



Author of "Gaboreao the Terrible," "Born to Be Hanged But—," etc.

I HEARD a noise at the door and sat quietly. I recognized it as the faint sound of sensitive fingers trying a skeleton key.

The room was dark and it was one of the so-called wee sma' hours when even those with uneasy consciences are supposed to be asleep and when, as if to establish a compensating ratio, even the faintest of noises, the little creaks and rustles that are scarcely audible in daylight, are as noticeable to a listener as the clatter of bronze.

Not having much humor, I did not call out an invitation to come in. Besides, the person in the hall seemed already determined on that. As I was not in bed, but had dozingly remained on the *chaise-longue* when I turned out the reading lamp by my side, I saw no reason at all for disturbing my visitor's entrance.

I was not surprised that someone, uninvited and at such an hour, should try to come. Not that I had been waiting for such a one. Not at all. It would have taken more to keep me awake than the fear that somebody might steal the black jewel-casket from off my table. Sleep does not come easily to me, nor remain long. I was in pajamas, with a blanket thrown over my legs, and I had, with a great show of patience, been offering myself to what the poets call Morpheus. I do not want anybody to think that worry or anything of the sort kept the bewitching kindness of sleep from my eyes, nor am I a sufferer from insomnia. I don't sleep much; that is all. I am not a sufferer from anything, unless it be the meddlesomeness of people who misjudge me. One of those who were misjudging me seemed to be at the door then, trying the unresisting lock.

II.

PERHAPS I would do well to pause and say a word about the casket. It did not belong to me. But I had as good right to it as the man I took it from. His name was Blackstone. He was a newcomer to San Francisco, but the police of very few if any cities knew about him. Not that he was clever. No. He was handsome, or not handsome exactly, but he had much about him that fascinated women. He was skillful at compromising women, then heartless in making them pay. So he had a good income, money in the bank, and posed as a gentleman.

It was very foolish of him to come to me, though he did not know that I knew all about how he had tried to get me into trouble a year before in New York. He was two-faced and treacherous, as men who fascinate women usually are. Among the things he had said was that the man who killed me would never be brought to trial—which may possibly be true. When one has the undeservedly notorious reputation of gambler and gunman, such as mine, the law is not likely to be very excited over the way he meets death. Blackstone had gone so far as to say that someday he was going to "get" me. The man who has lived as I have lived is likely to be made a target at any time, and without being so very fearless he may get more or less used to the danger, as soldiers in a way get used to snipers.

I did not like Blackstone and he was aware of it, so he took that comparatively safe means of getting a little revenge and was comfortable in the belief that I knew nothing of how he sometimes talked. To my face he was always friendly. I waited patiently. There is nothing quarrelsome about me.

If he wanted to seem to be friendly when an icicle would have been more attentive to him, I could afford to watch him and wait.

I came back to San Francisco and would have forgotten him had he not, about a year afterward, dropped in on me with a casket full of gems.

I shall make the incident brief: He wanted me to give him several thousand dollars for the lot. I was not interested. His offer dropped and dropped until it came down to a price I really could have afforded to pay. But I do not buy stolen gems—or any other kind. I never bought a piece of ornamental jewelry in my life. He said that he was a stranger and did not know how to go about disposing of the gems, and all that sort of thing, but I was a friend and he would give me a good bargain.

The casket was slightly larger than an ordinary cigar-box, very heavily made, solid, peculiarly so, but a rather plain-looking box—that is, not ornamented in any way beyond a monogram of letters that I made out to be M.C. I knew nothing of jewel-caskets, but this one seemed to me thick enough to have served for a kind of strongbox, except that it had the flimsiest of locks.

I suppose that I would at once have sent Blackstone coldly on his way, but it happened that a friend of mine dropped in. He was a little nervous dope fiend who knew a great deal about gems, as every successful pickpocket must. He took a glance at the glittering trinkets and cheerfully called them a fine assortment of “glass”; upon being pressed for further information he declared that the stones were really very good paste.

At once it became clear that Blackstone had tried to fleece me. Perhaps it had appealed to his sense of vanity to think that he could put something over on me. He knew gems, though if in a hurry he might snatch up a false one by mistake.

