

ATOMIC DEATH



SCIENTIFIC
6^D
THRILLER

By Hans Karlson

THIS IS A SHOCKER THRILLER!!

"ATOMIC DEATH"

A new and unusual type of thriller

THE invention of the "Kay-ray" had opened up unlimited fields by which to benefit humanity; but this was not to be. The inventor's gruesome murder and the capture of the Kay-ray by a ruthless and diabolically clever gang gives rise to a reign of terror which catches millionaires, bankers and ordinary people in its grip. To combat these unprecedented crimes, private detective Clinton Forder and the young scientist Bayne Mandeville need cunning equal to that of their enemies and escape a horrible death by a hair's breadth.

The "Kay-ray" is a machine by which all matter may be greatly reduced or enlarged in size in a few minutes and is used with results which are terrifying and incalculable. This is a fast-moving thriller with a completely new scientific background.

Look for the next of this series

"THE JAWS OF DOOM"

ATOMIC DEATH

By

HANS KARLSON

CHAPTER I.

Was It Murder?

CLINTON FORDER had been practicing as a private detective—and a very successful one, too—for the best part of ten years.

But this was the most extraordinary story he had ever heard in the whole of his experience.

"You mean to tell me that this gadget's capable of shrinking anything it touches?" he asked again incredulously, "anything at all?"

The young man who sat opposite him across the detective's desk drew a nervous hand through the unruly shock of straw-coloured hair that surmounted a rather pear-shaped face.

"Seems as if I can't get a soul to believe me," the young man said, "I'd hoped I might find some help here . . . but you're just like the police. They wouldn't believe it either. They—well, **they** as good as told me I was mad."

"Here. Hold hard, young fellow," said the famous detective soothingly, "I haven't said yet that I don't believe you. My motto is, and it always has been, that nothing's impossible. However fantastic anything seems there's always a logical explanation for it—if only you can find it!"

The young man with the shock of yellow hair sank back into his seat again. He looked drawn and pale and exhausted as though he had been through a worrying time. The gaze with which he fixed Clinton Forder combined a sort of helpless appeal with a hint of hostility and suspicion.

"I'm nearly driven crazy by the thought of it," he said, "**I know** what that machine can do . . . **I know!**"

Clinton Forder nodded understandingly, a shrewd look in his steady grey eyes as he studied Bayne Mandeville.

"I know what you need," the detective announced with sudden decision and, rising from his swivel chair, he went to a cupboard in the corner of the room and started mixing a drink.

"Not for me, thanks," Mandeville protested, "I don't drink."

"Good for you," Clinton Forder calmly applauded—and went on mixing. "This isn't a drink," he explained, "it's a nerve tonic . . . drink it down," he said, handing the glass to the reluctant young scientist with that combination of sympathy and discipline

known as the bedside manner.

With a dubious glance at the glass and another at its donor's steady grey eyes under their bushy eyebrows, Bayne Mandeville capitulated and swallowed the potion down at a single gulp.

Almost immediately he felt a pleasant relaxation throughout his body, but his mind remained quite clear.

Clinton Forder spent a few moments thumbing through books in the shelves — not that he really wanted to look anything up, so much as to give Bayne Mandeville, late assistant to Professor Cyrus Carton, a chance to properly absorb the soothing draught.

"Now, Mr. Mandeville," said Forder at last, returning to his swing chair and leaning back in it comfortably, "I know you're tired of telling your story, but I'd like it all again just the same. Don't miss anything out . . . anything you think might be useful, that is."

Bayne Mandeville gave a slight shrug of resignation and began:

"I had just got through my course at the University and was looking for a job when I heard that Professor Cyrus Carton was looking for a physicist as an assistant. I knew that he had resigned from his chair at the University to undertake some form of specialised atomic research and this was a subject I was very interested in. To make a long story short, I got the job" — the nerve tonic has done its work thoroughly and Mandeville was telling his story with a smooth continuity that had been absent from his former recital.

"I found that the Professor's work was very advanced, the young scientist continued, "and that he had almost perfected a machine capable of the most elastic control over atoms. During the few months I was with him he corrected the few imperfections that remained and he had there then an instrument that . . . well, one that made the story of Alice in Wonderland look like a stodgy unimaginative piece of writing."

"Just what does this machine do?" Clinton Forder asked.

"It projects a ray that influences the velocity of atoms . . . do you mind a slightly technical explanation?"

"As long as I can understand it," smiled the detective, "don't smother me with science, though."

"I'll try not to," Mandeville said, and he was smiling as he spoke, thoroughly at ease again. "All matter is composed, as you know, of units called atoms — you've read a lot about it, no doubt in connection with the atomic bomb. These atoms are the basis of everything, from a bookcase to the human body. Atoms vary a little in kind, of course, and that variation is determined by the natural velocity at which they normally revolve."

"Each atom is a sort of solar system in itself, isn't it?"

"That's right," the young physicist nodded, "and each has its own standard as regards density and potential power."

"And that standard can be altered by this machine of your

Professor's? Is that it?"

"That's it exactly — and the result, of course, is that each atom may be diminished or increased in size. . . ."

"So that anything composed of a few billion of these can be increased or decreased in size, too?"

"I see you've grasped the main idea," young Mandeville said, "now all you have to do is to scoff!" he added, with a return of his former bitterness.

"I'm not scoffing," Clinton Forder assured him gently, "I only want to get hold of all the facts as clearly and as quickly as possible. . . ."

The door of the detective's office opened and Eunice Appleton, his secretary, gave a discreet little cough to attract her employer's attention.

"Yes, Miss Appleton? — what is it?"

"There's a Miss Janet Weir here to see you, sir . . . she seems very upset."

Clinton Forder smiled ruefully as he said in an aside to Mandeville: "You see? You're not the only one. Most of my clients are upset. They never come to see me till they're almost at the end of their tether," he added with a whimsical smile, "that's why I always keep that bottle handy" — he turned towards the waiting secretary and spoke in a louder tone of voice — "Please do your best to . . . to comfort her, Miss Appleton. 'I'm engaged for a few moments. Even if the Duchess of Abingdon calls I can't see her yet.'"

"Is the Duchess of Abingdon a client of yours?" asked the young scientist, obviously impressed.

"Never heard of the lady," grinned the famous detective, "but she would be if she was in trouble enough!"

With a slightly rueful smile — the sort of smile that inferred she always got the dirty jobs — Eunice Appleton retired again to the outer office; and Clinton Forder turned to his visitor.

"Now tell me just what you know about the actual murder of the professor? . . . if it was a murder, that is. I understand the police regard it as suicide?"

"Yes — they do," said the young man bitterly. "They don't believe the machine was stolen either. They work on the theory that all Professors are absent-minded and that Professor Carton mislaid it somewhere."

"It's not a very cumbersome thing then?"

"About the size of a small folding camera. It can be slipped into a vest pocket."

"And out of one just as easily, of course," said the detective thoughtfully, taking a cigar from the box in front of him and pricking the end with a delicate care, "but go on, please. You were telling me why you thought it was a murder and not a suicide."

Now that he was convinced of the famous detective's genuine interest in the case, Bayne Mandeville's whole attitude altered and he leant forward eagerly in his chair.

"My first reason is a psychological one," he said. "The Professor was not the sort of man to commit suicide. He had no family and consequently he had no family troubles. He lived for one thing and one thing only — the perfection of this theory of his and its application for the advancement of science and the benefit of humanity. Even if he had been dying of some painful disease — and he wasn't — I feel sure he would have hung out as long as he could to see the result of his work."

"And your other reasons?"

"The men I told you about . . . the last people, as far as I know, to be alone with the Professor."

"They came to see him just as you were going home, I think you said?"

"Yes, that's right. They said they were pressmen wanting to interview Professor Carton. But I've seen a few pressmen in my time and somehow they didn't look the part."

"So what did you do?"

Bayne Mandeville shrugged. What **could** I do?" he said, making an expressive gesture with his hands. "I tried to send them away — to tell them that the Professor only saw people by appointment. But he's a nice . . . he **was** a nice old chap and when he heard them there he came and spoke to them, and after a while he said to me, 'A little publicity never does anyone any harm, Bayne — unless they've got something to hide.' . . . That's the funny part about it, Mr. Forder. He never did seem to realise that he did have something to hide. He only thought of his inventions in terms of the good it could do — never of the harm."

"I see," said the detective thoughtfully, "and if you felt this way, why did you go home?"

"Professor Carton told me to," Mandeville said with a shrug. "He said 'There's no use you waiting around, Bayne. I'll see you in the morning'" — a shudder went through the young man's spare athletic frame as he recalled the dreadful significance of the phrase — "I saw him in the morning alright. When I let myself in with the key Professor Carton had given me — I often got there before he did — I found him lying on the floor burnt to a cinder. It was a dreadful sight. He must have died in agony because the voltage of the current which killed him was not strong enough to kill him outright — only to burn him slowly. There were charred marks all over the floor where he had kicked and writhed around."

"He was holding the terminals of two live wires, I think you told me?"

"Yes. It was the ordinary city current passed through a reducing transformer. The special voltage was required to operate a

very delicate machine Professor Carton used."

"I see," said Clinton Forder, his heavy eyebrows closing nearer to one another as he pondered the problem. Now, don't get upset and think I'm scoffing at your theories," he continued, "that's not the idea at all. All I want is your explanation as to how these two murderers — assuming that they **were** murderers — persuaded a canny old man like your Professor Carton to take hold of the ends of two live wires?"

"It does sound rather far-fetched, I'll admit," Mandeville said with a wry grimace, "but it's not impossible — not by a long chalk. Supposing the Professor was demonstrating this machine to the men — he was as proud of his equipment as a kid with a new toy. Supposing he had unseated both terminals and was holding one in his hand and with the other hand he was pointing out parts of the machine perhaps?" . . .

Bayne Mandeville paused and glanced at the detective to see how Forder was taking it. The cynical reception the police had accorded his theory still rankled strongly in his mind.

"Go ahead," said Clinton Forder, nodding quietly and with no trace of scepticism marring his characterful features. "What then?"

Reassured that the detective was far from laughing at him, Mandeville said: "Supposing one of the men had said 'Here — have a cigarette, Professor?' — or even 'Here's a screw-driver, Professor. Point it out with that' ". . .

Again the young physicist paused, fearing the ridicule of the man sitting opposite. But Clinton Forder had made his name by pursuing the policy of the open mind he saw no reason to change that policy now.

"If that had happened," he said quietly, "the Professor might have been absent-minded for once — you say that he wasn't as a rule. He might have been so interested in his own demonstration that he would have reached his free hand behind him without looking — to take hold of the cigarette or the screw-driver as the case may be."

"Exactly!" cried young Mandeville with enthusiasm, but then he sobered quickly and shot a glance at the detective. "Are you sure you don't think that's too far-fetched?"

"It's far-fetched right enough," Forder admitted frankly, "but so are a million and one things that happen every day. Now you say you let yourself in with a key — why?"

"Because the door was locked, of course."

"Then the key that had locked the door wasn't there, of course? Where was it found?"

"It wasn't found," Bayne Mandeville said, "at least, not as far as I know, and I remember that the police had a pretty thorough search for it."

"And these 'pressmen' ? Did you give the police a description

of them?"

"Yes — but I had the impression at the time that they weren't natural, somehow," Mandeville said. "I couldn't help feeling that if ever I saw them again they'd be in very different sorts of clothes."

He went on to explain that he had felt the men were the type who would normally be rather flashily over-dressed — probably with cut glass tie-pins in gaudy ties and with rings on their fingers. . . .

"You know the sort," the young physicist finished contemptuously, "but it seemed to me they'd gone out of their way to look like something they weren't."

"But their faces? — and figures? The gait they walk with, too — that's very important."

"Well, I never saw them really 'walking'," Bayne Mandeville said slowly, "and as for their faces — well, there again I don't think they'll look the same next time I see them."

"How do you mean?"

"They both had moustaches and beards, to start with. I know there's nothing particularly extraordinary about that — specially as some of the more bohemian types of journalists go in for that sort of thing — but somehow they didn't seem natural."

"False, you mean?"

"No. Not unless they were very well done. But it seemed to me that the beards were both very new — as if they'd grown for the occasion. I don't suppose there was more than a fortnight's growth."

"H'm," remarked the detective thoughtfully. "If that's true the inference, of course, is that the affair had been planned a long time."

"That's just what I thought," Mandeville said.

CHAPTER II.

The Millionaire's Story

CLINTON FORDER asked a few more searching questions and Bayne Mandeville, reassured now that the famous detective had no intention of laughing him to scorn, gave the answers as faithfully as he was able. Then suddenly he burst out, apropos of nothing. . . .

"I'm so terribly scared of the dreadful uses that unscrupulous people could put the Kay-ray to. They could do the most fiendish things to innocent people without ever being suspected! Why, already I've seen a few disturbing paragraphs in the paper. . . .

"Like this, for example," the detective said drily, as he flipped open a drawer, extracted a scrap book and handed it to his visitor

open at a recently pasted-up page. "Read that!" he said, pointing significantly to the clipping in question.

ATTEMPTED FRAUD DETECTED IMPOSTER ARRESTED

An exceedingly daring imposter, it is alleged, called at the South Avenue branch of the Security Bank yesterday, claiming that he was Mr. Henry P. Saltwither, the well-known millionaire.

This man asked for an immediate cash advance of £20,000 against the cheque which he presented and, because of their visitor's obviously disturbed manner, as well as the large amount involved, the bank authorities took particular pains in checking up on their client's signature and the credentials which he handed to them.

