A Mystery Story for Boys

The Arrow of Fire

Roy J. Snell

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The
ARROW *of* FIRE

By
ROY J. SNELL

Author's Logo

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THE ARROW OF FIRE

CHAPTER I
THE SQUAD CALL

It was midnight. The waters of Lake Michigan were like glass, smooth glass, miles of it, blue-black. There was no moon. The stars burned queer bright holes in the blue-black glass. The long, low craft that glided through the water caused scarce a ripple.

At the prow of this Great Lakes' freighter stood Johnny Thompson. He was gazing at the skyline of his own beloved city. Three years had passed since last he had caught the rumble of that great metropolis and had seen her lights gleaming out into the night. Now he was gliding slowly, surely forward—to what? His city, to be sure. But after that? Mystery? Romance? Fresh adventure? Who could say?

In his three years of wandering Johnny had known mystery, romance, and adventure aplenty. He had glided up dark mangrove-bordered streams at the heart of tropical America. He had crept into dungeons in the haunted castle of Haiti. He had felt the call of the barren tundras and smoking mountains of British Columbia and Alaska. He had faced the savage, hungry wolf pack, and had matched power and prowess with the Kadiak bear.

Ah yes, mystery, romance, adventure, had been his.

And yet, as he stood there watching the skyline of the city he had known so well as a boy, as her massive buildings bulked larger and larger before him, as he saw the spire-like structures that had reared themselves skyward in his absence, as he thought of the dark, little known streets, of the hidden cellars, the underground tunnels, of the wealth, the misery, the power, the intrigue, the crime of this, his native city, he could not but feel that after all he had wandered far in vain, that

even here at his own doorstep was to be found romance, thrills, adventure such as he had not known in strange lands. Was he right? Only time could tell.

So he stood there dreaming until he felt the boat bump against the massive cement finger that is the city's Municipal Pier, and knew it was time to go ashore.

"Where'd you come from?"

A well set up young man, some years his senior, asked him this question the moment his feet were on the pier.

He wanted to tell the fellow it was none of his business. But he had learned caution. He looked the questioner over from head to toe.

"Some college fellow," was his mental comment as he took in the other's spick-and-span appearance. Dressed to the minute, that's what he was. "May be a young reporter."

"Just came down from the North," he said quietly. "Been hunting with bow and arrow." He whirled his leather cased bow about as evidence. "Caught this boat at Two Harbors."

"Yeah? Do you always travel that way?"

"Freight? Why, anyway, I've never waited for a fancy boat. Take the first one that will bring me where I want to go."

"Not a bad idea." The stranger's look changed. "Going over town? Bound that way myself. Mind company?"

"Not a bit."

"All the same, I wonder who he is and what business of his it is that I came from somewhere and am going somewhere else," Johnny thought, as they passed through a long, low shed, and turning to the right, headed down the pier toward the city.

For some time the two walked on in silence. Johnny was busy studying his rather sudden friend. His smart black derby, neatly creased trousers and shining shoes

contrasted oddly with the blue shirt and khaki trousers that Johnny wore.

But Johnny had formed a habit of looking through clothes to the man.

“This chap,” he told himself, “is no fop. Hate to meet him when he is full of fight. Don’t get those shoulders, that chest, that stride drinking pink tea, nor smoking through his nose. This chap’s a man. Hundred per cent. But why did he pick me up? Try to find out.”

“Used to live here in this city,” he volunteered. “Had a room with another boy in an old bat roost over beyond the Wells Street bridge.”

“I know the place,” the stranger replied. “Gone now. Tore it down. Putting up the biggest business building in the world there now.”

“They are?” Johnny was taken aback. This city of his was too fast for him.

“Sure are. Quite a building yours was, too. Don’t matter. Thing’s in the way. Down it comes. That’s the city for you.”

Again there was a period of silence.

“Get a car here.” The stranger stopped beside the curb. “One coming now. But where you going?”

“Hadn’t thought much about it. Lots of places in a city. One night, it don’t matter.”

“Come on down with me. Like to see that thing you say is a bow. Can’t do much with it, can you? Come along. Got an extra bunk. Not much. Good enough for one night, though. Just down here on Grand. Be there in ten minutes.”

The street car rumbled by. Once more Johnny marched beside his new-found friend. And march was exactly the word.

“Walks exactly as if he were going to war,” Johnny told himself. “What a queer chap! Dresses like a college dude. Trains like a prize-fighter. Walks like a soldier. Worth knowing, I’d say.”

When, however, they reached a dark opening between two six story buildings

and the stranger said, “This is the place. We go down. Watch your step. Shaky old stairs,” Johnny experienced something very much akin to fear.

He knew enough about strange cities at midnight to be on his guard. This part of the city certainly was not the best. They were near the city’s water front. The river was two blocks away. Between them and the water lay endless rows of warehouse slips, great dilapidated sheds, boats half sunken and rotting; all this and more.

As he hesitated a truck rumbled down the deserted street. It turned to the right to enter a gap of darkness that was a door to the brick structure nearest at hand.

Cheered by the thought that there was someone about, he decided to risk it.

Moving cautiously, he followed his companion down a low flight of stairs, then passed down an uneven board walk that ran close to the walls of what appeared to be a dilapidated one story structure.

Once more a stair confronted them. This time they mounted upward.

Once at the top the stranger threw open a door and touched a switch to throw on a flood of light. Johnny entered. The door was closed and locked after him.

The room his eyes took in at a glance was in strange contrast to its rude exterior. Softly tinted wall paper, shelves filled with books. Good pictures, tasty furniture. A man’s place; but neat, with the neatness that comes only at the touch of a woman’s hand.

“Nice place,” said Johnny.

“I like it,” the other smiled. “Even like where it is. Know what? This shack is older than the place where you used to live! Funny, ain’t it? Just a wooden shack. But here she stands. Life’s funny that way.”

Johnny stared at his companion. His words did not affect him. It was what he did at this moment that counted most. Having removed his coat, he unstrapped a belt to lay an automatic pistol on his dresser. He did all this as if it were quite the customary thing, part of his day’s business.

“And this,” Johnny told himself with an inaudible gasp, “is neither in the movies

nor in the wild and woolly West."

"Well," he told himself a moment later, "Whatever's on, I'm in for it. I'll not run."

Johnny was no weakling, nor was he a coward. When opportunity permitted he spent an hour or two each day punching the bag or swinging the gloves at some real companion. He was a lightweight boxer of no mean ability, as you who have read our other books will know. Just at present he was at his best. Boxing had been denied him, but rugged mountain trails, the camp axe, and a six foot bow had offered opportunities for training that no indoor sports could match.

Nor was Johnny wholly unarmed. He had never in his life carried a revolver, yet in the corner where he had placed it, close at hand, was such a sturdy yew bow as might have gladdened the eye of Robin Hood. And beside it were six ashen arrows with points of steel keen as a razor blade.

"But this," he told himself, "is Chicago. My native city. My home."

"You'll be feeling need of sleep," said his companion of the hour. "That's your bunk. Turn in when you wish. Don't mind a little music to lull you to the land of dreams?" He snapped on a radio which stood, until now quite unnoticed by Johnny, in the corner.

"Not a bit. Something soft and low," Johnny chuckled, "like the murmur of a mountain stream."

"No chance at this hour. Jazz is all you'll get."

Johnny disrobed to the tune of "Deep Night" which seemed appropriate to the hour.

When he had crept beneath the blankets, his strange host threw off the house lights, leaving only one dull golden eye, the radio's tiny dial lamp, gleaming.

Johnny was truly weary. The day had been long and full of the inevitable excitement of arriving. His last impression as his eyes closed and his senses drifted away was that of a great golden eye glaring at him from the dark.

Then, with a suddenness that set his blood racing, he was sitting up in bed wide-

awake.

Loud, jangling, setting his ears roaring, a gong had sounded.

“Bam! Bam! Bam!” It seemed in this very room.

“Wha—what was that?” he stammered as the sound died away.

As if in answer to his query, a voice came from the radio:

“Squads attention! Squads 21 and 24 go to Jackson and Ashland at once; a drug store. Robbers breaking in there.”

What did it mean? To Johnny the whole affair was but a confusion of sensations, a mild affair of the night.