I was entirely polite, but Mr. Blackstone departed without his casket—or anything to console him for its loss.

I thought the incident closed, but a day or so later he telephoned demanding the casket. The conversation was brief: I said “good-by” and hung up.

He ventured to come to see me and offered a lot of money for the casket. I told him to go to the devil.

My room was burglarized, but the burglar neglected to look behind the bathtub.

He wrote me a threatening letter and I began to

be interested. Then he telephoned to say that I was a tinhorn, a coward and many other things and that I had hid the casket for fear somebody would take it away from me. Before hanging up I assured him that the casket and the gems would be on my table every night from the time I came into the room and I suggested that he call.

I never expected to see him. But somebody was at the door, coming in.

III.

SOME sense, neither sight nor hearing perhaps, but something such as warns a person when somebody stands noiselessly behind him, told me when the door was opened.

The person was using extreme caution. That was wise. True, it might be a random burglar stumbling, so to speak, against my door and hoping to carry off something besides a bullet or two in his legs, but anyone who came knowingly into my room would expect the bullet to reach a more fatal place than legs.

A soft, almost noiseless footstep crept on to the carpet. Then another and another. I could hear the faint, nervous breathing of the form almost within hand's touch of me. A pause in movement. I waited. I was not excited. I had no reason to be: the cards were all in my favor. True enough, some people do grow agitated when four aces fall to them. I am not one of those people.

I waited with my fingers motionless against the little brass chain of the light on the stand beside my chair.

In those days, and sometimes in these, I would about as soon have my five fingers, my hand, cut off and mislaid as to have a gun beyond reach. As it was, I was fully satisfied with the situation. The only trouble about shooting is that it makes a noise and people come to ask questions.

A sheaf of spreading light thrust itself out from the electric torch my visitor carried and fell on the empty bed; simultaneously I pulled the lamp's cord and with some effort to be calmly polite said—

“Won't you sit down?”

A smothered, futilely strangled little cry of fright—and the woman, a masked woman, with hands that gripped the torch and a small gun pressed in sudden alarm against her bosom, stepped stumblingly back. The eyes shot gleamingly through the mask-slits at me.

"Push the door to, please," I said pleasantly, trying to speak as naturally as one might under normal conditions to a not unwelcome stranger.

I was not going to let her know that I was as much surprised as herself.

She stepped slightly to one side and closed the door without taking her eyes off me.

"I very nearly grew tired of waiting for you. Please sit down."

I courteously indicated a chair near me.

She approached the chair with slow, trance-like movements, her eyes fixed on my face as if hypnotized. She was momentarily bewildered. That was all that was the matter with her. Surprise can deliver a blow scarcely less numbing than a club.

She recovered rapidly, however, if not from the surprise, at least from the appearance of it.

She sat down with a certain feline care, a suggestion of—I don't know just how to word the impression I got, but I will say that she sat down with a suggestion of daintiness. She tried to convey, and nearly succeeded, that she was not at all uneasy; yet she did not assume any boldness or even nonchalance.

I could not see much of her face, for she wore a mask, a domino, a black piece of silk that hid her forehead and eyes. Her mouth seemed just a trifle large—she was a small woman—but, as that impression eventually disappeared, I may have had it because at first her mouth gaped a little. She was not at all the type one would suspect of being a female bandit. There was a shade of delicacy about her half-hidden face that the mask did not conceal.

I am not inclined to be romantic over any woman, not even a pretty strange one who comes picturesquely and unbidden into my rooms at such indiscreet hours. I had an idea that she knew she was amazingly pretty. Neither her knowledge of it nor her beauty would serve her so well as she might reasonably expect, for I happen not to be very susceptible to the fair, soft charms of women. That is, I have always been very determined not to be. If women are watched closely, suspected constantly and not trusted in the least, one can sometimes keep out of their fingers.

This little intruder had bobbed, wavy hair—light-brown hair that fairly tumbled off her head and clustered about her neck. There was a suggestion of gold about it, merely a flickering glint at times something like sunlight on deep water. I am not being romantic. I am merely

describing her hair accurately.