Because Mr. Saltwither normally deals with another branch of the bank, his personal appearance was unknown to the Manager of the Southern Avenue branch — except for photographs which he had seen occasionally in the press — and, as the credentials and signature were all in order, he authorised the payment.

Just as the money was about to be handed over, however, an inspecting accountant who knew Mr. Saltwither well came on the scene and stopped the transaction. The accountant stated that although the imposter was extraordinarily like the millionaire in appearance, the men were actually extremes in size, Mr. Saltwither being 6ft. 4in. in height and the other man less than 5ft.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the case, however, is that Mr. Saltwither himself cannot be located, although our reporter learns from the millionaire's wife that she knows of no reason why he should be absent from home.

Bayne Mandeville's face took on an expression of anxiety as he came near to the end of the paragraph. "I hadn't seen that," he said, "how did you come to cut it out?"

Clinton Forder smiled. "I keep all sorts of odds and ends like that," he explained, "I find they often come in useful when they're least expected to."

"I've not the least doubt what's happened," the young physicist said, "and neither have you, or you wouldn't have shown me the cutting."

"It certainly adds point to your theory," the detective said cautiously, "that's all I can say at present" — he stood up and held out his hand, as a sign that the interview was closed — "leave your address and telephone number with Miss Appleton and I'll get in touch with you later."

"Later?" Mandeville almost exploded, "but this is urgent!"

Forder's face remained unmoved, but his bushy eyebrows lifted a little and his grey eyes smiled. "Sometimes we finish the journey swiftest when we take our time getting started," he remarked enigmatically. "Good-bye for the present, Mr. Mandeville. I've got a busy day in front of me. Thank you for calling."

With a reluctant shrug the young scientist moved towards the door, but Clinton Forder had already pressed a bell on his desk with the result that Mandeville almost cannoned into the visitor that Eunice Appleton was showing in.

Worried as he was, Bayne Mandeville still found himself able to admire the trim figure in the neatly fitting coat and skirt with a boater style hat well back from the dark roll of hair that crested her forehead. When Miss Appleton had said that this client seemed worried she had not been exaggerating, for a look of real distress sat upon the olive-skinned features of Janet Weir's somewhat Spanish type of face.

"Oh — I'm so sorry," she said, as she almost collided with Mandeville, "I'm really . . . I'm not quite myself to-day I'm afraid."

She shot him a quick mechanical smile, which was dazzling in its brevity and then looked past him to the desk.

"Sit down please, Miss Weir," said Clinton Forder, and then called over her head to the departing client, "Don't forget to leave your address and telephone number, Mr. . . . er . . ."

Bayne Mandeville, already piqued at the fact that he was being hurried out and his case apparently shelved, was more so when he thought that the detective had failed even to remember his name. He might have been relieved if he had known that it was part of Forder's policy not to let one client know the name of another.

When Eunice Appleton had closed the door behind Mandeville Janet Weir burst straight into her story without preamble.

"You **must** help me, Mr. Forder," she literally panted out. "My father has been arrested and is being tried to-morrow. Dad wouldn't do a thing like that — I know he wouldn't — and anyway there was no need for him to. None of us spend more than our income or run up bills or gamble or anything like that and . . ."

"Here — not so fast, please, Miss Weir," Clinton Forder interrupted patiently. "What is your father accused of?"

"Robbing the bank! **His** bank . . . the one he's manager of, anyway."

"You say he doesn't gamble?"

"Heavens no. The poor man hardly spends a penny — except on us. And I'm sure . . ."

The detective had to admit that this girl looked the decently thrifty type. She would not buy cheap or gaudy clothes but would buy well and take good care of things.

"I take it your father had the only key to the vault; that there was no sign of any attempt to force the doors and that the strong-

room was found locked but the money was missing. Is that so?"

It was only a shot in the dark, but its effect on the girl was remarkable. She looked at the famous detective as a credulous audience looks at a stage magician.

"How did you know?" she gasped, "there's been nothing about it in the paper yet — thank heaven!"

"Where is your father now? Is he on bail?"

A look akin to panic crossed Janet Weir's face. "No . . . the Judge wouldn't give him bail. He's . . . he's in gaol."

Clinton Forder knew just what an effort it cost the girl to say those few words. She was the proud type — proud of her father, her family and its former integrity.

"You must go home now, Miss Weir," he said, as soothingly as he knew how. "Here — take a drop of this."

He rose and poured out a dose of the same medicine that he had given to young Mandeville. "Don't be alarmed," he said, smiling as he saw the dubious look on his visitor's face. "It isn't poison and it doesn't even taste bad. But it'll quieten your nerves and do you good."

Janet Weir swallowed obediently and then the detective ushered her to the door.

"But you will do **something**, won't you Mr. Forder?" she said appealingly and a little despairingly, like a girl terrified of letting go this last straw.

"I'd like to meet your father," Forder said, "I'll pay him a call right away."

When Janet Weir had gone, Miss Appleton poked a worried head through the doorway and said: "I'm holding two calls on the line for you, Mr. Forder. Are you ready to take them now?"

"No thanks, Eunice" — he often used her christian name when there were no clients about — "tell them to ring again at . . ." — he glanced at his watch — ". . . twelve o'clock."

He took up his hat, gave a characteristic flick to his tie and hurried out to hail a taxi. In a very few minutes he had presented himself at the enquiry counter of the Metropolitan Gaol.

"Good morning, Mr. Forder," said the warder on duty, "come to see one of your customers?"

Clinton Forder was well known to the staff of the gaol, for his business often took him there.

"Two of them," he said, nodding, "Mr. Weir, the bank manager and the man who says he is Henry P. Saltwither. . . ."

"Gosh! The airs that bloke puts on," said the warder, "he's got the nerve of a thousand!"

He was pressing a bell as he spoke and soon another uniformed member of the gaol staff appeared with a bunch of keys. When asked which of the two he wanted to see first, the detective gave his decision in favour of the alleged imposter.

"My name is Clinton Forder," he announced, when shown

into the little man's cell, "I'm a private detective and I think it's just possible I might be able to help you, Mr. . . .?"

He gave an upward inflection at the end of the sentence which implied that the prisoner himself was expected to supply the missing name.

"Henry P. Saltwither, sir!" snapped the little man testily; and then, in a more mollified tone, "Did you say Clinton Forder? I've heard of you. Good man, so I'm told. I hope you've got more sense than the other numbskulls I've been dealing with!"

The warder was listening with amused interest, but when Forder signalled to him that he wanted to be left alone with the prisoner the turn-key walked away after locking the door of the cell on the two of them.

"Now, Mr. Saltwither. Please tell me your story," the detective said, "and don't think I'll ridicule it if it sounds a bit fantastic. I want to hear everything."

The little man looked at him sharply. "You sound as if you knew something about it already?" he said. "It's fantastic all right, but how did you know?"

"I don't know anything — I'm here to learn," Forder said.

The well-dressed little man flopped with a tired sigh on to the edge of his bunk and offered Clinton a chair with a weary gesture of his hand. The front which he had put up for the benefit of the warder had evaporated completely and the prisoner looked thoroughly exhausted as well as bewildered and defeated.

"You say you won't ridicule the story," he said, with a gesture of hopelessness, "but I don't really see how you could fail to do so. Quite frankly, I would myself — if it had happened to anyone else."

"Let me be the judge of that — go ahead please, Mr. Saltwither."

The fact that he was addressed by the name which he claimed as his own seemed to help the little man's morale and he shot the detective an appreciative look before he began:

"I had been dropped as usual at the door of my office block yesterday morning and was on the way up the steps when I suddenly had a feeling of the most unusual exhilaration. I'm not a young man, Mr. Forder, but at that moment I can assure you I felt sixteen and not a day more. I felt as if I wanted to skip up the steps and send the revolving doors spinning just for the lark of doing it — but there are certain things a man in my position just can't do and behaving like a young urchin is one of them. . . ."

Clinton Forder nodded and said encouragingly, "Go on, Mr. Saltwither . . . go on, please."

"Well, I restrained myself from skipping across the marble foyer," the little man went on, "but I did give way to the feeling sufficiently to ignore the lift and to mount the staircase at a pace I never would have thought possible. Reaching my office, I still

felt too energetic to go straight to my chair the way I usually do and once having shut the door firmly behind me I started skipping about the office like a two-year-old. There's a long mirror in my room, and while I was dancing past that in a sort of a polka, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Something looked wrong, somehow — and I don't mean that I just looked damn silly . . . a man of my age! But there was something else. I stopped dancing and stared into that infernal mirror. Well, Mr. Forder, you may have heard the phrase, "I couldn't believe my eyes," but I never really knew what it meant until that moment. At first I thought someone had played a joke on me and changed my mirror for one of those trick ones that make you look smaller or bigger, as the case may be.

"But there was nothing wrong with that mirror," the little man said impressively. "It revealed me as a little squirt of a man — almost as small as I am now. Mr. Forder" — he lowered his voice to a gentle undertone to impress — "I have been six feet four inches in height for a matter of thirty years!"

As he made this statement slowly and with emphasis on every word, the occupant of the cell searched his hearer's face anxiously as if afraid to read there the signs he had read in other faces — incredulity, contempt, ridicule and sometimes that tell-tale look of embarrassment that people assume when conversing with a lunatic.

But Forder's expression was both serious and sympathetic; and now it was the prisoner's turn to look incredulous.

"You . . . you surely don't believe me?" he stammered, with an eager wistfulness that was pathetic.

"I have no reason to disbelieve you, Mr. Saltwither," the detective replied with native caution, "but I'd like to ask you a few more questions. This feeling of exhilaration you spoke of? How long did it last?"

"For about a quarter of an hour after I'd got to my office — until I'd reached the size I am now. I watched myself shrinking — in the mirror, you see — and I wondered whether I was going mad. That's **one** good thing that has come of this," he added bitterly, making a vague gesture which included the whole of the gaol as well as the cell. "I know at least that I'm not mad and that other people can see that I've shrunk, too!"

"The only difference is that they don't know that it **is** you," Clinton Forder said. "What happened next?"

With a sigh of relief that someone appeared to take his story seriously at last, 'Mr. Saltwither' went on: "I locked the door of the office and disconnected the inter-office communication and took the telephone receivers off their hooks. Then I sat down to think. Was anyone ever confronted with a problem like mine, Mr. Forder?"

"You were certainly in a difficult position," the detective

agreed, "but what made you decide to go to the bank — of all places — Mr. Saltwither? And to draw such a large sum in cash . . . or attempt to draw it, rather?"

"There is a fire-escape outside my window," the little man went on. "I heard a slight noise and turned in time to see a hand come through the window and throw an envelope into the middle of the floor. . . ."

"Did you catch sight of the hand's owner?"

"No. By the time I'd reached the window there wasn't a sign of anyone on the iron staircase outside."

"Did you notice anything about the hand?" Any rings, for example?"

"Why, yes. I have a clear recollection of a rather flashy looking ring. It looked like a diamond, but I should say it was rather too large to be true."

"The letter? — what was in it?"

CHAPTER III.

Clues Unfold

THE little man glanced round apprehensively, as though frightened that the warder was looking, then lifted the flap of his well-cut coat and slipped his hand through a straight, clean cut in the lining. Withdrawing a somewhat crumpled letter he handed it to Clinton Forder.

"They made me hand over everything in my pockets," he explained, "but I managed to keep this."

There was no superscription to the letter, which had been carefully printed in order to disguise the handwriting.

Well, you're in a nice fix now, aren't you? Take a look at yourself in the mirror. Who will believe you are Henry P. Saltwither, the famous millionaire, now? If you want to go back to your right size get hold of £20,000 quickly and put it in the hollow tree marked on this map.

That was all. There was no signature, but a torn scrap of a commonly used motoring map had fallen out of the envelope with the letter. Examining this carefully, Clinton Forder saw a small red-ink cross in near the junction of two country roads.

"I see," he remarked, "so that's why you needed that money so quickly. Did you show this to the police?"

"Of course. But they didn't regard it seriously. They were in two minds as to whether to put me here or in an asylum. I hardly blame them," the little man went on with a shrug. "Indeed, the thing I find hardest to understand — now — is why you don't

take the same attitude, Mr. Forder? Why, I haven't even hired you!"

"Perhaps I have reason to believe that your story may be true, Mr. Saltwither," said the detective guardedly, "but tell me. Have you seen your wife since you've . . . since you've been in this condition?"

"I sent for her at the bank," said the prisoner with an air of abstraction, "but in the meantime I'd come on here and the bank manager brought her along in a taxi" — he paused and then added bitterly — but she looked at me as if I was some sort of a freak in a side-show and then went off laughing."

"And your lawyer? — You've been in touch with him, I expect?"

The little man's face clouded over with anger as he replied: "That fellow will get the shock of his life if ever I get out of this mess! I made that man — absolutely made him! And all he does is to turn up his nose and tell me he hopes I get a good sentence."

Clinton Forder could not resist a quiet chuckle at this.

"Oh, don't be too hard on him," he said, "he's really being loyal to you — the real you, I mean. Don't forget you admitted yourself. . . ."

"Yes. I know, I know," interrupted the little man irritably, "but it's the very devil, just the same."

"Tell me, Mr. Saltwither," Clinton Forder said, "When was it you first began to feel this . . . this feeling of exhilaration, as you describe it? — somewhere between your car and the steps of the building, I take it?"

"Did you notice anyone standing around?"

"No — no one except a couple of press photographers . . . I think they snapped me as I walked in."

An eager glint came into the detective's grey eyes as he leant forward, his bushy eyebrows drawing together in a characteristic frown of concentration.

