about every alley, back yard, and fire escape near her building."

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed Jimmie enthusiastically. "I'll do dat little trick."

"And, Jimmie! No cigarettes!"

"Oh, no, Uncle Relius!"

Langa Doonh was the last to put forward a plea and he did it very succinctly, knowing full well that his master would understand.

"Sahib?"

Smith strode over to his servant and placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"You old knife thrower, you *would* like to go, wouldn't you?" he asked in a voice that had no master-to-servant in its tone. "Do you remember the night when you threw the knife on top of one of the Towers of Silence in Bombay—and saved my life by half a second?"

• "Sahib!"

The single word was low and guttural and held the throaty pleading of a dog that would not be left behind.

"No, no!" refused Smith with determination. "My plans are otherwise, and besides—he is not desperate yet. At the last moment, if he stands at bay, I shall call for Langa Doonh, *rajpoot* and comrade in arms, to be with me to the end."

"Sahib, *main sipahi hun*. I am a soldier and will obey."

So, all was arranged and then, suddenly, much had to be rearranged. In answer to its bell, Smith took up the telephone. He spoke lazily, carelessly, at first, and then carried the instrument, the length of its cord, to a large chair where he sat on the small of his back and sprawled while he talked earnestly at the little mouth-piece. His words were low and could only be guessed at by the group at the breakfast table. In the end he set the telephone back on his great desk and laughed.

"I was wrong!" he exclaimed. "This man Cardan is more stubborn and probably more dangerous than I thought, but he is not yet summoning me to a duel. Mr. Grayson has just telephoned that he, also, has received an invitation for tea with Cardan this afternoon and, by Jove, he insists on going. Cardan has had the impudence to invite him together with a police escort if he feels at all nervous. I am glad of the police suggestion on Cardan's part and I shall arrange to have my friend, Officer Monroe, escort the old gentleman."

"Aren't you going with him yourself?" asked Bernice in surprise.

"No," returned Smith. "It is going to be a contest of some very rapid thinking, and I am going to give myself a trifling advantage by arriving half an hour early, if I have to jimmy a window to get in. Let me think this thing out."

Smith stuffed some tobacco into a pipe, left it upon his desk, drank another cup of coffee, and lighted a cigarette, which he dropped into his coffee cup after the first puff.

"I think this will do," he said slowly. "I shall arrive at Cardan's at half past four, on account of a fast watch and misjudging the time required to travel from Brooklyn. Cardan will know I am lying, but that won't matter, and, no doubt, I shall be able to stay until Mr. Grayson arrives with Monroe. At a quarter to five, Bernice, your presence will be required. You will arrive as Mrs. Reginald Pitkins, the recent widow of Reggie, who has departed and left you heart-broken though rich. You had better make up a good deal and change your appearance, although Cardan may know nothing about you. Wear a heavy veil and dress in the smartest mourning. Can you manage the costume?"

"Can do," answered Bernice with such rapid enthusiasm that she almost clipped Smith's last word.

"Good!" said Smith. "I want to observe Cardan's reactions upon your arrival. You will play the part of a widow seeking communication with the spirit of her husband. You have just visited Mrs. Wilkins and found her drunk. Mrs. Wilkins, while drunk, gave you the name and address of Jerome Cardan. Consequently, you have come to Cardan to get a message from your dead husband. This will give me an opportunity to judge whether or not there is any connection between Cardan and the Wilkins medium. Use your wits, if possible, to stay on and see the show at five o'clock. If you are successful in remaining, you may be able to assist me in defeating the cleverest criminal in New

York in what will probably be the most audacious thing that any criminal ever attempted.”

“But what do you suppose he is going to do?” questioned Bernice.

“Blocked in one direction,” answered Smith, “he is going to attack Grayson from another angle and he is so sure of his skill that he intends to do this under my very nose and in the presence of the police. I expect that he will do something that is positively astounding.”

“But what *can* he do?”

“God knows,” said Smith.

CHAPTER X

THE GUESTS ARRIVE

It was exactly half past four when Aurelius Smith knocked on Jerome Cardan's door. Except that he was requested to enter, his entrance was almost exactly as upon the occasion of his first visit. Cardan might not have moved, so similar was his attitude as he sat at the same table, reading from an old book. Only for a moment did he glance up long enough to mention his visitor's name with quiet indifference.

"Uh-huh," returned Smith, as before, with equal indifference.

Again he sauntered to the table and, uninvited, took a chair opposite Cardan and with the table between them.

Without any introductory remark, Cardan commenced to read aloud, slowly and evidently translating:

At death the one body exudes from the other, by osmose and through the brain. It is held near its old garment by a double attraction, physical and spiritual, until the latter decomposes. If the proper conditions are given, the soul can reinhabit the physical body and resume the suspended life.

"Very interesting," remarked Smith.

"And it explains the reason for Egyptian mummification," added Cardan.

"I do not seem to have read of any mummy having

met the proper conditions to allow it to resume life," argued Smith.

"Mummification was purposely permitted to become a common practice so that undue attention would not be drawn to the mummies of the few initiates who used the art for its real purpose," returned Cardan dryly.

"Strange that we have never dug up one of those initiates," persisted Smith.

"We have done so occasionally," said Cardan, "and the papers have been full of strange happenings, such as sudden death. At other times, we have found the tomb empty and thought that the mummy had been stolen by grave robbers."

"Jolly little topic," remarked Smith, and glanced quickly at his watch as a knock sounded at the door.

It was to be an afternoon of surprises, and both Smith and Cardan were surprised when Policeman 126 entered the room. He was a big man and carried that police solidity of purpose in every action. He paid no more than a glance of attention to Smith before coming straight to the point with Cardan.

"You're wanted at Headquarters," he said.

Cardan expressed a degree of pleasure upon receiving such an unexpected compliment and inquired regarding the small detail of a warrant. There was none, but the police wished to ask certain questions regarding Cardan's connection with the late H. P. Brown, who had dropped dead from apparent heart failure during Cardan's visit.

"You can't give us the slip and stay that way in New York," concluded No. 126. "We want to know more about you."

Smith lighted a cigarette and lay back in his chair like an interested spectator who desired a little rest.

Cardan admitted the justice of the wishes of the police, but begged that Officer 126 would be kind enough to remain until a little after five o'clock, at which time he, Cardan, would be pleased to engage a taxi and accompany that officer to Headquarters. Officer 126 agreed to this reasonable proposition, accepted an excellent cigar, and selected the largest chair as being most suitable to the size of his body.

"Permit me to introduce Aurelius Smith," added Cardan. "My friend, Mr. Smith, is a private detective of considerable ability and is sometimes referred to, internationally, as Secret Service Smith, a title which equals, in alliterative strength, the prowess of the bearer."

"Smith is correct," drawled that individual, "but I am scarcely the friend of the murderer of the unfortunate H. P. Brown."

"Say, what kind of a party is this?" questioned the policeman, sitting up in his chair. "If you say the word, Mr. Smith, I'll put the bracelets on this bird and take him in pronto."

"No," advised Smith. "I think you will spoil an interesting afternoon if you remove Mr. Cardan at the present moment. He can't get away from both of us you know."

Aurelius Smith long remembered having given this advice and it became one of the sad memories of his life; yet no man can foresee, upon all occasions, what is going to happen.

"Mr. Smith has a peculiar sense of humor," said Cardan, his big, black eyes peering at the officer through

the horn-ringed spectacles and something that might have been a smile overspreading his yellowed face. "The absurdity of his statement lies in the fact that Brown is not really dead."

"He seemed pretty dead when we shipped him to the undertaker last night," commented Officer 126.

"You will remember," went on Cardan, tapping his book impressively with a lead pencil and speaking to Smith rather than to the policeman, "that a certain great occultist said that it was necessary to be born again. People have puzzled a great deal over these words and few, indeed, know what the words mean. The truth of the matter is that death is double and the second death occurs at varying lengths of time after the physical body is considered to be dead. It is then that the second birth takes place and the man severs his last connection with the physical life which he has just experienced. Now I assure you that Brown has not severed that connection. In short, he is not really dead."

Officer 126 looked at Smith and it was quite evident that he thought himself in the presence of a lunatic. Smith looked at Cardan and no man could have told what he thought. Cardan looked thoughtfully at the policeman before addressing him directly.

"You will shortly understand much more of this," he said with a peculiar emphasis.

"Sure, sure!" answered Officer 126 in the most soothing tone that he could command.

Smith rose, yawning slightly, and walked across the room to the heavy portières which concealed the sliding doors giving entrance to the next room. He deliberately parted the curtains and tested the doors. They

were locked. A keyless keyhole was blanketed on the inside.

"Still wondering how I knew you took that silent, backward step yesterday?" asked Cardan over his shoulder.

Smith ignored the question, but, for the benefit of the policeman, traced with his toe two parallel ribbons of depression which crossed the thick carpet and ended at the closed doors.

"What do you make of that?" asked the officer.

"Truck," said Smith. "Cardan took something heavy into the next room and doesn't want us to know what it is—yet."

"Humph!" grunted Officer 126. "What kind of a party is this, anyway?"

Before anybody could reply, the next surprise had occurred or, at least, was commencing. Without the formality of knocking, the hall door was burst open and into the room sped the most attractive sight in the world—a beautiful woman perfectly gowned in black! So swift was her entrance that even Cardan jerked in his chair to follow her movements across the floor, and Smith, standing in the center of the room, spun on a heel as she rushed up to him.

"Oh, dear Mr. Cardan!" she exclaimed. "I had such a terrible time to find you and this is Reggie's birthday and she told me you were quite ugly and you aren't at all and I would never, never have known you, but won't you hurry because it's his birthday and I just must talk to him about such a lot of things? I just know you won't tell anybody—except me, of course—what he says because Reggie just *will* say anything and people mightn't understand, don't you know?"

It would almost have seemed that the flow of words, which fluttered through the black veil, would never have stopped if Smith had not, gently but firmly, seized an exquisitely gloved hand and led the talker across the room to Cardan who had risen from his chair.

"This is Mr. Cardan," said Smith simply.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed in one long drawn monosyllable while the limpid brown eyes gazed, through the upper portion of the veil, into the black orbs of the broken-nosed man.

For a moment there was silence and Smith regarded the couple critically. It seemed fairly evident that Cardan, master of himself though he might be, was puzzled. As Officer 126 looked at the couple he was reminded of a black orchid that he had once seen growing on a bit of old log at a flower show. There was something foolish and pathetic, laughable and lovable about the young woman in her widow's costume. Covering her chin and mouth, an extra broad band, upon the veil, added a touch of the Oriental to the Fifth Avenue effect. Beside her, Cardan—the bit of rotting log—looked little better than hideous.

"Who are you, madam?" asked Cardan.

"I used to be Mrs. Reggie Pitkins," she answered slowly at first, but gathered speed as she went on, "but Reggie died and now I have to be Mrs. Reginald Pitkins. Don't you think that's better, now that Reggie's dead? You seem to know so much, Mr. Cardan. I just know you can talk to all the dead people and this is Reggie's birthday. You have such wonderful eyes and I just adore them. You can see right through me and look into my soul. I know you can. Won't you tell——"

"Have done, madam!" broke in Cardan, glancing at his watch. "Who sent you here?"

Smith's eyes became fixed on one of Cardan's hands as the question was asked, but the answer which he expected did not come at first.

"Just a love of a medium," began Mrs. Pitkins and was off again. "She has hinted several times that she knew a perfectly wonderful man, but she wouldn't tell me who he was till she couldn't make Reggie talk to-day and I just had to get him on his birthday and ask him if he likes the white edging on my hat. It's the first color I have worn and I think it's ducky. Of course, white isn't really a color, but you know what I mean, Mr. Cardan. Do you like it? I just know you understand how a woman feels about things like that. Won't you tell me if you——"

"Mrs. Pitkins," interrupted Cardan again, "who sent you here?"

"Why, the medium, of course," was the answer. "I am afraid she had been drinking and couldn't get hold of the spirits. I mean the right kind of spirits. Drinking is so dangerous in these times. Don't you think that——"

"Did Mrs. Wilkins send you here?" demanded Cardan, almost losing his temper and Smith, with a shrug of his shoulders, strolled to a chair.

"Of course, she did," answered Mrs. Pitkins impatiently. "That's what I have been telling you. She said you could make me see Reggie with my own eyes and I——"

Again Cardan interrupted and again the lady began an endless stream of words. Through it all Smith sat with a bored expression, but inwardly admiring the

finished acting of his assistant. When Cardan ordered her out of the room finally, she begged and pleaded for one glimpse of Reggie. She offered to write a check for five hundred dollars for just one glimpse. Her offer was not even considered. Cardan threw open the door and advanced upon her with arms extended, long fingers trembling, and a lack of expression upon his face that denoted innate cruelty. His appearance was enough to have sent nearly any woman screaming into the street, but—Bernice Asterley was not defeated.

Mrs. Reginald Pitkins did not rush screaming into the street.

"I won't go! I won't go!" she exclaimed and, in another moment, she had perched herself on the arm of the chair in which Officer 126 was sitting.

"I don't know what kind of a party this is," growled that large limb of the law, "but this lady stays here as long as she likes."

For the first time Cardan's face showed evidence of passion and, at sight of it, Smith left his chair rather quickly and moved to a point in the room where he faced Cardan and stood between him and the other two.

"Well?" he asked.

Instantly the expression of passion faded from Cardan's face. He actually smiled, perhaps a little cynically, before going over to his chair by the table.

"Very well," said Cardan. "Let the lady stay. Her nerves, however, will be so badly shaken that no doctor will be able to cure her."

"I just love to feel my nerves tingle," burst out Mrs. Pitkins. "Reggie always said that——"

This time it was Officer 126 who interrupted the

flow of words and he did so by laying a great paw on the black gloved hand

"Shush up!" he ordered.

"That's just what Reggie used to say," murmured the pretty widow and relapsed into complete silence; nor did she move from the arm of the chair in which her protector sat.

It was at this moment that Mr. Grayson arrived with Officer Monroe. Monroe entered first and held the door open for Mr. Grayson. At the same time, Smith rose and formally introduced Jerome Cardan to the old merchant. The two men inclined their heads slightly, but did not speak. Monroe recognized his brother officer and the two men nodded. Smith placed Mr. Grayson and Monroe in chairs which faced Cardan from the opposite side of the table.

"Oh, I forgot," added Smith. "Mrs. Pitkins, allow me to present Mr. Grayson."

Mr. Grayson rose and bowed deferentially to the charming widow whom he little guessed had ever taken dictation from him in his own office.

Hardly had he resumed his seat when the landlady entered with a large and rather heavy tray of tea things. Smith crossed quickly and took the heavy tray out of her hands. Half-way to the table he seemed to trip and dropped the heavy tray upon the floor with a dreadful crash.

Cardan laughed.

"Some party!" said Officer 126.

"Reggie always said that——" began Mrs. Pitkins, but seemed to forget what it was that Reggie said.

CHAPTER XI

PLAYING WITH DEATH

PERHAPS Officer 126 was the only person in the room who failed to perceive the significance of Smith's accident with the tea tray. Certainly, Cardan's laugh, the first trace of humor that he had shown, was not the laugh of an ordinary host; neither was Smith's lack of all apology quite to be expected from a guest under usual circumstances. In fact, the careless way with which the offending guest shoved the tray out of his way with his foot, would have been unpardonable under ordinary circumstances. But circumstances were not ordinary and the situation assumed a tenseness as Smith straightened to his full height and crossed to Cardan and placed a hand upon his chair. Looking down upon the yellowed face, he spoke in a voice that was quiet but full of meaning.

"Well, Cardan, it's your move."

Jerome Cardan twisted a little in his chair and looked up at his tall antagonist. The black eyes sought and found the blue ones; nor did the blue ones waver in returning the stare. Once Cardan lifted a trifle in his chair as if he would bring his eyes closer to those of the man above him so that he might exert his will more powerfully. Smith, statue-like, continued to gaze into the eyes below him and a faint smile spread over his lean face.

"No, no, Cardan," he said. "I have studied your art too much and I can control my mind too strongly for you to become my master by means of the hypnotic glance. You must do better than that."

"Very well," returned Cardan, "I shall do better than any man has ever seen—in modern times. Please arrange yourselves in a semicircle facing me so that I may speak to you more easily."

Cardan rose and placed a chair for himself in front of the portières which concealed the doors leading into the next room. As he seated himself, the small group pushed their chairs into an irregular line before him. Smith coolly sat upon the table, one foot upon the floor and the other swinging slightly—an excellent position from which to come into sudden and violent action. Mr. Grayson, with Monroe close beside him, occupied a chair directly facing Cardan. Officer 126 did not need to move and regarded the scene with professional blankness except that he shot several curious glances at Monroe as if wondering how his brother officer had come into the deal. Mrs. Pitkins brought a small stool and camped by the side of her officer.

"So interesting!" said Mrs. Pitkins. "I just know something terrible is going to happen."

"Further acting is quite unnecessary, Mrs. Pitkins," answered Cardan. "You stopped talking too suddenly to be genuine. I don't think you come from the Police Department as the officer, with whom you sought shelter, certainly did not know you. That means that you are in the employ of Aurelius Smith."

Bernice Asterley lifted the black veil and threw it carelessly over her hat. At the same time, she extracted a small note-book from her bag and, a second

later, was busily engaged in taking down a stenographic account of all that happened. Mr. Grayson and Officer 126 stared at her in considerable astonishment, but Smith continued to swing his foot and did not even turn his head. He was simply waiting until something happened which would permit him to make a move on his own part.

"Mr. Grayson," began Cardan, "you are a clever man and I have some things to say which you will understand. Of course, there is no time for me to say all that I would like to say, but—yes—I think you will understand the few words that I have time to employ.

"In the first place, I am a very old man, older than you would believe and older than Aurelius Smith dares to believe. During many years I have studied things that are little known to man, things that people pray about in churches and scoff at on the street. I have learned much and, incidentally, have gained some of the powers usually possessed only by the gods. You smile at the idea of gods, Mr. Grayson? And why shouldn't there be gods? Human beings are wonderful enough to be part of a scheme of anything; nor are they wonderful enough to be the top of that scheme; nor does God make gods absurd, more than man makes ants ridiculous."

"I do not happen to believe in God," remarked Mr. Grayson quite calmly.

"So?" queried Cardan, raising his eyebrows. "I knew that you were clever enough to use other people's brains and to build up a large fortune thereby, but I did not know that you were intelligent enough to think for yourself on matters that were really worth while. I am delighted. However, many intelligent people de-

lude themselves and, of course, God is, was, and always shall be—though not the God who is taught in the churches. How much would you give to believe in God?"

"Much," was the rather dry reply. "Even give me reason to believe in the possibility of God and I shall be your debtor for life."

"Very well," returned Cardan. "That is not difficult. Ask yourself the question: Does infinity exist? An affirmative answer renders *anything* possible. Otherwise, infinity would be limited—which is absurd."

"Words, nothing but words," returned Mr. Grayson. "The finite mind cannot grasp infinity."

"Neither can it grasp God because God *is* infinity," retorted Cardan. "You scorn to believe in the top of the ladder because you are blind to the rungs. You smile at the idea of the gods and yet it is only through the gods that you can mount to God."

"God or gods, it is all the same," returned Mr. Grayson. "I can see no reason for the existence of either."

"And that is because you are hoodwinked and cannot penetrate the frail, physical barrier which separates you from conscious contact with the superphysical existences," answered Cardan. "I have only to remove the bandage from your eyes and the light of true wisdom will dwell with you for all time."

"Do that and you may name your own price," stated Mr. Grayson, "but I am tired of words and did not come here for metaphysical discussion."

"Very well," returned Cardan. "I shall accept your challenge, Mr. Grayson, and will hold you to the terms which you, yourself, have stated. In the first place,

let me inform you that I was about thirty years of age, as man reckons age, when I established communication with Philip Bombastes Aureolus Theophrastus von Hohenheim who had just been murdered. This man, spoken of in history as Paracelsus, was finally able, on account of his sudden death and because of his vast knowledge, to give me the minute details of man's transition at death and of his various conditions thereafter."

"Are you mad?" asked Mr. Grayson. "Paracelsus lived several hundred years ago."

"So did you," answered Cardan, "but you don't remember it. You need not believe what I am saying at present. Later, I shall show you something that will force you to believe. With the knowledge, that I obtained from the murdered von Hohenheim, I was able to pass the gate of physical death with full continuity of memory and without losing a certain objective which I had fixed in my mind. This objective was the total banishment of compulsory death for man upon this earth. I have achieved this for myself as I now have a complete memory extending over five thousand years and have only suffered one physical death during the last four hundred years."

There was silence for a moment. Nobody appeared desirous of making any reply to so astounding a statement. Bernice Asterley's pencil came to a stop and she glanced thoughtfully about the room. Her face, too highly painted to be seen without the veil, possessed a bizarre beauty that was oddly out of keeping with her quiet manner and alert gaze. Smith, on the table, continued to swing one long leg, silent and waiting.

"When physical death occurs," continued Cardan, "the man, himself, usually drowns for a few minutes, hours, or days as the case may be. Just as in sleep, his connection with the physical body continues, except that he is unable to reinhabit that body because its organs have ceased to function and he does not know how to start them going again. Most people in dreams contact their loved ones for several days after those loved ones have suffered the physical death. In such cases, neither suspects his true state, the one sleeping and the other what is called dead. By long practice I can maintain consciousness from the waking to the sleeping state and this permits me to communicate mentally with those who have recently passed out of physical existence. Indeed, by a little concentration, I can even accomplish this without seeking the realm of sleep. But I am not satisfied to be able to do this myself. I wish to give such a blessing to the whole of humanity and that requires a special institute for the training of instructors and—and money, Mr. Grayson."

"You have only to prove your words to obtain all the money your require," answered Mr. Grayson.

"I need only a million, Mr. Grayson," went on Cardan. "Of course, it would be easy enough for me to obtain it if I permitted myself to use the power I have. I can command people to sleep or to die, to awaken or to resume life, and to do my bidding in all things. I would not, however, force money unfairly. I must have a million, but it must come to me in the light of reason. With it I shall erect a suitable institute of knowledge in Europe and America shall see me no more."

"So you will leave the country for a million,"

drawled Smith, "and your game, after all, is only blackmail."