She had on a rather short, black, pleated dress of what appeared to be some kind of serge, and a blouse of the same material. It was a loose blouse with a scroll of black silk braid running about the breasts. The belt was a wide black piece of unpolished leather, caught together by a heavy wide black buckle. She wore shimmering black silk stockings and her small feet, very small feet, were fitted with a sort of heel-less slippers of black soft leather. Her marauding costume seemed to have been designed with an eye toward invisibility. She would have been very inconspicuous in a dim light unless one was attracted by her white hands and the unconcealed part of her face.

I looked at her carefully, deliberately, almost critically. I wanted to know as much about her as my eyes could tell me. Then, too, I have found that it disturbs people in an awkward situation to be stared at. She did not seem to care. She was a woman—and so touched her hair appraisingly, adjusted with a fleeting gesture her mask, pushed a fold out of her skirt—and quick as a flash turned her little toy-like gun on me, saying sternly—

"Hands up!"

The situation was not nearly so perilous as I may have made it appear in telling. For one thing, I have found that women seldom shoot a man they have never loved. For another thing, I slowly—very slowly—drew back a corner of the blanket and exposed a gun that could have swallowed the one that she held. My gun nestled in my hand, the muzzle straight at her. If she knew anything of me at all, she knew that I could not miss. She may have known that with anything like a fair shot I never did miss.

A half-minute of motionless tenseness followed. Then she gradually straightened up and sat back in her chair, leaving the little gun in her lap as she slowly half-raised her hands.

I leaned over and took the torch and gun from her. I glanced at the gun and tossed it back on to her lap and felt irresistibly a flash of admiration for her. The gun was not loaded. I was not proud of having bluffed out a woman who held a thing worthless as a toy—not even as effective as a toy gun, which will at least make a noise when the cap is fired and perhaps scare somebody.

"And what can I do for you?" I asked.

Breathlessly, eagerly, she answered. Her voice was wonderfully flexible. It had a trained, pleasing

tone that sensitively ran the gamut of inflections. Hers was a truly amazing air of spontaneity, both in manner and voice—amazingly so because after the first little bewildered cry she did not seem frightened. I knew that she was. Anybody would have to be, in her situation. She begged me, please, to give her that casket and let her go. The casket belonged to her, she said.

I suggested that we grow confidential and that she begin by telling me about herself. I wondered very much that a woman like this should be the confederate of Blackstone. I knew that he fascinated women, but she did not seem to me to be the sort of woman that he would fascinate. He usually caught empty-headed women, rather vapid, characterless creatures. She was not like that.

"I've made a mistake," she said simply, as if it explained what I wanted to know.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, bowing slightly. "I was not asleep."

"You should have been—this time o' night!" she flashed, with a good pretense of petulant reproachfulness.

She was clever. I began to admire her considerably, though she was desperately trying to play the coquette. She was artful and it took more daring to seem to be a coquette at that moment than it had taken to pick the lock of my room and enter. She crossed her knees and sat back with an air of sulkiness, her eyes on the casket.

"Why," I asked, "all this excitement over bogus gems—glass—paste?"

She looked at me quickly, with a glimmering of alarm in her eyes. And thereby she confirmed certain suspicions that I had. I guessed that among the collection of paste there was a stone or two of real value which could easily enough have been overlooked, I thought, by my friend the pickpocket, who had given the casket little more than a casual glance and almost idly had fingered the trinkets.

"You have examined it carefully—the box?" she demanded.

I assured her with a rather knowing air that there wasn't a thing of value in it.

She gave a decided start at that and a hand went out toward the casket as if to seize and inspect it. But I checked her. I told her that the box had been left in my custody.

"But it is mine!" she exclaimed. "I must have it. I will have it. Oh, please, give it to me!"

That was not the sort of appeal to move me.

Women—or men—strike the wrong chord if they think to move me by begging. I forgive audacity; I admire bold strokes; I may even be satisfied if some ingenious bit of daring gets the better of me, provided the circumstances are not too serious; but I have no use for beggars, not even when the beggars are pretty women. And I have no gallantry.