The other man nodded. "Yes, that's right. It caught me with surprising suddenness. I remember thinking how extraordinary it was because I had been feeling pretty lively up till then."

"Did you notice anything strange or unusual about the men or their cameras?" he asked.

"Mr. Saltwither" looked surprised at the intensity with which his interrogator asked the question. "No, I'm afraid I didn't," he replied. "You see, Mr. Forder, I'm not exactly a nonentity in this city and I'm very frequently photographed. I've come to take it rather as a matter of course."

"Yes, I quite understand that," the detective replied, a little disappointed.

But suddenly the face of the little man before him lit up with an inspiration of recollection. "There was one thing, though," he exclaimed with a new animation, "what a fool I was not to

think of it before!"

"Yes?" said Forder, leaning forward hopefully.

"The ring! . . . the diamond! . . . One of those camera men wore a ring with a large diamond. It could have been the same—I believe now that it was—as the ring on the hand that threw that letter in through my window!"

"Thanks, Mr. Saltwither," said the detective quietly, "that's the best piece of news you've given me yet!"

"Can't see how it helps much. Still, you know your own business best, I expect."

"Well, I'm going now, Mr. Saltwither," said the young detective rising. "Have patience, sir. I feel sure you'll get out of this business in the long run . . . but it may take time."

"Well, that's the best news I've had yet, anyway," grunted the other with a lugubrious smile, "but it seems to me that, whatever happens, I might have to spend the rest of my life like this."

"That's possible," Forder admitted. He knew it would be cruel to laugh, but he felt desperately like it.

The detective's next call was paid on Mr. Edward Weir, Manager of the Richmond branch of the Federal Bank, who occupied a cell not far from that which Clinton Forder had just left.

"Your daughter engaged me on your behalf, Mr. Weir," the detective explained, feeling very sorry for the old man who raised a weary, puzzled head to greet him. "I'm a private detective and I'd like your own explanation of how the money might have disappeared."

But the bank manager shook his head wearily. "I have no explanation. It's completely beyond me," he said. "I have the only key to the vault and it never leaves my person—I even sleep with it locked to my wrist."

"You don't think you left it open by mistake?"

"If I did, someone else locked it—after they'd taken the money."

"Could anyone make a wax impression of the lock and get a key made to fit it?"

"That seemed the only reasonable solution, of course, but three leading locksmiths have told the police that such a thing isn't possible with that kind of lock," Mr. Weir said. "I remember being warned about that, too, when I was first given custody of the key."

"Now I must ask a very personal question or two, Mr. Weir," Clinton Forder said. "There is only one thing, in my opinion, that could make a thief out of a man with your home life and social background."

"I'm interested to know there is on," said the banker drily, "but I'm getting used to being insulted. Please tell me what this mysterious 'thing' is, Mr. Forder?"

"Blackmail!" said the detective.

As he uttered the significant word Clinton Forder kept a watchful eye on the bank manager's face, keen to notice the slightest reaction or the smallest change of expression; but the only effect it had on Edward Weir was to bring a slightly weary smile to his face.

"You'll have to search for another reason, I'm afraid," he said, and Forder knew that this dignified old man was speaking the truth.

When the detective finally took his leave he assured the banker that although the latter's case looked hopeless enough on the surface he thought he saw at least a faint glimmer of hope.

"Is that just professional optimism?" said Mr. Weir, with the same weary smile, "I'm afraid I can't see any other grounds for your hopeful words."

"We can only wait and see, Mr. Weir," Clinton Forder replied as the lock of the cell clicked back into place and he waved an adieu to the banker.

Already Clinton felt that he had warped a few useful threads which, when the cross-weave was supplied, would reveal the true pattern of this mystery. He felt as certain that Edward Weir was guiltless of the crime attributed to him as he did that the dwarf of a man in the other cell was really the millionaire that he claimed to be. But it was no use telling a Judge what you felt certain about. You had to prove it.

Hailing a taxi, Clinton Forder hurried back to his office to keep the mid-day phone appointments that his secretary had made for him.

"We'll have to turn this place into a matrimonial agency," Miss Appleton smiled at her employer. "I think we'd do a big business."

"What do you mean?" Clinton Forder asked.

"Well, just after I'd shown Miss Weir out of the office, I had to run out to get some stamps. It's all right, Miss Jones from next door came in to look after the phone," she added quickly, forestalling Forder's acid comment, "and just as I got into the front foyer there were your last two clients talking as if they'd known one another all their lives."

"Young Mandeville and Miss Weir, you mean?"

His secretary nodded. "Yes. He must have waited for her downstairs, I think."

"Funny," said the detective absently—he was thinking of something else—"I wonder what they could find to talk about?"

Eunice Appleton arched her eyebrows. "You'd be surprised, Mr. Forder," she said demurely.

Her employer laughed. "Eunice! You're a minx!" he said severely, "but d'you think they're still down there? I'd like to catch that young man."

"I don't know whether they're still there. It's a fair time

since I saw them . . . but love's a wonderful thing!"

Forder grinned and grabbed up his hat. "I'll go down and see," he said.

He found the two of them just where Eunice said she had seen them and they both recognised him at the same time.

"What about a spot of lunch with me? And you, too, Miss Weir," he added, turning to the girl, "but there's one condition. No shop. You can talk about anything but what's on your mind . . . is it a bargain?"

They made the bargain and they kept to it; but some times during lunch the conversation flagged a little, a state of affairs which could be easily understood.

"If you'll excuse us now, Miss Weir?" he said politely, directly they had finished their coffee, "I think we'll be running along. . . ."

"Is there any reason why Miss Weir can't come, too?" young Mandeville asked. He tried to make the suggestion appear casual, but his eagerness to have the girl with them was more than obvious to the detective.

"I don't suppose there is," Clinton Forder replied with a twinkle in his eye, "and perhaps it will help to keep Miss Weir's mind off her own troubles."

"But that's what I wanted to ask you, Mr. Forder, only you made us promise not to talk shop at lunch," the girl broke in with an anxious expression on her face. "When are you going to do something about . . . father?"

"I saw him this morning and told him that nothing could be done in a hurry," Clinton said. "He understands," he added in what he hoped was a comforting note.

"I don't think there's any doubt that your friends have been active already, Mandeville," he said, "and I wouldn't be surprised if Miss Weir's father was one of their victims."

"What do you mean?" asked Janet quickly.

"Tell her, Mandeville . . . if you haven't done so already, that is. You were talking together long enough in the foyer outside my office," he added with a smile.

"We found we had both lived in the same country town," the young scientist replied a little stiffly. "We didn't discuss the business we had with you at all — did we, Janet?"

"Then I think the sooner you do so the better," Clinton Forder said drily, smiling to himself as he thought how quickly these two had got on to a Christian name basis. "It's my idea that your paths have crossed in other places besides a country town."

The detective kept both eyes on the road ahead and both ears

behind him as Bayne Mandeville recited the story of Professor Cyrus Carton's death and all the implications behind it. Occasionally Forder would put in a word himself, and when Mandeville finished, the detective said:

"So you see, Miss Weir, if all this is true then it's perfectly possible for the possessor of this Kay-ray, as Mandeville calls it, to shrink the door of a vault just sufficiently to make the bolts ineffective and then to expand it again until it fits into place as if it had never been opened!"

"Of course!" exclaimed Janet Weir, only too ready to grasp at straws, "that explains everything. But why can't we explain that to the police and get father out?"

Clinton Forder smiled. "I'm afraid it's not as simple as all that," he said. "The police want something a lot more concrete than we're able to give them at present before they'll act. You see, I happen to know that your father is not the only bank official in trouble at the present time. Several men in other towns are in exactly the same sort of fix. Three more cases were mentioned in my mid-day batch of cuttings from the press agency."

"Three more?" exclaimed Mandeville.

"Yes — and here's another cutting you might be able to explain," said Forder, feeling in his pocket and handing a slip of newsprint to the young scientist.

WHO MADE THESE CARS? MANUFACTURERS PUZZLED

The appearance on city streets and highways of motor cars at least twice the size of their normal prototypes has caused a stir in the motor trade. Although these huge vehicles bear the names of well-known manufacturers, dealers state emphatically that cars of this size have never . . .

"There! That's what I mean!" exclaimed Mandeville, with a sort of morbid triumph. "There's no end to what they can do! Absolutely no end!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Pocket Millionaire

Janet Weir was obviously reluctant to leave them, but when Forder promised to let her know immediately any really important developments occurred she consented to take the taxi which Mandeville had called for her.

When the two men were back in the detective's office, Clinton

Forder told Eunice Appleton to go home and then settled at his desk with a sheet of paper in front of him and a pencil in his hand.

"I always like to get things down where I can see them," he explained, "even my own thoughts. It's amazing what a mess a man's mind can get into if he doesn't take it out and tidy it now and again."

"Sounds like a sort of a shelf in a cupboard, the way you put it," Mandeville grinned, running a hand through his straw-coloured mop of unruly hair.

"That's just what it feels like," Forder said, and drew a free-hand line right down the centre of the page.

On both sides of the line he put headings.

KNOWN FACTS

1. Saltwither reported to have completely vanished. Man accused impersonating S — spoke truth about letter — i.e. Letter was not fake.
2. Professor Carton died . . . Murder? Suicide? Accident?
3. Man disappeared within ten seconds from fire-escape outside Saltwither's window.
4. Weir not isolated case. Other bankers former integrity gaoled same reason.
5. Extra large diamonds on finger of man suspected of being involved.
6. Mrs. Saltwither denied her husband's identity when confronted with smaller man.

REASONABLE DEDUCTIONS (from those facts.)

This man **is** Saltwither and his story is true.

Murder.

Climbed through adjacent window into nearby office. Probably criminals use office same building.

Kay-ray responsible for giving thieves easy access to funds without leaving trace.

This may be genuine diamond operated on by Kay-ray. NOTE watch diamond trade reactions.

Probably gave him no chance to prove it. (I must arrange another meeting.)

Clinton Forder had written the above slowly and carefully in a round, characterful handwriting whilst Bayne Mandeville lay

back with a cigarette in his hand puffing rings idly towards the ceiling. When the detective had finished his self-imposed task, he turned the paper round and pushed it across the desk to the young scientist.

"That's about what I make of things as they stand," he said. "Take a look at it."

Mandeville studied the paper awhile and then handed it back.

"I didn't know you'd seen Saltwither," he said.

"Neither do I — with strict certainty," the detective replied, "but I've seen the man who claims to be Saltwither and, as you see there, I've no reason to doubt his story. No more, at any rate, than I have to doubt yours."

"What's the next step, then?" Mandeville asked.

"I'd like to comb carefully through the tenants of Saltwither's building — especially those who have easy access to the fire escape that passes his window. But that's a job for the morning. In the meantime, I think we'll go out and pay Mrs. Saltwither a visit."

In a few minutes they were once more in a taxi and headed for the mansion home of the millionaire. Heavy taxation did not seem to worry the Saltwithers for a porter at the lodge opened the huge wrought-iron gates and a butler answered their ring at the front door.

The two men were shown into a fine old library where the fire was burning in the grate and after a few minutes Mrs. Saltwither herself came into the room.

"Please don't get up gentlemen," she said, waving them to their seats with a courteous gesture. "I expect you're from the press?"

She looked tired and anxious. There were heavy shadows under her eyes and she gave the impression of one who had not slept properly for many nights. When he saw her Forder gave up any idea he might have had that Mrs. Saltwither might have been quite glad to see the last of her husband. It was obvious that she was a very worried woman.

"No, we're not from the press, Mrs. Saltwither," the detective assured her and a look of relief came over the lady's face. "As a matter of fact I'm a private detective and I'm interested in your husband's case. You still have no idea where he is?"

"None at all," Mrs. Saltwither replied promptly, and she shook her head with a sort of puzzled hopelessness.

"You've interviewed the man who declares that he is your husband? — the man in gaol, I mean?"

The lady gave a short bitter laugh. "That person!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Why, it's too ridiculous. Henry was a very tall man!"

Clinton Forder walked over to the bookshelves that lined the room, fingering the backs of some beautifully bound leather volumes. Then suddenly he turned and his face was very serious as he addressed the millionaire's wife.

"Mrs. Saltwither, I have something very serious to tell you. Do you think you can stand what might prove to be a very great shock?"

"You mean that Henry is dead?" she asked quickly. Her hand went to her breast and she pressed it tightly there.

Forder shook his head. "I don't think he is," he replied, and a look of relief swept Mrs. Saltwither's face, "but . . . well, certain evidence I have obtained had led me to the conclusion that something without precedent has happened to your husband . . . something that you may find difficult to believe."

"Go on — for goodness sake, go on!"

"You were taken to see a certain man in gaol, Mrs. Saltwither," Forder continued slowly. "You spoke to that man. I believe that you spoke to your husband, Mrs. Saltwither."

An expression of incredulity took precedence on the lady's rather formless features, but the studied seriousness with which the detective had spoken obviously had its effect upon her.

"Please explain what you mean, Mr. . . .?"

"My name is Forder — Clinton Forder," the detective said, "and this is Mr. Bayne Mandeville. Mr. Mandeville was working with the late Professor Cyrus Carton when the Professor perfected a machine which he called the 'Kay-ray', so I'll leave it to him to explain the effects of this machine."

Mandeville explained to the bewildered lady just what the Kay-ray could do to the individual atoms of which all matter is composed. He made it clear, too, that the effect was just the same whether the matter was living or dead.

"You mean that . . . that someone deliberately made my husband shrink? — to **that** size?" she demanded with a sort of incredulous contempt.