"Not at all," answered Cardan, "and I shall gladly accept your apology a little later." Turning to Mr. Grayson. "Mr. Grayson, you know that the world hungers for knowledge of life after death and that the fear of death sleeps in the heart of man. Medical science is striving desperately to appease this hunger by extending life. Science forces the gland of a ram into the fat and muscles of man's abdomen and he lives for a few years longer—sometimes. Science deals with the physical body, which is the servant of man, instead of with man himself—man who, properly instructed, may command his physical body to live or to die as he desires. I can instruct man so that he need never die, never lose his memory, never fear annihilation. Is it not worth a million—even if I go to Europe and never return?"

"I am a business man," said Mr. Grayson, "and you talk what seems to be nonsense. Give me proof and the million is yours."

"Thank you, Mr. Grayson," said Cardan. "I accept your offer and will permit you to be the judge of the proof. I am sure that Mrs. Grayson will be very happy to have you believe the statements I have been making."

"Leave my wife out of it," returned Mr. Grayson coldly.

"I shall be happy to do so—at least for the present," said Cardan with meaning emphasis.

Aurelius Smith slipped from the table and stretched his long arms as one does when feeling his muscles in a lazy way.

"Look here, Cardan," he said, "you know we are busy people. Put your cards on the table and finish the game."

"Good!" exclaimed Cardan. "I shall do so. You, Aurelius Smith, accuse me of murdering the man named Brown. I defy you, or anybody else, to prove it. I have, however, selected Brown as an exhibit of the power which I possess. The city turned his body over to a small undertaker who, fortunately, was in financial difficulties. I gave this undertaker enough money to leave the country and, in return, he gave me Brown's body before it was embalmed."

"You certainly will make a trip to Headquarters with me," remarked Officer 126.

"Yes, my conduct may have been illegal," admitted Cardan, "but I shall give the law something quite new to think about by bringing Brown back to life and asking him to accompany you to Headquarters. At the same time, I hope that I shall convince Mr. Grayson of my power."

Cardan rose and flung back the portières which covered the large sliding doors at the back of the room. He inserted a key and turned it. It required only a slight push to send both doors rolling apart on well-oiled bearings. Another moment and Cardan flooded a curious room with brilliant light.

All but Smith, who was already standing, rose with varying degrees of astonishment as the inner room came into view. It was hung, from ceiling to floor, with some kind of black material and there appeared to be no windows. The only article of furniture was a plain sofa upon which rested a black coffin.

"Brown's physical body," remarked Cardan, "lies in

the coffin before you. Brown, himself, has not passed the portal of the second death; nor will he do so on this occasion. This is because of three reasons. In the first place, his physical body, not having suffered sufficient decomposition, binds him. In the second place, his earthly desires are still too strong to allow the breaking of his antahkarana, or bridge, which connects his lower and impermanent mind with the higher and permanent portion of his mentality. In the third place, my will prevents his flight. Just at present, Brown is hovering around you, Mrs. Pitkins, feeling the earthly attraction of a pretty woman."

"And has he something to say to me?" asked Bernice, with cool indifference and thereby drawing Cardan's attention to herself as Smith moved to the side of the room in order to view the coffin from a slightly different angle.

"No," replied Cardan. "He is in a dreamlike condition and does not realize what has happened to him. He is thinking that he would like to pass his hand through your hair, to kiss your lips, to——"

"That will be enough," interrupted Bernice, her pencil flashing as she took down every word in shorthand.

"Come, Cardan," broke in Smith. "Give us action. I'm not ready to apologize yet, you know."

Notwithstanding the seeming impossibility of the many statements which had been made, there was a tense feeling of expectancy in the room when Cardan shoved the sofa up to the open doorway. With its black burden it blocked the entrance into the next room save for a small space at the head which Cardan left open for him to pass through. Mr. Grayson, alone, remained somewhat indifferent and resumed his chair

in silence. Monroe stood close beside him. Officer 126 was on the left of the room with Bernice at his side, but half a pace in his rear. Smith stood well forward on the right, his light cane dangling from his left arm.

Cardan took up a position just inside the darkly draped room directly behind the center of the coffin. His yellowed and marred face seemed medieval as his black eyes peered over the coffin at the people grouped in the outer room.

"Steady!" said Smith to Bernice in a low voice.

Immediately, the girl dropped note-book and pencil upon the floor. She brushed back the black veil more effectively and placed both hands upon her hips standing boylike, expectant, waiting.

Cardan's hand sought the coffin and there was a sharp click, causing a slight tremor from all, save Smith, in the outer room. It was the release catch for the covering panels.

"Identification is first necessary," announced Cardan and lifted the face panel.

Both Smith and Officer 126 stepped forward and looked down upon the rigid, ghastly features.

"It's Brown!" grunted Officer 126. "Some party!"

Smith beckoned to Monroe who had not moved away from Mr. Grayson.

"It's Brown!" confirmed that officer after a close scrutiny.

"And you, Mr. Smith?" asked Cardan.

"It certainly looks like Brown," replied Smith.

"May I try the pulse of the—ah—corpse?"

Cardan threw back the empty name panel and the foot panel. The arms were not crossed, but lay on either side of the forlorn and rigid body. Cardan took

one hand and lifted it, causing the arm to rise under resistance and without bending at the elbow.

"*Rigor mortis*," he announced as he passed the white hand to Smith.

For half a minute Smith's fingers pressed the thin wrist before he placed the arm back in the coffin.

"Observation and reason would indicate that this is Brown and that he is dead," he stated quietly while he moved to his former position and the remainder of the group arranged themselves much as they were before the coffin was opened.

Mr. Grayson was leaning forward in his chair and observing the scene gravely but closely. From where he sat the upper portion of the face in the coffin was quite visible.

Cardan raised both hands, palm downward, over the body as if testing some sensation that made itself felt to him. He glanced about the room and up to the ceiling as if something floated in the air, something visible only to him. For a moment he closed his eyes and then, suddenly, grasped the body by the shoulders and shook it quite roughly.

"Wake!" he exclaimed. "Rise at my command!"

It seemed as if the eyelids in the coffin were commencing to flutter, but the next instant Cardan seized the body and forced it into a sitting position.

"Wake!" he exclaimed again in a stern voice.

An exclamation of astonishment came from Officer 126, followed by a slight gasp from Bernice.

The eyes were *open*—and staring stupidly about the room.

"Get up!" commanded Cardan.

Falteringly the body struggled out of the coffin and

stood, beside Cardan, just within the second room. Brown, if Brown it was and not merely an automatic corpse, seemed dazed.

"What is your name?" demanded Cardan.

"Brown," was the low reply.

"What do you last remember?" came a second question.

"I—I was at—the—police station in—a—cell," came the halting and low-voiced answer.

While the pitiful figure, ghastly in his poorly arranged grave clothes, swayed by the empty coffin, Cardan stepped out into the front room.

"Mr. Grayson," he said, "you have had proof of my power over life and death. Is it not worth a million to you that a man such as I should build his institute of learning in Europe—even if he should stay there for the rest of your life?"

Mr. Grayson had risen and, although both Smith and Monroe closed in on him, he waved them aside and walked up to Jerome Cardan.

"Mr. Cardan," he said, "you have changed my belief in life and I will keep my promise. My check will be good for one million when the bank opens tomorrow."

While Mr. Grayson was writing the check at the table, Smith paced the floor in concentrated thought, slapping his light cane against his leg. Once he glanced at Bernice, but she shook her head indicating that she could suggest nothing.

"Of course," said Cardan, suavely, to Officer 126, "Brown, having come to life again, will go back to the police station to face the silly charge which Mr. Smith has made."

Officer 126 was beyond speech and continued to stare in utter astonishment about the room. Cardan seemed to have won a complete victory.

"And your apology, Mr. Smith?" asked Cardan, ironically.

At that instant Smith's roving eye, searching desperately for something he might have overlooked, fell upon something that was almost invisible—something so slight that a thousand men might have failed to realize its significance. Mr. Grayson's check was being extended to Cardan when Smith quickly plucked it from between the yellowed fingers.

"No, no!" protested Mr. Grayson and Cardan wheeled with a sound that resembled the snarl of an animal.

"I demand that check, Mr. Smith!" exclaimed Cardan.

"And I demand your arrest for fraud!" retorted Smith. "Look!"

Smith raised his cane and pointed it at the coffin. Suddenly his long body seemed to extend across the room as he sank to one knee and lunged as a fencer does. The cane reached the coffin and passed *inside*. For one second there was a dramatic tableau, all eyes directed at the coffin behind which stood the sickly figure of Brown.

"Black silk-covered air holes are not necessary for dead people," remarked Smith, rising.

"Come along!" broke in Officer 126. "I'll take both you and your talking corpse down to Headquarters, Mr. Cardan."

Cardan took a pace backwards in the direction of the coffin. His face slowly convulsed with rage and the

fingers of his left hand crooked like the bent claws of a bird of prey. His right hand darted inside his coat.

Smith sprang to the center of the room and, without taking his eyes off Cardan, reached a left hand toward Bernice. He felt the touch of her hand and the next moment that young lady was almost jerked off her feet as Smith flung her behind him in the direction of Mr. Grayson and Monroe. Cardan turned slightly away from Officer 126 and darted a look at Smith from the corner of his eye.

"Move slowly, Cardan," spoke Smith. "A sudden move and you are a dead man. Take your right hand out of your coat and do it slowly."

The speaker's right hand held a pistol close to his right hip. Nobody had seen him draw it, but it was there.

Cardan, slowly controlling himself, opened his mouth as if to speak, but remained silent. Slowly, his right hand came out of his coat with a pencil which he tapped, with apparent indecision, against his teeth. It was evident that the visible emotion of anger was fast leaving him. He cleared his throat slightly and began to turn slowly toward Smith. As he did so, Officer 126 lifted both hands into the air, swayed a trifle and fell with a crash upon a small chair which broke under his weight.

For just a second Smith's eyes flashed to the fallen policeman and, during that fleeting second, Cardan leaped into the next room followed by a shot from Smith which splintered a panel in the sliding doors as they crashed together.

The doors appeared to have locked themselves upon closing and Smith fired three shots into the lock be-

fore they would part. Shoving the doors all the way back, he entered not more than one minute behind Cardan—yet the room appeared to be empty save for the coffin which had been closed again. One of the black wall draperies moved a trifle and Smith swept it aside exposing an open window only four feet above a back lane which bisected the block.

“His pulse is nearly gone and he’ll be dead in half a minute,” called Monroe from where he knelt beside his brother officer.

“Yes,” said Smith, leaning upon the coffin. “I should have known in time. I saw it all, but my brain worked half a second too late to save your comrade’s life.”

“What did you see?” asked Monroe.

“Look well at his face,” answered Smith from across the room. “Do you see a small pin prick or a drop of blood?”

“Yes,” answered Monroe after a moment. “There is a small puncture under the right eye.”

“Now look on the carpet,” continued Smith. “Can you find a tiny metal object?”

“Yes,” answered Monroe again after a brief search. “I see a gramophone needle.”

“Don’t touch it!” called Smith. “It is for the coroner.”

“But I don’t understand how it was done,” said Monroe.

“The pencil, man!” exclaimed Smith. “Cardan tapped it on his teeth and coughed. I saw it done and didn’t realize what was being done. There was no lead on the end of the pencil. It was a *blow-pipe*.”

Smith turned to the coffin and lifted the panels

which covered it. Inside lay Brown, cold, rigid, and quite dead.

"Mr. Grayson," he said, holding out the million dollar check, "here is your money. Remember that I cannot return a human life in a similar way. Will you now promise to do exactly what I say?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Grayson quietly.

"Then you will arrange to have Bernice Asterley report at your home tonight as Mrs. Grayson's companion."

CHAPTER XII

NEWS AND NO NEWS

LANGA DOONH, left behind on the afternoon of Cardan's party, roamed about the rooms on Fenton Street much as a faithful dog wanders about when the family drives away and leaves him shut in the yard. There was no work for him to do beyond ordering some provisions by telephone and making arrangements in the kitchen so that food could be prepared at short notice if required. At intervals, he stood at a window peering out into the street and he was always listening for the telephone by means of which news or instructions might arrive.

Jimmie had departed in the morning with lips whistle-puckered and joy in his eyes after having drawn upon the treasury to the extent of several dollars. His business was to scout the neighborhood of Mrs. Wilkins' apartment on West Nth Street and it was a safe guess that certain back-yards, alleys, and fire escapes were about to give up any secrets to a pair of blue eyes. Smith, himself, had sauntered away in the afternoon and Bernice Asterley had appeared before Langa Doonh, about fifteen minutes later, as the surprising widow. The reserved native had even shown some surprise at the transformation which she had worked and he watched her from the window with pride as she walked toward Fifth Avenue—pride in

their little family, pride in anything which was connected with Aurelius Smith.

It was nearly six when Smith telephoned to learn if Jimmie had returned. But Langa Doonh reported that Jimmie had not come back and the conversation ended from the other end as if time pressed. A few minutes later, Bernice drove up in a taxi and flew to her room. With the speed of an actress, in her dressing-room, she changed her clothes and washed the make-up from her face. Her first question had been about Jimmie and, after the unbelievably quick change, she again asked if he had returned. Langa Doonh could only shake his head in the negative and add that Jimmie had not even telephoned.

Bernice turned with sober face to the door when the native servant held up a protesting hand and pointed to tea and toast which he had prepared with lightning speed and placed upon the table on the lion skin. Partly to please Langa Doonh and partly to wait a few minutes longer for Jimmie, Bernice drank some tea and ate a piece of toast. While she ate the toast, she described very briefly what had happened at Cardan's rooms.

"What do you think of it?" she asked as she rose to depart.

"Missie sahib," answered Langa Doonh with assurance, "trick not work and coffin have dead man at end. If trick work, coffin be empty."

"And that doesn't explain very much," called Bernice over her shoulder as she ran for the door. "I am going to Mr. Grayson's house."

Langa Doonh, left alone again, cleared away the tea things and made rapid arrangements for the next

arrival who might require food. He was in the act of burning a little incense before a small image of Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god of luck, when Officer Monroe arrived. Langa Doonh conducted the policeman to the great living-room and found him a comfortable chair and a box of cigars. In answer to some questions, he replied that Mr. Smith was not at home and that he did not know when he would return. Beyond that, he had no information to give out which was quite customary with him when not in the presence of long and tried friends. Monroe smoked and watched the Hindu add a little more incense to the smoldering heap before Ganesh.

Perhaps fifteen minutes had passed before Aurelius Smith came silently down the passage and entered the great room. Langa Doonh was at his side at once, taking hat, coat, and cane. Smith nodded to Monroe without any surprise and dropped himself carelessly into a large chair.

"Well?" he asked.

"They won't believe me!" exclaimed Monroe.

"Humph!" grunted Smith and then to Langa Doonh: "Jimmie?"

"Chota sahib not come back," answered the servant.

There was a moment of silence while Smith sat motionless in his chair. Finally, he reached for his pipe and looked at his visitor.

"Eaten?" he asked.

"No," returned Monroe.

"Curry, Langa Doonh, and make it hot," directed Smith and Langa Doonh vanished into the kitchen. "Now," he continued, turning to Monroe, "who won't believe you and what won't they believe?"

"Headquarters!" answered Monroe, disconcertedly. "When I tell them that the corpse got out of the coffin they come close up to smell my breath. I would have lost my job if I had had a drink today."

"Well," returned Smith chuckling, "do you blame them?"

"No, not altogether," answered Monroe. "But I saw the thing happen myself. You saw it happen. What is the explanation?"

"To find out what we don't know, we must consider carefully what we do know," said Smith. "I suppose you investigated the undertaker who took charge of Brown's body?"

"Yes," was the answer, "and it is just as Cardan said. The undertaker is in financial trouble and has disappeared. His establishment is upset and demoralized and they could not produce the body of the man Brown."

"And what does Headquarters think about the death of your comrade, Officer 126?" asked Smith.

"Heart failure," said Monroe. "There was no trace of poison on the gramophone needle. They put it down to heart failure and one man asked me why I didn't die of fright too."

"It does sound ridiculous," said Smith, "but it is a very sad matter for the family of your dead comrade. In fact, the whole thing is hideous and reveals the brain of a man who will be extremely difficult to defeat."

"But we are getting nowhere!" exclaimed Monroe. "Can a corpse walk and talk? What really happened?"

"Before we decide what really happened," returned Smith, "let us consider what *might* have happened if I

had not found the airholes in the coffin and if Cardan had been quite successful."

"Well?" asked Monroe.

"You will remember," began Smith, "that Cardan was quite successful up to the point that I shoved my cane into the coffin. Now let us imagine what would have happened if I had not punched my cane into the coffin. First, Cardan would have placed Mr. Grayson's check in his pocket. Second, he would have called Brown into the outer room and handed him over to Officer 126. Third, he would have closed the doors leading into the inner room. Fourth, he would have taken his hat and coat and accompanied Officer 126 and Brown to Headquarters.

"That leaves a pretty situation. Cardan would have restored Brown to life which is not a crime according to any law that I know. Brown, while alive, would probably have had no mind left that could give evidence against Cardan in any way whatever. The result would have been that Cardan would have bid the police a friendly or sarcastic adieu and would have deposited his check when the bank opened on the following day. That was Cardan's game and he very nearly succeeded."

"That doesn't explain how a dead man can come back to life," remonstrated Monroe.

"No," admitted Smith, "and I am not sure that I can explain the 'miracle' quite satisfactorily—yet."

"I would have given a month's pay to have walked into Headquarters with Brown," said Monroe ruefully.

"You may yet do so," answered Smith dryly.

While Monroe looked his astonishment at the suggestion of such a possibility, Langa Doonh entered

with a huge plate of steaming rice and placed it upon the table amid several other dishes whose mysterious contents gave off savory odors. For a time, the discussion ceased while Smith instructed his guest in the art of eating a real curry. Few people, in America, know that a curry cannot properly be enjoyed unless all the different dishes are thoroughly mixed with the rice.

For some time, during the meal, Smith refused to talk about the case of Cardan. It would almost have seemed as if he was more interested in eating than in anything else in the world. He crumbled the "Bombay duck" over his curry and explained that it was a small fish dried in the hot sand under an Indian sun. Half a dozen different spices received a running comment as he added each, in correct proportion, to the wonderful concoction which Langa Doonh had assembled.

"Lost interest in Cardan?" finally questioned Monroe.

"Did you ever try to think of a name and fail just because you were thinking too hard?" countered Smith. "You can often get better results by dropping a problem for a few minutes."

"Well," returned Monroe, "I admit that this dead man 'miracle' is a stiff problem."

"Not at all," remarked Smith rather dryly. "That is not the problem I am working on."

"And just what problem is that?" asked Monroe, draining a second glass of water after the hot curry.

"The problem of determining just where Cardan is at the present moment," answered Smith. "If the police don't find him and if nothing unexpected happens, it may take several days of hard work to locate

Jerome Cardan—unless he thinks it best to attack *me*.”

“You don’t seem at all worried.”

“On the contrary, I am more worried than I like to admit.”

“Are you worried for any particular reason?” asked Monroe, accepting a cigar.

“Yes,” returned Smith very seriously. “I am worried on account of Jimmie. I sent him to investigate the neighborhood of this Wilkins woman. Jimmie has neither returned nor made any report by telephone. Something has gone wrong or at least something unexpected has happened.”

“But what makes you think that Cardan has anything to do with the Wilkins woman?”

“You may not have noticed it,” replied Smith, “but this afternoon my assistant, Miss Asterley, badgered Cardan into mentioning the name of Wilkins without having spoken it herself. Cardan and Mrs. Wilkins are connected beyond a doubt.”

Smith rose and strolled over to the wall on which hung his maps. For a while he stared in silence, but it was apparent that he was thinking rather than observing what was before him. Suddenly he turned about and drew a chair very close to the telephone upon his large table. Ordinarily, Langa Doonh would have brought his slippers and his dressing gown but that experienced servant knew very well that Aurelius Smith would not seek the comfort of a dressing gown until some new development had occurred or, at least, until some news had been received from Jimmie.

“Let us talk it over,” began Smith, motioning Monroe into another chair opposite to him. “In the first place let us consider the inner room at Cardan’s place

after we broke into it this afternoon. Just what did you observe?"

"A simple room," answered Monroe, "with the walls entirely covered by black hangings. There was nothing in the room except the couch and the coffin. Behind the hangings there was a window, through which Cardan escaped, and a door leading into a bedroom. The bedroom contained——"

"Just a minute!" broke in Smith. "We haven't finished the black draped room yet. In the first place, an accumulation of dust, where the draperies were tacked to the picture molding, proved that they had been hanging for several months and this indicates that the black effect was not prepared especially for the exhibition which we witnessed. In the second place, you yourself, discovered a small hole in one of the draperies and behind this hole projected a six-inch copper pipe electrically wired and with an insulated core permitting a current of electricity to flow into some object which might have been suspended upon the pipe just in front of the black background. Such an arrangement might have been used for trick effects or for hypnotic purposes. I am inclined to believe that the room was originally intended for some such purpose. The landlady knew about the black room, but didn't understand it and didn't care so long as Cardan continued to pay her the rather large rent which she received."

"Yes," said Monroe, "and that doesn't tell us very much. As for the bedroom, there was very little in it and not even a handkerchief had a laundry mark."

"And that proves that it was not his headquarters," continued Smith. "When we find Cardan's headquar-

ters, we will find a chemical laboratory and probably some very surprising things. The bedroom, however, contained one bit of information that Cardan forgot to remove. You will remember that there was a pair of rather new shoes and that the sole of the right shoe was scraped laterally quite close to the heel. What do you make of that?"

"I suppose he must have stood on something that was hard and rather sharp?" suggested Monroe.

"In a way you are right," returned Smith, "but remember that he stood on it only with his right foot. What Cardan stood on was a spade! In short, he had been digging. I looked for a spade and for any ground where he could dig, but there was no spade in sight and the back-yard was covered with cement that had been there for several years. Only the cellar remained and there I found what I wanted. The landlady told me that Cardan used an old room in the basement for storing his packing cases. Inside the door of this room I found the spade and I saw that this portion of the cellar had not been covered with cement. By shifting a few packing cases, I discovered a rectangular excavation that had every appearance of being a newly dug grave."

"And who do you suppose he intended to bury?" demanded Monroe.