"Where's Blackstone?" I said abruptly.

It took her a few seconds too long to answer and she replied at first by staring wide-eyed at me and shaking her head slightly. Then, with an air of innocent mystification that was far from deceiving me, asked—

"Who is he?"

"The man who sent you—because he was afraid to come himself," I told her roughly.

Though I did not move, did not turn my head, I was sure that I heard a muffled sound at my door. I guessed that Mr. Blackstone might be listening. I hoped so. He would hear something interesting of himself before I had finished.

"Oh," she said. "Mr. Blackstone?"

"Yes. The gentleman who permits the women he has kissed to pay his expenses."

"Oh!"

Involuntarily her eyes went toward the door. I did not seem to notice. A pause followed. She seemed to be studying me closely, hesitantly trying to decide something. At last, low-voiced, she said:

"I have heard of you—I wonder"—her eyes went furtively toward the door and came back to my face as she went on—"I wonder if—you—are a gentleman."

I told her bluntly that I was not, that I was a gambler, a professional gambler.

When a woman begins to appeal to a man to be a gentleman it is high time to throw up breastworks.

"Blackstone's a gentleman," I added. "He has hidden behind your skirts. I would rather be a crook."

Something very near to a smile came to her lips but went away. She seemed really agitated without showing much nervousness, or, more accurately, I had the impression that she was highly keyed, as if about to venture something desperate.

Rather than that there should be protracted silence, I went into some detail regarding Blackstone. I told some of the things that I knew; that he was a venomous cad and cheat, liar and rascal, without a thing in the way of personal

courage to make even Satan's imps respect him.

"You say that behind his back," she remarked, but I could not tell precisely what she meant.

It was not exactly as if suggesting a reproach, nor quite like doubt if what I said was true, but she rather conveyed the idea of wonder as to what I would say to his face or do if confronted by him.

"True," I answered. "His back is all that he presents these days. And that, only at a distance, a safe distance."

She said that it was not like what she had heard of me—that I should boast.

But I am suspicious of women when they pay compliments, though she did it exceedingly well. I told her that I did not understand.

She hesitated and again her eyes went a little anxiously toward the door. And I thought that I understood what was the matter. She seemed to be wanting to say something to me, yet was also aware that a listener was at the door. However, it might be that she was outguessing me, playing a deeper game than she thought I would imagine. It is hard to tell about women. Their simplicity and their subtlety is often so bewilderingly alike; that is what makes them so hard to understand.

"Please listen," she said. "That casket was stolen from me. I must have it! I will pay—anything. It is money you want, isn't it?"

"Usually, yes. Money. But why this sudden interest in the casket?"

"It hasn't been sudden with me, Mr. Everhard. I was frantic when—when my sister missed the casket. But I didn't know who had taken it."

"I see. You didn't suspect Blackstone."

"I didn't know who had taken it," she repeated, seemingly a little anxious not to offend Mr. Blackstone's eavesdropping ears. "Then I learned that you had it. You have refused every offer. I simply must have it. My—my sister's future is at stake."

"You think a great deal of your sister, don't you? Why didn't you come to me at once?"

She almost whispered—

"I didn't dare!"

"Dare? Dare?" I repeated and significantly gestured my surprise that anyone dared not meet me in daylight, yet come at such an hour and in such a manner.

"Oh, I can't explain," she said quickly, feverishly.

I watched her closely. If that was acting it was

good acting. But one is always at a disadvantage with women unless they are distrusted and even then one doesn't have much security.

"Would you prefer to explain to me—or to the police?" I asked coolly.

If she had known as much about me as she thought she did, she would have known that I never called on the police. They sometimes called on me; but I shall say this for them: they were always polite. She did not know of my aversion to signaling a policeman: she did not know that I never go to them. She shuddered and sat upright with a jerk.

"Oh, please, no! Can't you be generous? Please. I must have that casket. I must have it! I can't pay an enormous sum, but I'll pay everything I have!"

I scowled and slowly shook my head. It irritates me to be begged.