Before his question could be answered the words came again. “Squads 21 and 24 go at once to Jackson and Ashland; a drug store. Robbers breaking in there.”

Then, in strange incongruity, there came again the wild, fantastic rhythm of a modern dance tune.

“That,” said the strange host in a quiet tone, “is a squad call. It’s a thing the police have taken up. They hope to check crime that way. Forty-six squad cars are waiting for the calls. Two cars are at Jackson and Ashland now. It’s a new stunt.”

“I should say it was,” said Johnny as he began to understand that the sound of the gong as well as spoken words had come from the radio. Once more he settled back against his pillow.

As he lay there now he kept his eyes on the profile of his host. Dimly lighted as the room was, Johnny seemed to read on the face of the man a look of alert expectancy which had nothing to do with jazz music.

“He is listening,” he told himself. “Waiting for another squad call.”

At once questions formed themselves in his mind. Why did this young man listen so intently? Where lay his sympathies? With the police, or with the law breaker? If with the law breaker, was he interested in some dark doings of this

night? Was he listening for the call that would tell of the discovery of his band?

“Strong body. Clear eyes. Keeps himself fit. Wonder if law breakers are like that. Be interesting study. Have to—”

In the midst of his speculations he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II
A RUNNING BATTLE

The morning light shone dimly through a narrow, darkly shadowed window when Johnny awoke. To the reader it may seem strange that he had slept so soundly. To the habitual wanderer a cot, a hammock, or only a hard floor is made for sleep. The places, a jungle, an Arctic tundra, a shack in a city's slums are all the same to him. He sleeps where he may and leaves trouble to the morrow. So it was with Johnny.

His first waking thought was of his newfound friend. As he sat up and stared about him, he realized that he was alone in the room. The cot close to his own was mussed up and empty. His strange friend was gone and his automatic had passed out with him.

"Queer." Johnny's hand went out for his trousers and his bill folder.

"All there," he murmured. "Mighty queer, I'd say. I—"

His reflections were broken off by the squeak of a door hinge. The outer door had been opened a crack. It was closed so quickly that he caught no glimpse of the intruder.

Springing out of bed, he hastily drew on his clothes, then went to the corner and bathed hands and face.

"Ah!" he breathed, "another day. And once more a city, my native city! My home! How good it is to live!"

He opened the door and stepped outside. What he saw amazed and puzzled him. The place in which he had spent the night was a plain board shack of but one

room, built at the back of a lot. Before it, separated from it by some ten feet of boardwalk, was a second low, wood structure. This building was three times as large as the other, but was, if anything, in a worse state of repair.

These shacks had evidently been built before the street was laid, for their eaves were about on a level with the street walk.

“Queer place to live,” he mused as his eyes, sweeping from left to right, found brick structures of considerable height on every side. “Queer they’d leave such a shack standing. Stranger still that anyone’d care to live here. Fellow’d think—”

At that instant the back door of the larger of the two wooden structures opened and a girl stepped forth.

A girl of sixteen, with well rounded face and figure, big brown eyes and a disarming smile, she formed an unforgettable picture, framed as she was by the gray of decaying wood, the door frame.

“Hello.”

“Hello back,” said Johnny.

“You want some coffee? Yes?”

“Yes,” Johnny grinned.

“But say!” he exclaimed as she prepared to vanish. “Where is he?” He nodded toward the shack he had just left.

“Drew? Him? He is gone a long time. Before the sun is up. He is gone. Gone to work. What kind of work? I don’t know. Fine man, Drew Lane. You know him?”

“A little.”

Johnny studied the girl as she turned to go for his coffee. She was dark. Her hair was black. Her speech was not broken, but her sentences were short and crisp.

“Italian. Born in America, perhaps,” he told himself. “Wonder why they live here? No neighbors; no lawn; no garden; no scenery; no nothing. Only bare walls.”

She brought him coffee, this girl, and thin sandwiches spread with odd but delicious preserves. She set these on a small table in the room where he had spent the night. He ate in silence.

“Queer old world,” he murmured to himself. “Wonder what I should do next.”

Opening his bill folder, he counted two hundred dollars in currency.

“In Chicago they wear store clothes, I guess you’d call them. Better buy some, I guess.” This to himself. The girl by this time was gone.

Leaving his duffel bag and archery equipment in the corner, he walked out of the place, boarded a street car and went rattling away downtown. Twenty minutes later he was engaged in the dual task of trying on a ready made suit and convincing the clerk that he had not always lived in the “sticks.”

Two hours later, when he boarded a car going north, he seemed quite a different person. Save for the deep tan which life in the open had bestowed upon him in lavish abundance, he could scarcely have been told from any city youth. Such is the transforming power of clothes.

“I’ll go back to that shack and see if this fellow, Drew Lane, has come back,” he told himself. “Don’t want to leave without at least thanking him. Queer sort of chap. Wonder why he carries a gun? Express messenger maybe.”

At that he gave himself over to a study of his fellow passengers. He was standing on the rear platform. Two of the half dozen men there attracted his attention. They talked of cards and gambling. One said he had lost a “leaf” last night. What was a “leaf?” Johnny couldn’t even hazard a guess.

The car lurched. Johnny put out a hand to steady himself. It was his left hand, for he was decidedly left handed. Strangely enough, one of the men cast a sharp look at his hand, then turned to his companion with a knowing wink. The other replied with a dainty pluck at his own sleeve, as if to say, “See! It’s new.”

This last action was not lost on Johnny. They took him for a hick, just because his clothes were new. He colored behind his ears.

“Like to give them a good swift poke,” he thought. Johnny could do it, too, as you probably know. But Johnny was wise. He knew how to wait his time. And

how very short the time is on some occasions!

At Grand Avenue he swung about to drop off the car. Suddenly there was a confused crowding about him. He felt something hard strike him in the left thigh. Something snagged at his pocket.

“Thieves!” he thought. His hand shot down for his purse. It was gone!

“So that was it! How dumb I—”

“There they go! I’ll get ’em.”

He leaped off the car and followed in hot pursuit.

But what was this? Now there were four. Two were much younger than the ones he had seen.

“What of it?” He did not slacken his pace. “Get help from somewhere. Can’t pick my pocket in broad daylight,” he panted.

Down an alley they raced. The two younger men had been behind at first. They were swifter of foot, were catching up with the two he had seen on the car.

Then of a sudden he caught his breath.

The foremost young man had half turned his head. In that instant Johnny recognized his host of the night before, Drew Lane.

“The dirty dog!” he muttered, slowing up. “No wonder he carries a gun! Ho well, let ’em have it. You can’t get yourself shot to save a few dollars, especially when you haven’t a chance to win.”

But what was this? Another wild turn of events. Having caught up with one of the men Johnny had seen on the car, Drew Lane dealt him a blow on the chin that sent him spinning round and round, and dropped him with a crash to the ground.

“What you running about?” Drew Lane fairly shouted. “Get yourself killed.”

Leaving him lying there, he went racing on after the other fugitive.

Still Johnny did not understand what it was all about. Only one thing was clear. One of two people had his purse. In that purse was his remaining one hundred dollars, and some odd bits of change. There was an even chance that the man lying on the stones of the alley pavement was the one. He might at any moment recover the use of his legs and vanish with the purse. Johnny needed the money.

Having reasoned this out, he sprinted up to the spot beside the man and stood there, feet well placed, hands in position, attentive, expectant. What he expected came to pass. Rolling over twice, the man put a trembling hand to his jaw and stole a furtive glance at Johnny; then he crept to a position on his hands and knees closely resembling that of a racer who prepares for a hundred yard dash.

“I wouldn’t move, if I were you,” said Johnny, coming a step closer. “You are all out of breath. Besides, you are in no condition to run. Don’t exercise enough, you don’t. Your clothes are all right, quite the thing, I suppose. But it’s what’s inside the clothes that really counts. How’d you look stripped? Huh!”

The man looked up at Johnny out of the corner of his eye. He took in the well rounded shoulders that bulged the lines of his new coat, noted his hard clenched fist and the clear keen glint in his eye.

“Think you’re a smart bunch, don’t ya’?” he growled. “College kids!”