"Well," answered Smith, "Brown would have fitted in quite easily, but, on the other hand, he could have put me in by bending my knees a little."

"It seems to me that you didn't give all your information to the police," remarked Monroe.

"No," returned Smith. "I had no time to talk, but

I am telling you everything I know now. Use the information as you like and, if you get Cardan, no person will be better pleased than I shall be."

"And just what do you deduce from the empty grave?" asked Monroe.

"I said I would tell you everything I knew," answered Smith, "but I didn't say I would tell you all my deductions. Nobody can always deduce correctly and I do not wish to put you on a wrong scent. I will say this much. Cardan failed and Cardan did not use the grave. Therefore, if Cardan had succeeded, he *would* have used the grave since people do not dig graves for nothing."

Monroe sprang to his feet and walked about the room.

"Instead of making it clearer, you make it more confusing!" he exclaimed. "Not including the landlady, there were seven people at Cardan's rooms this afternoon. Which one did he intend to bury and what good would it have done him if he had been successful?"

"That is something for us to learn," answered Smith. "If the case were simple, it would not be interesting. Remember, however, that we saw seven people, but that we may not have seen everybody since the inner room was rather a mystery until we broke into it. Cardan drove out of the alley in a limousine which was described by a taxicab man who heard the shots which I fired into the lock. In all probability, Cardan was not alone in the motor car or even in the inner room."

"And is that all you have learned?"

Smith silently took something from his pocket and handed it to the policeman. It was a small block of

wood with a hole through which ran a loop of stout cord.

"I picked that up in the alley," said Smith. "Just bare your arm a little and run your hand through the loop. Shove it up on your arm a little and twist the block."

"A tourniquet!" exclaimed Monroe.

"Exactly!" returned Smith. "You will remember that I tested the pulse of the supposed corpse and detected no heart action. A little thing like that would have cut off the flow of blood entirely."

"But a tourniquet would have left a mark on the arm," remarked Monroe.

"Quite right and I examined Brown's arm just before I left the place."

"Well?"

"There was no mark."

Monroe tossed the block and cord upon the table.

"I can't see that we are making any progress," he said.

"No," returned Smith, "but when we start to move, we will find all these things useful to remember. Another thing you should know is that the Wilkins woman has vanished. I reached her apartment fifteen minutes after she had driven away with two trunks which must have contained all her personal belongings. If she had been ready to leave, Cardan would just have had time to warn her by telephone to make a run for it."

As Smith finished speaking, the telephone sounded and he jerked the receiver to his ear before the first jangle had ceased. An exchange operator stated that Cold Spring was calling and that the caller wished to have the charges reversed. Quickly and succinctly Smith

replied that he would pay all charges and asked to have the connection established. The next minute Jimmie's voice, excited and almost frantic, came over the wire.

"Gee, Uncle Relius!" he called. "I trailed de dame to Cold Spring an' she's spotted me an' I'm broke. She's comin' now an' I——"

That was all. There was a rattle and the telephonic communication was broken.

For half a minute Smith sat motionless and then stepped swiftly to one of his wall maps and ran his finger up the Hudson, twenty, forty, fifty miles, to Cold Spring. He glanced at his watch and selected a railroad time-table from a drawer.

"Jimmie has followed Mrs. Wilkins to Cold Spring and is caught," he commented rapidly.

Langa Doonh, in the act of removing a dish, set it back on the table and picked up his master's hat and coat.

"Let me see," continued Smith, consulting the time-table. "A New York Central train reached Cold Spring at seven twenty-two and it is now seven thirty. This train left New York at five fifty-three and Mrs. Wilkins could just have caught it according to the time she drove away from her apartment. Jimmie probably telephoned from the Cold Spring station. She caught him in the act of telephoning, but how the devil did she know who he was? The next train is not until nine forty-three and arrives at eleven forty-seven. There is only one thing for it and that is a fast motor trip for me."

Langa Doonh held out the coat and Smith slipped into it and was half-way to the door before he seemed to remember that he had a guest.

"Want me to come along?" asked Monroe as Smith halted and looked back at him.

"No one I would like better," answered Smith, "but if I obtain valuable information in Cold Spring, it might be well for you to be in town so I could telephone you and get quick action."

"Right!" returned Monroe, rising and receiving his own hat and coat from the ever-watchful Langa Doonh.

At the door Smith turned to Langa Doonh.

"Telephone Miss Asterley at Mr. Grayson's house," he directed. "Tell her that Jimmie has followed Mrs. Wilkins to Cold Spring and that I am going up by fast motor."

The door slammed and Langa Doonh was again alone. He took up the telephone and called the Grayson house. The line was busy. After an interval he called again and again the busy signal sounded. Twice more he called before the connection was made. A servant informed him that Miss Asterley had not arrived and the connection was broken at the farther end with scant courtesy.

The huge Hindu sat motionless for a moment as his master had done but a few minutes before. If Miss Asterley had not arrived, something had gone wrong with Smith sahib's plans. Such a thing was a serious matter to Langa Doonh and he had nobody but himself to consult about it. And, in addition, it was quite possible that some harm might be coming to the missie sahib. Langa Doonh decided that something had to be done and, since he was alone, he had to do it.

Langa Doonh was never slow to act in an emergency. He stepped into his little sleeping-room and re-

moved the Indian costume which he wore about the house. In all save his head-dress he donned dark American clothing. On his head he wound a towering white puggaree in the front of which he pinned a large spinel ruby. The effect was startling. His huge frame and his handsome features, beneath the great puggaree, gave the appearance of an Oriental gentleman of great distinction. Langa Doonh, the servant, had disappeared and a gentleman of the East stood in his place so far as any New Yorker was likely to detect.

From an old steel traveling trunk, which had come from India, the native next produced a heavy gray sock and poured forth ten shining twenty-dollar gold pieces which he distributed equally in right and left pockets. Having armed himself with gold, he next armed himself with steel and slipped a long, leather-sheathed knife into a hip pocket. Thus equipped, Langa Doonh locked the door behind him and stepped out into New York City to see what could be done.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT HAPPENED TO JIMMIE

SPRING was in the air when Jimmie set forth to investigate the neighborhood of Mrs. Wilkins' apartment house on West Nth Street. Even in the city a small boy feels the spring just as the frogs do in the marshes of the country. He wants to stir around and make a noise. Adventurous feelings goad his thoughts and a tin can is something to be kicked by way of outlet to those feelings. Squarely in front of Jimmie, on the narrow sidewalk of Fenton Street, stood a tin can. Most boys would have met the can on the point of a toe, but an early struggle for life in Chicago had taught Jimmie the value of shoes; nevertheless, it was necessary that the can should be kicked.

Elevating his toe as much as possible, Jimmie struck the can with the bottom of his heel and so well planted was the kick that the can rattled, rolled, and banged right out onto the broad pavement of Fifth Avenue where it ended its noisy career directly under the nose of a white poodle. This lamblike caricature of a dog was led by so stylish a mistress that any ordinary dog would have considered her much as Jimmie considered the white poodle and that may be left to the imagination. As for the white poodle, boudoir reared, it sat down, trembled, and rolled over as if dead. Jimmie thought it was dead.

Most boys would have taken to their heels, but—not

Jimmie! He sauntered up to the corner just as the lady was kneeling beside her pet with a bottle of smelling salts in her hand. Truth to tell, the lady was too interested in the condition of her poodle to think about the tin can or the reason for its sudden appearance. Jimmie, who never before had seen a dog faint, stood astounded as the poodle swayed a sickly head under the influence of the salts.

"Get a taxicab," said the lady, suddenly noticing the red-haired boy.

Jimmie, relieved of any necessity for explaining the reason for the tin can, stepped carelessly from the curb and hailed a taxi. Mistress and poodle entered the cab and Jimmie heard an address that was very near West Nth Street. Good fortune never met Jimmie without being received with open arms and he suggested, in his very best English, that it might be well for him to come along in case the dog got worse and assistance was required. The lady glanced into the blue eyes and nodded her head. So it was that Jimmie also entered the taxi and rolled northward with a lady and a white poodle.

The journey ended before a handsome apartment house where Jimmie received a few words of thanks and a dollar bill. Jimmie strolled away thinking about a tin can, a "skirt-mutt," and a dollar bill.

"Yuh never can tell!" he muttered as he turned his steps toward Nth Street.

Jimmie found West Nth Street to be one of those rather monotonous cross streets which run from the park to Riverside Drive. The houses and apartment houses were neither fashionable nor poverty-stricken. The apartment houses lacked sidewalk awnings and

door-men, but many a smart little car at the curb testified to a certain degree of prosperity. The boy noted these things and much more as he sauntered along with the joyous feeling that adventure lay ahead of him and that the world was at his feet. Did he not have the whole day before him and had he not been given three dollars for expense money? By kicking a tin can he had increased the three dollars to four and the day had scarcely started. Anything might happen and it was impossible to give a guess as to what it would be. To prove it, a fleeting shower sent some drops pattering upon the sidewalk.

Jimmie turned up his collar and stepped up to the door of the very apartment house that he had been sent to investigate. Just beyond the rain he stood against the glass door and waited for something else to happen. So long as his luck held there was nothing to be gained by attempting to interfere with it—and it seemed to hold. Almost at once a taxi drew up and an old lady stepped out with several packages in her arms. One of the packages fell as she hurried through the rain to the door. Jimmie dashed forward and picked it up. He carried it to the door and insisted on carrying it inside. Indeed, he insisted on carrying it to the elevator and nearly succeeded in entering the elevator with the old lady. The old lady gave him five cents, however, and the elevator boy took the parcel and shoed him out.

Jimmie found himself alone in the marble-lined hall. He saw at once that one West Indian boy ran the elevator, operated a house switchboard, and tended the front door. Such a place could afford few obstacles to such an enterprising character as Jimmie. The elevator

had scarcely disappeared before he was ascending the stairs with all the assurance of a regular resident.

The third floor hall was deserted when Jimmie reached it. He searched for a door bearing the No. 31 and, having located it, carefully estimated the distance from it to the head of the stairs. It is true that Jimmie had no instructions to penetrate the quarters of the enemy—but Jimmie was an adventurous character this spring morning and luck was holding well. He pressed the bell of No. 31 and dashed to the stairs where he crouched with his eyes just above the top step. He had not long to wait before the door was opened by a woman in a pink wrapper and with a head of hair quite as red as his own. He ventured only the briefest glimpse before lowering himself beyond view and descending to the second floor with the silent agility of a cat. From the description which had been supplied to him, the red hair was enough. Mrs. Wilkins was at home.

It was only the matter of a few minutes for Jimmie to wait for the elevator to make another upward journey and to walk unperceived to the street where he found that the rain had stopped. On the second floor a window, which opened on a fire-escape, had attracted his attention, but he had decided that something had to be left for later in the day. It might be a good thing to meet some of the noisy youngsters who cluttered the street and, with such an object, he edged up to a small group who were playing marbles. Jimmie played marbles professionally, just the way he met anything else in life and, after half an hour, the game was over because his pockets were bulging and nobody else had any marbles. Such a killing might have led to

trouble if Jimmie had not issued a general invitation for ice cream soda at the corner drug store. From that moment he began to be the boy king of the street. It must not be thought that Jimmie was a coward and feared any rough tactics on the part of the gang if he, a stranger, had attempted to walk away with all the marbles. He loved excitement, but he knew that his job was to make friends rather than enemies. So the ice cream sodas resulted and peace reigned and Jimmie was no longer an outsider.

One of the gang had a soft rubber ball and somebody suggested a game that was the nearest approach to baseball that the police and the size of the street would permit. Nobody, however, had a bat and Jimmie was on the point of offering to buy one when an idea occurred to him. Under his suggestion, a raid was made on all the back yards and alleys in search of a broom handle which might be cut in two. The gang penetrated alleys and climbed over back fences until there was no spot in the vicinity of Mrs. Wilkins' apartment house which had not been explored. Sundry cats were chased and several janitors were insulted by out-stuck tongues and shrill jeers before the small riot ended and the gang emerged upon the street with half a broom handle. Like a good general, Jimmie came out last and gazed at his "army" with considerable satisfaction.

Throughout most of the morning the game of ball continued to the very great annoyance of most of the grown-ups who passed along the street. Noon, however, broke up the gang and Jimmie turned his thoughts to more serious things. He had not forgotten the second floor window which opened onto a fire escape.

Indeed, he had noted the same fire escape from the back-yard and knew just what windows it passed. One of them must certainly belong to apartment 31. Jimmie fortified himself with several sandwiches and two more sodas before tackling the job—a job, by the way, which he had no orders to attempt. The sodas were not wise, but his stomach was the center of a temptation which dwells with all small boys.

Jimmie was much too small to be mistaken for a burglar and he regarded a fire escape much as a country boy looks upon a tree—something to climb. There was nothing wrong about it any more than there was anything wrong about a cat walking upon a back fence. Consequently, he eluded the West Indian boy and ascended to the second floor hall where he swung himself out of the window and on to the fire escape with the ease of a monkey and the apparent innocence of childhood.

A short climb brought Jimmie to the iron landing on the third floor where the framework jutted to one side and came into contact with a kitchen window. The window was open and the boy settled down to see what could be seen. A bit of sunlight flashed between two adjacent walls and brightened his red hair and blue eyes with something of the theatrical effect of a spot light. There was no possible way of hiding and Jimmie realized that boldness was the safest attitude that he could adopt. He sprawled carelessly and began to whistle. Nothing happened for five minutes and Jimmie was on the point of throwing his ball into the kitchen as an excuse to follow it when Mrs. Wilkins entered. She still wore the pink wrapper and carried several dresses over her arm. Apparently between

thirty and forty, she was of large build and strikingly handsome, but under the red hair, which so closely resembled Jimmie's, her blue eyes were worried or, perhaps, tired.

Jimmie lowered his whistling somewhat and proceeded to drop a marble upon a cat in the yard below. Although his face was directed downward, it did not prevent him from watching Mrs. Wilkins out of the corner of his eye. He saw her come to the window and look out just as he dropped the marble.

"What are you doing there?" she demanded.

"Nothin'," answered Jimmie, looking up in feigned surprise.

Mrs. Wilkins closed the window and turned away. A sudden expression of suspicion came over her face as she moved to the door and she halted. If Jimmie had been able to note that expression, he might have descended the fire escape faster than he had climbed it. But he was unable to see her face at that particular moment and, when she suddenly threw open the window again, he met a smile almost as innocent as his own.

"Want to earn five cents?" asked Mrs. Wilkins.

"Sure!" answered Jimmie stoutly.

"Watch the kettle and call me when it boils," said the lady in pink, pointing to the gas stove.

Jimmie climbed through the window with alacrity. He had no sooner touched the floor than the window was closed and locked. He sensed danger immediately and darted to the door, but Mrs. Wilkins had her back to it before he could escape. Instantly the boy knew that he was trapped and that he had only his wits to depend upon.

"Where's de kettle?" he asked with forced carelessness and waiting to discover the intentions of his opponent.

"Where did you come from, my boy?"

"No place."

"What is your name?"

Jimmie stood silently for a moment with his back to the stove and with the kitchen table between him and his opponent. There was a fear clutching at his heart, but it was far from being the fear of a coward. He was afraid that he had blundered and that he would have to meet the disapproval of Aurelius Smith and the disapproval of Aurelius Smith was, to the youngster, like the zero hour to the man in the trenches. He decided that the best thing to do was to escape as quickly as possible.

"What is your name?" repeated the woman.

"Huh?" asked Jimmie as if he had been asked the solution to a problem in integral calculus.

Mrs. Wilkins reached for a piece of clothes line and took a step forward.

"I am going to tie you up," she said menacingly, "until you tell me who sent you here."

Catching a small boy may be almost as difficult as catching a mouse. It is true that a boy is larger than a mouse, but he offsets such a disadvantage by means of brains and imagination. Jimmie's eyes darted from the window to the dumb-waiter, which was closed, and then to the stove. It was possible to jump through the closed window, but such an escape would be dangerous and painful. The door of the dumb-waiter, being closed, there was no way of knowing whether the little lift was up or down. If it was down, it would be pos-

sible to slide down the rope, but if it was up, nothing would be gained by jumping down the empty shaft. The dumb-waiter was a possibility, but there was something on the stove that was more than a possibility. Like a flash, Jimmie darted toward the dumb-waiter and Mrs. Wilkins surged in the same direction, rope in hand. It is probable that the boy could have reached the dumb-waiter first, but it is doubtful if he could have opened the door and made his escape even if such an escape had proved possible when the door was opened. Mrs. Wilkins' momentum carried her to the dumb-waiter, but Jimmie, being much lighter, halted abruptly. Another second and he had skipped to the gas stove where, with a dish towel, he lifted the kettle *which had just begun to steam.*

"Put that down!" screamed Mrs. Wilkins as Jimmie spilled some of the boiling water in her direction.

Jimmie, tense and rather white, backed silently through the swing door. Outside, he quickly placed the kettle on the floor and rushed down the hall to the front door of the apartment. Behind him came the infuriated woman. There was a rattle, a thud, and some very unlady-like language as he fumbled for a moment with the lock. The kettle on the floor had done its work, but Jimmie did not wait to ascertain the extent of the damage. He went down the stairs at full speed and only hesitated long enough in the lobby to stick his tongue out at the West Indian boy.

The sun was not quite so bright for Jimmie during the remainder of the afternoon. He debated the question of reporting to his master by telephone, but hesitated too long because he felt that he had blundered and thought that he could present a better case in person.

Too many ice cream sodas may have had something to do with it, but Jimmie was depressed as he sat down on the curb to think in company with a hydrant.

Jimmie's day was nearly ended before he went into rapid action in the service of his beloved chief. At half past four a trunk was carried out of Mrs. Wilkins' apartment house and placed on a taxi. The boy wandered toward the taxi for a closer inspection and had the good fortune to stand with the taxi between him and the sidewalk just as Mrs. Wilkins came out and entered the taxi. He caught a glimpse of her red hair through both cab windows and sidestepped quickly against a rear wheel where he stood as motionless and alert as a fox-terrier.

"Grand Central Station," said Mrs. Wilkins and the taxi was off with Jimmie squirmed within the circumference of the big spare tire that was clamped in rear.

As the taxi slowed down on turning into the checking department of the station Jimmie dropped to the ground and followed on foot at a very respectful distance. He knew that he would be recognized at once if he came close enough to learn the destination of the trunk which Mrs. Wilkins was checking. All he dared do was to stand a long way off and hope that, even at that distance, the lady would not spot his red hair.

Better fortune awaited him, however, as Mrs. Wilkins entered the huge waiting-room and approached a ticket seller's window. Among the throngs of people the boy darted here and there and came closer and closer to the woman he followed. He was separated from her only by a very fat man as she bought her ticket.

"Cold Spring," Jimmie heard her say from the other side of the fat man and wondered where that might be

as he began to count the change that was left in his pocket.

Jimmie darted back into the crowd and approached another window where he requested a single half-fare ticket to Cold Spring. He placed a handful of change down and prayed that there would be enough. Jumping a city taxi was much easier than jumping a train out of the Grand Central Station. Fortunately, there was enough and one nickel to spare. With that nickel and his ticket he threaded his way to the departure platform and boarded what was evidently a Pullmanless, local train which pulled out almost as he stepped on board the rear car.

Jimmie's first action was to walk slowly forward through the train until he caught sight of Mrs. Wilkins' red hair. As the passengers faced the engine, he was able to observe them from the rear with comparative safety. Half-way through the train he found his quarry and returned to the car immediately behind with much relief.

At the 125th Street station Jimmie realized that he was leaving New York and home with a capital of only five cents. He wished that he had not spent so much on ice cream sodas, but it was far from the first time that he had been out in the world with no money and he was really not much disturbed. At Harmon, ice cream and candies were sold on the train. Although it was six o'clock, it was not lack of money that made Jimmie turn his head away. The sweets which he had already consumed were sending out alarming signals to the active little brain under its red thatch. Jimmie gritted his teeth and did not move about much in his seat. His eyes wandered vacantly over the expanses of the Hudson as the train followed the shore-line.

Everything has an end, however, and Cold Spring was reached shortly after seven. Jimmie, ice-cream-soda sick, dropped off a rear car and felt a little better because of the excitement which new action brought. He saw Mrs. Wilkins get off the train and go toward the baggage-room and, in a spirit of reconnaissance, he circled the little station and entered the waiting-room by the back door. A few people from the train were passing through the waiting-room on their way to motor cars in rear of the station. Suddenly a wave of nausea swept over Jimmie and with it a longing for his Uncle Relius, who was, Jimmie believed, able to cure any trouble that could possibly arise. In a corner was a rickety telephone box and into it the boy dashed.

It is true that Jimmie had only one nickel, and New York was fifty miles away, but Smith had taught Jimmie many little things and one of them was that telephone charges might be reversed in just such an emergency as Jimmie then found himself. The telephone box was stuffy and the boy, struggling with his *mal de* ice cream soda, clutched desperately at the telephone and inserted his only coin. The connection with New York was made in remarkably quick time, but to Jimmie it seemed a long, long time. Only Smith's voice bucked him up at the end—that and the sight of Mrs. Wilkins coming toward him.

Jimmie never knew exactly what happened as he was dragged from the telephone. He knew that he struggled, but he didn't know that he turned into a wildcat and wrought havoc in the little waiting-room. His master's voice still rang in his ears, and he fought blindly until a pain seized him in the arm, a pain so severe that he screamed weakly and fell to the floor unconscious.

CHAPTER XIV

LANGA DOONH GOES FORTH

WITH a white skin and a touch of Oxford, Langa Doonh might have been known in England as a gentleman's gentleman. He was exceedingly intuitive and knew just how and when to do the right thing in the presence of others so that harmony resulted. This does not mean that he could not fight—far from it! The true gentleman's gentleman will fight in the interest of his master to the last ditch, and there was no ditch which Langa Doonh would not enter in the service of Aurelius Smith. To him, Smith sahib was a god, and where that god laid the hand of friendship, there, also, went the tall Hindu's devotion.