"Why," I asked coldly, "are you afraid of Blackstone? He is a poisonous, cowardly little snake."

"I know it," she whispered almost inaudibly. "He is my husband!"

I nodded slowly as if I believed her. I did not wholly disbelieve her. No. I simply didn't trust her. She had brains, that woman, and I could not imagine such a woman as she being taken in by a fellow like that.

My hearing is sensitive, exceptionally acute, and I thought that I heard a sound not unlike a restless, impatient slip of hand or foot outside of my door. My ears listened; my eyes watched her.

"Everything is there?" she asked, indicating the casket.

"Yes, everything is on that table," I replied, glancing toward it.

On the table were papers, a bulbous vase from which half a dozen fragrant carnations raised their ragged blossoms, a book or two and the casket, bulking black and solidly against the vase.

I then said that she should tell me why she was so anxious to have that casket and its bogus gems. I said it in such a way as to imply the threat that she would perhaps regret her silence if she refused, but I did not hold out any kind of promise.

"He made me come," she whispered excitedly. "He said you wouldn't shoot a woman. Honestly!"

I knew Blackstone would not hesitate to do a thing of the kind but I could not imagine him making a woman such as she was do anything she did not care to do—particularly turn robber to steal

paste.

IT was a peculiar situation, indeed. The husband, or alleged husband, listening at the door wherein his wife had entered as a burglar; I fully aware that he was at the door, yet pressing his wife on threat of arrest to tell me things which might infuriate him. It was not only a peculiar situation but also one that did not displease me. She was afraid of him, or seemed to be, and she did not quite trust me. The distrust was mutual. I simply listened to what she said. I did not believe her and yet scarcely disbelieved her.

She seemed trying to make up her mind to be frank—or to appear frank. It usually amounts to the same thing in a woman. There is one great disadvantage in distrusting women: when they are truthful, one is sure not to believe them, and a woman is never so dangerous as when she is truthful. She made several beginnings, said a word, paused, started again, hesitated, then removed her mask and fingered the elastic with which it had been fastened about her head. My ears were very intent on the door and, without appearing to move so as to be in a better position to glance at it, I edged around a little. I had the strong feeling that something was about to happen.

At last she threw down the mask as if indicative of her decision to throw her story to me, but whether or not she had decided to tell a true story or had simply decided on what lie would suit was rather difficult to decide. If it were a false story, I could not compliment her imagination. It was commonplace enough to be true. She spoke in a low voice and leaned forward confidentially as if not to be overheard. But, I said to myself, that may be only an artifice. Women like to appear confidential. It is one of their favorite attitudes.

She said that she had met Blackstone when she was young and foolish. She had married him. He left her. She heard that he was dead. She believed it. She went on the stage. She took another name. She thought Blackstone was clear out of her life.

A few months before, she had met a young man, a wealthy young man, who loved her, whom she loved. He had gone to China on business. He was returning and she had come to San Francisco to meet him. His ship was due tomorrow.

She had been in San Francisco about three weeks. She had taken an apartment and was living very quietly, waiting for the man she loved. Then

one night Blackstone walked into her rooms. Her husband! He had seen her on the street, recognized her, followed her.

He had gone through everything she had, taken some jewelry, sneered at the casket and its contents, made her give him money; then one day she missed the casket itself. He denied knowing anything about it—and at last she told him it was worth money and that she had to have it. Then he told her he had sold it to me—that I was a fellow he didn't like and he had enjoyed selling me paste.

She had told him that they were not all paste, that it was worth thirty thousand dollars—that she must have it.

She wanted it, she said to me, to return to the man she loved, who had given her the casket and its contents as an engagement present, but of course Blackstone was only agitated by the eager desire to get his hands on so much wealth.

"I can never explain to him—but I must return his gifts!" she cried.

Of course she told me all that much more expressively and even more rapidly than I have related it. She spoke fast, with disconnected phrases that were as enlightening as sentences would have been, and as she talked she leaned nearer and nearer to me and her voice rose until at last, as if careless of who heard her, she cried out that she would return those jewels—she must return them.