“We’re not a bunch,” said Johnny. “And I’m not from college. I’m just now from the sticks. Some day you fellows will learn that all the boobs don’t come from the sticks. Mostly they don’t. They live right here in the city.

“As for those other fellows, I don’t know their game. I only know that one of you got my money, and I want it back.”

“You—you don’t know those other young fellows?” The man’s tone sounded his surprise.

Then a light of cunning appeared in his eyes.

“All you want is your money? Well, there it is, kid.” He placed Johnny’s purse on the cobblestones, then stole a fugitive glance to the corner round which the other three had gone. “You’ve got your money back. Sorry I took it, kid. Just a joke. Joke on a country kid. Ha! Ha! Guess I can go now.”

“Guess you can’t!” said Johnny, paying no attention to the pocketbook.

“Say, I’ll tell you!” the man exclaimed. “You’re a smart kid. How’d a leaf look to you? Huh? A whole leaf?”

“A—a leaf?”

“Sure. There it is.” The man drew a crumpled bill from his pocket and put it beside Johnny’s purse. It was a hundred dollar bill.

“So that’s a leaf?” Johnny grinned. “I’m not much used to city talk.”

“I’ll leave it right here,” the man whined. “Now can I go?”

“No, you can’t. Not for ten grand!” Johnny said. “And there’s some of your crime slang right back at you. Put up your filthy old leaf. They grow better ones on cottonwood trees out in the sticks. Here come the rest of them.”

It was true. His host of the night before was returning down the alley. So, too, was a slimmer young man with a freckled Irish face. Between them, looking very much exhausted and quite disgusted with life, was Johnny’s other street car companion.

“Well, well!” said Johnny’s host, Drew Lane, eyeing the purse on the cobblestones. “Exhibit A. Right before my eyes!

“That yours?” he asked, turning to Johnny.

“Sure it is.”

“And these birds took it?”

“Sure did.”

“What could be sweeter? Luck’s with us this morning, old pard!” He patted the freckled faced Irish youth on the back. “Got a case. All sewed up neat and tight.

“Get up!” he ordered. The man on the cobblestones stood up.

Drew Lane picked up the purse. At the same time he threw open his coat, revealing a star. It was the emblem of a city detective.

“You’ll get it back O.K.,” he said to Johnny. “Here’s ten till you do.” He pressed a bank note into Johnny’s hand. “Don’t mind coming along, do you? Need you for a witness. Been looking for these birds for six weeks. Now we got ’em; got ’em dead to rights!”

“Don’t mind a bit,” said Johnny.

“Come on, you!” Drew turned his prisoners about. “March! And make it snappy!”

“Name’s Lane,” he said to Johnny as they tramped along side by side, “Drew Lane. Glad I found you. You’ve helped us to a pretty good break. Fellow’s record depends on how many good clean arrests he makes.

“This is Tom Howe, my side-kicker.” He grinned as he put his hand on his freckled companion’s shoulder. “Detectives mostly work in pairs. We’ve been together a good long time. Lane and Howe. Lane and HOW! That’s the way they say it.” He chuckled. “Pretty good pals, even at that.”

A police car was called. It arrived. Lane followed one of the prisoners into a seat. Howe took the other. Johnny took his place by the door. They went rattling away toward the police station.

At the station the prisoners were allowed to call a lawyer on the phone, then were locked up.

“Case’ll come up in two or three days,” said Drew Lane. “Be in town that long, won’t you?”

“Hadn’t thought much about it,” said Johnny. “Sort of interested in life, that’s all. Mostly stay around where life’s current moves swiftest.

“This,” he added, “looks like a good start.”

“No place in the world half as interesting as this old city,” said Drew Lane, gripping Johnny’s hand. “Stay with us, and we’ll make you a police captain. Won’t we, Howe?”

“And HOW!” exclaimed his partner. “Looks like the real thing to me. Bet he could knock your right ear off with that mit of his right now.”

“Ever box?” Drew turned to Johnny.

“A little.”

“We’ll put on the gloves sometime.

“Say!” he exclaimed. “There’s no reason why you shouldn’t shack it with me for a few days. Why don’t you?”

“I will,” said Johnny.

“Wants to keep track of me,” was his mental comment. “Needs me for a witness.”

“See you there at 6:00 P.M. Here’s your purse. We’ll need it as evidence later. You can swear to its contents. Don’t let anyone get it while Howe and I are not around. May not get it back.”

“Right!” said Johnny. “See you at six.”

CHAPTER III
TALKING IN THE DARK

Johnny spent the remainder of the day sight-seeing. Old friends awaited him, the Museum, the Art Institute, the State Street stores. The work along the Outer Drive amazed and delighted him.

“Great city!” he mused. “Do anything. No spare land for parks. Make some. Why not? Goes and gets things, this old city does. No islands. Dig some from the bottom of the lake. Great, I’d say!”

Then his brow clouded. He recalled stories he had heard repeated. Even in the far-away Canadian woods men had spoken of rampant crime, gang killings, wholesale gambling and robbery in his beloved city.

But at once his face brightened. “A few hundred fellows like this Drew Lane would fix that all up. Young, ambitious, fearless college fellow, I’ll bet. Looks like a dude, but got real stuff in him. Why not a thousand like him, fresh from college, full of ideals, ready for fight? Like the men that went to France. Why not? A thousand strong! The Legion of Youth. Man! Oh man!”

So, sight-seeing, reminiscing, dreaming, he wandered through the day to find himself, toward eventide, wandering back to the low shack that lay at the foot of many great piles of brick, and wondered more and more that such a fellow as Drew Lane should choose so humble, not to say disreputable appearing, habitation.

“Lot of things go by opposites,” he told himself. “Besides, there’s that girl. Italian. But a beauty for all that.”

He was only partly right. The girl had played a part in it all, but not exactly in

the way he thought.

“Just what you been doing with this thing?” Drew asked, taking up Johnny’s bow, as he entered.

“Hunting.”

“What did you kill?” Drew’s brow wrinkled. “You couldn’t kill much.”

“Couldn’t I though!”

Johnny drew forth an arrow and handed it to him. “Exhibit A. I will ask you to examine the point.” Drew felt of the razor-like edge and whistled.

Taking up a square of pine board, Johnny set it against the far end of the room. Then, nocking the arrow, he sent it fleeting. The arrow struck squarely in the middle, passed quite through the board and buried itself in the wainscoting.

“Oh—ah!” said Johnny. “’Fraid I’ve marred your paint.”

“Silent murder!” murmured Drew. “What a spiteful little thing of power!

“Wouldn’t be bad; not half bad,” he mused a moment later.

“Bad for what?” Johnny asked.

“For an officer. Catch a bunch of yeggs pulling a job. Pick ’em off one by one with that bow, like the Indians used to do wild turkeys. And gather them up after. Never know what killed them. I say! We’ll have to add you to our staff!”

They laughed together, then went out to the little restaurant around the corner for their evening meal.

Darkness had fallen when they returned to the shack, yet Drew Lane did not throw on the lights at once. Instead, he guided Johnny to a comfortable chair.

“Let’s just sit and talk,” he said. “I like it best this way, in the dark. You tell me of the wild woods where the North begins, and I’ll tell you of a city where trouble is always just around the corner!”

“Tell me first,” said Johnny quickly, “how you came to be at the pier last night

and why you picked me up."

"Nothing easier," Drew laughed. "An officer of the law is never fully off duty. Tell you about some of my 'off duty' experiences some time. You'll be surprised.

"You see, last night I strolled down to the pier, just for an airing. Then your ship came in. Thought I'd have a look at anyone who came off. An extraordinarily large number of persons enter our country in this way from Canada and Mexico. Mighty undesirable persons, many of them. So I was on the lookout.

"When I saw you I guessed you were all right. But in our business, guesses don't go. We must have facts. I got them. You were O.K."

Drew lapsed into silence.

"But that doesn't explain why I am here now," Johnny suggested.

"Oh! That." Drew sat up. "There's a natural comradeship between certain people. If you are one of the parties you know it at once. I felt sort of related to you. Liked the way your muscles bulged beneath your clothes. You had an air of open spaces about you. I wanted to know you. So here you are. Regret it?"

"Not a bit."

"Nor I."