There were two motives which stirred Langa Doonh as he stepped out to Fenton Street and locked the door behind him. In the first place, Bernice Asterley had not arrived at the residence of Mr. Grayson, and it was highly desirable that Smith should be notified that something had gone wrong. In the second place, it was quite possible that Bernice was in trouble or danger and needed assistance. To convey information to Smith and to render assistance to Bernice were the manifest duties of Langa Doonh. He felt the heavy weight of gold in his pockets and hailed a taxi. The driver was impressed by the majestic appearance of his fare and was still more impressed upon receiving the address of Richard Grayson's palatial residence.

Two Police Department cars were drawn up at the

curb when Langa Doonh reached his destination. Before the iron-grilled doors a burly policeman stood sentinel. New York policemen are not often at a loss for speech or action, but this one was a bit puzzled as the dark man with the high turban and flaming spinel ruby mounted the steps.

"Your business?" he finally demanded.

The presence of the police made it evident that trouble of some kind had descended upon the inmates of the house and, under such circumstances, it was probable that admission would be difficult. As it turned out, there was just one open sesame for a stranger, and Langa Doonh, with unerring instinct, hit upon it.

"Mrs. Grayson," was all he said.

After those words, no inquirer could have escaped entering the house, and Langa Doonh's slow but lithe stride scarcely hesitated before he found himself in a library where Richard Grayson sat with two stern-faced men. One of these men, undoubtedly a police official, barked a question at Langa Doonh as he entered. Half a dozen quick, penetrating questions followed and all were answered with such dignity, quickness, and economy of words that the police official looked his approval.

"Servant of Aurelius Smith," remarked the police official. "Evidently all right, since you recognize him. Trying to do something on his own. Has no information for us. Knows nothing about Mrs. Grayson."

While Mr. Grayson lowered his head in blank despair, Langa Doonh put a question of his own.

"Where is Mrs. Grayson?" he asked.

"Humph!" grunted the police official. "No harm in telling you what we know. Mr. Grayson's dismissed

chauffeur returned to the garage, bound and gagged the new driver and reported at the front door with the car at five o'clock. Took Mrs. Grayson for a drive in the park. They should have returned at six, but it is now half past seven and nothing has been heard of them."

"And Asterley missie sahib, she not come?" questioned Langa Doonh, stumbling a little with his English.

"That was the female operative that Aurelius Smith was to have sent over," mused the police official. "No, she didn't arrive."

"Then I know where Grayson memsahib is," stated Langa Doonh.

"Where?"

"With missie sahib."

"Yes?" questioned the official. "And with whom do you think Miss Asterley is?"

Langa Doonh uttered but one word.

"Cardan."

The police official brought his fist down upon the table.

"I would give a lot to know where that trickster is," he remarked.

Langa Doonh remained silent, but indicated his desire to be gone by the slightest but most expressive motions in the direction of the door. He had learned all that he thought possible and he had said as much as he wished to say. His departure was not delayed.

The next move was a visit to the garage where Smith had a regular account for motor car service, and here Langa Doonh learned something which surprised him. He was told that Mr. Smith had not taken a car out for several days. Langa Doonh felt sure that his master

would not have patronized any other garage. Jimmie had been caught, something had happened to Bernice Asterley, and now he had drawn a blank in his first effort to get into touch with his master. There was a loneliness about the heart of Langa Doonh as he stepped into the most powerful car that the garage afforded and directed the driver to take the quickest road to Cold Spring.

Shortly after Riverside Drive and New York City had been left behind, Langa Doonh took one of his great gold pieces out of his pocket and passed it to the chauffeur.

"You go quick," he said, "and two more come."

It was large bakshish for a native of India to give, but Langa Doonh knew that tips in America were foolishly large and he was reckless in his desire to reach his master in the shortest possible time. The result was that the great car traveled through the gathering darkness at a speed that was just short of being criminal and Cold Spring was reached a little before ten.

Cold Spring at night is rather dark and very much closed up, but Langa Doonh discovered an ice cream parlor which possessed a telephone box from which he called Smith's place on Fenton Street and also Mr. Grayson's residence. There was no answer from the Fenton Street call and Langa Doonh knew that none of his little "family" had returned. From the Grayson residence he learned that neither Mrs. Grayson nor Miss Asterley had been found. Inwardly somewhat disconsolate but stolid in outward appearance, Langa Doonh stood in the doorway of the shop and stared at his waiting car.

"Good evening, Mr. Langa Doonh."

The native of India wheeled about so suddenly that the woman who had spoken behind his back stepped back a pace. She was smiling, however, and, arms akimbo, looked at him in a friendly way and without the least embarrassment. Undoubtedly she was one of those friendly, good-hearted people who naturally make friends wherever they go. Apparently she was the proprietress. Although Langa Doonh had wheeled quickly, he seemed to read her kindly character at the first glance and bowed gravely.

"Looking for somebody?" she asked.

Langa Doonh admitted that he was.

"Tall man, all legs and arms? Nice man with blue eyes? Kind of lanky?"

"Yes," said Langa Doonh with interest. "Where is he?"

"Told me to tell you he had gone up the river road, but didn't know how far he had to go," said the woman. "He came into Cold Spring about half past eight and went through the town like a blue streak. The station master told him that I knew everybody and everything in town and he came straight to me. He used that telephone and then said that a dark gentleman from India would come with a big turban and a red ruby and that I was to tell him he had gone up the river road. After that he bought a second-hand car at Tully's garage without looking at it and was gone as fast as he came."

"You mean the great sahib come here at *half past eight*?" asked Langa Doonh in amazement as he remembered that Smith had left Fenton Street at half past seven.

"Well," returned the woman, "I don't know about

his being a great sahib, but he's a mighty quick one, and just as sure as my name is Fanny Dunlop, he walked in here at half past eight."

"But how did he get to Cold Spring?" asked Langa Doonh.

"Don't know," was the reply. "He was walking when I saw him, sort of rolling along with a step a yard and a half long. Looked as if he wasn't going fast, but most people would have had to do a dog-trot to keep up with him."

Accustomed as Langa Doonh was to the methods of his master, he could not help marveling at the man who could jump the fifty miles to Cold Spring in less than an hour and who could leave a message in the way it had been done. Of course, there was only one thing to be done, and Langa Doonh directed his chauffeur to travel up the Hudson by the river road and to drive very slowly.

It was very dark as the car left the small town and bumped slowly over the narrow road which ran parallel with the railway tracks beside the river. Some deserted houses and unlighted habitations were to be seen occasionally, but the district was almost mountainous on the right and bordered by the bare banks of the Hudson on the left. In the darkness it seemed very wild and lonely. Occasionally a lane led off to the right in the direction of some shadowy house and each time Langa Doonh halted to examine the road tracks by means of the swivel light on the car. Once he followed such a lane until he came to an old shed in which stood a rickety motor car. He felt about in the tonneau and discovered two empty milk pails. After some consid-

eration, he lifted one pail and tapped the bottom gently with a finger and when he returned to his own car he carried the pail with him, to the increased mystification of his driver. It was theft, of course, but Langa Doonh had a reason for it.

Farther on the road ran through the tiny village of Storm King and after that not a light was to be seen except across the river where a few lights twinkled from Newburgh. Half a mile beyond Storm King, Langa Doonh directed his driver to pull into a grass-grown lane which led to a deserted house and to wait for him. A New York chauffeur is accustomed to most things, but this one had mixed feelings as he saw his Eastern passenger climb over a fence and vanish into the darkness with the tin pail in his hand. A previous request for a monkey-wrench only nonplussed the chauffeur the more. What would any man want with a tin pail and a monkey-wrench at such a time of night and in such a lonely place? The driver felt three gold coins, lit a cigarette, and gave it up.

Where Langa Doonh had climbed the fence the ground rose gently and then more steeply toward the high hills which banked their wooded summits against the night sky. On and on he climbed and the ground rose more and more steeply until the wooded area was reached and the Hudson lay far below. Upon a rough boulder under a tree Langa Doonh seated himself and looked down upon the great expanse of river.

Storm King Mountain massed itself in blackness from the opposite shore and was etched with flashing lights where motor cars circled its face upon the rock-hewn roadway. Upon the river a night boat passed, a

gleaming toy of light flashing its searchlight from shore to shore with childish fancy. Two fast trains roared past each other upon the nearer bank.

When the trains had passed and stillness prevailed, Langa Doonh lifted the pail and beat upon its bottom with the monkey-wrench. He struck rapidly and with great regularity so that the monotonous beating sounded over the still countryside. He beat for several minutes and stopped for a full five minutes. Again and again he repeated this performance, which was the best imitation of the Indian tom-tom he could produce with a milk pail and a monkey-wrench.

It is probable that no such monotonous beating of a tin pail had ever before occurred upon that hillside, and Langa Doonh believed that Smith, if within hearing, would recognize such a signal and know that his servant was near. No reply seemed to come, however, and Langa Doonh was about to give one last effort, when a small branch snapped not fifty yards away. At the same instant, as the Hindu turned his head to listen, the distant hoot of an owl came through the night. It was followed by two additional hoots and then by a group of three hoots.

Instantly Langa Doonh reached for a branch above his head and silently pulled himself up among the fluttering leaves. He had recognized the distant owl as being none other than Smith himself, but the breaking of the branch nearby was something that had to be considered before anything else was done. Much as Langa Doonh wished to reply to the mournful hooting, he did not dare to attempt it until he had discovered the cause of the noise nearby. No animal, wild or tame, would have remained so near the spot during the earlier beat-

ings on the pail. It might be that a curious farmer, awakened from sleep, had come to investigate the unusual noise. The Hindu could not be sure, and for a considerable time he strained his ears among the rustling leaves, but could hear nothing of significance. He was about to descend to the ground when the cracking of a dry twig warned him that the intruder was still present and very close. Again the hooting of the owl broke out and it was very much nearer than before.

Evidently Smith was fast approaching and, in the shadows near Langa Doonh's tree, a strange man waited. Suddenly, in the dim light below, a man stepped out. Langa Doonh could just discern his outline, but, beyond the fact that he was not Smith, he could be sure of nothing. There was a slight rattle and the man picked up the pail and disappeared in the darkness by means of a few steps.

Again and still nearer came the hoot of the owl. From the darkness and not fifteen feet from the tree broke out the monotonous tamping upon the pail exactly as Langa Doonh had done it. The man in the tree was not slow to realize the situation. A strange man had read the night signals and was using the pail to lure Smith on—perhaps to death, since he knew that they were all juggling with life and death.

Something had to be done and done quickly. Again the imitation call of the owl sounded and this time it was very close. A short burst of tom-toming replied and there was silence.

Langa Doonh examined his tree more closely. The trunk was too big to embrace and the limb he had seized was the only one from which he could descend. The tree was on the edge of the woods, and to drop

from it was to silhouette himself against the glimmering bosom of the river below.

A low whistle came from the right, but there was no answer from the pail. Within a few seconds Smith might encounter an unexpected and therefore doubly dangerous enemy—if Langa Doonh failed to warn him.

Years before, when hunting dacoits along the Hub River in Baluchistan, he had used a strange signal to warn his master that great danger was approaching, and now, in America and upon the banks of the Hudson, a sound went out into the night that must have astounded any farmer who chanced to hear it. It commenced with a low moaning sound, not unlike that of a man in pain, and gradually rose into a loud and lusty bellowing such as only the throat of Langa Doonh could send forth—that throat or the throat of the striped hyena of India.

Silence followed the fearful outburst of noise and, after a minute of waiting, Langa Doonh sprang from his limb to the ground and darted into the shadows to aid his master in what might follow.

CHAPTER XV

BERNICE STEPS INTO DANGER

It must be remembered that it was shortly after five o'clock that the extraordinary events terminated at Cardan's apartment and that it was after six that Bernice left Fenton Street on her way to the Grayson residence for the purpose of acting as companion and guardian to Mrs. Grayson. She was quite aware that she was participating in an extremely unusual and very dangerous case. Already two men had died in her presence and one had passed away near their doorsteps. The fact that one of them had apparently been revived for a short time only added to the horror of things. Yet Bernice was not unnerved, was not afraid—at least for herself.

As she turned into Fifth Avenue and mounted to the top of a bus, Bernice did, however, suppress a slight shiver of apprehension. Jimmie had not returned from his investigation of Mrs. Wilkins' apartment house, and she remembered her earlier forebodings in regard to the boy. High above the great traffic, she worried about Jimmie and yet she knew that it was not Jimmie for whom she really worried. Aurelius Smith was probably, at that very moment, nearing the dangerous heart of the whole mystery, and yet her confidence in him was so great that she did not fear for his safety. But it was for Smith that she feared—deep in her heart. Much as she loved Jimmie, she believed that

the boy had caused Aurelius Smith to open his heart for the first time and she feared for the man, more than for the boy, because she felt that disaster to the boy would close the man's heart forever.

This does not mean that Bernice, as she rode uptown on top of the bus, was in love with Smith; neither does it mean the opposite. She, herself, would not have acknowledged such a thing even to herself, but just as spring had induced Jimmie to kick the tin can, so had it drawn her attention to something which lay ahead, something which she did not yet know but which she feared might be withdrawn forever. She shook herself free from the disturbing thoughts and found that 42nd Street had been passed and that they were well up the Avenue.

Descending from the bus, Bernice walked the last few blocks toward her destination, a destination which she was never to reach. Amid the slow and congested traffic, which passed close to the curb, a particularly handsome motor attracted her attention. Through the window, as it passed, she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Grayson seated alone on the back seat. Undoubtedly it was the same face which had stared down at the old merchant from a gold frame at his office. The green lights soon halted the traffic and she caught up to the car and passed it. The next block contained the house of Richard Grayson and Bernice had crossed the intersecting street and had almost arrived when the unexpected thing occurred.

Out of the crowd upon the sidewalk and almost directly in front of her, Jerome Cardan stepped to the curb just as the limousine with Mrs. Grayson drew up before the door. At the sight of Cardan, the heart of

Bernice skipped a beat, but her feet did not miss a step. Something had to be done and done instantly. For a man like Cardan there was no time to call a policeman from half a block away, and pedestrians, if appealed to, would only stare and stand helpless. Bernice took action herself and without a thought of what might happen to her.

As Cardan jerked open the door and stepped into the car, Bernice stepped in after him. So closely did she follow that she bumped into him before he could turn and seat himself. Undoubtedly, Cardan was taken by surprise, but surprise, to a brain like his, only brought instantaneous action. Like a snake, he turned and struck at the same moment and the blow of his fist fell cruelly on the side of the girl's face. She dropped inert upon the floor of the car and a small pistol, just taken from her hand-bag, rattled against the foot-rail. Only one pedestrian stopped to stare as Cardan closed the door and the car moved away.

Mrs. Grayson had leaned forward in surprise when Cardan entered the car. During the rapid action which followed, she seemed partly bewildered but raised a protesting hand.

"Be quiet!" commanded Cardan. "It is for Josephine."

The sharp command had the same effect upon the old lady that is seen when an obedient child is spoken to by a stern parent. She leaned back and paid no further attention to the actions of the strange man who had just knocked down a young girl before her eyes.

When Bernice recovered consciousness, she found her wrists and ankles tied with large handkerchiefs and in her mouth was fastened some soft stuff which she

later discovered to be a bit of waste from the tool-box of the car. The blind of one window was drawn and she was seated so close to the opposite side of the car that it was impossible for anybody to look in the remaining window and notice her condition. There was plenty of room on the back seat for Cardan to sit between Mrs. Grayson and his latest victim. No doubt he had been partly supporting her while she had been unconscious.

Owing to the jolting of the car, Bernice did not betray her returning consciousness by the slight movements which she made. She was clever enough to realize this and feigned insensibility for some little time in the hope that information of value might reach her through some conversation. But there was no conversation. Not a word was spoken except an order from Cardan to the chauffeur directing him to put on speed in the open country but to take no chances of arrest in towns or villages. The left side of her face was sore, her head ached, and there was an oily taste to the stuff in her mouth which was nauseating, but—Bernice did not consider herself beaten. She tested the bindings futilely. Helplessly she wondered what Smith would do, and tried to puzzle it out.

Out of slightly opened eyes Bernice had been able to locate their position as the upper end of Riverside Drive before she decided just what she thought Aurelius Smith would do in her position. In the first place, he would be utterly fearless; of that she was certain. In the second place, he would be delighted to be where he was, since he would probably consider that he was being forcibly taken to the very place he wanted to go, the heart of the mystery. In the third place, since

Cardan did not wish to talk, Smith would probably make him talk.

Bernice felt better when she had decided these things in her mind and she started to imitate what she thought Smith would do by trying to make Cardan talk. Robbed of her feet and hands and tongue, she suddenly drove her elbow savagely into the ribs of the yellow-faced man beside her. At least, it was into his ribs that she tried to drive her elbow. A sharp pain was the result as her funny-bone came into contact with something harder than ribs and she could not resist a low cry. Cardan neither spoke nor moved, but Bernice had learned something. She knew that he was carrying a shoulder-holster under his coat.

New York was soon left behind and during the long drive darkness settled over the country. Occasionally their course was parallel with the Hudson, and this served to indicate their position roughly to Bernice. Cardan paid no attention to her and only talked a very little to Mrs. Grayson, who seemed quite content to be where she was and to have no will beyond the will of Cardan. Sometimes Bernice thought that Mrs. Grayson appeared like a woman who was contentedly waiting for something that was more important than anything else in the world. A scrap of conversation gave Bernice an inkling regarding this.

"Are you sure that she will be there?" Mrs. Grayson asked.

"Josephine?" queried Cardan, a little as if he had been thinking intently of something else. "Yes, she will be there—if I command her."

"And will you keep your promise and let me keep her this time?" continued Mrs. Grayson.

"Only if you do everything exactly as I direct," answered Cardan. "If you do one thing against my wishes, you will never see Josephine again—even after you die."

"I will, I will!" exclaimed Mrs. Grayson with great emotion. "I will do everything just as you say."

Bernice, sitting quietly in her corner and resolved to wait and watch, could not decide in her mind whether Mrs. Grayson was acting because of some great inducement or on account of hypnotic influence. She decided finally that it might be partly due to both reasons. It seemed impossible to believe that an experienced woman would act as Mrs. Grayson was doing unless it were done under some kind of abnormal conditions. Not once had Mrs. Grayson spoken to her, and such action was not in accordance with the kindly nature of the old lady.

It seemed a long time and Bernice's mouth and tongue were terribly dry before they turned off a main thoroughfare and entered upon a winding country road upon which the car was forced to slow down. The blackness of night had long settled down and Cardan switched on an overhead light while he cut the cord and removed the gag from Bernice's mouth.

"If you speak once when I do not address you, I will put it back," he said. "If you try to cry out, you can imagine for yourself what will happen."

Bernice remained silent. Her mouth was too dry to articulate and, as Cardan switched out the light, she pondered over her predicament in the darkness. Once she raised her wrists to her mouth to try the knot with her teeth, but a quick movement on the part of Cardan warned her and she dropped her hands to her lap. The

man was inhumanly alert. She dared try nothing at the moment. She wondered again what Smith would do and she began to wonder if she would ever see him again, or Jimmie, or Langa Doonh. Suddenly she realized that she must already have been missed and that steps probably were already being taken to find her. But how could any man find her—even Smith? It was even impossible for her to throw something from the closed car on the very slight chance that it might be picked up and her trail followed. She knew that she must extricate herself or be rescued very soon, since the man who held her was totally heartless and her end might be swift.

Once the road they were following crossed some railroad tracks twice while it skirted the very edge of the river at a point where the tracks pierced some huge rocks by means of a short tunnel. At the second crossing a train was passing and the gates were down while a silent watchman stood within a few feet of the car. Cardan laid the cool blade of a knife against Bernice's wrists.

"If you make the slightest sound," he said, "I will send this into your side at exactly the right spot."

He spoke very low and close to her ear. If Mrs. Grayson heard the words, she gave no indication of it.

Shortly afterwards, Cardan ordered the driver to turn off the road to the left and the car lurched through a shallow ditch and came to a halt in a fenceless field bordering the river. Cardan removed the binding from the ankles of Bernice and opened the door for the party to alight. As Bernice left the car she felt a strong hand on one of her bound wrists and knew that she was not to be allowed the free use of her feet.

The night was very dark. Across the broad river the high and irregular banks loomed mountainous against the sky. Between them and the river bank a New York train roared by with its string of lights of tantalizing safety. On the opposite side of the country road a building could just be discerned and from it glowed faint lights from curtained windows.

Before leaving the car, Cardan spoke to the driver quite openly.

"Wait by the car," he said. "It will have to be abandoned in some distant state. I will give you money and directions later."

Crossing the road with his two companions, Cardan paused at a wooden gate which opened on a brick path leading up to what could just be distinguished as a stone house. He still held Bernice, but used his free hand to point out a mountainous outline not far in rear of the house.

"Mrs. Grayson," he said, "that is Breakneck Mountain, and the forces are propitious. See the figure of the regional logos crouching upon the summit. Look closely where I point and you will see him."

"Yes, yes," replied Mrs. Grayson earnestly, "I see him."

"And you, Miss Asterley?" questioned Cardan. "Do you see him?"

"You mean the one with blue eyes?" countered Bernice, seeing nothing but the outline of the high ground.

Cardan jerked her along with him as he approached the house and Mrs. Grayson followed behind. Bernice could see that it was an old stone house and that the lower windows were heavily barred. They did not enter by the front door, but turned to the left and ascended a footpath which led to higher ground where

a door at the side opened upon the second floor. At the door Cardan spoke in a low voice to Bernice.

"If you can think of any way that you can be of service to me, you may be able to save your life," he said.

"And if you can think of a quick way to commit suicide, you may be able to escape the electric chair," retorted Bernice, although she was far from feeling as confident as her words would indicate.

Cardan knocked upon the door, which was unlocked and opened by Mrs. Wilkins, and the party entered.

"Good evening, Mrs. Wilkins," said Bernice with remarkable self-possession. "It is rather late to call, but I hope you will excuse us."

There was a patter of small feet and a red-haired boy rushed across the room and threw himself upon Bernice.

"Hully gee!" he shouted. "If it ain't me new aunt, yuh kin kick a giraffe on de smeller!"

Bernice raised her bound hands and circled the boy with her arms, pressing him to her. Here was added responsibility. Not only did she have Mrs. Grayson to protect and her own life to save, but she now had Jimmie and, indirectly, Smith, who was so much wrapped up in the boy. Was it possible for her slender shoulders to carry the load? Bernice bit her lip and hugged the boy closer.