"That's what we believe, Mrs. Saltwither," the detective put in.

The pallor of the lady's face did not show beneath the generous application of rouge which gave it its permanent complexion, but the pained expression in her eyes told its own story.

Forder nudged his companion and led the way across the big room to where double french doors gave outlet to a beautiful garden. He wanted to give Mrs. Saltwither a chance to absorb the news gradually with all its extraordinary inferences concerning her future life with her husband.

It was not long, however, before she joined them where they stood. "I'm very grateful for your consideration, gentlemen," she said with a quiet dignity, "but I'm ready now for any further discussion you may wish to have."

"Thanks, Mrs. Saltwither," the detective said. "Now sup-

posing what we have told you is true, is it your desire that we take steps to prove that your husband and the "imposter" who is being held in gaol are one and the same man?"

"Certainly it is," the woman replied; but there was an unsteadiness in her voice.

"Then it's up to you, Mrs. Saltwither — you yourself," Forder explained. "I propose that we go along to the gaol again and that you ask this man certain questions which only your husband can answer. It's presumptuous of me to give you any hints in this way, of course, but just by way of explaining what I mean you could ask such questions as 'What is your favorite meal?' 'Where do you buy your shirts?' — or perhaps, even, something a little more intimate such as 'Where did we spend the first night . . . ?'.

"I think I understand what you mean," the lady broke in hastily, and this time the colour that flooded into her cheeks made the rouge seem dull and pallid; but she went on quickly without any pause, as much to cover her confusion as for any other reason. "Then I suppose the sooner we pay a visit to . . . to 'him', the better. Are . . . are gaols open at night?" she asked rather vaguely and with an obvious distaste.

"Not as a general rule," the detective admitted, "but I've no doubt they'll make an exception in this case."

Mrs. Saltwither stepped over to the wall and pressed a bell. "I'll have my chauffeur drive us down straight away," she said.

Your Shoe, Madam

WOMEN OF DISCRIMINATION

INSIST ON

"Watkins" Shoes

FOR

UTILITY,

QUALITY

and COMFORT

When they arrived at the goal Clinton Forder had no difficulty in gaining admission to the cell and any doubts that the detective might still have harboured disappeared completely as he saw the eyes of the little man light up on recognising the woman that came with them.

"So you've discovered the dreadful truth at last, my dear," he said.

It was an embarrassing moment for both of them. Mrs. Saltwither tried valiantly to appear friendly and natural as she gazed in renewed incredulity at this undersized replica of the man who had been her husband.

"We'll leave you two alone for a few moments," Forder said and signalled to Mandeville to follow him out with the warder.

But it was not long before the excited voice of the millionaire called them back.

"Tell them, my dear," he said simply.

"I'm sure now — absolutely sure," said Mrs. Saltwither, speaking with a tremble in her voice, "that this is my husband."

"Then there's no charge," Forder said, "we'll go and see the governor of the gaol right away — you should be out in an hour, Mr. Saltwither."

The millionaire's first enthusiasm at the thought of his release was soon clouded by other considerations. "That's all very well," he exclaimed, "but how can I go out and face people I know looking like this. I'll be the laughing stock of the whole town."

"I'm afraid there's no alternative in the meantime, sir," Mandeville put in, "not unless Mr. Forder is able to recover the Kay-ray. I worked with Professor Carton and I think I could probably make another machine of the same type. But it would take me anything from six months to a year, I should say!"

"If it's a matter of expense? . . ." Mr. Saltwither broke in eagerly.

"But it's not, I'm afraid. It's a matter of time and of what the Americans call the 'know-about'."

"We're not promising anything, Mrs. Saltwither," the detective said, "but it's quite possible we'll be able to recover the thing."

"But will it work in reverse?" the millionaire asked, with an anxious and half furtive glance towards his wife.

"I think I can promise you that," Bayne Mandeville replied.

Clifton Forder was as good as his word and within a little over an hour the missing millionaire had been released from gaol and was on the way back to his mansion.

"I'd like your help again in the morning," the detective said as he and the young scientist parted for the night. "By the way, there's an important thing I'd like to ask you."

"Is it a hard question?" Mandeville asked, smiling.

"That's for you to say," Forder replied. "Is there any counter

to this infernal gadget? . . . any sort of shield or anything that would nullify the effect of the rays?"

"Yes," said Mandeville promptly, "there is. Ordinary brown paper."

"What? — any brown paper?"

"Yes — provided I paint it over first with a solution containing powdered uranium."

The detective remained thoughtful for a moment. Then he broke into a sudden swift smile. "What sort of a tailor are you?" he asked.

"Tailor? — what do you mean?"

"I was thinking that a couple of suits of your brown paper might make us feel a little better dressed."

Now it was Mandeville's turn to smile. "Why didn't I think of that before?" he wanted to know, "it's a wizard idea."

So when Bayne turned up next morning at the detective's office he was carrying a small suitcase from which he produced two close-fitting full length garments of brown paper. Whilst one side of the paper looked quite normal, the other side had a high gloss and, seen in certain lights, a metallic glint as well.

"I know your idea was a suit," he said, half apologetically, "but it seemed to me that underclothes weren't quite so conspicuous."

The detective burst into a hearty guffaw of laughter. "You think of everything, Bayne," he declared, seizing the opportunity to break the official ice and to get on to a Christian name basis with his client, "I think the sooner we get into these togs the better — never know what trouble we might get ourselves into before the day's out!"

And that is why, when Eunice Appleton opened the door a few minutes later to see whether her Boss had arrived, she retired with more haste than dignity, her cheeks suffused in blushes.

When he had recovered his own equilibrium, the detective took up the phone. "Get me the National Association of Architects on the phone please, Miss Appleton," he said, using his most business-like tone to cover his confusion of a few moments before.

CHAPTER V.

Hot on the Scent

WHEN the call came through, the detective made known his simple wants. "Who designed the building known as Saltwither Chambers?" he asked.

He got the answer and hung up the phone. "Come on, Bayne, he said, "we're going round to see Messrs. Johnstone, Freyberg and Waters — it's easier than sneaking round passages and climbing fire-escapes."

When he arrived at the office of the well-known firm of architects, Clinton Forder's name sufficed to have them ushered immediately into the office of the

firm's principal — Mr. Geoffrey Freyberg.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Forder — I've heard so much about you," the architect said. "What can I do for you?"

"It's a very simple matter — your outer office could have fixed us up," the detective said. "I only wanted to borrow a plan of the Saltwither Chambers which, I understand, you built."

"Yes, that's a job we did a few years ago, Mr. Forder," the other man replied; and then he chuckled: "But you won't find any secret passage or sliding panels in the working drawings — we thought it safer to leave them out."

The detective gave a tactful laugh and Manderville followed suit and in a few moments they were on their way back to Forder's office with the roll of borrowed plans. Clearing everything from his desk, Clinton Forder spread the North Elevation right across it.

"This is the fire-escape, probably," he said, pointing to the etched lines zig-zagging up the plan; "yes, it's sure to be, because that would give Saltwither a suite of offices from front to back right in the centre of the buildings where the entrance is. Now let's look at some of the floor plans and check with that deduction."

He swept the North Elevation from the table and Bayne helped him search through the floor plans of the various stories until, on the first floor, they found a suite of offices labelled on the plan, "Reserved for Mr. Saltwither and staff." The rest of the offices, on this and other floors, were merely identified by numbers.

"You're right," Manderville said, his voice revealing his admiration for the detective's powers of deduction, "Saltwither's suite is right over the front door, and his own office is at the back of the building — with the central fire-escape behind it."

"Now, all we want," said Forder, scratching among the rolls of plans once more, is to find out who's in the corresponding offices on the second and third stories — they hardly could have got much higher than that and disappeared before Saltwither reached the window."

"But why should it have been one of those offices at all?" Bayne wanted to know. "Why couldn't he have disappeared through one of the fire-escape doors into the passage and along to any other office in the building — or even out the front door, for that matter?"

"Because in that modern type of building the fire doors are all controlled from a central switch. They're permanently locked, except in case of fire, when they're all released at once."

"But what's the idea of that?"

"To prevent just such abuse of them as you're now suggesting."

Forder eventually decided on four different suites of offices as being the most likely marks, but there was nothing to indicate who their occupants were. Each was distinguished on the plan by a number only. Jotting down the four numbers on a piece of paper, he opened the door and pushed it out to Eunice Appleton.

"Please find out who the tenants of these offices are, Miss Appleton," he said, "those are the numbers of office suites in Saltwither Chambers. Do it tactfully. I don't want the agents to know that it's Clinton Forder that's enquiring."

"Who are the agents, Mr. Forder?"

"Sorry — I don't know," the detective said and closed the door again.

However, it was not long before the efficient Miss Appleton came in with a typed slip of paper bearing the names of four business firms and with their occupations neatly annotated against each.

No. 35, 2nd Floor: John Morgan & Co., Merchants.

No. 36, 2nd Floor: AMBEE Packing Co. Packing Experts.

No. 124, 3rd Floor: Sample Chang and Samble, Solicitors.

No. 125, 3rd Floor: BATTLE Engineering Co. Dairy Specialists.

Forder studied the list with Bayne Manderville looking over his shoulder.

"The second floor's the most likely," he said, "that means . . . However, let's call on the lot of them and see what we can find out."

On the way through the outer office, Eunice Appleton protested that there were at least three potential clients begging for appointments.

"Hold them, m'dear—hold them," said the detective soothingly, "there's no one knows how to do that better than you!"

The girl turned back to the switchboard with a shrug and a sigh and her placatory tones followed them out into the passage as they made for the lift.

On the way to the Saltwither Chambers, Clinton Forder stopped the taxi at the office of a well-known tourist agency and came out armed with innumerable pamphlet price lists, application forms, etc.

"Planning a trip?" Bayne Mandeville drily enquired.

"This gives us an alibi," Forder explained with a grin. "You can't just bowl into an office and say you want to take a look around. It excites a certain amount of suspicion."

"I don't get it," said the young scientist, still mystified.

"From now on we're a couple of those public nuisances they call 'out-door representatives'," the detective explained. "We're representing Mungford's Travel Agency and it's our job to extol the virtues of sea travel and just plain travel."

Bayne Mandeville laughed. "I see," he said, "but why pick on that? Why not insurance or advertising or something?"

"I just had a hunch this might suit our purpose better, that's all," the detective replied. "If you'd suddenly found a way of making a lot of easy money, wouldn't your thoughts naturally fly to travel?—especially if you thought the police might get wise to your little schemes."

"Well, I must say you think of everything!" said the physicist admiringly, but just then they noticed a large crowd milling round the window of a shop with heavy plate-glass windows. But it was the fact that two policemen stood on guard—one at each end of the window—that caused Forder to say:

"Pull up here, driver!"

Leaving the travel literature in the taxi, they got out to investigate. Clinton Forder's elbows were as sharp as the next man's and soon they were in the forefront of the crowd, staring into a jeweller's window.

EVERY STONE ABSOLUTELY GENUINE.

So read the large notice that spread right across the window. Half of the show space was devoted to the usual jeweller's display, but the other half of the window had been completely cleared and was devoid of everything except a large velvet cloth on which were placed five huge diamonds, cunningly cut and sparkling brilliantly against the effective background of smooth and sombre black. To provide a little contrast and colour, a ruby, a sapphire, and an emerald were also displayed and each was of unusual size and brilliance.

One glance was enough for Clinton Forder.

"They don't cut diamonds as large as that," he said in a quiet aside to Mandeville. "Our friends have been at it again."

"Certainly looks like it," the young scientist agreed.

Forder was looking at the name-plate of the firm on the frieze above the window.

"THE AMBEE JEWELLERY Co." he muttered, and then said ruminatively, "Funny the way these blokes always make some silly mistake like that."

"Like what?" said Mandeville.

"Don't you recognise that name? . . . we're on our way to see AMBEE Packing Co. It's either a very strange co-incidence or our friends are sadly lacking in originality." He took the typed list that Eunice Appleton had given him from the pocket of his coat—"Floor 2, Number 36," he read.

Soon they were back in the taxi headed for the Saltwither Chambers once

more and before long found themselves knocking at the door which bore the legend

THE AMBEE PACKING Co.

Fearing that their research might bring him once more face to face with the two men whom he was convinced had murdered Professor Carton, his former employer, Bayne Mandeville had considerably altered his appearance by the simple expedient of smearing his unruly mop of straw-coloured hair with an oily pomade and plastering it down close on his head. He had been careful, too, to wear a different suit, a bow-tie instead of the slip-knot type and a shirt of different colour. On Forder's advice he had also bought a bottle of sun-tan lotion from the chemist and his normally "indoor" complexion now looked like a product of the wide open spaces.

"Your own mother wouldn't know you!" the detective had said, inspecting the result of these attentions with satisfaction.

There was no response to the first knock, so Clinton Forder turned the handle of the door and found that it was locked.

"Expecting visitors, it seems," he muttered drily, and then knocked good and hard.

He heard another door opening somewhere inside and then a man's voice from behind the locked outer one said, rather querelously:

"Who's there?"

Forder did not answer and held his finger to his lips to warn Mandeville to take the same cue. There was a momentary silence inside the room and then, as the detective had expected, quick steps came towards the door and the key turned in the lock.

When the door opened a few inches and a man's face peered through the narrow aperture, Forder employed the well-known salesman's technique and slipped his foot between the door and the jamb.

"We're representing the . . .

"Don't want any to-day, chum," the man inside said, and tried to close the door in their faces. But he had overlooked a little matter of a size nine boot.