So they talked. And as Drew Lane's voice came to him in a slow and steady murmur Johnny felt a kindred spirit laying hold of his very soul. More than once, too, he felt an all but irresistible impulse to leap to his feet and dash from the room, for a steady, indistinct but unmistakable still small voice was saying to him: "This man goes into many dangers. If you travel with him he will lead you into great peril. Once you have followed you cannot turn back. Such is the spirit of youth, faith, romance, and love for the human race. Test the steel of your soul well. If you are in the least afraid it were better that you turn back now." Johnny listened and humbly vowed to follow this or any other leader whose purpose was right and whose heart was true.

An hour passed. At last Drew Lane rose, stepped across the room and pressed a button to set a square of light dimly glowing.

“Like a little music?” he asked.

Johnny did not reply, but waiting, heard as in a dream the faint, plaintive notes of a violin creeping into the room.

It rose louder and louder. Then of a sudden, quite without warning, it was broken in upon by a terrible, jarring WHONG!

Clang! Clang! Clang! sounded a brazen gong. Then a voice:

“Squads attention! Squads 8 and 11 go to 22nd and Wabash. A man robbed there.”

The message was repeated. Then again, quite as if nothing had happened, the violin resumed its lovely melody.

“That’s the way it goes at that station,” said Drew. “Funny part is that the gong sings a sweeter song to us than the violin. It’s a great service, son; a great service.

“Of course in time we’ll have our own station; broadcast the calls on a low wave-length. Only people who get the squad call will be the boys in the squad cars. Know how it works, don’t you?”

“Not very well.”

“Simple enough. Someone reports a robbery, a burglary or what have you, to the police by phone. The report is relayed to headquarters. Headquarters gives it the once over. Is it important? Out it goes on a private wire to the radio station. ‘Hold everything!’ the radio squad report operator signals to the other studio people. Then Whang! Whang! Whang! the report goes out.

“More than forty squads of police, with loud-speakers in the tops of their cars, are listening, waiting. Number 9 is called. The squad car whizzes away. Two minutes later they are there. Burglars have laid down their tools to find themselves staring into the muzzle of an officer’s gun. A bank robber has pulled off a slick daylight affair, only to walk right into the waiting arms of a detective squad summoned by the radio. I tell you it’s great.

“But after all,” his voice dropped, “we’re not getting them very fast, not as fast

as we should. It’s the professional criminals we don’t get. We—”

“There! There she goes again!”

Once more the squad call sounded. This time it was the robbery of a store by two men who fled in a green sedan.

“You might haunt the courts for two weeks at a time and never see a professional criminal on trial,” Drew went on. “And yet eighty-five per cent of crimes are committed by professional criminals, men and women with records, who make a business of crime, who haven’t any other occupation, who don’t want any other, who wouldn’t know what you meant if you asked them to settle down and live an honest life. In this city one person out of every three hundred is a professional criminal. Think of it! Three hundred people go to work every day, work hard, save their money, raise their children in a decent manner, look ahead to old age; and here is one man who robs them, beats ’em up, burglarizes their homes, disgraces their children. And the irony of it all is, the whole three hundred can’t catch that one man and lock him up. Be funny if it wasn’t so tragic.”

“I suppose,” said Johnny, “it’s because the city is so big.”

“Well, perhaps.” Once more the young officer’s voice dropped. “It’s discouraging. And yet it’s fascinating, this detective business. There are boys, lots of them, who think crime is fascinating. They read those rotten stories about Jimmy Dale and the rest, and believe them. I tell you, Johnny!” He struck the table. “There never was the least touch of romance in any crime. It’s mean and brutal, cowardly and small. But hunting down these human monsters. Ah! There’s the game! You tell of your white bears, your wolves, your grizzlies. Fascinating, no doubt. But compared with this, this business of hunting men, there’s nothing to it!” He took a long breath and threw his arms wide.

“I believe you,” said Johnny with conviction. “I wish I might have a part in it all.”

“Don’t worry. You have made a good start. You are to be a witness.”

“That—why, that’s nothing.”

“Nothing, is it? You wouldn’t say so if you had seen witnesses kidnapped, bribed, beaten, driven out of town, murdered by the gangs that all but rule us. A

good witness. That's all we need, many's the time. And lacking him, the case is lost.

"You won't fail us?" he said in a changed voice.

"I won't fail you. When the trial comes up I'll be there."

"Of course." Drew's tone was reassuring, "I don't want you to become unduly frightened. Pickpockets don't band together much. We seldom have trouble once they are caught. It's the robbers, the hi-jackers, the bootleggers. They are the ones."

A few moments later they turned in for the night. Johnny, however, did not sleep at once. He had been interested in all this newfound friend had told him. He had felt himself strangely stirred.

"If only I could have some real part," he whispered to himself.

A few moments later he murmured half aloud, "That's it! I believe I could do that. Anyway it's worth the try. Do it first thing in the morning."

With that he fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV
JOHNNY CALLS THE SQUADS

It was night: ten o'clock. Johnny stood atop a ten story building, looking off and down. A thousand white lights shone along an endless way. Like great black bugs with gleaming eyes, countless cars glided down that glistening boulevard. To the right, shimmering waters reflected the thousand lamps. And at the edge of this water, on a yellow ribbon of sand, a host of ant-like appearing creatures sported. These were human beings, men, women and children, city cave-dwellers out for a breath of fresh air and a dip in the lake before retiring for the night.

"How happy they are," he murmured to himself as their shouts of joy came floating up to him. "And how happy they should be. The great Creator meant that they should be happy. And for the most part they have earned happiness, a brief hour of pure joy after a day of toil.

"'One in three hundred,'" he recalled Drew's words, "'One in three hundred is a crook.'

"Ah well," he sighed, "catching the crooks, and so making those others safer, happier, freer to enjoy their well earned rewards: that's our job. And it's a big one."

These last were no idle words. Only a day had passed since his long talk with the young detective, Drew Lane; yet even in that brief span of time he had found for himself a part in the great work, in the task of detecting crime. A very, very small part it was, but a real one all the same.

He smiled as he thought of it now. In half an hour he would enter the door at his back, would pass through a rather large room in which stood all manner of band

and orchestra instruments, and then would enter a veritable cubby-hole of a place. In this closet-like room was a chair, a telephone, a large police gong set on a steel post, and a microphone. When these were rightly placed there was room for Johnny to squeeze himself into the chair, that was about all. Here, for two hours around noon, and again two hours at midnight, it was to be his task to sit waiting for the rattle of the telephone. Every jangle of that telephone was to set him into brief but vigorous action. In a word, he formed the last link between the unfortunate citizen who was being robbed, burglarized or attacked, and the police squad that stood ready to come to his aid.

Johnny had landed this part-time job, which he felt sure would prove more than interesting, just as he had secured all else in life, by going after it. He had spoken to Drew. Drew had spoken to a police sergeant. The sergeant had said a word to a captain. The captain, being just the right person, had spoken to the manager of the station. And there you are.

“And here I am,” Johnny said to himself. “And, for the glory of the good old city I have always loved, I am going to pound that police gong as no one ever has, and to such good purpose that someone higher up will say:

“‘Good boy! You deserve something bigger and better.’” He threw back his head and laughed. “Then,” he sighed, “maybe they’ll make me an honest-to-goodness detective.”

Meanwhile there was the telephone, the “mike,” and the gong. He had taken his training at noon. Now, from 10:30 P.M. to 12:30 A.M. he was to go it alone.

As he reached the door to his cubby-hole, a tall, red-headed youth rose and stretched his cramped legs.

“Quiet night,” he murmured. “Ought to have it easy.”

“Thanks. Hope so, for the first night at least.” Johnny eased himself into the chair and the red-headed youth departed.

A quiet night? Well, perhaps. Yet for Johnny, all unaccustomed as he was to his new duties, it proved an exciting one.

The very place itself, a great broadcasting station at night, was filled with interest and romance.

The large studio before him was not in use. More than a score of instruments, horns, bass viols, cellos, snare drums, basso drums and all the rest stood there, casting grotesque shadows in the half light.

Beyond this, through glass partitions, he could see a young man. Sitting before an elaborate array of lights, plugs and switches, this man put out a hand here, another there, regulating the controls, directing the current that carried messages of joy, hope, peace and good will to the vast invisible audiences out in the night. He was the station operator.