There was a yelp of pain and Jimmie slid to the floor.

"It's me left wing," he explained, rising to his feet. "De big red dame twisted it somethin' awful at de station."

Suddenly Jimmie's eyes fell upon Bernice's bound wrists and he became silent.

"Where did you get the boy?" were the first words that Cardan uttered after entering.

"He followed me to Cold Spring and I grabbed him at the station before he had time to telephone," explained Mrs. Wilkins.

"You fool!" replied Cardan, with all the more meaning because the words were spoken with utter lack of emphasis. "If you have bungled things this time, you will pay for it as you have never paid before."

Without waiting for an answer, he locked the outer door and withdrew the key before requesting Mrs. Grayson to lie down upon a couch.

"You will need all your strength for what is to happen, and must sleep," he said.

Without a word, the old lady stretched herself upon the couch and he carelessly pointed a finger at her face.

"Sleep! Sleep!" he commanded. "Sleep until I awaken you."

It was evident that she was entirely under his will and it needed nothing more. Her closed eyes and gentle breathing showed that sleep had come upon her like an enveloping cloud. Cardan turned away like a competent workman who has finished one thing and turns to the next.

"Boy!"

Jimmie edged away from Bernice, where, on the pretense of clinging to her, he had been trying to untie her wrist binding with his one useful hand.

"Look into my eyes!"

Jimmie glanced at the black eyes in the ugly, yellow face and shivered a little.

"Did you telephone anybody from Cold Spring?" Cardan demanded.

It must be confessed that Jimmie knew how to lie, when occasion demanded it, with a subtlety that was quite astounding. Usually he mixed truth with untruth in a guileless and confusing way.

"Sure!" he replied assertively. "D'yuh tink a guy from Chi don't know how tuh telephone?"

"And whom did you talk to?" asked Cardan, watching him keenly.

"Huh?" asked Jimmie in pretended surprise and really acting—showing off—with Bernice as his audience. "I telephoned de Chief o' Police of course."

"Lying," commented Cardan, which was quite true, but goes to show that he was not infallible when it came to getting the truth out of an ex-newsboy from Chicago.

Mrs. Wilkins showed some relief when Cardan left Jimmie and turned to something else.

"Did my car arrive at the green house?" he asked.

Mrs. Wilkins replied that she did not know and had not gone over to find out because she was afraid to leave Jimmie alone.

Although the room was lighted by electricity, Cardan took two candles, lighted them, and placed them in one of the front windows, drawing the curtain enough for them to be seen from without.

Upon the central portion of the rear wall of the room was suspended a large black curtain of heavy material. Bernice had noticed it upon entering and wondered what it might conceal. She was soon to know, for Cardan's next move was to draw the curtain to one side.

Bernice gazed in wonder at the glittering object which was revealed—a huge five-pointed star! The

outline was edged with tiny white electric bulbs and the surface seemed to be highly burnished silver. In the center was an unusually large bulb of a bright red color.

Before this great star Cardan dragged a heavy chair having an iron head-clamp at the back which somewhat resembled the apparatus used by photographers in the early days of that art.

"Miss Asterley," said Cardan, "I expect that I shall kill you, but it is just possible that I may find a use for you and it is necessary for me to subject you to an extreme hypnotic process so that your will may be subject to mine for all time—even after you are dead. Kindly sit in that chair."

As Bernice did not move, Cardan stepped toward her, only to be met by Jimmie with outstretched fist and foot ready to kick. Again it was the efficient but cruel workman who acted. Cardan struck the boy a heavy blow upon his left arm, hanging limp and useless by his side. Jimmie crumpled up upon the floor with a scream of agony and Mrs. Wilkins dragged him to one side.

Again Cardan advanced toward Bernice, only to be interrupted by a knock at the door. Opening it, he gave Bernice the greatest surprise of the evening. Standing in the doorway was Brown—Brown whom she had seen dead in his coffin before the police carted him away! Even as he stood there, he seemed rather sickly, though not so sickly as he had appeared when he had struggled out of his coffin and wavered about in the darkened room in New York. Bernice drew in her breath and waited.

"Get the car in all right, Billy?" asked Cardan.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Saw your lights and came over as fast as I could."

"Come in and sit down for a few minutes."

Cardan turned swiftly to Bernice and dragged her into the big chair where he clamped her head in the iron vise so that she was forced to stare at the great star on the wall. He shoved the chair to a point within five feet of the star and threw a switch on a side wall.

Instantly the great, glittering apparatus burst into dazzling brilliance and began to revolve. The effect was amazing, fascinating. It seemed to attract and hold the gaze, although the red light in the center was so powerful that it pained the eyes almost like a knife stab.

After one look, Bernice closed her eyes and raised her bound hands before them—but it was useless. Cardan pulled her hands down and, with two fingers of his other hand, raised the lids which covered her brown eyes. The lights pained her and the revolving wheel dizzied her. After a minute of useless struggling, she began to moan and kicked convulsively with her legs.

Again Jimmie struggled to come to the rescue. He kicked and tried to bite, quite regardless of any pain that he suffered. His physical strength failing him in Mrs. Wilkins' powerful grasp, he began to scream and swear, and the language of the Chicago slums, which came from his small mouth, was something fearful to hear. Finally Mrs. Wilkins dragged him into a back room and shut the door.

"When you have suffered enough," commenced Cardan to Bernice, "you will sink into unconsciousness and your inner self will hear my commands and obey them—for all time."

Suddenly he turned away in the act of listening and then hurried to the door, which he opened. With the door opened, could be heard, far in the distance, a

rapid tamping sound, as if metal were being struck on metal. For a full minute Cardan stood there, while Bernice covered her eyes with her hands and sat trembling, but listening also.

Cardan turned to Mrs. Wilkins.

"I believe that that brat did telephone, after all," he said. "That sound is the nearest approach to an Eastern drum beating that these hills have ever heard. Smith has an Eastern servant, and Smith is the only dangerous enemy I have. I will have to investigate this."

Swiftly Cardan took the two candles from the window, switched the current from the great star, and freed Bernice from the chair before turning sharply to Brown.

"Take the girl to the green house," he ordered, "and guard her so that she can't possibly escape. Bring her back if I put one candle in the window. If I put two candles in the window, kill her and throw the body in the river. Do you understand? Remember that one slip means jail and death for all of us—except me."

Bernice half staggered from the chair as she was forced to accompany her ghastly keeper into the outside darkness. She was experiencing enough to shatter the nerves of most girls and yet, somehow, she struggled to keep her mental balance and to fight on as best she could. It is doubtful if she could have done it for any other master than Aurelius Smith.

Behind her, as she left the door, she caught a glimpse of Jerome Cardan striding away in the direction of the distant drumming. The door closed and darkness seemed all about as she stumbled down the path to the road beside her unbelievable captor.

CHAPTER XVI

SMITH ON THE TRAIL

WHEN Aurelius Smith left his Fenton Street quarters, on his way to answer the telephone call from Jimmie, he parted from Officer Monroe at Fifth Avenue. It happened to be the same spot from which Jimmie had driven away with the lady and the pet poodle and from which Bernice had mounted to the top of the bus on her way to the Grayson residence. It remained to be seen if Smith, himself, would be more fortunate than Jimmie and Bernice.

"Monroe," he said in parting, "I am going to look for my youngster. The boy seems to be in trouble and it may be very serious. I expect that it will end in a man hunt for Cardan and I intend to keep on going until I have my man if it takes the rest of my life. I know I can depend on you for help if the chase leads back to New York."

"You can that," answered Monroe, "but I'll never be the same man until I understand that talking corpse."

"There is only one explanation possible," was the brief reply. "Ask any doctor."

The next minute Smith stepped into a taxi and Monroe shook his head disconsolately as he was left behind.

Smith's first action was to stop at a bookstore and to purchase a road map showing the Hudson River district in the vicinity of Cold Spring. Having done so, he suddenly altered his plans and it was because of this

that Langa Doonh failed to find any trace of him at the garage.

"Hudson River at 96th Street," he directed his driver, and during the drive he studied his map, impressing detail after detail of the Cold Spring district upon his mind.

At 96th Street the taxi came to a halt on the pier stretching out into the river. Smith alighted and looked out over the water. Fortune seemed to be with him. A man was just pulling to the shore from a flying machine which rested on its pontoons at a short distance. As the rowboat bumped into the wharf, Smith called down to the rower.

"A hundred dollars if you will fly me up to Cold Spring."

"Well," said the man, looking up at the tall figure on the wharf, "I'll take you up after I get something to eat."

"Two hundred if you go now," snapped Smith.

"Get in," answered the man, beginning to turn his boat.

The aeroplane was a good one and rose quickly into the air after a short rush over the water. The fuselage contained two seats and Smith, from his seat in rear, watched the river drop below and narrow into a broad ribbon in the rays of the setting sun. Flying was no new sensation for him and he enjoyed the stimulating effect upon his mind. It seemed a very short time before he saw the great gray walls of West Point and reached for the speaking tube.

"Drop down," he directed, "and taxi over the water to a point on the shore about a quarter of a mile from Cold Spring."

The water was calm and it was possible, by a little gentle nursing, to bring one of the pontoons so that it almost touched the shore. Smith, who often carried large sums of money for emergencies, paid the pilot and was able to jump to the shore from one of the pontoons without wetting his feet.

"You gave me three hundred," called the pilot, who happened to be an honest man.

Smith turned on the shore.

"The extra hundred is for waiting for me until day-break," he answered. "I will give you an additional hundred if I go back with you."

When possible, Smith always left his bridges standing when he advanced toward an enemy, and he parted from a flying man who was considerably puzzled but rather inclined to have faith in his abrupt customer.

It was but a short walk down the railroad tracks to the small station, and it was there that Smith hoped to pick up the trail which he was determined to follow to the end; nor was he disappointed. It was between trains, and in the empty waiting-room he saw at once that something unusual had taken place. Two windows were broken and the glass in the door of a rickety telephone booth was smashed. His foot pressed upon a marble and he noted several more upon the floor. At the ticket window he spoke to the solitary agent.

"Where is the red-haired boy who threw a handful of marbles about the place?" was the first question.

"It was a bushel of marbles, and not a handful," said the agent. "He would have wrecked the place if his red-haired mother hadn't jerked him about something fearful until he collapsed. She said he often had fits like that, and I hope he doesn't have another around

here. She gave me five dollars, but I don't think it will cover the damage."

"You say that the boy collapsed," said Smith. "Just what made him collapse?"

"I only heard the row and didn't see it happen," answered the agent, "but young Tulley said that she twisted the boy's arm so badly that the pain made him faint."

"Who is Tulley?"

"Drives a livery. Got a little garage up the street. He drove the woman and the kid away. Say, what's all this to you, mister?"

"Case of abduction," answered Smith briefly. "Can you tell me where Tulley drove them?"

But the agent, interested as he was upon hearing that a crime had been perpetrated under his nose, had no knowledge of the destination of the red-haired woman and her pretended son. There was nothing more to be learned at the station, and Smith walked up the village street through the gathering darkness to Tulley's garage. The garage proved to be a small affair and a lonely man in overalls was seated upon the running-board of a second-hand car bearing a sign that it was for sale for the sum of two hundred dollars. Smith's interview was brief.

"Where is Mr. Tulley?" he asked.

"Dunno," was the lazy reply. "He didn't come back from the station."

It would seem as if the searcher had reached an impasse for the moment and that he would have to wait for the return of Tulley, but Smith, follower of many vague trails, simply turned on his heel and walked up the street. An old man, reading a paper on the steps

of an undertaker's establishment, looked up to find the tall figure gazing down at him.

"Do you know where I can find Mr. Tulley?" asked Smith.

"Haven't seen him," was the unsatisfactory reply. "Did you try at his garage?"

Smith seated himself on the step beside the old man in the way that a lazy man does when he is forced to the unusual effort of hard thinking. For a few moments he did not speak.

"I've got an important deal with Mr. Tulley," he said finally, "and they don't know where he is at the garage. Now in a town like this"—Smith paused to light a cigarette—"there is always somebody who knows everybody and pretty much what everybody is doing. Do you know such a person?"

"Guess you better go and see Fanny," suggested the old man promptly.

"Fanny?"

"Fanny Dunlop," the old man went on to explain. "She has an ice cream parlor and vegetable stand across the street. She knows everybody and she is so easy to talk to that everybody tells her about all they know."

From the station agent, Smith had gone to the assistant at the garage. From the assistant at the garage he had gone to the old man on the undertaker's steps, and from that old man he sauntered across the street to the woman called Fanny. It was in this simple way that Smith often worked. Some of his best achievements often were the result of continual persistence in apparently trifling matters.

Fanny proved to be just the person that Smith wanted and, in fact, she turned out to be so interesting

that Smith might have spent the evening in her ice cream parlor if he had not been engaged in pressing work. A woman's age is no matter, but Fanny's hair was slightly graying and her blue eyes looked at people in an alert and friendly way that was very engaging. Probably she was much handsomer than she had ever been pretty at an earlier age. It was her mind, however, that attracted Smith.

It was quite dark outside as Smith stepped into the ice cream parlor and surveyed the store with its vegetable stands in front and the small round tables and soda fountain at the rear.

"Welcome, stranger," said Fanny, standing alone with arms akimbo in the middle of her store. "If you are tired of New York, a dish of my ice cream will be your first naturalization papers in Cold Spring."

"Thank you," replied Smith, taking a chair at one of the tables, "but why do you think I come from New York?"

Fanny watched him as he seated himself and then placed a slip of paper carefully upon a glass show-case before dishing up the refreshment. Over her shoulder she answered.

"It's so simple when you know how it's done," she said. "Of course, you are a city man, and New York is the only large city that sends any of its people to Cold Spring."

"You are right," admitted Smith very frankly and evidently interested. "Could you tell me anything more about myself?"

Fanny brought the ice cream to the table and looked down quizzically at her customer.

"I could tell you three things," she said. "You came

to Cold Spring in a hurry and on important business. You came into my shop to get some information from me and not for ice cream. You are probably connected with the police, but you might be a burglar."

Smith raised his spoon several times before replying. When he did speak, he again spoke quite frankly.

"All you say is quite true," he said, "and you are one of the world's interesting women. I should be grateful if you would explain how you deduced these things."

Fanny laughed pleasantly.

"It's all so simple," she said, "when you know how it's done. I saw you walk up the other side of the street between trains and I know that it's mighty important business that brings a strange New Yorker to Cold Spring at this time in the evening without even a suitcase. You asked a question of old Johnny Siebold, and, not knowing the answer, he sent you to me, which was the sensible thing for him to do."

"And why do you think I'm a burglar?" asked Smith as Fanny stopped.

"I don't," she replied quickly. "Your face is too honest, but when you sat down, you sat gingerly on the right side, which means that there is something uncomfortable in your hip pocket. It might be keys, but you would carry such things too constantly to use such an uncomfortable pocket. It might be a flask, but you are not the kind of a drinking man who needs to carry the stuff about with him. More likely it's a gun and, since you're too honest to be a burglar, I suppose you must be a—a detective of some kind."

Aurelius Smith was always appreciative when he discovered anybody who possessed his own rare qualities.

It always had the effect of establishing a strong bond of comradeship. He drew from his pocket and dropped upon the table a jangling pair of handcuffs.

"Madam," he said, "you are a lady whom I shall always be honored to know."

"Glad to hear it, and you are always welcome," replied Fanny. "Now what information can I give you?"

"I want to find young Tulley."

"Tulley?" exclaimed Fanny quickly. "What do you want with him? He's as straight as a string."

"I know nothing against Tulley," said Smith, "but he drove two passengers from the station and I am trying to find them."

"A red-haired woman and a sick boy?" asked Fanny.

"Correct."

"I don't know where he took them," replied Fanny hesitatingly, "but I saw him drive by. Is it very important?"

"Very."

"I could tell you where Tulley is now," continued Fanny, "but I'm not an idle gossip and I don't talk about people's private affairs, even if they tell me about them."

"In this case you may save human lives, and every minute counts," returned Smith gravely.

"Well," answered Fanny slowly, "at the present minute Tulley is playing a ukelele in the front parlor of his best girl's house in Newburgh. This is his evening in Newburgh and nothing under the sun could keep him away."

"Her name?" asked Smith.

But Fanny did not know the name of Tulley's fair attraction in Newburgh. A few more questions and

Smith knew that he had obtained all the information that was possible at the moment. A coin telephone stood in a booth at the back of the shop and he turned his attention to this.

A call to the Grayson residence in New York brought Smith the startling information that Mrs. Grayson had disappeared and that Bernice Asterley had not reported there.

"Mrs. Grayson kidnaped and Bernice on the trail," he murmured grimly to himself, and called his own number on Fenton Street.

The regular ringing of the telephone was all the answer that came from the Fenton Street call. Evidently nobody was at home, which meant that Langa Doonh was absent. Again Smith deduced quickly.

"Langa Doonh has gone to the help of Bernice or is on his way to find me," he thought as he stepped out of the booth.

On his way out of the store he stopped for a moment with the proprietress.

"It is possible," he said, "that a big, dark man from India, with a white turban and a red ruby, may come to Cold Spring tonight. If you see him, please tell him that I have taken the river road to Beacon and may cross by ferry to Newburgh. His name is Langa Doonh."

Fanny agreed to deliver the message and was positive that such a man could not get into Cold Spring for more than five minutes without her knowing it.

Just a moment Smith hesitated by the glass showcase while he held out his hand.

"I hope," he said very earnestly, "that everything will turn out well for your son in California."

Fanny's eyes filled suddenly with tears as she grasped his hand and her voice broke as she spoke.

"Thank you," she replied with difficulty, "but—but how did you know about him? Nobody in—in Cold Spring knows."

"The letter on the show-case, madam," replied Smith. "Just above the money-order, which is pinned to it, I can see—couldn't help seeing it—that a man has begun it with 'Dear Mother.' The money-order is your reply, and the twenty-four cent air-mail stamp, also upon the show-case, means that you are about to send the letter to California in the quickest possible way. The air mail is collected in New York at half past eight tomorrow morning. I may return to New York before that time, and if your store is open when I pass through, I shall be glad to see that your letter is posted in time to catch the air service."

Fanny's eyes were still blurred with tears as she watched her tall customer cross the street, with his lazy, swinging stride, toward Tulley's garage.

The assistant was still sitting on the running-board of the second-hand car as Smith walked in and took the driver's seat after removing the For Sale card.

"Fill her up," he directed.

"She's full," replied the assistant in surprise.

Smith leaned out and handed some bills to the man, stepped on the starter, threw in the clutch, and the car rattled out on the street. It was the quickest sale that had ever been made in Cold Spring. The assistant did not know that a sale had been made until he counted the money and the car failed to return.

Smith, who carried a driver's license in the State of New York, rattled around the first corner and turned

into a narrow, winding road which skirted the river in the direction of Beacon. It was very dark and the road was bad, but Smith never seemed to hesitate. Much experience with military topography during the War and an excellent memory permitted him to fix the territory in his mind after a brief study of the road map which he had purchased before leaving New York.

The road ran close to the railway tracks and, just before reaching Storm King, it crossed the track twice at a point where the railway used a tunnel to pierce a mass of solid rock. At each crossing a watchman was in charge of gates. Smith stopped to question each watchman. The first man had seen Tulley pass, but hadn't paid any attention to any passengers that he might have had. The second watchman, however, knew Tulley very well and had seen him pass with a red-haired woman and a small boy. Smith threw in his clutch again and rushed through the tiny Italian hamlet, which clustered about the little station, and into the darkness of the country beyond. Few houses and fewer lights dotted the road and he did not stop again until he reached the ferry landing at Beacon. Here he was again fortunate in receiving news of Tulley, but this time Tulley had no passengers in his car.

"Tulley crossed, all right," the ticket agent stated, "and he was mighty angry because he just missed a boat. He said he was late because he had to drop a couple of passengers at a house on the river road."

Once more Smith turned his car into the lonely road by the river and commenced a return trip. Somewhere between Beacon and Storm King a red-haired woman and a red-haired boy had been left at a house. The problem was to find that house and, although that

problem was difficult, it was not so difficult as it might seem, since there were very few houses on the four- or five-mile stretch.

To examine every house seemed the best plan, and Smith traveled slowly, watching for every light and every gate which might give access to a darkened building. The job was tedious, and farming people retire early, so that sometimes they had to be awakened. Many were the excuses which the indefatigable searcher invented as he knocked at front doors or back doors. Sometimes he said that there had been a motor accident and asked if a lady with red hair had sought shelter at the farmer's house. At other times he asked for water for his radiator, or merely inquired the way. While he spoke, he observed closely and he relied mostly upon his keen reading of human character and his natural ability for deduction.

It was when Smith had completed a little more than half of the return trip to Storm King that the unexpected happened. He was returning to his car after inspecting a crumbling and utterly tenantless house when he suddenly stopped to listen. From far away came a beating sound upon the night air. It was as though something metallic was being struck with great regularity and very rapidly. The hills sent their echo to the sound, and Smith realized that he had heard something like it before among other hills. A memory of the foot-hills of the Himalayas came back to him, a memory of Hindu mantras chanted to the accompaniment of native tom-toms. There was no wailing chant with the present beating sound, but Smith needed nothing more to tell him that Langa Doonh was calling to him in a language that was intended only for his ears.

What Langa Doonh wanted, Smith did not know. It might be only to tell him that Mrs. Grayson was kidnaped and that Bernice was missing, something that Smith already knew. It might also be that the native servant had information of vital importance that Smith did not know. Under the circumstances Smith gave up his house-to-house search and, leaving his car, struck upwards over the rising ground in the direction of the distant sound which stopped and continued again at intervals.

The road, winding in its course, drew away from Smith as he progressed and was quickly obliterated in the darkness. Rising fast toward a wooded portion of the slope, he passed in rear of another house from which lights shone through curtained windows. Smith marked the house as the next one to be examined and passed on to enter the fringe of the wooded slope. It was extremely dark and he was guided only by the tom-tom sound and glimpses of the Hudson River below

The guiding sounds grew louder and louder, but still they were quite distant when Smith answered with the deep moaning cry of an owl. Three times he called, then twice, and then once. As he advanced as fast as possible over the rough ground he called again and again at intervals as he had done once before with Langa Doonh in northern India. Although he expected only to meet a friend he advanced with greater and greater caution as he drew closer and closer. Scouting in many of the open spaces of the world had rendered him an experienced woodsman and he exercised his talent so that his approach was quite inaudible at a short distance above the slight rustling of the leaves.