"I'm sure you'd like to look over some of our pamphlets," Clinton Forder said, pushing his way with enthusiastic purpose into the room, and keeping up a running fire of sales-talk as he went . . . "there's beautiful photos of the barrier reef . . . ever seen the coral on the barrier reef? . . . and some pictures of the native girls on Pacific islands that would make you want to take the very next ship! . . . and if you want to go further afield we can give you the full particulars you require . . . no charge at all, gentlemen"—another man had come to the door of the inner office to take a look at the visitors, but Forder and Mandeville swept them aside too and marched right through. "You'll find a breath of fresh air and a change in every picture you look at . . . and as for the service provided by Mungford's Travel Agency. . . ."

By this time both men were well inside the inner office and Clinton Forder, with superb impudence, was already unfolding travel circulars and spreading them out on the desk.

As often happens when a good salesman adopts a sufficiently forceful approach, the occupants of the office were becoming genuinely interested and now they were bending over the folders with a sort of half-hearted reluctance which gradually turned into something approaching enthusiasm.

"It kind of gets you, all right," the taller of the two men admitted. "Look at this one, Sam!"

Soon the two occupants of the office were arguing almost heatedly over the respective merits of Bali and Honolulu and Clinton Forder took the opportunity to stand back and have a look around.

There was a curious bareness about the place which suggested recent or temporary occupancy and there was little or no evidence of packages or packaging. Taking stock of the men themselves whilst they were engaged in close study of the pamphlets, Forder saw that one of the men was of medium height and rather

squarely built with a strong jaw and the sort of mouth that one associated with men of the Sicilian race.

The other man was a shade taller and, although he could not be described as thin, he was at least more finely built than the man he had addressed as "Sam." He had a more conventionally Anglo-Saxon appearance, too, with blue eyes and imperfect teeth.

Both men were rather showily dressed. Both were clean-shaven and . . . both wore diamond rings on their little fingers and diamond stick-pins in their colourful ties.

Glancing towards the closed window, the detective noted with satisfaction the silhouette of the staircase showing plainly behind the lightly frosted glass. His eyes swept the room, searching for something that looked like a camera — searching for the Kay-ray machine.

CHAPTER VI.

Ordeal by Terror

FOR Clinton Forder had little doubt that they were well on the right track and that these men could tell him, if they so wished, where the fantastic little instrument could be found. But at least they had been careful to put it out of sight. There was nothing at all that answered the description which Bayne Mandeville had given him of the little machine. Clinton could see that the young scientist, too, was glancing furtively round the room in search of the Kay-ray, and once the glances of the two men met. Forder lifted his eyebrows questioningly and jerked an indicative thumb towards the backs of the two men who were still examining the pamphlets.

Bayne Mandeville rightly interpreted the signal as meaning "Are these the men you saw at Professor Carton's laboratory that night?"

His slightly dubious answering nod just as plainly said: "I'm not quite certain, but I think so."

Just then one of the men — the one that "Sam" was calling "Jumbo" all the time — turned and spoke to Forder.

"Say, how long would you geezers take to fix it up for us to go one of these trips?"

"You can go to-morrow if you like," Clinton Forder replied with bland indifference to the facts.

"But what about passports and all that?"

"The firm takes that right off your shoulders and there's never any trouble at all. Where do you want us to book you for?"

Acting the good salesman once more he had a pencil out in a flash and held it poised over one of the application forms.

"Hey, not so bloody fast," Jumbo growled. "We don't even look like going to-morrow. All I asked was how long notice you nuts wanted. See, we're busy men, we are — never know when we can get a chance to get away. Might have to make up our minds in a hurry."

"Hurry's right!" Sam muttered, half under his breath; but the other man heard him and gave him a surreptitious jab with his elbow to silence him.

The detective pretended not to notice this by-play, still content to play the keen salesman. "Well, just give us a ring any time you're ready," he said airily, "and we'll get you away safe an' sound the next day. But ring Mr. Mungford direct. Don't forget that — Mr. Mungford himself."

Just as Forder was about to turn towards the door, unable to think of any excuse for staying longer, but resolved to make a return visit via the fire-escape and the frosted window, he saw something that made his pulses leap.

He saw something that proved, for good and all, that the Kay-ray had been used in this very room.

"That's a queer kind of a door you've got on that strong-room, he remarked, knowing that Sam had seen his change of expression, and deciding that his best move was to brazen it out — "looks like they've put the right door in the wrong hole!"

He stood gazing at the door in question and then started to walk slowly towards it, watching out of the corner of his eye as Sam and "Jumbo" exchanged glances. The door was in the closed position and there was a margin of six to eight inches all round three sides, leaving the "shot" bolts floundering helplessly in mid-air.

"It's always been like that," Jumbo said, after an awkward pause, "we've told the agent about it, but he's pretty slow on the job. . . . Of course, we can't ever keep anything in it."

"Then you won't mind if we take a look?"

"No — go right ahead!"

If the detective had seen the meaning wink that Jumbo passed to Sam he might not have been so anxious to examine the safe; but as things were he took the words at their face value and walked right into the vault with Bayne on his heels. He did not know what he expected to find in there, if anything, but his years of experience had taught him never to neglect an opportunity, nor to overlook the smallest detail.

"There's a switch on your right there," Forder heard Sam say, "Turn it on and have a look around."

It was Bayne Mandeville who turned the light on to reveal a fairly large office strong-room about twelve feet long by eight feet wide with shelves mounted on three of its sides. But as the light came on a sudden sparkle at the far end caught the detective's eye and he stepped quickly forward, half conscious before he reached them of what he was going to see.

"Diamonds!" he breathed to himself; and in that moment he realised their danger. "The door — quick!" he cried to Mandeville.

But it was too late. The slowly expanding door had pushed the ends of the heavy bolts into slots and soon the expansion would be complete and the door hermetically sealed. But in the meantime there was still an opening an inch or so wide — wide enough for their captors to jeer through.

"Let us out!" called Bayne, knowing that the appeal was useless, yet prompted to make it by the urge for self-preservation.

"Let you out?" — a hellish chuckle came from beyond the creeping door — "Yes, we'll let you out right enough — about three weeks from now. Meantime we're taking a little trip to Honolulu . . . or maybe Bali. . . ."

The voice faded away as the expanding door, operated on from the other side by the Kay-ray, no doubt, squeezed firmly into its sponge rubber bed. A cold perspiration broke out on the brows of the two imprisoned men as they realised in their separate thoughts that the door would now be air-tight.

"Three weeks?" Bayne Mandeville was thinking, "the air in here won't last more than twenty-four hours — if that."

Clinton Forder was the first to speak. "If ever a man deserved kicking, it's me!" he said in a quiet but decided tone of voice.

Bayne Mandeville laughed, but it was a laugh that had a quaver to it. "What about me?" he said, "we must both have been mad!"

"Diamonds by the hundred and plenty of time to enjoy them in!" said Forder, with bitter self-denunciation.

"Not so much time at that," Bayne corrected him.

"I don't s'pose yelling's much good — not now, at any rate."

"It would use up the air more quickly."

"Hell! — who'll want air if we don't get out of here before we starve."

"We won't starve. We'll suffocate," Mandeville said, with a calmly scientific appreciation of the situation that sent a cold shiver down the detective's spine.

After a long, hopeless pause during which each was waiting for the other to speak, Clinton Forder said — as much to keep up his own courage as for any

other reason: "Maybe there'll be office cleaners coming in — perhaps they'll hear us?"

Bayne Mandeville had been making a close inspection of the walls and the ceiling. "There's no means of ventilation," he said, "none at all."

For awhile they stood in brooding silence, staring questioningly at one another. Then Clinton Forder could bear the inactivity no longer.

"We've got to do something," he said, "or I'll go crackers. There's nothing to read — only those damn diamonds."

"Tell you what," said Mandeville, "we'll split them up half-and-half and play tosses for them? That should pass the time till the cleaners come — if they do."

"And if we hear them when they do come," the detective added with a wry grin.

They started the game, both of them pretending an enthusiasm they did not feel. There's not really much fun in playing for thousands of pounds when you know you won't live to enjoy it. They played in silence, too, because both men were actually aware of the necessity to conserve the air as far as possible.

Fortunes fluctuated first one way and then the other, but always it was about even; and soon the game got boring. They needed a basis of skill to hold their interest.

"Ever play that game when you were a kid?" Bayne said suddenly, "where you draw a line in the dirt near a wall and try to get close to it with pennies — or stones?"

"I played it with cigarette cards."

"We could try diamonds."

"Won't they chip?"

"Not if they're good ones. Anyway, who cares?"

They started to play, with a strip of sticking paper from a roll of stamps gummed to the floor as a target-line. It was a better game than the other because it brought skill to bear and soon they became so immersed in the game that the natural dread of their predicament was mercifully forced into the background of their minds. But it was always there, gnawing like some sort of mental toothache.

Suddenly Bayne looked at his watch. "What about stopping for awhile and listening?" he suggested. "If the cleaners are coming they might be here pretty soon."

But, after an hour's breathless listening and waiting, not a whisper of sound penetrated the thick steel door.

"Nine o'clock," said Mandeville, breaking the long silence. "They won't be here now — not unless they come in the early morning."

"Let's go on with the game, then," the detective said. "I can't stick doing nothing."

They played until after mid-night, forcing themselves to an enthusiasm it was hard to feel.

"These confounded underclothes of yours are making me too hot," Forder said at last. "I think I'll peel them off."

"Me too," said Mandeville, and both men started to take off their clothes in order to remove the brown-paper underwear. They had become quite used to wearing it and, except for the heat they were beginning to feel, would scarcely have noticed that they were wearing them.

Suddenly Mandeville stood stock still, with his trousers lying on the floor of the strongroom and the underpants of treated brown paper in his hand. He was staring at the paper garments with such an intensity that the detective stopped too and stared at Mandeville in turn.

"Wha's the matter, Bayne?" he asked.

"This paper. There's just a chance. . . ."

He stopped in the middle of the sentence but there was no mistaking the suppressed excitement in those first few words.

"Chance of what?" Forder said eagerly, catching the other's excitement, "what is it, Bayne?"

"It mightn't work," said Bayne with the same air of suppressed eagerness, "but maybe it's worth a try."

While Forder's mouth stood half-opened, with an exasperated question on the tip of his tongue, Bayne Mandeville began tearing the trousers open, so that they reverted as nearly as possible to mere sheets of brown paper.

"It's worth a try," the young scientist said again, and started to rub the coated side of the paper hard against the concrete floor, putting enough energy into the work to scrub the deck of an ocean liner.

"They won't need any cleaners while you're here," the detective remarked drily. "What in heck are you doing, Bayne?"

"Turn out the light," was all Mandeville said in reply, but he said it so urgently that Clinton Forder obeyed immediately.

The younger man stopped his scrubbing and turned up the paper to look at the side which had been in contact with the floor.

"Look!" he exclaimed eagerly. "There's a chance! Look at that glow—see it?"

Clinton Forder *did* see it—a bluish phosphorescent glow that looked weird and mystical in the darkness.

"I see it right enough, but what's it all about?" he said. "If you'd only tell me I might be able to give you a hand."

"It's something I found out by accident in the Professor's lab," Bayne Mandeville explained. "We had a sheet of this paper treated with uranium solution to act as a shield during a certain experiment. When we'd finished with it it was just lying there on a bench, and when the cat spilt some of its milk on the floor I used the paper to wipe it up. I hate the smell of stale milk like hell so I scrubbed pretty hard. The Professor called me for something before I had time to get rid of the paper, so I just tossed it back on the bench and went to see what it was that he wanted. Without knowing it I'd thrown it on top of a key that Professor Carton used to lock a big case with and, next time he came to use the key, it just turned round in the lock without getting any sort of a grip at all. . . ."

"The key had shrunk, you mean?" the detective put in quickly; and now his voice was eager too.

"That's it," said Mandeville, and started scrubbing again like a madman; but above the rasp of the scrubbing his voice went on, "but it's only a forlorn sort of a hope, I'm afraid—there's one heck of a difference between a small key and a big steel door!"

But the ray of hope that the young scientist had held out was enough to put new life and energy into Clinton Forder. In no time at all he had flipped on the light again, and was scrubbing his paper singlet lustily on the floor beside Mandeville.

Both men put a fury of energy into their work and when they turned out the light the phosphorescent glow on Bayne's paper had increased so that it provided the whole vault with a soft bluish light. Forder's was not so bright yet, but it showed a promising glow.

Whilst the detective, heartened by the sight of obvious results, returned to his scrubbing with renewed vigour, Bayne Mandeville seized a pot of Clag from one of the shelves and dabbed it here and there on the paper so as to hold the ragged sheet in place against the steel door. When his own discarded garment had assumed as bright a glow as Bayne's, Clinton Forder followed suit, pasting his paper beside Mandeville's. Then both men set to work on their remaining garments and soon all four sheets of paper had been pasted again the inner side of the strongroom door.

The air in the room was rapidly becoming more rarefied and their strenuous work had told on the two men in consequence. Breathing hard and fast they still found it difficult to get enough life-giving oxygen into their lungs and the

hope engendered during their furious moments of effort began to fade as the door showed no signs of any change.

"Do you think it's going to work?" Forder asked anxiously.

"How the hell do I know?" Mandeville snapped — his nerves were badly on edge — and then he calmed down a little. "Sorry, Clinton," he muttered, "I'm afraid I'm a bit of a coward. The idea of smothering like a rat in a blocked-up hole doesn't appeal to me at all."