In the studio beyond, only half visible to Johnny, the men of a jazz orchestra performed on saxophones, trap drums and who can say what other instruments?

“And I am now part of it all!” Johnny thought to himself. “I—”

But now came a buzzing sound, a red light flashed.

“A call!” he exclaimed in an excited whisper. “My first night call.”

Placing his finger on a button, he pressed it twice. This told the operator in the glass cage to stand by, ready to give him the air.

“All right,” he spoke into the phone, then gripped a pencil.

His pencil flashed across the paper.

“Got you,” he said quietly. “Repeat.”

His eyes followed the lines he had written.

“O.K.”

Now, striking the gong, he spoke into the microphone: “Squads attention!” His own voice sounded strange to him. “Squads attention! Robbers breaking in at 6330 Drexel Boulevard. Squad 36 assigned.”

Repeating: “Robbers breaking in at 6330 Drexel Boulevard. Squad 36 assigned.”

Once more, save for the ticking of his watch and the faint throb of the jazz orchestra penetrating the padded walls, his cubby-hole was silent.

“Queer business,” he murmured.

He tried to picture what was happening ten miles away at 6330 Drexel Boulevard. Burglars had been breaking in. Who had reported them? He pictured neighbors looking through a darkened window, seeing the burglars prying up a window. He saw the neighbors tip-toeing to a telephone, notifying the police.

“And then the Chiefs call to me; my call to the squad. The burglars are inside by now. And here comes the squad. Clang! Clang! Clang!

“They are not the first arrivals. Nearby residents have heard the squad call. In dressing gowns and slippers they have rushed outside.

“But the burglars?” he mused, settling back in his chair. “Did they get them? Who knows? If they were professionals, wise to all the tricks of escape, probably not. If they were amateurs, first-timers, boys who saw romance in crime, probably they were caught. And Drew says one professional is worth ten first-timers in jail. The first-timer may never repeat. The professional will never do anything but repeat. It’s his business, his *profession*. And what a profession! Bah! I’d rather—”

Again the buzz; the light. This time it was a shooting at Halsted and 22nd Streets.

“Drunken brawl.” The affair did not interest him. He put it through with neatness and dispatch; then he resumed his meditations.

CHAPTER V
MYSTERIOUS VIOLENCE

It was twenty minutes past twelve o'clock, ten minutes before closing time. At this precise moment a thing happened that was destined to change Johnny's whole career. It was to make him a hunter of men.

At this hour the radio studio in an out-of-the-way corner on the tenth floor of a great hotel was dimly lighted and spooky. The merry-makers in the studio beyond had long since departed. That room was completely dark. So, too, was the studio nearest Johnny. Even the dim shadows of musical instruments had faded into nothing. Two lights burned dimly, one over Johnny's head, the other directly before the operator who, half asleep, sat waiting for the moment when he might cut a distant ballroom orchestra off the air and follow his fellow workers home.

"No more calls tonight," Johnny was thinking to himself. "Quiet night, right enough; one holdup, two robberies and a shooting. Ho well, it's been interesting all the same. Fellow wouldn't—"

No, there it was again, one more call. Buzz, buzz, flash, flash.

He pressed his ear to the head phone, his lips to the mouthpiece. And then, like lightning from a clear sky, things began to happen. He was struck a murderous blow on the head. He was pitched violently forward. He had a vague sensation of something resembling a microphone glancing past him, then crashing violently against the wall. Other objects appeared to follow. A sudden shock of sound burst on his ears, filling the air.

"Shot," he thought to himself. "I'm shot!"

He experienced no pain. For all that, his mental light blinked out and he knew no more for some time.

In the meantime the operator in the glass cage was seeing and hearing such things as he had never so much as dreamed of.

His first intimation that something was wrong was when Johnny's microphone sent him a curious sound of warning. This was caused by someone grasping it in both hands. Compared to the sound that followed at once, this was as nothing. Had two freight engines entered the room from opposite directions and suddenly crashed they could not have produced a more deafening hubbub than that which came from the loud-speaker as the microphone, hurled by mysterious hands, crashed against the studio wall.

As the operator's startled senses directed his attention to Johnny's cubby-hole, and his eyes took in at a glance the full horror of the situation, he stood paralyzed with fear.

His chair overturned, Johnny Thompson lay crumpled on the floor. A shadowy figure reached up and crushed his light as a child might a bird's egg. The same figure seized the police gong and hurled it through a window. Broken glass flew in every direction. A telephone followed the gong. Then, as mysteriously as he had come, the sinister figure stepped once more into the dark, leaving wreck, ruin and perhaps death in his wake.

"Gone!" No, not quite. One more act of violence. Came a flash, a roar, and a bullet struck with a thud against the padded partition.

The operator promptly dropped flat upon the floor. Nor did he, being a prudent youth, rise until heavy feet came stamping up the stairs and three uniformed policemen, led by a youth in shirt sleeves, burst into the room.

The young man in shirt sleeves was Drew Lane.

From the moment Johnny took his first squad call, Drew had been listening in at his room. He had come to have a very great interest in Johnny. "Anyone of his courage, spirit and ambition, coupled with a desire to be of real service to others, will go far," he had told himself. "I'll just listen in tonight. He may make a slip or two. If he does I can set him right."

Johnny made no slips. In fact Drew was obliged to give him credit for a steady hand and a clear head. Drew had been thinking of throwing off the radio and turning in, when the crash of the wrecked microphone reached him through his loud-speaker in the shack.

With a mind well trained for sudden disaster, he knew on the instant that something unusual and terrible was happening in the studio. What it was he could not guess.

Grasping his automatic, without waiting to draw on his coat, he had dashed out of the shack, down one rickety stairway, up another, and raced. By good chance he had run squarely into a police squad car.

“Step on the gas, Mike!” he shouted, springing into the car. “East on Grand, then north on Lake Shore. Something gone wrong at the broadcasting studio!”

The motor purred, the gong sounded as they were away at sixty miles an hour.

“Heard it,” Mike shouted above the din. “Guess your young friend dropped his ‘mike’!”

“Worse than that,” Drew came back. “I’ve heard that happen. This was different. Worse! Ten times worse!”

That he was telling the truth you already know.

And that was how it happened that Drew and the squad appeared on the scene, exactly six minutes after the destroyer had completed his work of demolition.

“Hey! What’s this? Who’s here?” bellowed Mike O’Hearne, the head of the squad, drawing his revolver and leading the way.

“He—he’s gone!” The terrified operator rose shakily.

“Who’s gone?”

“I—I don’t know. Truly I don’t. But look! Look what he’s done!”

“Where’s the light switch?” Mike advanced into the studio, tripped over a trap drum, dropped his gun; then said some words appropriate to the occasion.

“Here. Just a moment.”

The operator, who was rapidly regaining the power of his senses, touched a switch and the room was flooded with light; so, too, was Johnny’s cubby-hole.

“They—he shot at me,” stammered the operator, once more thrown into confusion at sight of Johnny’s still form crumpled up beneath the debris.

“Who shot?” demanded Mike.

“I—I don’t know.”

“You don’t know much. Looks like they’d done for this boy here. And why, I wonder? That’s always the question. Why? Here, give us a hand. Let’s get him out of here. Somebody call the house doctor.”

Relieved to find there was something definite he might do, the young operator got the doctor on the phone at once.

“He’ll be up right away,” he reported.

“Hm, let’s see.” Mike, the experienced police officer, who had examined a thousand cases, living and dead, turned Johnny over carefully.

“Lot of blood,” he muttered. “Hit on the head. May come round. Doctor can tell. Bring some water.”

The operator brought a pitcher of water. Mike bathed Johnny’s forehead, then began washing away the blood. Johnny had just begun to stir a bit when the doctor arrived.

A full five minutes the doctor remained bent over the prostrate form.

“I hope he’s going to come out of it,” Drew said to a husky, grizzle-haired Irish sergeant named Herman McCarthey. “He’s a game kid, and he’s got right ideas. He’ll go far. This was his first night.”

At the end of that tense five minutes Johnny sat up unsteadily.

“He’s reviving,” said the doctor. “Let’s have some air.”