I did not believe her. Thirty thousand dollars was too much money. Neither Blackstone nor my pickpocket could have overlooked gems of that extreme value. But I did not have much time to think. She was leaning very close to me and one of her hands was laid on my arm and the fingers pressed tightly as if to hold my attention by physical force; the fingers of her other hand ran up along my arm with a kind of beseeching tenderness.

"Please, please, please!" she begged, but I flung her backward and shot and the man died just as he stood tiptoe facing me through eight inches of open door.

A revolver was in his hand and it exploded from the spasmodic twitch of his fingers as he went down on his face sprawlingly, shot through his forehead. His bullet hit the floor by my chair. It was all over in three ticks of a clock, for he had made the fatal mistake of hissing—

"You and my wife!"

And I killed him.

"You lose," I said frigidly to her, adding that as a trap she and her man had made a pretty flimsy thing of it.

"So help me God, I have told you the truth!" she said tensely, breathless, staring down at the body.

She stood with hand to throat, half-shrinking, as from a thing of horror, yet fascinated.

I told her that she had better not say a word more until she had heard me lie; that then she could tell her story any way that she pleased.

I did not know what kind of a mess I might be in for, with police investigation and a strange woman for witness; but I thought that I had her at a disadvantage. Anyway, I would give her a fighting chance to get out. As for Blackstone: I snatched up the mask she had dropped, rammed a pencil through it to serve for a bullet-hole and quickly placed it on his forehead; then, tossing the little toy gun out of sight, I went to the door, where soon were gathered people in bathrobes and without them, men and women, some of whom chattered in nervous excitement though they tried to hold their teeth set.

I treated the curious mob in a fashion friendly enough. I seemed to do my best to answer a dozen questions at once, but I told nobody anything. I seemed trying to explain in the midst of interruptions and, though I kept everybody out of the room, I let them jostle me at the door and peer through morbidly, some of them perhaps sympathetically, at the pretty young woman in my room who, huddled forward, was weeping with hands to face.

But, of course, no one could come into the room or touch the body of the dead man until the police arrived. Everyone was tense with nervous curiosity; though the man lay on his face, all could see that he was masked. It seemed mysterious and thrilling.

The police came, the police-patrol. It came rattling down the street through one of San Francisco's heavy fogs and the policemen bustled with an air of directness and business through the crowd about my door.

They knew me at a glance and, though their eyes were a little suspicious, they were respectful. My record was not above suspicion, but it was unindictable.

I told my story. I had not been able to sleep. I had sat up, trying to read. I had heard a noise in the hall, then a sort of scuffling, not loud, but strange

enough to arouse curiosity. I had gone to the door and listened, barely opening it. Almost at once a woman had flung herself against it. She could hardly talk. She was out of breath and frightened. She staggered into the room, gasping for me to save her.

I had been surprised and did not know quite what to do and had just turned around when a shot was fired—and, having a gun on the arm of my chair, I had snatched it up and shot. I mentioned to the policemen, just to remind them, that at times I could shoot rapidly. I had whirled and shot, I did not know the woman. I had never seen her before. The man was masked.

THAT was my story. Not truthful perhaps, but honest. The woman could get from the net as well as she could. I had no great sympathy for her, for I was more than half inclined to believe that she had leaned so close to me, had gripped my arm so hard and let her fingers run up my arm so pleadingly, to distract my attention from the door and give Blackstone a chance to come in and cover me with his gun—and perhaps shoot. She may have been sincere and he may have merely jumped at the chance of seeking an excuse to kill me by pretending to find his wife and me together.

Neither the truth as she might tell it nor what lies she could imagine would very well discredit my story. I had told it first. I had told it plausibly. Besides, the dead man wore a mask and the police are never inclined to side with masked men, living or dead. She might say I had poked a pencil through the black silk, but then she would have to explain how the mask came to be in the room, and so implicate herself; whereas I had given her a loophole if she had the ingenuity to take it.

When the police came into the room, other people tried to follow. They tried to crowd close to hear what the woman would say, but everyone was pushed back into the hall and a big policeman put his arm, like a bar, across the door.