In the game he played, no precaution could be disregarded in the long run with impunity.

Smith was very near his goal when a change occurred in the sound that he was stalking. The duration of the beatings became shorter. Some sixth sense seemed to warn him and he fingered a pistol in a side pocket and dropped silently to the ground; nor did he rise, but crawled forward with the greatest care. There remained only a few yards more before he must come upon the man who made so strange a sound on the high banks of the Hudson.

Suddenly, almost from above his head, a low sound of agony burst forth. It increased in volume and ended in a bellow that would seem to come from anything but a human throat. Smith, motionless upon the ground, slipped the pistol from his pocket. A dark form dropped from a branch of a neighboring tree and leaped into the shadows. There was utter silence.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNUSUAL COMPANION

WHEN Bernice Asterley stepped into the outer darkness with the man Brown, she found it filled with balls of red and white fire which danced and floated about her in a most confusing way. She knew of course that this was caused by the strain on her eyes from the great five-pointed star upon which she had been forced to gaze. With her hands bound and her eyes deceiving her in such a manner, she was able to do little more than to stumble through the darkness beside her companion. Where he was taking her she did not know except that he led her across the road and seemed to be cutting across an open space of ground close to the river.

Gradually the balls of fire grew less and Bernice was able to pull herself together and to use her wits once more. To be away from Cardan was a distinct relief even if she was walking alone through the darkness with a man who had risen from a coffin not so many hours before. One of the first things she noticed was the way he was leading her. Many men do not know it, but any experienced girl learns a lot by the way her escort takes her arm. Bernice was quite capable of reading a man's character while he helped her across a street. She was a pretty and attractive girl and she knew it just as she knew the postal rates yet she found herself in a lonely spot with a man who held her arm

carefully but just as it might be held by an older *woman*.

"Thank providence for that," she thought to herself and turned her mind to the possible advantages of conversation.

Simply to ascertain whether or not he would talk her first remark was most trivial.

"It is very dark," she said.

"Yes," he agreed.

"But the air is very invigorating," she continued.

"I don't think so," he answered.

After that they walked on in silence for a while. He would talk, but how much could she get him to say? She considered this and also her chances to escape, for Bernice had made up her mind that she would take the most extreme measures to prevent herself from falling again into the hands of Cardan. Cardan's sudden departure and change of plans gave her the hope that her friends were near. Perhaps Smith, himself, was in the neighborhood. The long-drawn hoot of an owl sent an involuntary shudder over her. She was most at home in the city and the melancholy countryside was not her best environment. Unconsciously she clung a little to the arm that guided her.

"Have we far to go?" she asked.

"Sometimes I think so and sometimes I don't know," was the curious reply.

Bernice was puzzling over these words when they emerged into the deeper gloom of a frame house which loomed darkly before them. A few rickety steps led to a front door into which Brown fitted a key and they entered a pitch-dark hall. Up to this point Bernice had refrained from any attempt at escape because she

did not wish to put her captor on the alert and she hoped that a better opportunity would arise. It does not take a very strong man to hold a slender girl when her hands are bound and one failure to escape would make the next attempt all the more difficult. She believed that she must escape by means of her wit rather than by means of physical strength or dexterity. Still, a pitch-dark house in the country with a man of dubious character was an uncertain situation and Bernice's heart sank as she wished that she had made a break for it in the open.

Brown had locked the door again on entering and he groped his way through the dark and up some creaking stairs. Bernice followed a little behind him as he tugged her along. Finally he closed another door and, with his back to it, released the girl for the first time while he lighted a candle.

By the light of the single candle Bernice found herself in an attic room, the gabled ceiling of which gave space for a solitary window, propped open with a stick, in the end wall. A camp bed, littered with rumpled blankets, stood near the window and a battered traveling bag lay upon the floor. Plaster had fallen from walls and ceiling and some of it still lay upon the rough boards of the floor.

Brown locked the only door to the room and drew a broken chair up to the window. He seated himself and gazed out into the night with an expression of weary persistence upon his face. It was the expression of a man who was pursuing a road from which he could not turn back. It was not particularly an evil face, although it lacked any hint of high ideals. Weakness and selfishness predominated and appeared

stamped with a resignation to fate. Bernice studied the profile for a minute before speaking.

"Have you known Mr. Cardan long?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Brown without turning his head from the open window.

"Then you know him well?"

"Not as well as he knows me," was the ready answer. "Nobody really knows the master well."

"You call him master?"

Brown turned his head without any show of emotion and looked at his questioner.

"Yes," he answered, "or the devil."

There was something very sad in the utter lack of emphasis which he used in speaking. Bernice noticed it and sat down upon the camp bed before speaking in a very gentle voice.

"You are not happy?" she asked.

"Are you?" was the quick but dull-voiced counter question.

"How could I be when you keep me a prisoner in this lonely place?" she asked.

"I am never happy," he said and turned again to stare silently out of the window.

"What are you looking for?" Bernice asked after a pause.

"The candles," he answered quietly. "I will be able to see them from this window. One candle means I must bring you back to him and two candles mean that I must kill you."

The words were spoken in such colorless tones that a cold horror seemed to come with them. From outside drifted the low moaning of a distant owl. Bernice shivered and cowered down upon the disorderly

blankets. She had been in tight places before but her present situation seemed to have no parallel. After all, she was little more than a schoolgirl in years, bound, defenseless, and listening to calm talk of her approaching murder. Added to this, she had just gone through an ordeal of a most terrifying kind. It was not to be expected that she could maintain composure and for a few minutes she broke down and sobbed quietly to herself.

If Brown heard the sobbing, he gave no indication of having done so. His elbows were on the windowsill and his chin rested in his hands as he looked into the darkness. Bernice, glancing up, was angered by his heartless tranquillity. It roused her and she taxed her wits again as she fenced for an opening that might lead somewhere.

"How did you feel," she asked, "after you got out of the coffin this afternoon?"

"You saw me?" he queried indifferently.

"Of course, I saw you," she returned. "What did you feel like?"

"I felt weak and tired and dizzy, the same as usual," he replied.

"The same as usual!" exclaimed Bernice. "Do you mean that you often do such things?"

"Of course," was the matter of fact reply. "Didn't you know it?"

Curiosity to know more came to Bernice so that the horror of her position dropped a little into the background. It spurred her on to ask more questions of this strange man.

"Do you mean to tell me that you can die and come back to life?" she asked.

"I have always been half dead," replied Brown, turning and looking strangely at the girl. "I have never been alive like you. Half of me is always gone. You can't understand."

"Nobody else can understand it," retorted Bernice. "I saw you murdered with my own eyes and I saw you come to life again and get out of your coffin. The thing is quite impossible and yet I saw it."

"You saw me murdered!" exclaimed Brown.

For the first time he showed emotion. There was fear, great fear, upon his face and in his voice.

"Yes, I saw you murdered," confirmed Bernice, watching him closely.

"Who murdered me?" he demanded excitedly and trembled as he rose from his chair.

"Your master, Cardan, the devil," answered Bernice.

Brown heaved a great sigh of relief and sank back upon his chair.

"Then it must be all right if he did it," he said, "although he never did such a thing before."

"Never did what before?" asked Bernice.

"Never murdered me before," said Brown.

"Are you crazy?" demanded the girl with real astonishment in her voice.

"Of course," returned Brown with a full return to his monotonous tones. "Anybody who is half dead must be crazy, I think."

A stranger conversation in a stranger place could scarcely be conceived and for a few minutes Bernice puzzled over her next words. When she had spoken of seeing him murdered, she had touched upon some hidden chord. That was evident from the fear he had displayed. What that chord was or how she had

touched it remained a mystery. She tried him in another direction.

"Would you like to die?" she asked. "I mean to be really dead?"

"I would like it very much."

The words were simply spoken and evidently carried the truth. There was no doubt of the man's sincerity. Undersized and with rounded shoulders he, nevertheless, possessed some of the dignity that always reveals itself when the truth is spoken.

Bernice pulled her nerves together and approached the man at the window. The idea occurred to her that she might throw her manacled arms about his neck and strangle him, but again she hesitated to attempt an extreme method and tried once more to penetrate the veil by means of her wits. Instead of using physical strength, she gently laid her bound hands upon his head.

Beyond a slight start Brown did not move or even turn his head from the window. The girl, behind him, looked over his head, but saw nothing except the vague shadow of rising ground. Not a light was to be seen.

"Poor boy," she said softly. "Perhaps you might become happy if you untied my hands and let me help you to get away from Cardan."

Brown simply shook his head in the negative, but he did it gently as though her hands soothed him and he did not wish to dislodge them. He did not seem to expect any untoward action upon her part and apparently thought her quite helpless.

"Why don't you try to buck up and be your own master?" asked Bernice, still resting her hands upon his head.

"There is nothing left to be master of," Brown replied resignedly.

"Are you sure?" persisted Bernice. "If you once got away from Cardan, you might get your strength back again."

His head shook under her hands and, bending a little, she was astonished to find him crying. For a minute she was silent and gently stroked his head, hoping that she might work upon his emotions enough to make him do what she asked.

"Don't you think that there is a little hope for you?" she persisted. "I am giving you just a bit of ease, just a little comfort. Let me help you more."

"No, no!" he suddenly exclaimed as if he were in pain. "It is too late! Something happened the day before yesterday and now there is no chance for me at all. I am being called away and only Cardan holds me back. I couldn't break away from Cardan, but if I did, I would answer the call. I want to answer it, but—I am afraid."

Bernice stepped back a little. The man who had been so emotionless was becoming so excited that it startled her, but he quieted a little as she removed her hands from his head.

"Just what is calling you?" she asked.

"It is out there in the night," he answered more calmly and pointed through the open window. "It floats and sometimes surrounds me almost as if I were devouring myself."

Bernice considered this statement.

"When did this strange call first come?" she questioned.

"About dark the day before yesterday," Brown replied and shuddered a little as he spoke.

Again Bernice considered and remembered the hidden chord which she believed that she had previously touched upon. Inwardly she was nervous and excited, but she forced an outward calmness as she decided to thrust once more in the same direction.

"Do you know what happened about dark the day before yesterday?" she asked.

Brown shook his head in the negative.

"It was at that exact time," continued Bernice, "that Cardan shot a poisoned gramophone needle into you and—you died."

"I don't remember," mumbled Brown to himself.

Slowly he turned in his chair and faced Bernice. A look of horror grew in his eyes. Some idea or conviction seemed to be working into his brain. His face twitched and the horror in his eyes increased almost to the appearance of insanity. Suddenly he slipped to the floor in a writhing, tormented heap.

"God!" he screamed. "It can't be true. It can't be true!"

Bernice darted to the window and peered down, but the drop was too great and there was nothing to cling to if she attempted to climb down—a difficult feat at best while her hands were tied. She tried the door, but, as she expected, it was securely fastened. To obtain the key from the demented man while he rolled about in distraction was almost impossible. There was nothing to do but to release her hands and for the first time her teeth came into unrestricted attack upon the knots. It seemed, in her desperation, to be slow work

but gradually the knots loosened. She was almost free when Brown spoke. So busy had she been that she had not noticed him rise and he was standing in the center of the room when she heard his voice. He seemed dazed, but his excitement had vanished as he stood there pointing to the window.

"It is time," he said in the old monotonous tones.

"What do you mean?" demanded Bernice, openly working with her teeth upon the last knot.

"The signal from the other house," returned Brown, still pointing to the window and seeming to pay no attention to her open attempt to free her hands.

"Wha—what is the signal?" gasped Bernice.

"The worst," answered the man as he seated himself again upon the chair and leaned slightly out of the window in order to look more carefully.

"Two ca—candles?" faltered Bernice. "Am I to die?"

"No, there is only one candle," he answered. "Death would be much better for you than to go back to the devil who orders you back to him."

As he spoke, the last knot came loose and Bernice's hands came apart. Although her wrists were greatly cramped, she experienced a new sense of freedom which helped her to nerve herself for the struggle which she felt must come now or never. When one is forced to the wall, unexpected things can sometimes be accomplished and pure desperation brought all the energy of Bernice into play.

"Let me see!" she demanded and joined the man at the window.

He did not reply, but moved slightly to permit her to look out. One distant, twinkling light shone out of

the darkness. As she looked, Bernice saw her chance and took it with her characteristic quickness.

"You are wrong!" she exclaimed. "There are two lights. Look!"

Brown thrust his head out of the window and Bernice knocked out the stick which held it up. Instantly the window, shrunken and without any counterweight, fell upon the back of his neck. He struggled a little, but Bernice stepped a little to one side and held the window down so that he was utterly helpless. By increasing the pressure she believed that she could strangle him to death, but, even after what she had gone through, a sense of pity for the miserable creature held her back from such an extreme measure.

Bernice knew that her next move was to escape from the house and, as Brown ceased to struggle, she deftly extracted the key from his pocket. It was the work of a very few seconds for her to pick up the candle, unlock the door, and descend the stairs. The key of the front door was in the lock. It turned easily and she blew out the candle, opened the door, and rushed straight into the sheltering darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CASE ALMOST COMES TO A SUDDEN END

WHEN Jerome Cardan departed to investigate the drumming sound, he left behind him, in the lonely house, Mrs. Wilkins, Jimmie, and the sleeping Mrs. Grayson. Bernice and the man, Brown, had been ordered to a building described as the green house. In the darkness this house might have been anywhere except that it had to be within candle gleam of the house which apparently was Cardan's headquarters. In a field, several hundred yards away, waited the Grayson limousine with the discharged chauffeur. Both houses and the car seemed to be utterly cut off from one another by the inkiness of the exceptionally dark night.

Mrs. Wilkins, with her back to the door of the inner room, watched Cardan depart with a strange look upon her face. If hate and fear could be mingled with admiration and even love, then her face showed such things. What she was to Cardan and what he was to her would be difficult to know from her face.

Unexpectedly a loud crash sounded in the room behind her and she jerked the door open to find that Jimmie, whom she had left for scarcely a minute, had thrown a water pitcher through a window and was busily trying to follow it. Mrs. Wilkins was a determined woman as well as a powerful one and she had had enough of Jimmie's activities. She brought him back to the large room with a strength that left him

no alternative. In a very few minutes she bound him, hand and foot, with stout cord and laid him upon the floor in plain view half-way between a large fireplace and the couch upon which Mrs. Grayson was lying. After that she bolted the outside door and threw some sticks of wood upon the fire. The great star, unlighted and motionless, drew her attention and she covered it with the curtain before settling down in an easy chair by the fire to wait.

Jimmie, upon the floor, watched her covertly. The effects of the over abundance of the ice cream sodas had long since passed away and he was wide-awake with excitement notwithstanding the late hour of the night. Indeed, if Mrs. Wilkins had noticed him closely, she might have seen that he was lying slightly upon his sore left arm which went to show that he was recuperating fast. After his outburst of Chicago profanity, at the time that he had tried to come to the rescue of Bernice, he had seemed to have lost his faith in speech and had relapsed into watchful silence.

The large room occupied the entire front of the house which, owing to the steep-sloping ground upon which it was built, exposed two stories in front and only one story in the rear. Two windows looked out over the lower windows and formal entrance on the ground floor below. The right wall contained another window and a side entrance which could be reached by means of a few wooden steps. The opposite wall, on the left, contained an old fashioned fireplace upon the right of which was a curtained space for hanging coats and upon the left was Mrs. Grayson's couch. The great five-pointed star occupied the center of the rear wall and a door on either side gave admission to

inner rooms. A third door, on the right of the star, opened to a stairway leading below. The whole house was very old with thick stone walls and heavy oak floors.

At first Jimmie watched Mrs. Wilkins and hoped that she would go to sleep, but she picked up a magazine and turned the pages slowly while she glanced at the outer door from time to time. He turned his attention next to the fire and to Mrs. Grayson. The fire offered many possibilities of destruction to his active brain, but he was too well tied to accomplish anything. He had heard Smith speak of hypnotism in connection with Cardan and he guessed that she was sleeping because of this mysterious art. Her unnatural sleep tended to terrify him, but not sufficiently to prevent a strong desire to try the effect of tickling her with a straw. Such an experiment was as far removed from him as the fire and for the same reason. Finally he began slyly to investigate the knots which restrained him. He believed that Bernice was safe for a time and, since he had informed Smith over the telephone that he had reached Cold Spring, he felt that help would soon come.

"Dat guy could follow me own shadow if it got loose from me," he thought confidently, "and he'll blow up de whole works when he butts in."

The position of Mrs. Wilkins' chair permitted her to look at the fire by turning her head slightly to the right and to view Jimmie by turning it slightly to the left. By turning still more to the left she could see the outer door and directly behind her was the closed door of the room from which Jimmie had thrown the pitcher through the window. Jimmie could see this

closed door behind his red-haired captor. Every time he looked at her it entered his field of vision.

Considerable time had passed and Mrs. Wilkins had begun nervously to shift in her chair when Jimmie noticed that the door to the inner room was slightly ajar. There was but a very slight opening which showed black from the unlighted room within. The boy was not really sure that the door had not always been ajar and, anyway, it occurred to him that it might have been opened by a current of air coming through the broken window. Nevertheless, the door attracted him and suddenly in the dark opening he saw a human eye.

Jimmie sat up as quickly as his bindings would permit.

"What is it?" demanded Mrs. Wilkins noticing his sudden move.

"De cat's whiskers!" he replied tauntingly and thinking very rapidly. "Dey're ticklin' me back."

Mrs. Wilkins rose and went to look anxiously out of the side window and Jimmie noticed that the eye had withdrawn although the door remained slightly ajar. As she returned to her chair the boy lay back upon the floor and simulated an utter lack of interest in all things, but one eye stayed so that the door was within its vision. Somebody had spied upon the room and it was more likely to be a friend than a foe. Jimmie waited and hoped.

Not more than half a minute passed before the strange eye once more appeared in the narrow opening and this time the door began slowly to swing inward. Two eyes appeared and Jimmie strained hard to keep rapture from his face as he recognized the features of

Smith—his Uncle Relius! Slowly the door opened wider and Smith stood framed in the doorway with a finger pressed to his lips in the sign for silence.

One swift glance was all the tall man gave before stepping silently to the curtains which covered the hooks for coats on the right of the fireplace. Very carefully, while he watched the back of Mrs. Wilkins' head, he parted the curtains and slipped inside where he was completely hidden.

It is doubtful if Mrs. Wilkins could have heard Smith's rubber-soled shoes upon the floor, but she rose restlessly as if she sensed danger and again approached the window to gaze anxiously into the darkness. Jimmie lay upon the floor in a fever of excitement and tried his best not to show it. His heart almost stopped beating as a low knock sounded at the door and Mrs. Wilkins opened to admit Cardan. Smith and Cardan were about to come face to face and Jimmie held his breath as he waited for what he expected would be the greatest drama of his life.

"Aurelius Smith is actually in this neighborhood," remarked Cardan dryly as he closed the door behind him, "and I have altered our plans."

"Are we to do the materialization tonight?" asked Mrs. Wilkins.

"No, there will be no more illusions of Mrs. Grayson's dead daughter," answered Cardan. "That was good enough to get her into our power and to keep her lips sealed to her atheistic husband. I shall perform one more operation on Mrs. Grayson which will rob her of all memory and you will take her to Chicago as your invalid aunt, traveling by night in the Grayson car. I shall then go abroad and write Mr. Grayson

that he may have his wife when he transmits half his fortune, in gold, to me in Russia. With that much money and my power I can gain control of the Russian government, build an empire, and rule the world."

"And if Mr. Grayson refuses to pay?" asked Mrs. Wilkins.

"In that case," replied Cardan indifferently, "you will mail him one of Mrs. Grayson's fingers every week until he changes his mind and I cable you to stop."

Cardan walked over to where Jimmie lay upon the floor.

"He dies," he said callously, looking down without any expression.

"Yuh big piece of cheese!" snorted Jimmie, unable to keep silent any longer.

"And the girl in the green house?" asked Mrs. Wilkins in a strained voice and shuddering in spite of herself.

"She dies also," he answered and bent over Mrs. Grayson with outstretched hand.

The yellowed, slender fingers were almost touching the forehead of the sleeping woman when they drew back. Cardan slowly straightened up and he glanced around the room.

"I suppose there was no disturbance while I was away?" he asked.

"None," answered Mrs. Wilkins, "except that the brat threw a pitcher through the bedroom window."

"I will look at the window," he said and walked slowly toward the bedroom door which was adjacent to the curtained place for hanging coats.

In order to reach the bedroom door, in a straight line from where he stood, it was necessary for Cardan

to pass the fireplace and the improvised coat closet closely on his left. He walked slowly and, in passing the fireplace, raised his right hand carelessly to his left breast inside his coat. Half of the curtains had been passed when his hand jerked from his coat and a light revolver barked two shots straight through the curtains next to the door.

Instantly the curtain next to the fireplace was torn aside and the roar of a heavier gun was followed by the rattle of Cardan's revolver upon the floor as Smith stepped out, covering his opponent with a .45 Colt automatic.

"A poor shot," remarked Smith. "I had intended to put the bullet through your pistol hand but it only struck your weapon."

It must be admitted that Cardan took the contretemps with remarkable coolness. He shook his right hand, numbed somewhat by the jar, but in no other way seemed affected as he faced his adversary, silent and motionless.

"Look!" exclaimed Smith and swept aside the curtain through which Cardan had fired.

Hanging upon a hook, close by the bullet holes in the plaster, was a watch.

"Now, Cardan," he continued, "you can judge for yourself whether or not you mystified me when I visited you in your New York rooms. Apparently you knew what I was doing behind your back and, when I took a certain backward step toward your inner room, you drew my attention to it for the sole purpose of making me believe that you had superphysical powers. In reality you have supernormal hearing and you actually heard my watch ticking so that you knew where

I was without turning your head. Instead of fooling me you afforded me the opportunity of hanging up my watch for you to fire at while I covered you from the other end of the curtains."

While Smith was speaking, his gun never wavered from the direction of Cardan's head although his eye flashed frequently to Mrs. Wilkins who had sunk into a chair with bowed head.

"Order your woman to untie the boy," directed Smith as Cardan neither spoke nor moved.