Windows were thrown up. Johnny opened his eyes and looked about him.

“Wha—where am I?” he half whispered.

“Right where you were,” Drew chuckled. He was pleased to see the boy coming round so soon.

“I—I—” Johnny’s eyes held an uncertain light. Then they cleared. “Something hit me. I—I went—went down. The microphone, the telephone, every—everything went—”

“That’s all right,” said Herman McCarthey quietly. “Just you take it easy. You’ll be fine and dandy pretty soon. Then we’ll take you home in the car and you can tell us all about it. He hit you, that’s clear. Hit with his gun. Dent of the hammer’s in your scalp. An’ it’s goin’ to stay some time.

“He hit you. We don’t know just why. But we’ll find out, won’t we, Drew?”

“You know we will!”

“And we’ll find the man, won’t we, Drew?”

“We sure will!”

“And when we do!”

“And when we do!” Drew Lane echoed with appropriate emphasis, and a light grip on his automatic.

CHAPTER VI
WHO? AND WHY?

Half an hour later Johnny and Drew were back at the shack. The squad car with its load of burly policemen was gone.

For a long time nothing was said. Johnny's head hurt. It also ached in a most extraordinary manner. He felt sick at the stomach. Life for him had gone suddenly very strange.

"Drew," he said at last, "that man, whoever he was, didn't give me a chance, not a single fighting chance."

"Of course not. They never do, those gangsters."

"Drew," said Johnny, "I was hunting in the Arctic once, stalking a polar bear all alone; following his track. He turned the tables and started stalking me. But, Drew, before he struck at me with that great paw of his, he hissed like a goose."

"Gave you a warning," Drew said quietly. "Rattlesnake'd do that, too; but not a gangster.

"Johnny," he said, suddenly wheeling about, "you've been believing in that old saw, 'honor among thieves.' Forget it. There isn't any. Not a bit.

"I've known them to run over a little family car, smash it in bits with a powerful truck they were using to carry illicit goods. Did they stop? Not much. Fired shots in the air, and left little children to perish in the wreckage. Honor! Not a bit. I tell you it's war! Pitiless war waged by monsters. And this land will not be free until they are all safely lodged in jail."

Again for a time there was silence.

“Drew,” Johnny spoke again, “I used to say that if a man picked my pockets or held me up and got my money, I’d say, ‘You are a smart guy,’ and let it go at that, but that if he hit me on the head I’d spend the rest of my life hunting him. And when I found him I’d kill him. That man hit me, Drew, hit almost hard enough to kill, and without warning!”

“He did,” said Drew, “and we are going to get him, you and I. But after we get him, I guess we’d better let the courts deal with him. Justice, Johnny, is an arrow, a keen pointed arrow that goes straight and fair. Sometimes I think it is an arrow of fire that burns as it strikes.”

Johnny thought that a strange expression. He was to learn more of it as the days passed.

“First thing we’ve got to do to-morrow,” said Drew, “is to work out the probabilities?”

“The probabilities?”

“Sure. You’ve read detective stories?”

“Sometimes.”

“Know how most of ’em go? A murder. One of six men may have done the killing. This one might have, or that one. This one probably did. And this one, well, you hardly consider him at all. But in the end, it’s always the one you did not suspect. It’s the bunk. Real life is not like that at all. You have to figure out what is probably true, and try to prove that it is true. It usually is.

“Take this case of yours. You are to be a kingpin witness in my case against two pickpockets. Your testimony will convict them. No doubt about it. Do they belong to a well organized gang? Did a member of the gang try to do away with you so you could not testify? It’s been done many times.

“Another possibility. You were about to put through a squad call. What was that call? Was it important? Was a big burglary in progress? Was this man sent up to silence the radio and prevent the squad call? If that was the angle, was more than one major crime committed in that half hour? If so, which one was connected

with the attack upon you?

“Once again; many a gang’s activities have been interrupted, their purpose thwarted, by radio squad calls. The leader of one of these gangs may have decided to take revenge; hence the raid to-night.

“So you see,” he said, rising, “there are several possibilities to work out. The probability must be reached. Herman McCarthey will have all the dope in the morning. He will help us work it out. He is a seasoned trooper and has a wise old head on his shoulders. Meantime, you must try to recall every incident connected with the affair.”

“I remember one thing,” said Johnny. “It came to me at this very instant. I didn’t see the man’s face, but I saw his hand, a large dark hand, and it was deeply scarred. It had a hole in the middle of the palm.”

“Good!” exclaimed Drew. “Couldn’t be better. Take us a long way, that will.

“And now we must catch three winks. To-morrow is a big day. To-morrow you are to be our star witness.”

CHAPTER VII
IN COURT

Johnny and Drew were up at eight o'clock next morning. At 8:30 the black-haired, dark-eyed girl with smiling lips and dimpled cheeks brought in steaming coffee and some unusual but delicious pastry.

Drew called her Rosy, and patted her on the arm. Rosy's dimples deepened.

Who was Rosy? Why did she live in that other shack among the walls of brick and mortar? Why did Drew room in this odd place? Johnny wanted to ask all these questions. Realizing that their answers did not greatly concern him, he asked none of them.

At ten o'clock he and Drew were seated on the front bench of the "Local 46," the particular court room in which their pickpocket case was to be tried.

The whole scene was packed with interest for Johnny. The judge in his box-like coop, the young prosecutor and the deputies standing below, the motley throng that filled the seats at his back, each waiting his turn to appear as complainant, defendant or witness, made a picture he would not soon forget.

The judge was a dark-skinned man of foreign appearance. His hair was long. His eyes were large, and at times piercing. He sat slumped down in his chair. When sudden problems arose, he had a trick of bracing his hands on the arms of his chair and peering at a prisoner as a hawk might peer at a squirrel or a mouse.

"He's Italian," said Drew. "Smart man. Knows his business. Square, too. A good judge. Lots of fun, too, if he wants to be."

At this moment two names were called. Two large men, respectably dressed,

walked up the aisle to take their places at the high, narrow table just before the judge's stand. Two officers stepped up beside them.

"Confidence men," whispered Drew. "We all know them. Haven't got a thing on them, though, I'll bet. Just picked them up on suspicion. They get thousands every year from people who are looking for a chance to make easy money. They —

"See! I told you. The judge is letting them go. It's not what you know that counts in court. It's what you can prove."

Once more the stage was set. An attractive young woman, carefully and tastefully dressed, a young man at her side, a middle-aged man of stocky build carrying a package, a young lady of the shop-girl type at his side; these four stood before the judge.

"Young lady," said the judge, leaning forward and adjusting his glasses as he spoke to the well dressed one, "you are charged with the theft of one dress, taken from the store of Dobbs, Hobson & Dobbs; value $14.00. Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Guilty," the girl murmured with downcast eyes.

"It is my duty," the judge leaned forward in his chair, "to warn you that if you plead guilty I may fine you from one dollar to one hundred dollars, or send you to jail for from one day to one year. Knowing this, do you still wish to plead guilty?" His tone was impressive.

The girl hesitated. A short, gray-haired man stepped up and whispered in her ear.

"Her lawyer," explained Drew.

"Guilty." The girl nodded her head.

The evidence was presented. Then the husband of the young lady spoke: "If your Honor please. This is the first time this sort of thing has happened. I will give my pledge that it will not happen again."

The judge raised himself on his elbows, stared through his glasses and exclaimed: "I'll see that it doesn't happen again for sixty days. The idea! A woman of your intelligence going into a store and carrying off a dress that

doesn’t belong to you and you don’t need! Why did you do it?”

“I—I don’t know, Judge. I—I just saw it there. I—I liked it. So, the first thing I knew I was taking it away.”

“Exactly. Sixty days! Sit over there.”

The judge pointed to a row of chairs at the right of his box; the defendant burst into tears, dabbled her eyes with an embroidered handkerchief; her young husband led her to a seat and, for the time, the affair was ended.

“The judge will allow her to weep for a couple of hours,” Drew explained in a whisper. “Meantime, his secretary in the back room will get some people on the wire and look up her record. If her record is good, he’ll set his sentence aside, put her on a year’s probation. Probably never hear from her again. She’s had about enough.