"Then you've given up hope? You don't think it will work?"

Bayne Mandeville gave a hopeless shrug. "I don't suppose it will," he admitted. "There's too much metal for the little Kay-ray power generated."

"Oh well," said the detective philosophically, "a watched kettle never boils, anyway. Let's get on with our game. I've got a bit of lee-way to make up if I remember rightly."

They started to play their game once more, but more lethargically this time. The rapidly rarefying air and the reaction from what both had come to consider a false hope were telling on both of them. Nevertheless, the game was punctuated by oft-repeated glances at the door . . . half furtive, half hopeful glances for, though each of them still clung to the slender hope that remained, neither wanted to raise any further false hopes in his companion.

CHAPTER VII.

Escape

SUDDENLY, with a gesture of despair Bayne Mandeville tossed his last diamond and flung himself into a sitting position on the floor with his back to the wall.

"I'm sick of that," he announced, and then quite irrelevantly, "You know, it wouldn't have mattered so much if . . . if I hadn't met Janet Weir. I was mad about that girl. I'd made up my mind to marry her."

Clinton Forder was not surprised by this sudden outburst. He knew from experience that even the most reserved of men tended to reveal their confidences in times of impending danger . . . a piece of wisdom he had learnt as an officer in charge of troops at Milne Bay and other battle centres.

"She's a nice girl," the detective said, knowing that it would comfort his companion to discuss the matter nearest his heart, "I knew she was one out of the box directly she walked into my office that day."

"She'll be looking for you, I expect — she hoped you'd be able to get her father out of gaol."

Clinton Forder gave a wry smile. "I'm afraid I'll be disappointing a lot of people," he said, "including myself!"

"If only the influence developed by that darned uranium was strong enough. . . ."

Mandeville turned his head lazily towards the door as he spoke, more because he was talking about it at the time than because he expected to see any change.

But suddenly his back straightened and his whole body became rigid and alert. He looked for all the world like a well-trained gun dog pointing.

"What's up," said Forder. The increasing rarification of the atmosphere was having its effect and he made the first stupid exclamation that came into his head.

"The door — look!" cried Bayne, and the next minute he had bounded to his feet like a human jack-in-the-box and was over against the great steel door. "There's a gap — the bolts are showing," — and then, crestfallen, he turned back and flopped disconsolately into his former position by the wall — "it's no good, though. The influence is used up and there's still a good two inches of bolt holding."

Clinton Forder stood staring at the door. Bayne was right and the great steel door had definitely shrunk, but only far enough to leave a small gap show-

ing round the edges and to display the bolts crossing the gap like the ribs of a decaying bullock starved by a drought and pecked at by carrion crows.

"Wouldn't it be possible to revive the 'influence', as you call it?" the detective suggested. "Couldn't we try taking them down and doing some more scrubbing?"

"We could try," Bayne said with a dispirited shrug, "but I wouldn't hold out too much hope."

"We don't want much," Clinton reminded him grimly, "only a little bit."

They took down the two top sheets first and started to work on them once more. Down on their knees they scrubbed and panted, but at least they no longer had to fight for breath. The crack round the door, small at it was, had been enough to let in the life-giving oxygen.

Without being told, Clinton got up and switched off the light and Mandeville let out a joyous exclamation as he saw that the paper sheets were once again glowing with an eerie phosphorescence that lit the whole chamber.

With feverish haste they gummed the paper into place again and then started on the other two sheets and, with growing hope, replaced them on the bottom half of the great steel door.

This time they made no pretence of playing the game that had formerly served its purpose, but concentrated instead on watching the door. At first they could see no change and their spirits sank to zero. Clinton Forder pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and, stretching it between his two thumbs, held it against the gap.

"She's moving . . . a little," he announced in a subdued but excited tone of voice.

"If only she'll keep going," said Mandeville tremulously.

The shrinking of the door not only 'kept going', but it actually accelerated and, as the anxious watchers kept their eyes glued to the focal point of their efforts, they saw the ends of bolts appear and then slowly but surely shrink away clear of the sockets.

The sight so mesmerised them at first that they could neither speak nor move. Then Forder gave the door a gentle push, touching it timidly as if he feared to know the answer.

But it moved.

Bayne Mandeville, who had been watching with breathless anxiety, gave a wild whoop and leaned his whole weight against the big door to send it crashing back against the side wall of the office.

"Thank God!" he cried.

"And a certain Mr. Mandeville," added the detective drily, as he stumbled over a chair in his efforts to find the light switch for the main office.

When success finally rewarded his efforts and the room was flooded with light, Clinton Forder went straight to the big desk in front of the window, looking for the pamphlets which had gained their entry.

Divining what the detective was searching for, Bayne Mandeville picked a few crushed folders out of the waste paper basket and held them up.

"Is this what you're looking for? They're in the right place, I reckon. We won't be needing them any more."

"Careful with them!" exclaimed the detective sharply; and then, with a smile at his own anxiety and at the astonished expression on Bayne's face, he added by way of explanation, "We'll be needing them all right. They're our most precious possession as far as this case is concerned."

"But how?" said Mandeville, amazed.

"No time for explanations now—I want my sleep" was all that Clinton said in reply.

The nightwatchman on the front door regarded them both with some suspicion when Forder and his client presented themselves before him.

"Ain't seen you blokes before, have I?" he asked, cocking his head on one side.

Rather than think up a good story, Clinton produced the police badge which

the Chief Commissioner allowed him to carry.

"Police? — s'truth!" exclaimed the watchman, "what's doing, eh?"

"Nothing much," lied the detective, "we've been keeping a watch on a window in the building behind, that's all — the Century building. Good night."

"Be seeing yuh."

Once outside the two men made for a coffee stall and bought themselves a hamburger and a cup of coffee each. Coffee, they felt, had never tasted so good nor meat so tasty. When their stomachs were warm and full they parted.

"Will I be seeing you first thing in the morning? . . . well, about ten o'clock I mean."

Mandeville seemed hesitant. "I don't know. I . . . you see . . ."

"I know — Miss Janet Weir. Is that it?" said Forder with a grin.

Even in the crazy flickering light of the coffee stall it was evident that Bayne's face was redder. "As a matter of fact it is," he said with a sheepish sort of a grin.

"Okay, then. I've got your address, and if I want you urgently I'll send you a wire. That all right?"

"Yes," said Mandeville — "that bus goes my way. I'll take it."

The detective watched him run for the moving bus and jump on the step and then he himself hailed a taxi and was soon saying a silent prayer that he was safe in bed.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was two o'clock in the morning by the time he had gone to bed, however, Clinton Forder was up at his usual time in the morning. But instead of proceeding straight to his office, he went to Police Headquarters and was shortly closeted with Inspector Walker of the finger print division.

"Thinking of taking a trip, Inspector?" he asked, and threw an armful of travel pamphlets down on the desk in front of the police officer.

CUSTOMFIT—

shoes for men

SHOES OF CHARACTER

They've made their way by the way they're made



Obtainable at all Retailers

IN FULL AND HALF SIZES

Walker knew this private investigator well—as did most of the heads of the C.I.B.—and he was accordingly wary of the young man's jokes.

"What's the idea, Forder?" he said. "Have you got advance knowledge? Are they retiring me or something?"

"On the contrary, my dear Inspector," the younger man said. "You're just on the threshold of your career!—if you can tell me, that is, who owns the thumb marks sprinkled so liberally over those gems of literature."

"Mostly yours, I should say," the Inspector grunted, "judging by the way you were hugging them when you came in."

Forder nodded, quite unabashed. "Yes, you'll find mine there, no doubt, and also those of a certain Mr. Bayne Mandeville. But those aren't the ones you'll be interested in. How soon can you give me a report, Inspector?"

"How urgent is it?"

"Plumb urgent, as they say in the land of the doughnuts."

"Half an hour?"

"Good—you'll phone me at the office, then?"

"Maybe you'd like me to bring them along personally?" suggested the police officer sarcastically.

"Great idea," said Forder enthusiastically. "Glad to see you."

Waving a cheerful farewell to the good-natured Inspector, Clinton Forder left Police Headquarters and was soon back in his own office.

There was no need to ask Eunice Appleton whether there had been any callers, for five people sat in the ante room. One of them was Bayne Mandeville and the young scientist did not stand on ceremony but jumped up quickly when he saw Forder enter the outer door and practically pushed the detective straight through into his own office.

"Janet Weir's disappeared," he said, getting right to the point. "They told me at the Weir's that she'd left there early yesterday morning and hadn't been seen since. They don't know what's happened to her. When they'd rung all the hospitals they could think of, they reported to the police. But so far they've done no good either. . . ."

"But where could she . . ."

"Wait a minute. I haven't finished yet." Bayne Mandeville went on, "I came looking for you directly I heard all this, but you weren't here. I rang your home and they said you'd left. Then Miss Appleton told me that Janet had come in here looking for you yesterday morning. She seemed to be in a terribly anxious and excited state, your secretary says, and she wouldn't be stalled off. Said she had to get hold of you right away and couldn't Miss Appleton tell her where she could contact you."

Clinton Forder already had his finger on the bell, and, with a worried look on her face, Eunice Appleton appeared, knowing only too well what the trouble was.

"Miss Weir seemed so worried and so genuinely anxious to get hold of you in a hurry," she explained, before Forder could even open his mouth, "that I gave her a list of those four tenants in the Saltwithers Chambers . . . you remember—Samble Chang and Samble, solicitors and the rest of them . . . and I told her she might find you with one of them. . . ."

Clinton Forder restrained his anger with an effort. He knew that his secretary was taking her punishment already.

"What time was this?" he asked.

"About . . . well, less than an hour after you'd left here."

Mandeville and the detective exchanged glances. "That explains one hell of a lot," Forder said gloomily, "just as things were coming along nicely, too!"

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Forder," Eunice Appleton mumbled abjectly.

The detective laid a kindly hand on the girl's shoulder. "You couldn't help it," he said. "You were in a spot. I realise that. It's my fault for putting so much responsibility on your shoulders."

"But what are we to do?" put in Bayne Mandeville distractedly, "we've got

to find her — we've got to!"

There was no trace now of the greasy pomade that had glued his hair down the day before the young scientist was free to sweep his fingers with a characteristic gesture through the unruly mop of straw-coloured hair that crowned his worried brow.

Clinton Forder was fronting the window, staring out with a look of abstraction on his face. Suddenly he turned.

"Well, there's only one place to look," he said, "I wasn't quite ready for it really . . . but this has altered things, of course. I'll get police co-operation and make a raid on the hide-out of these devils."

"A raid on their hide-out?" Mandeville repeated, completely amazed, "but I didn't know you knew where it was."

"They've probably got more than one," the detective said, "but I know one worth trying. Miss Appleton, get me Inspector Mack in charge of the Mobile Section."

But just as the girl moved off to obey, there came a ring from the phone on Clinton Forder's desk. Eunice had plugged it through before she entered the room.

The detective whipped off the receiver. "Clinton Forder speaking," he said, in a get-it-over-I'm-in-a-hurry sort of voice. "Oh, yes Inspector . . . who? . . . oh, I'm mighty glad to hear it. So I'm some use after all, eh? . . . Listen, Inspector, can you get your friend Inspector Mack to send a couple of cars round right away? I've got a job for them . . . Yes, of course it's not a wild goose chase. You know me . . . Evidence? Bags of it. You will? — good man."

He hung up and turned to Bayne Mandeville. "The gentlemen we had the pleasure of meeting yesterday," he said, "were both well known to our friends the police. They might call one another Sam and Jumbo, but Inspector Walker knows them better as 'Diamond' Joe Harsch and 'Cracker' Smith . . . Joe's an international jewel thief and his friend specialises in opening safes by unauthorised means."

"But how did you find out all this?" Bayne Mandeville asked, amazed.

"Remember the travel pamphlets you wanted to throw away? — they had their thumb-prints on them."

"Of course. What a fool I am," said Mandeville disgustedly. "Did he say they were sending those cars?"

The detective nodded. "Yes, we'll go downstairs and wait for them," he said, and then turned to his still abashed secretary. Preceding his words with a forgiving smile he told her to get rid of the clients still waiting in the outer office.

"I know, Eunice," he added, before the girl could utter a protest that was on her lips, "women always have the thin end of the stick in this hard world. They always get the dirty jobs — but that's because they handle them so well!"

With a pleasant smile and a wave, Forder left his secretary to lick off the sugar coating and get down to the unpleasant task he had set her whilst he and Mandeville left by the private entrance and were soon on the footpath below to await the arrival of the promised police cars.

It took a great deal of forceful salestalk to persuade Sergeant Walsh — in charge of the two cars — that he should pay a call with his men at the laboratory of the late Professor Carton in order to have them and himself fitted out with brown paper underclothing!

"I've never heard such rot!" he exclaimed contemptuously, "we're busy men — we haven't the time for a lot of tomfoolery like that."

But Forder reminded him of the case of Henry P. Saltwither, whose predicament was common knowledge by now to all the members of the C.I.B.

"All right, then," the Sergeant reluctantly agreed at last, "dress these others up like tailor's dummies if you like, but leave me out of it. I don't want to be bothered with any of that flummery-mummery."

"You might go the same way as Saltwither," the detective reminded him.

The Sergeant tapped the gunbelt strapped inside his double breasted coat. "I've got another sort of a ray, here," he said with a grim smile, "and I'm betting a pound to a penny it works quicker than the Kay-ray or whatever you call it."

Despite his stubborn opposition to the scheme, as far as his own person was concerned, Sergeant Walsh ordered the cars to drive to Professor Carton's laboratory. The drivers were left in the cars so that radio contact with headquarters could be maintained while the other men went up into the lab.