Cardan spoke some words rapidly in Polish.

"Speak English!" commanded Smith threateningly, suspecting some kind of a trap.

Mrs. Wilkins rose resignedly and as if to obey the order. She appeared to search upon a littered table and said something about her scissors being in the bedroom. Before Smith could divine her intention she walked quickly between him and Cardan, who seized the opportunity and sprang toward the door.

Whether or not Smith would have risked the woman's life by firing was not to be disclosed. Certain it was that Cardan had ordered Mrs. Wilkins to act as she had done and that he had calculated upon American chivalry for women to keep Smith from firing. Even so Smith's gun cut little circles in the air as it searched for its target past the woman's body. The action was so rapid that it was measured in seconds and Smith had only time to bend his knee for a spring in pursuit when the door burst open and Langa Doonh stood in the doorway.

Turbanless and with a great knife clutched in his hand the native paused for a second glaring at Cardan, who had halted abruptly not three feet from the door.

Smith took in the situation instantly, acted with equal speed, and was just able to prevent what he knew was about to happen.

With hatred upon his face and knife upraised Langa Doonh sprang at Cardan, who retreated a pace as Smith passed him in a leap upon his own servant. To accomplish his object was one of the most difficult things that Smith ever attempted. While he kept his gun in the general direction of Cardan, and watched him as best he could, he exerted all his strength with his free arm to restrain Langa Doonh. Short, sharp words of command issued from his lips as he struggled desperately to hold the infuriated native back. Although the struggle was brief, it once almost seemed as though the native would bury the knife in his own master in order to reach his enemy.

"We are not dacoits!" stormed Smith who fully sympathized with the feelings of his servant. "We are not murderers! Thou art a *rajput* who hands the captive enemy to the magistrate."

The words, spoken earnestly in the native tongue, had their effect and the servant suddenly squatted upon the floor in patient submission, abashed that he had resisted his beloved master and smothering his wrath for his enemy.

It was none too soon. Cardan had his hand upon the knob of the door which led downstairs and Mrs. Wilkins had entered the bedroom.

"Get the woman!" directed Smith to Langa Doonh as he goaded Cardan into the center of the room with the muzzle of his Colt and proceeded to search him for other arms.

Langa Doonh bounded into the bedroom from his

squatting position in a way that showed the action to be a relief to his pent emotions. There was a scream from the inner room and Mrs. Wilkins, large woman though she was, returned to the front room under one of the big native's arms.

"Untie Jimmie!" next directed Smith and Langa Doonh knelt by the boy's side to work deftly with the knots.

The touch of the native's fingers was like honey to Jimmie's soul. He had been once more the intimate spectator of Aurelius Smith in action. He was a boy who was transported with delight.

"Gee!" he exclaimed as he got to his feet. "Gee, Uncle Relius, yuh didn't croak him like yuh did de bandits in Colorado."

"Where is Bernice?" asked Smith sharply, but touching the boy's head with his hand for a moment.

"She was here tonight," explained Jimmie, suddenly remembering that his family was not yet intact. "Dey put her in front of de star on de wall and den de big hen took me into de bedroom. When I come out, she was gone."

Smith quickly pulled the hanging from before the five-pointed star under Jimmie's direction and gazed at the unusual object while Langa Doonh, knife in hand, watched Cardan as a fox-terrier watches a rat hole.

"This machine is not a bluff, Cardan," said Smith over his shoulder as he examined the star swiftly. "The center light is actually inclosed in cut glass and contains a lens for projecting the red beam. The whole thing is a diabolical contrivance for use in hypnotic practise and"—turning to face Cardan—"if you

have harmed Miss Asterley I will let Langa Doonh cut you into ribbons."

"She is unhurt—yet," remarked Cardan coolly, looking at his watch and seating himself in a bored manner under the native's watchful eyes.

"Where *is* she?" demanded Smith.

"I refuse to answer," was the cold reply.

"Cardan, you are beaten," returned Smith with equal coldness, "and any more resistance will only bring you a heavier sentence when you go before a jury. Notwithstanding your phenomenal power of hearing, you lost the game when you tried to match yourself as a woodsman against Langa Doonh and me. While my servant played with you, I examined the only lighted house in the neighborhood and found it to be your headquarters. Jimmie having broken a rear window, it was easy for me to reach the catch and enter. It only remained for me to wait for your return. You are caught and might as well give up and face the jury."

"I shall face no jury," stated Cardan with easy confidence.

"Where is Miss Asterley?" demanded Smith again.

Cardan remained silent, his black eyes gazing at his questioner with insulting arrogance. His manner was as if the battle was only commencing.

"Take off his shoes!" suddenly ordered Smith.

Langa Doonh knelt with his long knife and slashed the shoe-strings careless of the tongue or even the skin underneath.

"Put his feet in the fire!" came the next command, cold and menacing in its simplicity.

Langa Doonh's face lighted with joy at the words.

He seized man and chair in one great armful and was half-way across the room before Cardan spoke.

"You will defeat your own end," said Cardan quite calmly and as if there were no danger at all for him. "There is no time for torture."

"Speak quickly," said Smith, motioning the servant to put down his burden much to the native's disgust.

Cardan drew out his watch and consulted it carefully.

"I have gauged this moment with great accuracy," he said. "Miss Asterley is with a man whose watch is synchronized with mine. He will cut her throat four minutes from now. Only I can give the signal which will save her and, if you waste the least time in torturing me, it will be too late to give that signal. Perhaps you have something to say, Mr. Smith?"

"Your terms?" asked Smith.

"Simply that you allow me to escape," was the reply spoken in the most indifferent tones.

Smith leaned upon the mantelpiece for a few seconds in thought. The man might be lying, in part or altogether, and yet he might be speaking the truth. There was no way to prove his assertion when so much—the life of Bernice—might depend upon the next minute or so. Smith made his decision.

"Right!" he said. "You go free, for the space of one hour, the moment Miss Asterley enters this room unharmed."

"Thank you," said Cardan with slightly sarcastic emphasis and, taking a candle from the mantelpiece, he lighted it and placed it in one of the front windows.

Not once had Cardan showed any alarm or even annoyance. From the moment of his first pistol shot

up to the setting of the candle in the window he had acted and spoken without any sign of stress or strain upon his face. Mrs. Wilkins, on the other hand, had seemed sunk in despondency, remaining in her chair as much as possible with bowed head.

As Cardan returned to the center of the room, followed by the alert native, Smith pointed to the sleeping Mrs. Grayson, who had not even stirred at the loud report of the .45 automatic.

"Bring her out of it!" ordered Smith curtly.

"Why not try your own power?" asked Cardan disdainfully.

But Smith was in no mood for bandying words.

"Put his feet in the fire!" he commanded again without any hesitation.

"You forget our armistice," remonstrated Cardan quickly.

"Armistice be damned!" retorted Smith. "You go free for the space of one hour from the moment Miss Asterley enters this room unharmed. Up to that time you will do as I say or Langa Doonh will shove you into the fire by inches."

Cardan turned to the sleeping woman with a slight shrug of the shoulders just in time to avoid the encircling arms of the native servant.

"It is of no importance," he said to Smith. "You are but a child who needs a little more attention than I have given you."

Without more delay Cardan bent over Mrs. Grayson, spoke a few low words, touched her forehead, and snapped his fingers. The result was almost immediate as the sleeping eyes opened and Mrs. Grayson sat up looking a little drowsy.

"Bring her to normal thinking," snapped Smith before Mrs. Grayson had time to speak, "and I warn you that your feet depend upon what you do."

It was impossible to know whether or not Cardan rebelled inwardly, but he sat on the edge of the couch and looked the old lady straight in the eyes.

"Mrs. Grayson," he said slowly, "the gods have willed that Josephine shall enter Nirvana which is the state of consciousness reached by Buddha forty years before he gave up teaching on this earth. It is not annihilation by absorption into the divine and your little girl is very happy. It would be cruel for me to bring her back to you tonight. Some day you will reach her and be happy with her and that day will come more quickly if you, yourself, remain patient and happy." He paused. "I command you to be patient and happy."

Mrs. Grayson's lips had just parted to speak when the door opened and Brown walked in leaving the door open behind him. He was rather unsteady and stood in the center of the room looking at Cardan and meeting the cold and inquiring glance in return.

"Well?" asked Cardan.

"She got away," answered Brown in a numbed manner and dully noticing the new arrivals for the first time.

Here was an upset for Cardan, but he remained quite indifferent in appearance and showed neither surprise nor anger as his eyes wandered blankly to Smith. Perhaps he saw something beyond Brown through the open door—something or somebody approaching.

As suddenly and unexpectedly as Brown had entered, Bernice Asterley issued from the dark exterior and

entered the room also. She was pale, but she walked quickly and confidently and came straight to Smith after one glance about the room.

"I was hiding outside," she said, "and did not think it best to come in until I saw you through the open door. I am sorry that I bungled things."

Smith smiled with more satisfaction than his face usually betrayed.

"This is a case full of bumbles," he said, "and I don't think you have anything to be sorry for. I come fifty miles into the country and I suddenly find you and Jimmie and Langa Doonh all around me. It looks like very efficient co-operation, especially as you all seem to have come through with whole skins."

Bernice looked pleased. Jimmie grinned. Langa Doonh continued to stare at Cardan.

"I think, Aurelius Smith," said Cardan suavely, "that conditions are such that our armistice is in effect."

"Miss Asterley returned by her own volition and not because of anything you did," remarked Smith dryly.

"Your promise," retorted Cardan, "was that I should go free for the space of one hour after Miss Asterley returned to this room unharmed. I will let your sense of honor decide."

"And how would you decide it if you were in my place?" asked Smith walking to the door.

"Exactly as you will decide it," answered Cardan, remaining in the center of the room.

"This ends the case of Grayson *versus* Cardan," remarked Smith and pulled the door wide open.

"Perhaps," said Cardan, walking slowly to the door,

"but it just commences the short case of Jerome Cardan *versus* Aurelius Smith."

Smith drew out his cigarette case as Cardan reached the door. He held it out and Cardan extracted a cigarette and Smith did likewise.

"Jimmie, the candle!" called Smith and Jimmie scampered across the floor with the candle from the window.

Both men lighted their cigarettes from the same flame at the same moment while Langa Doonh growled at his knife upon the floor.

"To the death?" asked Cardan.

"Uh-huh," said Smith and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX

SMITH PREPARES FOR THE END

THE events detailed at the close of the last chapter had taken place so quickly that Smith had been working more upon deductive reasoning than upon a full knowledge of the parts taken in the drama by Bernice, Langa Doonh, and Jimmie. His first act, upon turning Cardan free, was to hold a brief but searching consultation with his three diverse associates.

To Langa Doonh he spoke in Hindustani, the language which he used with his servant when he wished the minutest details or the most information in the shortest possible time. The native had little to say that Smith did not already know and Bernice came next.

"Put it in a nutshell," said Smith and the girl replied with stenographic brevity.

Smith put a few questions to Jimmie and turned again to Langa Doonh.

"Scout the neighborhood," he said, "and see if you can get hold of one of Cardan's cars. He had two—one that Brown used and the Grayson limousine. He has probably left the Grayson car as the one most likely to be picked up by the police. If you run into the discharged chauffeur, bring him back alive. Remember! No killing, except in self-defense!"

With the departure of Langa Doonh, the attention of Smith was brought directly to Mrs. Wilkins and Brown. At no time had he lost sight of these two, the

one disconsolate in a chair with her chin on her hands and the other standing morbidly in the center of the room, but he had not addressed either one. He took the woman first.

"What have you to say?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Which means that you won't talk?"

"Yes."

Smith considered her for a moment.

"Then he married you?" he asked suddenly.

Mrs. Wilkins started and flung him a defiant glance, but remained silent.

"I could probably narrate your story," continued Smith. "You met him in some little town out west, or up north. You were tired of the small town and wanted to see the city and what you thought was life. He was in the show business—one-night stands and hypnotism. It's strange what some women will marry, but you were ready to do anything to get away from monotonous surroundings. Well, you got the change and excitement which you craved and your youth went with it. All that was some time before the War."

Smith paused to motion Brown into a chair which that dazed person accepted without a word. Returning to Mrs. Wilkins, he continued to talk to her in a way that was cool and calculating and yet not altogether unkindly.

"Some time before the War, Cardan probably left the stage," he said, "and took to ways that were not altogether within the law—fortune-telling and fake seances. You could not withdraw and the easy money appealed to you. Then Cardan disappeared and the War came. He had always had a past which you knew

nothing about and his present became an equal blank to you. Years went by with the War and you thought that he was dead or, at least, had gone out of your life. Then, suddenly, he returned. You were probably hard pressed for money and joined him again. He aimed for bigger and bigger stakes and you were helpless in his hands. Finally came the Grayson case and you find yourself where you are."

The woman in the chair leaned back and looked thoughtfully at the speaker.

"May I smoke?" she asked.

Smith handed her a cigarette and lighted it for her.

"You know," she said after the first puff, "I like you and what you say is true—so far as it goes. I don't know how you guessed it but—it's true. He's a devil but, somehow, I suppose I love him. Can you beat it?"

"Jimmie!" called Smith. "Have you any charge to make against this woman?"

"What kin I charge her with?" asked Jimmie.

"Abduction," returned Smith shortly.

"Yuh mean dat de newspapers would print dat I was ab—abductioned!" exclaimed Jimmie with a blank look. "Naw! She didn't do a thing! She just grabbed me when I wasn't feelin' well. I ain't got any charge, Mr.—Uncle Relius."

"Mrs. Cardan," said Smith, "I will have to hand you over to the police for investigation, but I will make no charge against you. Just step into the inner room while Miss Asterley searches you."

Smith did not question Brown. He sat on the arm of his chair and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Old man," he said familiarly, "you are in a bad hole."

"Yes," answered Brown with evident lack of interest.

"I have pulled men out of some pretty bad holes," went on Smith, "and I would like to see what I can do for you."

"Nobody can do anything for me," replied Brown with the same indifference. "I don't know what the matter is, but I am like a shell with the meat half gone."

"I understand your trouble," said Smith quietly.

"Oh, it isn't the effects of hypnotism," said Brown listlessly.

"I quite understand that," returned Smith. "Your trouble is much more unusual and much more mysterious than anything that can be accomplished by means of hypnotism."

"What do you mean?" asked Brown, a frightened look coming into his eyes.

"I mean," returned Smith, "that I want to help you, but I can do so only if you ask no questions and do exactly as I say."

"I don't care what I do," Brown answered.

Smith ran a hand expertly over the man's clothing and, finding no arms, turned his attention to Mrs. Grayson. She was quite dignified and self-possessed as she sat on the couch and looked up at the tall man.

"I suppose I should apologize," she said, "for what must appear to you to be a ridiculous situation, but—I would do it over again for the happiness he gave me."

"His magic was so great?" asked Smith.

"He gave me back the magic of my little girl," an-

swered Mrs. Grayson. "He brought my Josephine back to me as she was before she died. It could not have been trickery. I touched her hair and felt her arms about me."

"Madam," returned Smith, "you have been under deep hypnotic influence and only the superficial student will maintain that all hypnotic phenomena are illusions. Colonel de Rochas, in Paris, gave science much to think about in reference to hypnotism. The surface of the art has only been scratched. If you think that you saw your little girl, you will find it more difficult to prove it trickery than to prove it genuine. Believe what you saw. Be patient and—be happy."

"You are very comforting to an old lady in an awkward situation," she answered. "Strangely enough, I do feel contented and happy when reason tells me I should be very much upset."

Bernice and Mrs. Wilkins returned to the room as Mrs. Grayson stopped speaking and Bernice handed Smith two small metal cylinders.

"She had no weapons," said the girl, "but I found these strange things very cleverly concealed.

Smith toyed with the tubes for a moment before dropping them in his pocket.

"Compressed gauze for materializing seances," he whispered. "Say nothing about it to Mrs. Grayson."

Langa Doonh returned with the information that there was no car at the green house and that the Grayson limousine had been damaged too much to operate. He had, however, brought up his own car and chauffeur so that his master's desire for a motor car might be gratified.

Smith left Langa Doonh on guard in the large room and descended to investigate the floor below. He was absent but a very few minutes.

"A very interesting chemical laboratory," he announced upon returning. "I wish I had time to examine it thoroughly."

Smith did not show that he was hurrying, but in reality he was working upon people and things with the least waste of time. Perhaps he would have moved faster and with more risk if it had not been for Mrs. Grayson regarding whom he felt a professional responsibility.

The departure in the dark from the stone house was done quietly and carefully. Langa Doonh went first with a firm grasp upon Mrs. Wilkins and Brown. Smith followed with Mrs. Grayson. Bernice and Jimmie brought up the rear. In the motor car, which was a big one, Smith placed Mrs. Grayson, Bernice, and Jimmie in the back seat. He seated Mrs. Wilkins and Langa Doonh upon the tonneau chairs. Brown was placed in front beside the driver and Smith stood by his side upon the running board.

In the early hours of the morning the return to Cold Spring proved quite uneventful. Upon the darkened main street of the sleeping town there was but a single glow of light. By Smith's directions the car stopped slowly and silently before that light coming softly through a doorway from a single lamp within.

Smith stepped to the sidewalk and entered the doorway where he stooped over Fanny Dunlop asleep in a chair. In her lap was a letter.

Smith coughed and Fanny opened her eyes.

"Bought another car?" she asked, looking from him to the large car at the curb. "I knew you couldn't pass in that old rattletrap of yours without waking me. Picked up quite a party, too, didn't you?"

Smith lifted the letter from her lap and put it in his pocket.

"Is it so serious that you were willing to sit up all night?" he asked.

"Were you ever a mother?" asked Fanny.

"Humph!" grunted Smith.

"Besides," added Fanny, "I don't have a date with a New York gentleman every day in the week even if he is only a detective."

"If you will light your little refreshment room and join my party," said Smith after a pause, "I shall see what I can do for you."

Fanny entered her store at once and Smith spoke a few words to Mrs. Grayson at the motor.

"I didn't tell you that I found a telephone when I was downstairs in Cardan's laboratory," he said. "Your husband and some members of the New York police force are en route to Cold Spring on a special train. It will be most comfortable for you if we wait for them here."

Shortly before dawn the special train, composed of an engine and one Pullman car, reached Cold Spring after a record non-stop run. On it were Mr. Grayson, Monroe, and two plain clothes men from Headquarters. They lost no time in walking the short block to Fanny Dunlop's store after being directed by the station agent.

In the back "parlor" of the little store the meeting

between Richard Grayson and his wife was affecting.

"My dear!" was all he said for a moment as he took her hands and sat beside her on Fanny's horse-hair sofa. Then, slowly and quietly: "God is good!"

Mrs. Grayson did not reply in words, but she looked questioningly at her husband.

"Yes," he explained, "only God could give me back such happiness and I believe."

Smith, whose business it was to witness everything, turned away with a faint mixture of surprise and amusement and looked straight into the astonished face of Officer Monroe who was staring, with open mouth, at Brown.

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Monroe. "Is the corpse loose again?"

But Smith drew the policeman aside and quickly described the events of the night while Fanny and Langa Doonh served coffee to all save Jimmie who had shudderingly refused an offer of ice cream soda and had fallen asleep soon after his arrival.

"I am convinced," concluded Smith, "that no further attack will be made upon the Graysons—so long as I live. Cardan has but one object in life now and that is to accomplish my death."

"It's a pity you didn't hang on to him," broke in Monroe. "Miss Asterley escaped by herself you know and your promise to Cardan was hardly binding."

"Every promise I have made to a crook has been carried out to the letter," said Smith dryly. "That fact has saved my life on several occasions. Now I want to show you something that I have not yet seen myself but upon which I base my whole theory regarding

Brown and Cardan's apparent raising of the dead. It is necessary that you should understand this in case I do not survive the next few hours or days."

Smith took Monroe and the two plain clothes men over to where Brown sat disconsolately in a corner of the room. Without any objection, Brown stood up and Smith gently removed his coat and rolled up a shirt sleeve.

"Look at that," said Smith quietly and pointed to a slight circle upon the white skin between the elbow and shoulder.

Smith handed back the coat and drew the policeman to the far end of the room where he could talk without being heard.

"Now," he said, turning particularly to Monroe, "you remember the tourniquet which I picked up in the lane outside Cardan's place in New York. That tourniquet caused the mark which you have just seen on Brown's arm. Brown had been placed in a cataleptic state by means of hypnotism and placed in the coffin for our observation in place of his *twin* brother. The cataleptic state is rigid and extremely deathlike. In such a condition the heart action is almost imperceptible, but to make doubly sure Cardan placed a tourniquet around the arm so as to cut off all flow of blood to the wrist and make it impossible to find any trace of pulse.

"Remember, also, the grave that I found in Cardan's basement. If Cardan's audacious trick had worked he would have foisted the living Brown upon us and buried the real corpse. He failed and, at the last moment, put the corpse back into the coffin and

carried off the living brother who had just been brought out of his trance."

"And does Brown admit all this?" asked Monroe.

"I have not dared to ask him and I advise you not to do so at present," answered Smith. "There are twins and twins. The Brown twins are the kind that are known to the medical profession as 'identical' twins. Such twins are so nearly alike that it is almost impossible to tell them apart. Even their finger prints are the same except that they are reversed as your own finger prints would be if reflected in a mirror."

Smith stopped talking for a moment.

"I want you to consider seriously what I am going to say," he continued. "'Identical' twins think and feel alike to a remarkable degree and an injury to one affects the other. This fact has been well established but, as yet, science only guesses at the mystery which surrounds those intimate brothers who come from one seed in the womb of their mother."

Once more Smith stopped to see if his listeners were serious in the consideration of his words.

"I am driving at this," he continued again. "Brown *must* have treatment by the best mental specialist *before* he is subjected to questioning. His mind has been weakened by much hypnotism and his twin brother is dead. Subjectively I believe that he feels the death of his brother, but instinctively he is fighting the cold fact from his objective brain. Let his loss receive objective realization at present and he will either die or go mad!"

Smith was interrupted by Mr. Grayson who came forward and shook his hand for a moment in silence.

"I owe you more than I can ever repay," the old man said finally.

"That reminds me," returned Smith quietly but gravely. "You see that lady who is helping my servant with the coffee?"