“But why do they do it?” he exclaimed in a whisper. “If you were a young woman would you go through all this and carry the memory of the humiliation and disgrace through a long life for a fourteen dollar dress? You would not; nor for forty dresses!

“But they do it, over and over and over. Hats, belts, coats, dresses, artificial flowers. What don’t they steal? And they come to court, sometimes three or four a day, to stand before the judge and weep. You’d think they’d learn, that everyone in the world would learn after awhile, everyone, except the professional shoplifter. But they don’t.”

And now a score of young black men stood before the bench. They were accused of gambling with dice. The dice, a hook for raking them in, and a few coins were offered in evidence.

“Who was running this game?” the judge thundered at them. Nobody knew; not even the arresting officer.

“Well,” said the judge, “you all working?”

“Ya-as, sir.”

“Got good jobs?”

“Ya-as, sir.”

“Louder.” The judge cupped a hand to his ear. “You all got real good jobs?”

“Ya-as, SIR!”

“All right, you can go, but we have a police benefit fund here. If you’ve all got real good jobs you might contribute a dollar each to that fund.”

The black men went into a huddle. They produced the required sum and marched out.

“One of the judge’s little jokes,” Drew smiled. “I don’t see how he could live through all this low down squalor day after day if it wasn’t for his jokes.”

“I want to tell you, Johnny, I wish I could tell every boy in the land a thousand times, crime is not attractive! It is mean and low down, sordid and dirty. That’s the best you can make out of it.”

“One more case,” he whispered as he rose, “then comes ours. You wait here. I’ll go get the men.”

CHAPTER VIII
PRISONERS AT THE BAR

Johnny will never know what that next brief trial was about. It had struck him all of a sudden that he was to play a part in the trial that was to follow. This thought set his blood racing. He was glad not to be the defendant. But as a witness his responsibility was great. For the first time in his life he was to utter words that would without doubt send a fellow human being to jail. The thought was not pleasing.

“And yet it’s my plain duty,” he told himself. He found much consolation in that.

A fresh turn of his mind for the moment crowded out all other thought. Who had beaten him up the night before? Was it some pal of these pickpockets? Would he be able to tell from the expressions on their faces when they saw him? His head was heavily bandaged. “They could not help but notice that. Perhaps they believe that their confederate made a thorough job of it,” he told himself. “They may not expect to see me here at all.”

“Ah! Now’s the time!” he whispered to himself. His name was being called. So, too, were the names of the two pickpockets and Drew Lane.

“Here they come.” He caught his breath and half rose from his chair. As he did so, one of the two prisoners coming down the aisle caught sight of him. It was the larger of the pickpockets. For ten seconds he stood there motionless, one foot poised in midair. Then his face spread in a broad grin, and he marched on up to the bar.

That grin puzzled the boy. “Wouldn’t grin if he hadn’t expected to see me,” he reasoned. “But why the grin at all?”

There was no further time for such thoughts. He was at the bar, between a police officer and a pickpocket. His right hand was in the air. He was being sworn to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God."

It struck him all of a sudden that some witnesses these days truly needed Divine help if they told the whole truth. He felt his bandaged head, and resolved to honor his oath, come what might; not only now, but always.

The judge went through with the usual formalities. The prisoners were charged with the theft of a purse. Guilty, or not guilty? A hook-nosed lawyer had advised a plea of guilty.

"And do you wish to be tried by this court?"

"Yes, your Honor."

The prisoners were warned of the possible outcome. Did they still wish to plead guilty? They did.

The trial began. Johnny was asked to tell his story. This he did in a straightforward manner, in spite of numerous interruptions from the lawyer for the defence. He neglected no detail of the little drama that was played by Drew and Howe, two pickpockets and himself on that fateful June day.

"Is that true?" The judge leaned forward to glower at the older of the two prisoners.

"Yes, your Honor. But, your Honor, it's the police. They—"

"Just a moment," the judge cut him short. "I asked you a question. You say this young man has told the truth? Very well.

"Now you tell us what you know." He nodded to Drew Lane.

Drew said that he and his fellow detective, Howe, had been riding that car line for three days, because there had been several losses by surface line riders along that line.

"When we saw these two birds," he went on, "we knew we had our men. We—"

“You knew them?” the judge interrupted.

“It’s our business to know them. We know more than three hundred pickpockets by sight.”

“You’re too darn smart!” snarled the slighter of the two prisoners.

The bailiff rapped for order.

“Have these men a record?” the judge asked.

Drew Lane passed up two sheets of paper.

The judge studied these with a gathering scowl. Then his face lighted as he looked at Drew Lane.

“Bad ones. That right?”

Drew nodded.

“Go on. Tell us what happened.”

“We saw them take this boy’s pocketbook. They saw us and made a break for it. We nabbed them. That’s all. What this boy told you is true, as far as we saw it.”

“It must be,” agreed the judge. “They don’t even deny it.

“What have you got to say?” He turned a poker face toward the prisoners.

The larger one answered, “It’s the police, Judge, and the detectives. I was goin’ to tell you, Judge. They won’t leave us alone. We been out of the jug six months. Been goin’ straight.”

“Call picking pockets going straight?” the judge flashed.

“We wouldn’t have done it, Judge, only them college boy detectives made us.”

He glared at Drew Lane.

“Your Honor,” a flicker of a smile hovered about Drew Lane’s mouth, “I object to being called a college kid. I’ve been out of college four years, and been in the

service all that time."

"I wouldn't," the judge leaned forward and pretended to whisper, "I wouldn't object at all if I were you. It's your greatest asset. They don't know you're a detective, these fellows, and when they do they don't take you seriously. That right?" He winked at the older pickpocket.

"That was it, Judge. You see, Judge," the man went on, encouraged by the judge's disarming smile, "I knew this boy was a detective. I—I'd see him before, and I says to Jimmy, me pal here, I says, just whispers, y' understand, 'Jimmy,' I says, 'it would be great sport to grab that country boy's wad right before this college boy detective's eyes.' We done it for sport, Judge, honest we did." The prisoner essayed a laugh, which turned out number one common, and scarcely that.

"I see," said the judge, leaning back in his chair and appearing to think deeply. "You stole a hundred dollars from an innocent boy as a joke on a boy detective? You were getting off the car, weren't you?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"And the boy was getting off to go another way. How did you expect to get his money back to him? How did you mean to explain his loss to him?"

"Your Honor, we—"

"Ah no! You didn't do it as a joke!" The judge leaned far forward. There was a glint of fire in his eye. The smile had faded from his face as a field of sunshine is blotted out by dark October clouds. "You meant to steal that boy's pocketbook. These records show that.

"It didn't matter to you that this boy might be left penniless in a strange city. If it had been a poor shop-girl with two weeks' pay in her purse, the price of a well earned week's vacation, you'd have done it too. It wouldn't have meant anything to you if it had been a scrub-woman. If the money had been earned by eight hours of scrubbing six days a week, you'd have taken it just the same.

"You don't want to go straight. You want to be pickpockets. That's the only occupation you have. It's the only one you'll ever have, except when you're in jail. And that's where you'll be for some time.

“Six months. Take them away.”

The deputies led the prisoners down the aisle. Johnny followed Drew out into the bright sunshine of a beautiful June morning.

“So that’s the way they do it?” Johnny said breathlessly.

“It’s the way they do it sometimes,” replied Drew.

“You see,” he went on to explain, “you are a transient witness. You are here now. But if we needed you to appear before a jury as a witness in this case four months from now, would you be in Chicago?”

“Four months is a long time.”

“Sure it is. Ordinarily those fellows would have gone before a grand jury and been held over to the higher courts. They’d been tried by a jury and got three or four years; that is, if you were present. But the judge, knowing you were likely to leave the city, made the best of things and tried them for larceny. He gave them all he could, under the circumstances. They are out of the way for a while at least.

“Well, that’s that!” Drew said a moment later. “Thanks a heap. You made our case for us. You helped us; now it’s up to us to help you find the fellow who battered up your head. Herman McCarthey is in the station now. Let’s go back and see what he’s uncovered.”

Retracing their steps, they walked once more into the lobby of the police station and waited for an up-bound elevator.