With Sergeant Walsh making acid comments most of the time and appealing frequently to the watch on his wrist, Bayne Mandeville worked feverishly on cutting and fitting the paper underclothing. Clinton Forder, acting under his directions, gave him a hand and, within the hour all seven men—as well as Forder and Mandeville themselves—were fortified against the malign and insidious influence of the Kay-ray.

Sergeant Walsh, alone, refused to be so equipped.

"We've wasted enough time on this flumbo-jummery already," he growled—and looked at his watch once more.

But the two drivers of the police cars had yet to be fitted out, so two of the others went down to relieve them whilst Mandeville used the last of his tin of quick-drying mixture in coating over their brown paper suits.

When at last they were ready to leave, Clinton Forder sat beside the Sergeant in the front seat of one of the cars while room was made for Bayne Mandeville in the other.

"Where do we go now—the museum?" Sergeant Walsh queried with a polite but bitter savagery.

Clinton Forder refrained from making the retort which leapt to his lips. He was thinking of what might be Sergeant's reaction if this did turn up, after all, to be a wild goose chase. He directed the Sergeant where to make for and Walsh passed the directions on to the driver.

"Slow down here," said the detective, speaking directly to the driver, "I've got to feel my way a bit. . . ."

"Maybe it's somewhere the other side of town?" the Sergeant suggested with a return of his bitter humour.

But Forder ignored the sally and directed the driver to turn up a bush track to the left—for he had sighted the house which had been marked on the millionaire's scrappy map.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Kay-Ray Again

DIRECTING the driver along several of the winding bushtracks which interlaced among the timbered country on the side of the steep hill that overlooked the river flats, Clinton Forder soon found that they were getting close to the white weatherboard house which was their objective—so close that he ordered the driver to pull up in the shelter of a couple of heavily foliated plane trees while he discussed a plan of campaign with the Sergeant.

"That's the house—the white one," Forder said. "It's my idea that one car ought to find a way round the back. In that way we can surround the house before they wake up to us."

"You ought to join the force, you ought," the Sergeant grunted—another of his sarcastic barbs.

"Maybe I will—when they raise the pay," Forder shot back and there was a chuckle from one of the plainclothes men in the rear seat.

Sergeant Walsh's jibes at Clinton Forder's expense, however, were never meant very seriously. Like the rest of the senior men in the force he respected the reputation and the judgment of this successful freelance and was usually will-

ing to follow his advice — provided Walsh was able to satisfy his own sense of 'face' in the process.

And this case was no exception to the rule. With another growl for good measure, he sent a constable over to the other car — which had pulled up just behind — to tell the senior in charge to watch the front of the house whilst the Sergeant's own car made a detour to get behind the place.

"And tell them to wait till they see us in front before they get moving behind there," the Sergeant concluded.

"Okay, Sarge," said the constable, departing with his message; and before long those seated in the Sergeant's car heard the purr of the other car's engines as she pulled round and headed back along the track.

It seemed a long wait, during which Sergeant Walsh regaled Forder and his own men with some evergreen tales of his early life on the beat, but it could not really have been more than ten minutes before Walsh said to the 'amateur' beside him:

"Reckon they'll be there yet?"

"They ought to," Forder agreed.

"Right, then — we'll move in," said the Sergeant and gave the nod to the driver.

As soon as the car stopped before the front gate of the white weatherboard house, its passengers disembarked with the quiet efficiency of long practice and passed through into the garden. There they spread out so far as to cover the house from every angle, and before long Clinton Forder sighted a corresponding net of determined men closing in from the rear of the house.

But those inside the house must have had swift warning of the invasion — probably there was a hidden alarm operated by the gate — because almost immediately steel shutters began to close inside every window, leaving only a narrow slot in each. Once all these shutters were down, with the slot showing in each, the place looked like a medieval castle with slits for arrows all round it.

But they were not arrows that came from those slots. They were nickel-plated bullets from modern automatics.

But the Mobile Division had met this sort of thing before. As soon as they saw that resistance was being planned they each sought their own piece of cover and returned the fire of the occupants.

The metallic 'ping' with which the police bullets crashed through the weatherboard, however, caused Clinton Forder to remark to the Sergeant — who was lying on the ground not more than eight feet away — that it looked as if they were in a protracted siege.

"The place is like a fortress," he said. "That weatherboard's only a bluff — there's steel armour behind it. Listen to those bullets."

"I believe you're right — as usual," was the other's reluctant admission.

But Forder did not even hear the rather grudging compliment. His glance had been caught by the sight of a bluish will-o-the-wisp dancing over the lawn. Raising his eyes a little he saw that the ethereal luminance were merely the continuation of a long straight steady ray of aquamarine which came at a slant from one of the window-slots and ended on the lawn.

Then it started to move.

It swept through the garden with the purposeful persistence of a giant squid's tentacle. One after another it sought out the men who lay there, resting on each a minute or so before it passed to the next.

But every man had been warned by Bayne Mandeville about the ray, and as the blue light approached each one, he whipped from his pocket the uranium-treated paper bag which Bayne had supplied in addition to the paper underclothing that the men were wearing. Putting these bags over their heads, they protected them from the effects of the ray . . . at least, that was what Mandeville hoped.

In the general course of its movement, the Kay-ray was sweeping away from Sergeant Walsh and the detective and Forder was regarding it with a sort of objective curiosity.

Then suddenly it began to swing back.

Before he could warn the policeman, before he could even cry out, the Kay-ray had swept over the surface of the garden and settled on the unprotected Sergeant Walsh.

"Look out, Sarge!" Forder called, "that's the ray . . . That blue light! It's the Kay-ray!"

Before he had finished speaking, Clinton Forder jumped up and headed for ray's victim. Secure in the knowledge that he wore protective clothing, he knew he had nothing more to fear than bullets and it was his intention to get in front of the obstinate Sergeant and shield him from the Kay-ray effects.

But hardly had he started up from his own patch of excellent cover behind a garden roller than the ray moved on from the Sergeant and played about Clinton Forder's own person.

He retired once more behind the roller and popped his own paper bag over his head.

Meantime the firing kept up from the house and from the policemen in the garden. As the ray passed each one by the plainclothes men took off their protective 'helmets' and rejoined the fray, aiming as far as possible for the narrow targets provided by the slots.

"This is no good," Sergeant Walsh suddenly roared, "we'll be here for a month o' Sundays at this rate . . . Benson — go get the gear."

Benson didn't ask any questions. He knew what the gear was and where to get it and soon he came back, dodging between the garden shrubs with a couple of axes in one hand and a lamp for a cutting flame in the other.

When Benson had flopped down with his tools between Forder and the Sergeant, Walsh bellowed out:

"Peanuts for the Duchess, boys!"

That might not have made much sense to Clinton Forder or his young scientific friend, but to the rest of the men it simply meant "Rush the door."

And rush the door they did. But it was a manoeuvre not without casualties. Constable Felton got a bullet in the leg which bowled him over near a rhododendron bush and Senior Turton stopped a .38 Smith and Wesson in the muscley part of the shoulder.

Turton may have stopped the bullet, the bullet didn't stop Turton. He came on with others till six men in all were huddled in the porch, pressing themselves close to the wall so that the snipers from inside couldn't get at them. The other four were in a similar position at the back of the house.

"Let her go, Benson!" the Sergeant commanded, "give him a hand, Tanner."

The two men stood back and let their axes bite into the wood of the door, but as Clinton Forder had foretold, the edge of the tools blunted themselves on the steel armour inside.

Get to work with that torch," Walsh grated out, and soon the keen blue flame was biting into the steel, cutting slowly up and then around, biting through the metal like a sharp knife.

All had their eyes on the door and none of the men noticed the Sergeant till he stepped forward to be first through the opening the cutting flame had made.

"Stand back, you little runt — who are you? demanded Benson as a diminutive figure tried to push him aside.

"Good God, it's the Sarge!" exclaimed Tanner, staring aghast at the greatly reduced figure of what had been their Sergeant of Police.

"Don't stand there grinning," bellowed the Sergeant, "follow me!" and none of the other men knew at that moment whether Walsh realised what had happened to him.

With the greatest of ease the leader stepped through the hole in the doorway, but those that followed found much more difficulty in negotiating the comparatively small breach.

Once inside, Sergeant Walsh, his revolver in his hand, went straight ahead, not waiting to make sure that the others were following him. The Sergeant *did*

know what had happened to him—he had realised it standing behind the bigger men there on the porch—and he was fighting mad in consequence. His only desire was to get within range of the devil who had done this lousy thing to him.

But the house was empty.

Search as they would—and ten trained men can search a small house pretty thoroughly in a very short time—they found no trace of a single living soul. No one dared ask the Sergeant any questions. No one dared look him in the eye.

It was Clinton Forder who found the way of escape used by the desperadoes who had defended the house. He was making a collection of cigarette butts from an empty fireplace—you never know when cigarette butts will prove useful as clues—when he saw the vague outline of a footmark impressed into the dead ashes of an old fire. Once his interest was aroused it was not long before the detective discovered that the cast iron backing to the fireplace was mounted on hinges and that it was supplied with handles disguised as small lion's-head decorations.

Opening the secret door he called to the Sergeant. "This is the way they got out, Sarge . . . down through the fireplace."

The little police officer joined the speaker, still thirsting for the blood of the men who had made a freak out of him, and the two men, followed by one of the plainclothes constables, lowered themselves down into an underground passage. Groping their way along they found that the passage had its exit into a garage built right on to the road that bounded the rear of the property—and they found, too, that the garage was empty, though recent oil-drips where the sump must have rested, and the acrid smell of exhaust fumes, proved that a car had only recently left the shed.

"Well . . . that's that!" said the little Sergeant bitterly, and then he turned to Clinton Forder. "You were right—as usual!" he exclaimed ungraciously but with obvious sincerity. "I was a stubborn fool not to take your advice . . . But, say, what's the cure for this thing? How can I get back to normal again?"

"Only by getting hold of the Kay-ray," Clinton Forder told him, "or waiting till Mandeville makes another in a few months' time."

The Sergeant groaned in anguish but said no more. His feelings were too full for words.

They went back to the house across the garden. Several of the plainclothes men were walking backwards and forwards along the verandah staring at the ground in front of them as they walked. They looked for all the world like doubtful drunks walking the chalked line at the watch-house.

"What's up with them?" the Sergeant grunted, "is it a dancing class or something?"

Clinton Forder stared at the men with interest and amazement. Then suddenly it dawned upon him what had happened and he burst into a spontaneous chuckle of merriment.

"Can't you see what's happened?" he said. "They were protected all over except their feet! . . . They've got feet like Manchu women now."

"It's nothing to laugh at!" snapped Sergeant Walsh, no doubt feeling himself to be ten times the subject of ridicule that his men were.

"You're right—it's not," Forder agreed, sobering immediately. "Well, I reckon the next move is up to you, Sarge."

"And how!" said the Sergeant, a malicious gleam in his eye. "When I get hold of Mr. Diamond Joe Harsch and Mr. Cracker blooming Smith those bright young fellers will wish they'd never been born!"

Clinton Forder was satisfied, now, that the police net would be spread wide and thoroughly. He only hoped that the criminals would be caught before they were able to destroy the Kay-ray—and to do any harm to Janet Weir.

Funny about the girl. There had been no sign of female occupancy of any room in the house—none at all, except the little card he had picked up in the garage when Sergeant Walsh wasn't loolooking. He took the card from his pocket now . . .

JULIE LERONG,
LADIES' HAIRDRESSER,
996 Collins St. Tel. GX1040.

Clinton Forder made up his mind to pay this Julie Lerong a visit directly he got back to town. Long experience had taught him to explore every avenue no matter how seemingly irrelevant.

But they took longer to get back to town than they had expected. They were just on the very fringe of the outer suburbs when the Sergeant's car broke down. As many of the men as could do so, including Sergeant Walsh himself, crowded into the other car and continued the journey, leaving Forder and Mandeville and the remainder of the men with the driver of the Sergeant's broken down car.

Bayne Mandeville tried to give the driver a hand but he seemed to be one of those men who prefer to work alone. Clinton Forder was quick to observe the signs of growing irritation in the harassed mechanic, so he said to Bayne:

"I reckon he can fix that on his own — let's take a look at this show over here."

It looked like a small circus or one of those side-shows that follow the country fairs or occasionally put up a stand on a vacant suburban lot. At any rate it was a big canvas tent with fluttering pennons on top and a huge notice painted in red, blue and black.

From where they stood neither Bayne nor Clinton could read the showbill because it was on too much of an angle, so they walked round towards the entrance to the tent where a woman of gypsy type sat huddled disinterestedly in a ticket box.

Come in and See
TINY TOWN
WATCH THE LITTLE PEOPLE AT WORK AND PLAY
Adults 1/-. Children 6d.

"Just as good a way of passing the time as standing round with our hands in our pockets," Clinton Forder said, and dropped a two-shilling piece at the ticket box window.

When they got inside they saw a miniature village composed of three or four small houses made of three-ply wood. These houses were no more than eight feet high overall and their occupants — who were engaged in various occupations outside them — were all dwarfs, and very small dwarfs at that.

One man was working at a sawbench, another was attending a flower-pot garden and a third, undeterred by the noise of the saw, was rivalling its music with a tiny fiddle.