Mr. Grayson nodded his head.

"She has an exceedingly brilliant mind," explained Smith, "but she is handicapped by a slightly dissipated son in California who bleeds her for money while she keeps a brave face and fights on in Cold Spring. Had it not been for her quickness of wit and high perceptive faculty I could not have found Mrs. Grayson tonight. In that case the result might have cost you half your fortune and your wife might have suffered mutilation and even death. Yes, Mr. Grayson, you owe a great deal—but not to me."

The mind of the old man showed its alertness by what he said and did.

"I have a man in my employ," he replied without any hesitation, "who is a wonderful handler of other men—knows how to bring out the best in their characters. This man needs a holiday and he leaves for California tomorrow."

Mr. Grayson turned and walked up to Fanny.

"Madam," he said, "I have long considered the opening of branch stores in small towns throughout the country. I shall open the first one in Cold Spring and I wish you would manage it for me on your own terms." He paused before continuing. "An agent of mine is going to California tomorrow. I want your son to come back with him and to accept a situation in my New York store."

Langa Doonh caught a cup that was slipping from Fanny's hand. Her eyes were winking and moist, but she was looking at Smith and not at Mr. Grayson.

Just before the departure from Cold Spring, as day was breaking, Monroe questioned Smith about Cardan. Smith, however, would not say much.

"I know how to meet him and I think I know where he has gone," he said. "I hope to arrive first and be ready to receive him."

"Then you will have to move fast," replied Monroe, looking puzzled. "He left the old house before you did."

"On the contrary, he left *afterwards*," said Smith.

Monroe looked still more puzzled.

"You must remember," explained Smith, "that we drove him out without any shoes and new shoes are hard to buy in the middle of the night in this district. He would be a marked man if he arrived any place without shoes. You can depend upon it that Cardan went back for his shoes after we left."

The Graysons planned to return to New York immediately on their special train. At Smith's suggestion and by his request Bernice was given the duty of accompanying Mrs. Grayson. With her went Jimmie and, of course, Mrs. Wilkins and Brown were taken charge of by the police. Langa Doonh, alone, was detained by Smith and the native's eyes gleamed in anticipation of what might be to come.

At the door of the little shop Smith, Langa Doonh, and Fanny watched the remainder depart for the station. Bernice held back to speak to Smith.

"You are not coming?" she asked.

Smith shook his head.

"Do you and Cardan meet before I see you again?" she asked with a distinct tremor in her voice.

From behind Smith, Fanny watched the girl keenly as if she were studying the upturned face.

"Do you?" repeated Bernice with just a trace of petulance.

A fleeting smile, as if of relief, passed over Fanny's face.

"Perhaps," answered Smith at last. "Tell you more on Fenton Street."

As Bernice rejoined Mrs. Grayson in the distance, Smith spoke to Langa Doonh.

"Take your car," he said, "and go back to the old stone house on the river road. See if Cardan's shoes are still on the floor, but, on no account, touch them. Then remove the great star from the wall and bring it to Fenton Street."

"Not come back for sahib?" asked the servant in disappointment.

"No," was the short reply.

Smith and Fanny stood for a moment in silence after Langa Doonh had left.

"You know," said Fanny, "if I were a few years younger I would set my cap for you."

"Good-bye," said Smith, holding out his hand.

"Not till I have tried to pay my debt," returned Fanny with her hands behind her back. "You were never in love, were you?"

"No," answered Smith.

"Then you have trouble ahead of you with this Bernice Asterley," said Fanny. "The best way for me to

pay my debt to you is to give you the antidote. Wait a minute."

Fanny entered her shop and returned quickly with a sealed envelope.

"You wouldn't believe it now," she said, "but when the trouble comes open this envelope and try the antidote."

"Thanks," said Smith and, taking the envelope, moved off with his long stride toward the railway station.

CHAPTER XX

HNO₃ AND NH₃

SMITH'S return to New York was really a race. Without any appearance of hurry he had parted from one after the other of his companions and, without a word as to his personal intentions, he had strode off in the direction of the Cold Spring railroad station. But he did not go to the station, instead he swung off to the left along the tracks parallel with the river and found his flying man rubbing some sleep out of his eyes after a cramped night in the cockpit of his machine. The trip back to the city was immediate and fast.

During the flight Smith considered the situation. There was no doubt of his arrival before Langa Doonh, Bernice, and Jimmie. The first had work to do at the old stone house and the last two were on a speeding train which, fast as it might be, could not compete successfully with the flying machine. There was one other, however, who caused Smith's flight to be a real race. That other was Cardan.

Smith believed that Cardan would strike quickly and with venom—like a rattlesnake—and he wished to reach New York before he might be forced to walk into an ambush. There was no need for him to hunt Cardan. That he would be attacked was certain and it was only necessary for him to wait for the combat. In the meantime, he carefully consid-

ered time and distance. It was just possible that Cardan, by motoring desperately, might be waiting when he arrived. Much depended on the shoes and Smith chuckled softly to himself as he thought of this.

Most of the city had not yet breakfasted when Smith reached Fenton Street. He drove straight to his door in a taxi and entered quickly but quietly, manipulating his latch-key silently as possible and using a handkerchief to turn the door-knob. With a man like Cardan it was common sense to take all precautions against poisons and chemical agencies of all kinds.

Inside his door Smith stood for a moment motionless. A soft thud came to his ears from the inner room and the door at the end of the passage began slowly to open from a position which had been slightly ajar. The waiting man dropped a hand into his side pocket, but otherwise he did not move. The door appeared to be opening of itself until, near the floor, the yellow face of a mongrel dog came into view. The next minute the animal jumped forward with a little yelp of joy and Smith lowered his pistol hand to pat Jimmie's dog.

"Go find him, Lemon!" he said, straightening up.

The dog jumped back, sniffed at the floor, barked at an imaginary rat, and looked up in a puzzled manner.

"No visitors present or you would know it, old scout!" commented Smith and felt assured that he had won the race with Cardan.

The first thing that Smith did was to invade the little kingdom of Langa Doonh and to start some coffee. After that he ascended to the floor above and indulged in a rapid shave. Lemon followed closely and assisted to the best of his ability by watching every

movement with the greatest sympathy and, no doubt, wishing in his doggish heart that a cat or a rat would appear so that he could prove his valor.

"It's all right, old boy!" said Smith, wiping his razor and looking down at the wistful dog. "You're doing more than you know."

The coffee was almost made and eggs and bacon were in the frying-pan when the telephone sounded from the large room. At the first tingle the dog threw a bark over his shoulder, but immediately centered his attention again upon the wonderful perfume that was coming from the iron dish in the hand of the tall man at the stove. Hadn't he heard the telephone many times before and wasn't food, after all, the greatest thing in the world?

"Let 'em ring, my boy!" said Smith. "We're not at home."

A whole tin of corned beef was opened for Lemon and brought into the large room on a platter which Smith placed on the floor at his feet. The dog looked at it in keen anticipation, but made no move to eat until Smith had arranged his coffee, bacon, and eggs upon the table. It was an old trick of Lemon not to eat until he was given permission.

"Now!" said Smith and man and dog commenced their breakfast.

Meanwhile, the telephone *was still ringing*.

"You know," said Smith while the dog stopped eating and looked up, "this is an automatic telephone and it will keep on ringing until the man at the other end hangs up his receiver or until I raise the hook at this end."

Smith finished his second egg and drank his coffee

while the telephone continued to ring. Lemon bolted his last piece of meat and looked from the man to the telephone. Like some mongrels, he was an exceedingly clever dog and he was accustomed to seeing the telephone answered when the bell sounded.

"Not this time, Lemon," said Smith, noticing the look. "Only a fool would keep on ringing as long as this and I'm not expecting a fool this morning. Somebody has made an automatic call and left his receiver down because he wants my bell to keep on ringing. Why?"

Smith rose and walked out of the room and down the passage to the front door where he paused for a moment before returning. He seemed to be measuring the distance to the telephone and paused thoughtfully before pacing slowly to Langa Doonh's little kitchen and listening attentively at the back door which opened upon a small yard connected with the street by a narrow passage upon one side of the old building.

"It's like this, Lemon," said Smith musingly as he continued the one-sided conversation. "A keen ear could hear the bell ringing from the street—or from the back yard—and Cardan has a very keen ear. If he heard the bell ringing he would naturally suppose that the telephone remained unanswered because nobody was at home. Therefore, we will let the bell ring and I think we are going to have a visitor very soon. Let's hope we both come through alive."

The dog whacked his tail on the floor to indicate that he thoroughly agreed with whatever had been said while Smith opened the door which led from the large room into the kitchen. He called to the dog and halted him in the doorway.

"Stand guard!" he exclaimed, pointing to the door which opened into the back yard. "Watch!"

Lemon flattened himself upon the floor and glued his eyes on the crack under the door. This was real sport and he entered upon it with undivided attention. No doubt, if he knew anything about such animals, he hoped that nothing smaller than an elephant would try to come through the door so that he might prove his worth. Jimmie was really his master, but his present companion held a high place in his affections and an order in the quiet voice of Smith was something to be carried out at all costs. So it was that he remained at his post while Smith ascended the stairs and arranged a window curtain so that he could view the street in front without being seen.

Having discarded his watch, which already had played so important a part in the battle, Smith settled himself in a chair and lighted a cigarette. Keenly alert, but in no degree excited, he confidently awaited the approach of his enemy. Guarded by the dog against surprise from the rear, he watched the front from which direction he expected the danger to come.

If Cardan struck in the open, it would almost be necessary for him to strike before Monroe and his police companions returned to the city and set in motion the great search that was inevitable. If he struck in the open, he would avoid all stealth and come straight to the front door. So Smith argued to himself as he lighted a second cigarette.

It was not without a reason that Smith had deliberately cut himself off from his companions. He had done so partly because he did not desire to run them into excessive danger, partly because he could not fore-

tell exactly what was to happen and partly because of a feeling of honor that he should meet Cardan single handed. Jimmie and Bernice should be well out of it until the encounter took place. Langa Doonh, of course, might have run into danger, but, then, Langa Doonh was a veteran of veterans.

With the third cigarette what was expected took place. A taxi drew up before the door and Cardan, himself, stepped carefully to the pavement carrying something in a large paper bag. Very slowly he walked to the door which he tried and found locked. Immediately his audacity became apparent for, at a wave of his hand, a second man emerged from the cab carrying a kit of tools. Jerome Cardan, probably with the fiction of a lost latch-key, had actually brought a workman to force the door in broad daylight!

Smith quickly, but silently, descended the stairs and shut the dog in the kitchen. With the easy stride of the boxer who is entering the ring he returned to the large room and stepped behind a screen through a crack of which he could obtain a very good view. It was not perfect concealment, but he expected to come to grips with Cardan within a very few minutes. While he waited, the telephone continued its intermittent and monotonous ringing.

Sounds of tools were audible upon the front door and, after a few minutes, voices drifted down the passage. The workman was paid off and the front door closed. An interval of silence followed before Smith, through the crack in the screen, saw Cardan slowly enter the large room. In his hands was the huge paper bag and his black eyes were covered by large and peculiar goggles which marred his face even more than

had already been accomplished by accident and nature. Evidently the goggles had been donned after entering.

Cardan paused a bit in the doorway before walking slowly, almost painfully, to the table upon which was the telephone. He placed the bag on the table and lifted the receiver for a second. The telephone ceased to ring and there was complete silence.

Cardan's back was to the screen as Smith stepped from his place of concealment. Silently as Smith had moved it would seem that some sound reached the man at the table for one hand shot to the paper bag which was between him and the telephone; yet he did not attempt to turn or make any other motion.

"Hands up!" said Smith firmly but quietly and, at the same time, brought his .45 Colt to bear on the back of the intruder's head.

Slowly the man at the table began to raise his hands and the right hand, in rising, lifted a curious object from the paper bag. It was of glass and somewhat resembled a very large Chianti bottle. Instead of the wicker covering of such a bottle, however, the huge flask was encased in a wire mesh and instead of the red wine of Tuscany it seemed to contain *nothing at all*.

"Turn around!" ordered Smith as flask and empty hand went above Cardan's head.

Cardan turned and looked silently into the black muzzle of the gun which was leveled at him.

"Put that flask on the floor!" directed Smith. "If you try any tricks, I will shoot you dead."

Cardan made no movement to obey.

"You were kind enough," he said, "to take some nitric acid from my private laboratory and to pour it into my shoes. I admit that you delayed my return to

New York while I stopped to treat my feet with oil. In return for the HNO₃ I have now brought you some NH₃. It is just a trifling chemical courtesy."

"Ammonia?" asked Smith glancing indifferently at the flask.

"Yes," replied Cardan. "It is not the liquid solution of ammonia, known to the housewife, but the gas itself. The flask, as you see, is heavily reinforced with wire which permits the gas to be compressed under several atmospheric pressures. You can work the problem out, now, for yourself."

"You mean," said Smith, "that, if I shoot you, the flask will fall and break. In that case the gas will expand into the room and attack my eyes so that I cannot reach the door before I am asphyxiated. So that is the reason you are wearing the strange goggles."

"Yes," acquiesced Cardan. "The goggles will protect my eyes for several minutes. You have a certain amount of intelligence."

"Well," said Smith, "let us look at the situation the other way around. If you throw down the flask, I can shoot you through the head before it strikes the floor."

"What good will that do you?" asked Cardan. "This gas would expand so quickly that you would never live to reach the door."

"Stalemate?" asked Smith, deciding that it was best to fence for time and await some opportunity which might arise.

"Checkmate," came the rather emphatic retort.

Smith smiled and his gun remained upon its target.

"Although our physical weapons may be evenly matched," said Cardan, "you forget that my mentality is much above yours and we are far from stalemate."

"To be sure!" agreed Smith, still smiling as he seized the opportunity to gain time. "Let's sit down and talk. Just drape that bottle of yours over the arm of a chair so that it can fall, but will not tire your arm. I do not wish to impair your exhibition of mentality by any unnecessary physical strain."

Watching each other calmly but critically, the two men seated themselves in chairs at some distance apart. Had it not been for the incongruous, bulbous-shaped bottle and the black pistol, there was nothing to suggest the enmity which existed between them. Undoubtedly, Cardan's face, below the dark goggles, was cold and hard, but it was a controlled face and showed no passion. As for Smith, he was, perhaps, a trifle taunting, but without any sign of excitement. Outwardly a more casual pair would be difficult to find.

"You seem to have given up your occultism," began Smith. "Perhaps you find physical means of destruction a little more accurate."

"An occultist uses physical means just as an algebraist uses arithmetic," retorted Cardan.

"But the arithmetic used in algebra is honest," commented Smith, "and the substitution of the living twin in the coffin was dishonest."

"Sentimentalists imagine that the means to an end are more important than the end," returned Cardan. "The truth is that nothing matters except the result. You can have a weak result or a strong result, but honesty and dishonesty are nursery words invented to deceive the masses into believing that something other than might can ever rule."

Smith grunted in a bored way and manipulated cigarettes and matches with his left hand. After deftly

lighting a cigarette he leaned forward to offer the cigarettes to Cardan, but the latter shook his head decisively and lifted the flask a trifle.

"After all," said Smith, "you cannot remain here forever and the minute you walk out into the open air, where ammonia soon dissipates, I shall have you."

"When I walk out of this room," answered Cardan, "you will be dead or——"

"Or what?" demanded Smith quizzically.

"Or you will have joined forces with me," completed Cardan.

Smith laughed.

"Is it the sentimental idea of honesty which prevents you from accepting my offer of partnership?" asked Cardan.

"Certainly," returned Smith, "but the idea is not sentimental."

"Permit me to explain the absurdity of placing any value upon honesty," began Cardan, raising his left hand a little to emphasize his words and peering seriously through the dark goggles. "In the first place you are aware that our solar system is composed of eight planets revolving about the sun which is the nucleus of the system. Science has long claimed that our solar system is made up of physical substance or matter and that matter is composed of atoms. Until recently the atom was thought by science to be indivisible although Blavatsky proclaimed the divisibility of the atom some forty years ago and was laughed at by scientists for her audacity."

"More Blavatsky occultism?" queried Smith.

"Occultism is only a knowledge of the finer laws of nature," rejoined Cardan. "Blavatsky was ahead of

her time when she taught the divisibility of the atom. Today the atom has been divided by science and behold the result! It is nothing less than a miniature solar system. The electrons of the atom revolve about a central nucleus just as our planets revolve about our sun. These electrons are held apart from one another and from their nucleus just as our planets are held from one another and from our sun. Looking the other way, our solar system is but an atom in matter which is so coarse that we are to it as our atoms are to us. There is no end to smaller and smaller degrees of atoms within us and, likewise, there is no end to larger and larger degrees of atoms of which our solar system is but a link. In such an inconceivably gigantic scheme what matters it if you do or do not become my partner?"

"It wouldn't seem to matter very much," drawled Smith, "and, since it doesn't seem to matter, I don't think I'll join you."

"You are very childish or you have not grasped the idea sufficiently," returned Cardan. "Think a little more. The end of my finger is composed of millions of atoms—or solar systems. Perhaps you think that intelligent life on these tiny solar systems would be jarred out of existence when I snap my finger, but such would not be the case. You must remember that atomic electrons revolve with, to us, incredible speed and that many millions of revolutions are made during the snapping of my finger. This means that intelligent life on such electrons would experience untold generations of existence while my finger was slipping off my thumb. During the sound of the snap, world-wars could take place and have time to pass into ancient history. At

the present moment you would never know it if our earth were an electron of an atom in the finger of some great giant whose finger was just slipping off his thumb. Before that great finger could fall, many thousands of generations would pass away for us. For us the motion of the finger would be so slow, even if we could see it as a whole, that it would cease to be motion. Are you vain enough to believe that any act of yours, honest or dishonest, has the slightest significance?"

"And what caused this gigantic mechanism which you describe?" asked Smith rather unexpectedly.

"The manifestation of that which is above God," answered Cardan quickly. "In Eastern philosophy, as described by Blavatsky, it is called the manifestation of Parabrahm."

"Uh-huh," said Smith. "You are right, but you have been talking a lot of distorted reason. You have made a mess of things and have gone off on what is known in occultism as the left-hand path. Now I will lay you a wager that I can ask you a simple question that you cannot answer."

"The wager?" demanded Cardan.

"This gun against your flask," was the quick answer.

"And the question?" asked Cardan.

"Do you accept the wager?"

"Yes."

The two men eyed each other warily.

"The question?" again demanded Cardan.

"Why did Parabrahm manifest?" asked Smith.

For a full minute Jerome Cardan was silent and Smith eyed him indolently over the top of his gun which rested upon a bent knee as he sat humped in his

chair. Each man was fencing for an opening that would break the deadlock.

"The answer to that question, except in sentimental language, is not written," replied Cardan slowly. "Parabrahm, being the absolute, has no beginning and no end. Reason can exist only when there is a beginning and, therefore, there is no reason for the manifestation of Parabrahm. Even if there were a reason, it would be absurd for you to question the absolute just as it would be absurd for a mosquito to question the ways of man or even a flea the way of a dog. Are you answered?"

It was a delicate moment for Smith. The slightest under-acting or over-acting and he must fail and failure almost certainly meant death. There was a little annoyance on his face and just a trace of confusion. Over it all there was a hint of the martyr who sacrifices all for an ideal.

"I will not quibble and I suppose I am answered," said Smith a little nervously.

"Your pistol!" demanded Cardan.

Smith tossed his gun in the air and caught it by the barrel and extended it, grip first, toward Cardan. As the latter leaned forward Smith's hand trembled just a trifle. The next moment Cardan seized the gun in his left hand and lowered the flask quickly but gently to the floor with his right hand. The transfer of the gun from his left hand to his right hand was extremely rapid, but no more rapid than the speed with which Smith jerked a second gun from his pocket.

Even so, Cardan pressed his trigger a full second ahead of Smith, who may have paused to take a little more accurate aim. Only one shot was fired, however,

and that shot came from Smith. Cardan's pistol dropped to his lap and blood spurted from the hand which had held it.

With a scream Cardan pushed back his chair and stooped with his left hand for the great flask upon the floor. In his bent position Smith's fist met the yellowed face and lifted him a trifle off his feet before he sprawled inertly upon the floor. Quietly Smith picked up the pistol which he had shot out of Cardan's hand. He chuckled a little as he looked at the safety catch which he had *thrown on* just before he had handed the gun to Cardan.

Jerome Cardan still lay upon the floor, awake and handcuffed, when Bernice Asterley returned to Fenton Street with Jimmie. She found Smith in the big room dressed in his blue dressing-gown and looking very bored. His back was turned to the man on the floor and he scarcely looked up as the girl entered. In his hand was a torn envelope from which he had just taken a slip of paper bearing a few scribbled words.

"So you did it!" exclaimed Bernice looking from Smith to Cardan with sudden admiration and hero worship in her eyes.

"Yes," said Smith languidly, "and now I'm bored to death. If I don't get another very interesting case very soon, I think I'll get married and give up my profession."

Bernice gasped.

"Give up your profession!" she finally exclaimed.

"Certainly," replied Smith. "A man can't do two things as well as he can do one of them. If I become bored enough to get married, I shall certainly give up criminology."

"Ah, gee!" exclaimed Jimmie, who had been gingerly walking around Cardan. "Let's both of us keep away from de skirts, Uncle Relius."

Bernice was about to speak when the telephone interrupted and Smith lifted the receiver to listen to a report from Langa Doonh who was at Tarrytown on his way back to New York.

"The old stone house burned down," said Smith as he replaced the receiver. "Langa Doonh found it in a blaze. I suppose that our friend on the floor tried to destroy evidence after he returned for his shoes. It's too bad, as I should like to have had that big star for a souvenir."

"Well," said Bernice, "I certainly hope that you find another interesting case very soon."

"Eh?" ejaculated Smith. "Oh, yes."

He glanced again at the scribbled words which Fanny Dunlop had given him in Cold Spring.

"Just telephone the police to send for Cardan before Langa Doonh returns and commits murder," he said.

As Bernice moved to obey with a snatch of song on her lips he slowly folded the note with a thoughtful expression after once more reading: "Don't be a monkey. She loves your professional ability and not you. Use your brains."

"A wonderful woman!" he soliloquized too softly to be heard as he dropped the note into his pocket and glanced at Bernice.

THE END