When I had finished with my story, the woman flashed a look at me that I did not understand: just a flash from the corner of her eye when I approached and cut off other people's view from her face. The look appeared more full of astonishment than anything else, but there also seemed to be a little something of gratitude.

She sobbed convincingly and in a broken voice and with nodding head said that I had told just what

had happened. The police had looked into the dead man's face but none of them recognized him. She told his name. She said that he had hounded her; that she could not escape him and that she was afraid of him. He had threatened to kill her because she would not be his wife.

She sobbed a great deal at this point, in order, I think, to get time to decide how best to go on. One big policeman laid a hand gently on her shoulder and spoke encouragingly.

She went on. She lived at the apartment next door. He must have learned in some way that she was planning to move so as to hide from him. Shortly before midnight he had telephoned that he would kill her if she tried to run away from him. Later he telephoned again that he was coming out and that he was going to wear a mask so that he could kill her without anyone recognizing him.

He must have been drunk, she said. He was often drunk. She snatched a handful of things together and fled, but he had met her right at the entrance. She broke away from him and ran. He followed. She darted through the entrance next door and ran up the stairs. He had caught her by the skirt and put the gun to her head but she had tripped him and fled down the hall—and burst into my room. After that everything had happened as I said.

As a preliminary story, the police were ready to accept it. Things more strange than she told happened daily under their noses and nothing remained except to confirm her story by going to the apartment next door. I wondered if she had thought of that when she gave an address so near at hand.

She had said that her name was Marjorie Cline and before she left the room I had no reason to question her ingenuity and resourcefulness. She stood up to go with the officers. Without a flaw she kept the role I had thrust upon her.

She looked pathetic and appealing. She was pretty and she did appear helpless, thoroughly distressed; so much so that the policemen, who are rather cynical and not easily made sympathetic toward people who tell strange stories, were gentle, even kind, with her. She spoke to me weakly, without offering a handclasp or thanks, which would not have looked well, and said that she was sorry that she had brought such trouble upon me. I bowed remotely and did not return any polite phrases.

Then she did a daring thing. She picked up the black casket from the table, picked it up swiftly and handed it with a sort of explanatory gesture toward the biggest policeman, saying that it contained a few little trinkets with which she had fled her room. The policeman looked at me, but before I could say anything—I don't know that I would have said much anyway—she explained further:

“Oh, yes, it's mine. See the monogram: ‘M.C.’”

He took it into his hand, scrutinized it and handed it back to her; together they went out, leaving me staring through the doorway.

The policeman who kept watch over the dead sat down, lighted a cigar, flicked ashes on the carpet and began to talk of other dead men and the various ways in which they had found their deaths. I bent over and put my nose to the carnations. I had of late been showing a rather unusual interest in flowers.

Suddenly a heavy, uniformed man burst into the room.

“She's got away!” he cried. “The little devil—slipped right around the corner. Wasn't watching her. Never suspected a thing. They never heard of her at the apartment next door—and she's gone. Right into the fog!”

The big fellow smashed his fist into an open palm and swore feelingly. Then questions came rapidly at me, but I stood pat. I knew nothing more of her than I had told. Nothing was to be got out of me—not at that late hour.

Then the ambulance came and the policeman and the dead man went away. When they were gone I made sure that the blinds were down, hung a cap on the doorknob and emptied the large bulbous vase into the water bowl. Then I fished out rings, bracelets, earrings and such, and dried them on a bath towel and tumbled the collection on the bed. I went over them carefully, but as I knew nothing of gems anyway it was not surprising that I found none I could pronounce genuine.

The next day I received a note. It was a short note, but it came from the woman whose name I never knew, for she said that it was not Marjorie Cline—“but something like that.” She assured me that her story, as she had told it to me, was true, literally true, and that I was welcome to the paste gems as mementos from her, because the casket had a false bottom where the real jewels were hidden. The lock was flimsy, so a robber might break it open easily and then, finding the paste

duplicates, fill his pockets and go with nothing of value. The note ended: my prayers to be freed from that beastly man were heard in heaven—for my ship came in today, and I can be happy now. M.C.

Oh, I hope it isn't a terrible thing to say, but I believe