Women, too, were engaged in various occupations. Several of them were attending cooking stoves — presumably placed outside the houses for exhibition purposes, for nothing these unfortunate folk did was private — another was milking a cow no larger than an airedale dog and still another was sitting and knitting with her face well down over her work as though she were ashamed to be seen. Her dark hair she had allowed to fall round her face and it was difficult to see her features.

"Poor souls," said Bayne Mandeville sympathetically. "What a hell of a life!"

Clinton Forder nodded. "Yes — to be stared at for a shilling a look . . . I say, Bayne, what do you make of that cow? It's giving milk right enough but I've never heard of nature going in for dwarf cows before — not as small as that . . ."

But Bayne Mandeville was not listening. He was standing quite still, looking hard at the girl who was knitting, an expression of incredulous horror on his face.

The intensity of the stare caused the girl to look up, and in two seconds Mandeville had jumped the rope enclosure and was down on his knees beside the

WHATEVER YOUR JOB

there are books whose subjects cover your work. We advise everybody to seek such books, buy them and read them.

Why spend years gaining experience when, by

THE PURCHASE OF A BOOK

you can learn what the experience of others has been?

PRACTICAL HANDBOOKS FOR TOOL-MAKING, ETC.

TOWN & COUNTRY BOOKSHOP PTY. LTD., 17 Pitt St., Sydney

FULLY ILLUSTRATED

Postage 2½d. per Volume

Capstan and Turret Lathes	3/-	Workshop Practice Simplified	2/-
Engineering Mathematics	3/6	Wood Finishing (Staining, Varnishing and Polishing)	2/9
Gauges and Gauging	2/6	Micrometers, Slide Gauges and Calipers	2/6
Gravity Die-Casting Practice	3/-	Modern Milling Practice	3/-
Woodwork in Theory and Practice	12/6	Home Carpenter's Practical Guide	2/9
How to Read Workshop Drawings	2/-	Motor Cyclist's Workshop	4/-
Jig and Fixture Design	3/-	Metal Turning Made Easy	2/9

If you are interested in a subject not listed above, please indicate the author and the title of the book—we will get it for you!

The Manager,
TOWN AND COUNTRY BOOKSHOP,
17 Pitt Street,
Sydney.

Dear Sir,
Please supply the books marked above for which
I enclose remittance.

Yours faithfully,

Name

Address

girl holding her by the shoulders and looking with an intent compassion into her face.

"Janet, darling!" he cried brokenly, "how did this happen? . . . How?"

"Go away!" whispered the girl in a voice of fear. "Go away!"

"But, Janet . . ."

Just then a big olive-skinned creature with a scar down one cheek came leaping into the enclosure after Mandeville.

"You ain't allowed in here," he said, "out of the enclosure — quick!"

He went to snatch up the midget that Bayne had addressed as Janet, but Mandeville let out a smashing right that sent the big brute sprawling backwards. Moreover, Clinton Forder was beside his friend now and one glance at the girl's face had told him the whole story.

"Get her out of here, Bayne," he said brusquely, "I'll talk to this brute."

CHAPTER IX

All's Well

MANDEVILLE picked the girl up in his arms, despite her frightened protests, and carried her outside. Tiny Town's customers started to follow, hoping to get more than their shilling's worth, but the savage way Bayne ordered them back made them think better of it.

Meantime the detective was having his talk with the big gipsy.

"There's a police car outside and a gun in my pocket," Forder said, in a grim undertone. "Are you coming quietly?"

For answer the gipsy's hand went into the folds of the colorful robe he wore and the light from the arcs flashed on cold bright steel.

But swift as the treacherous movement had been, the detective's action was even swifter. His right hand slipped inside the double-breasted fold of his coat and the automatic showed, grim and black, for a split part of a second before the pressure of the detective's finger discharged it.

The gipsy gave vent to something between a gasp and a howl and dropped the knife. The red blood spurted on his wrist and half-way up his forearm where the nickel-sheathed bullet had stripped off a sliver of flesh five inches long.

"Out to the car," commanded Forder quietly, gesturing with the automatic in the direction of the exit.

Holding his wounded arm, the big brute started surlily to obey; but the disinterested woman in the ticket box had suddenly become interested at the sound of the pistol shot and now she came running into the tent.

"Pedro . . . Pedro . . . what is it that has happened? What are you doing to him?" she demanded, turning like a tigress to Clinton Forder.

"Take it easy, lady," the detective replied, "all this noise won't help. Is this your husband?"

"Yes. Pedro is my husband."

"Good. Then you look after this show for him till he comes back. Meantime he's going to police headquarters."

He jerked a brusque thumb in the direction of the exit and the big gipsy surlily obeyed the gesture, preceding Clinton Forder out to the car whilst the audience followed at a more or less respectful distance behind, dividing their attention equally between the detective and his charge and Bayne Mandeville and the pretty little midget to whom he was talking about fifty yards away from the marquee.

Forder handed the gipsy to one of the constables standing by the car. "I'm afraid this chap needs a bit of first aid," he said. "He drew a knife on me and I had to plug him . . . when you've fixed him up take him into custody will you — a charge of wounding will do to start with."

Without waiting to hear the plainclothes man's comments, the detective turned and headed towards Bayne Mandeville and Janet Weir. Janet was sitting on the ground, with the young physicist's coat over her shoulders, sobbing bitterly.

"The poor kid's in a terrible state," Bayne whispered, as his friend walked up. "She went looking for you at the Ambee Packing Co. and she must have arrived just after they'd locked us in the strongroom. They kidded her along with a story that they were going across to another office where they expected to find you . . . Of course, once they got her in the car they just turned that damned ray on her and turned her over to this wretched outfit."

"But why on earth did she stay?" was Clinton Fordyce's amazed query. "Why didn't she up and run?"

"Because the cunning devil filled her up with a story that if she gave the show away or tried to escape she'd stay like that for ever. But if she was a good little girl and stayed with them for three months, they'd bring her back to her natural size."

"Big-hearted of them, I must say," Forder grunted.

"Wait here a minute with her, will you?" Bayne said, "I'll go and nab that taxi."

While Mandeville went off on his errand, the detective stood behind the heart-broken girl, not wishing to break in on her misery but reluctant to leave her in case the human vultures at the back gathered too closely around her.

And while he was standing there, with eyes focussed thoughtfully on her curly hair, his brain got busy, as it always did.

"Curly hair," he was thinking. "*Naturally* curly hair . . . then why did she want to go to a hairdresser? She herself had said that she was careful with money . . . But anyway, that card was found at the white weatherboard house, and Janet's own story suggested that she had never been there."

With a renewed interest in the card, the detective pulled it from his pocket and gazed at it thoughtfully. Then, without really realising that he was doing so, he turned it over.

"Gosh!" he muttered, "what's this?"

But he knew before he made the exclamation what it was. It was a printed appointment card and it signified that a certain Mr. Samuel Spry had an appointment with Julie Lerong at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 10th May.

"That's to-morrow," Forder ruminated. "Now I wonder who Mr. Samuel Spry might be? Samuel . . . Sammy . . . Sam!" Yes, that had a familiar ring; and the Sam who had locked them in the office strongroom, the Sam who was alias Diamond Joe Harsh or Cracker Smith, had certainly looked the type of man that would fit well enough with this card — the type who would have his hair waved, not because he was of doubtful sex but because such a procedure fitted in with his flashy style of dressing.

Bayne Mandeville had engaged the taxi by now and had returned to take the sobbing girl home.

"I'll look you up as soon as I get a chance," he said, flinging the words back over his shoulder as he hurried Janet to the waiting car.

Forder sauntered thoughtfully back to the police car, the appointment card held lightly in his hand. It represented another job for Inspector Walker of the finger print section and he did not want to spoil its story.

By the time he reached the car the fault had been found and mended and within an hour Inspector Walker had given his verdict. The prints on the card — or some of them — tallied with those on the travel brochures and undoubtedly belonged to "Cracker Smith."

"Cracker Smith, alias Samuel Spry," Clinton Forde reminded the other. "I don't think it'll do any harm to keep his appointment along with him — or without him, as the case may be. He mightn't show up now that we've given them a bit of a fright, but on the other hand he might. These coves sometimes do the most unexpected things."

"You're telling me," grunted the Inspector. "Well, I'll tell you this, young

When the job was finished the millionaire surveyed himself in the mirror with more than a little satisfaction.

"Now I'm no sort of a freak at all," he said, "except, of course, that I'm still a very rich man."

"You'll need to be, Henry," his wife said drily, "you'll have to buy yourself a complete outfit of new clothes again."

The millionaire turned to Clinton Forder with a twinkle in his eye. "Now, let me see," he said, "who was it hired you on my behalf?"

"No one I'm afraid, sir," Forder replied. "I just sort of butted in."

"Then I don't owe you any money?"

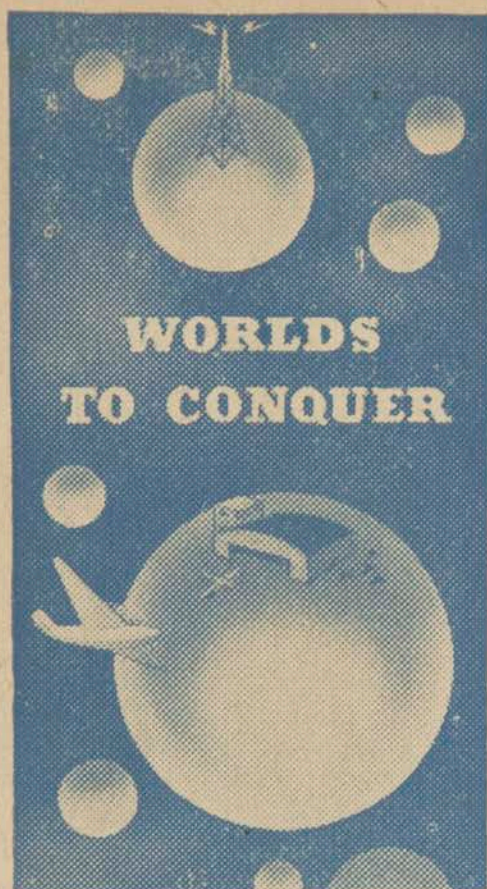
"Not a bean."

"H'm!" said the millionaire, pursing his lips thoughtfully, "you're a very extraordinary young man. I'd like to see you get along. You may remember I was prepared to pay £20,000 to a perfect stranger on the strength of that damn letter. So I won't be any worse off if I pay you the same amount, will I?"

"Twenty thousand pounds?" gasped Forder, "but I couldn't possibly take it, sir." He thought quickly and then came with a counter suggestion. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Saltwither, I'll take a thousand if you give the rest to a fund carrying Professor Carton's experiments — and put Mr. Mandeville in charge."

"Done!" said the millionaire, and held out his hand.

THE END.



A YOUNG MAN STANDS ON A BEACH

He is ambitious, industrious, wealthy and powerful. He weeps, because there are no more worlds to conquer.

● That was 2300 years ago. Alexander the Great was not stupid, but merely limited in his vision—as are men to-day who complain that "everything has been invented, everything has been achieved."

● It's true, these worlds are closed to the jack-of-all-trades. Only the trained man can hope to "break into" such fields as radio . . . aviation . . . Diesel power . . . Draftsmanship . . . dozens of other worlds that Man has only begun to explore.

● At this moment, 100,000 ambitious men (average age, 25) are enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools. They are getting practical, essential training through methods commended by leading educators.

Write for Free Prospectus Now!

International Correspondence Schools

140 Elizabeth Street, Sydney

CHOOSE YOUR CAREER

I.C.S. TECHNICAL COURSES FOR PRACTICAL WORKERS.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| — Aero Fitters' & Riggers' | — Architecture | — Mechanical Engineering |
| — Aircraft Production | — Carpentry | — Fitting, Turning & Machining |
| — Auto Engineering | — Building Contractors' | — Gas & Electric Welding |
| — Auto Mechanics' | — Civil Engineering | — Draughtsmanship |
| — Electrical Engineering | — Municipal Engineering | — Tool-making |
| — Electronics | — Shire Overseers' | — Steam Engineering |
| — Electricians' | — Concrete Engineering | — Gas & Oil Engines |
| — Air Conditioning | — Mining Engineering | — Diesel Engines |
| — Refrigeration | — Metallurgy | — Marine Engineering |
| — Radio Engineering | — Plastics | — Shipyard Drawing |
| — Practical Radio Servicing | — Chemical Engineering | — Works Administration |
| — Aviation Radio | — Fuel Technology | — Engineering Maths. |

I.C.S. COURSES OF PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| — Architectural Drawing | — Salesmanship | — Shorthand (Pitman or Script) |
| — House Planning | — Real Estate | — Intermediate Exam. |
| — Woodworking Drawing | — Advertising | — Leaving Exam. (name State) |
| — Structural Drawing | — Business Letters | — Matriculation Exam. |
| — Mechanical Drawing | — Journalism | — Senior Public Exam. |
| — Shipyard Drawing | — Short Story Writing | — Junior Public Exam. |
| — Managing Men at Work | — Radio Play Writing | — Police Entrance (name State) |
| — Commercial Art | — General Education | — Nurses' Entrance |
| — Poster Drawing | — Mathematics | — R.I.B.A. Exams. |
| — Dressmaking | — Accountancy | — Inst. of Auto. Mechs. |
| — Dress Cutting | — Cost Accounting | — Inst. of Fire Engineers |
| — Ticket Writing | — Book-keeping | — Inst. of Marine Engineers |
| — Show Card Writing | — Station Book-keeping | — Steam Certif. Exams. |

A.P.

In case you require some other subject, kindly write it here.....

Name..... Occupation.....

Address..... Age.....

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