CHAPTER IX
CLUES

“It’s queer the way the thing works out.” Sergeant McCarthey looked the two boys squarely in the eyes when Drew Lane asked him how he had progressed with the radio station case.

Meanwhile Johnny was sizing up the sergeant. Nothing very wonderful to look at, this Sergeant McCarthey. Average size he was, with a face like a hawk. His nose was too long. It was curved like a beak. Shining out from behind it were two small black eyes. His head was, for the most part, bald, and he was but forty-five.

“Reminds me of a bald eagle,” Johnny told himself.

To complete the picture Johnny discovered an ugly scar running down the sergeant’s jaw and around his neck. The sergeant had got that scar during his first year of service. A holdup man, caught in the act, had pretended to surrender. He had given up his gun, but seeing an opening, had stabbed McCarthey, half behind his back. From that time on McCarthey began earning the name of the hardest man on the force. Certainly he made them “stick ’em up, and keep ’em up.” For all that, there were those who knew that the sergeant had a very human side.

“What do you think, Drew?” he shot at the young detective. “Do you think those pickpockets had their gang walk in on this boy and beat him up?” He was speaking of Johnny.

“Tell the truth, I don’t,” said Drew Lane. “First place they laughed when they saw him. If—”

“Can’t tell as much about a crook’s laugh as you can a bullfrog’s croak,” McCarthey broke in. “Not as much. When a frog croaks he’s saying he’s happy. A crook’s liable to laugh when he gets ten years.”

“It’s not just that,” said Drew. “You know yourself that pickpockets are sneaks; coyotes, not wolves. They may be well organized in some cities. They’re not in this one.”

“You’re right,” said McCarthey, shuffling a sheaf of papers on the desk. “That possibility is about all there is to that clue. But we’ll keep the sheets; you never can tell.

“I work it out this way.” He spread five sheets of paper on the desk. “See! This one is for your pickpocket friends who are naturally afraid of Johnny as a star witness against them. We’ll put it over here.” He laid it aside.

“But what about the squad call that was going through when the raid on the radio station was made?” Drew broke in.

“I’m coming to that. That’s the queer part,” the sergeant went on. “You see I have four sheets left. That means four possibilities.

“Since you insist, we’ll take the call that was going through when the station was raided. You’ll be surprised. That squad call was a notice that someone was breaking in over on Lake Shore Drive. Swell apartment. People all gone. When the radio failed to give the alarm, a squad was sent out from the local police station, and the burglars were caught.”

“Oh!” Johnny leaned forward expectantly.

“That’s what I thought,” grumbled the sergeant. “But they turned out to be two kids, one about twenty, the other younger. Dressed like college kids, they were, in yellow slickers decorated with hearts and kewpies; you know the sort.

“But let me tell you one thing. You may lay a bet those boys never saw the inside of any college. I’ve been watching. We don’t get many real college boys. When they’re smart enough and good enough workers to get up to college, they’re too smart to think they can beat the game by turning crooks.”

“But where did the boys come from?” Johnny asked.

“That’s what they didn’t tell,” said McCarthey. “If we knew, it might throw some light on the subject. But you can see how likely it is that a bunch of kids are going to figure out that they’ll get caught burglarizing an empty flat unless they send someone to beat up a radio announcer or two. And besides, if they did, who would they get to go for ’em? Too dangerous. Lot worse than burglarizing.

“So that,” he threw the second sheet aside, “looks like a doubtful chance. But we’ll keep ’em all.

“Another queer thing.” He turned to the third sheet. “Not many cases go out over the air. We can handle ’em other ways. Three an hour is a good many. But in that fifteen minutes when the radio station was dead, smashed to bits, there were three squad calls that did not go out, and two were mighty important.

“You know that long row of warehouses just back of your shack, Drew?” He turned to Drew Lane.

“Sure.”

“Some cracksmen burst the safe in the third one from the water, ten minutes after the radio station was smashed.”

“That looks like a hot scent,” said Drew, starting forward to bend over McCarthey’s sheet.

“Rather blind one, at that,” said the sergeant. “No one saw them. A straggler heard the blast and turned in the alarm. Squad came. Safe was looted. Birds flown. Might have gone a dozen ways, rowboat, on foot, in a car. Gone, that’s all. Got something over a thousand dollars. Left nothing, not even a fingerprint.”

“It’s too bad,” sighed Drew. “I’d say that was the likely case. Going to blow up a safe. Mighty few cases these days. Since the radio gave us a lift, electric drills are cheap. Radio’s too quick for them. Whang! goes the blast; r-ring-ring! the telephone; gong-gong! the radio; and the police squad is on the way; all too soon for the safe-cracker.

“Easy enough to see why they’d send an accomplice over to break up the radio!”

“Ah, well!” McCarthey’s narrow eyes contracted. “Give us time. Not so many of ’em escape us.

“The other case that came off in that fateful quarter of an hour was a theatre holdup on State Street, just over the river; one of those quiet little affairs. Two men say, ‘Stick ’em up! Give us the swag. Don’t yell! Don’t move for a full minute, or you’ll be dead!’ A car. Quick getaway. And there you are!

“No clue. Nothing to go by. One of those things that are mighty hard to trace.”

“And you don’t think they could have had a friend—” began Johnny.

“Who made you a call? Not likely,” McCarthey laughed. “Little those birds fear the radio. They’re too quick. No radio will ever stop ’em. They’re like the army transports during the war that were too fast for the submarines.

“This last sheet,” he added, “I have saved for gentlemen who, on other occasions, have had their gentle business of robbing, burglarizing, bombing, safe-blowing and the like interfered with. From time to time I will enter the names here of those who show undue resentment to the radio activities of the police.

“And that, boys,” he concluded, once more shuffling his sheaf of papers, “appears to bring the case to date. These are the facts. Draw your own conclusions.”

“Conclusions!” Johnny said as he left the office. “I only conclude that I was slugged; that my telephone was smashed; and that my head still is very sore.”

“Give him time,” said Drew. “He seldom fails. In the meantime, we must do our bit.”

CHAPTER X
A ROYAL FEAST

That evening at nine o'clock Johnny was given a delightful surprise. At the same time some of the questions that had been revolving about in his mind like six squirrels in one cage were solved.

He had returned to the shack at six. Weary from his exciting day, he had stretched himself out on his cot and had at once fallen asleep.

Awakened by someone entering the room, and startled by the darkness that had settled upon the place since he fell asleep, he was about to cry out in alarm when the place was flooded with light and he found Drew Lane smiling down upon him.

"Have a good rest?" he asked.

"Fine. And you? What luck this afternoon?"

"No luck at all. But that's what one must expect. You can't get 'em every day. If you did you'd soon be out of a job. All the crooks would be behind the bars.

"Not that I'd care," he hastened to add. "There are a lot of occupations more congenial. If I didn't have a conscience that keeps me hunting men, I'd take up commercial aviation. There's a job for you! I can fly. Have a hundred and ten hours to my credit, and never a crack-up."

"Think they'll ever use airplanes in hunting criminals?" asked Johnny, sitting up.

"Might. Couldn't do much right in the city. But if a gang was supposed to be leaving town; if the car they used was well marked, you could do a lot with a

plane; soar about, watching a hundred roads at once."

"Had anything to eat?" Drew asked, as Johnny rose and busied himself with his toilet.

"Not since noon."

"My treat to-night. And you'll like it. Mrs. Ramacciotti has some ravioli a la Tuscany on the stove."

"What's all that?"

"You'll see. Just get on your collar and tie. We'll want plenty of time for a feast before you go back there to get beaten up again. Or are you going?"

"Think I'd stay away?" Johnny gave him a look.

"No, I didn't. But if I were you I'd sit with my back to the wall."

"Do more than that. Take 'Silent Murder,' as you call him, along." He nodded toward the bow that stood in the corner.

"Too slow. Better get a gun."

"Slow! Sometime I'll show you. That studio is all of twenty-five feet long. Door's at one end. My cubby-hole's at the other. Let anyone try getting to me after this!" He picked up an arrow and felt its razor-like point. "Silent murder," he mused. "About right, I guess."

To Johnny's surprise he found that the feast Drew had alluded to was just ten steps from their own door. Down one low flight of stairs, up another, and there they were in the shack that stood before their own and fronted the street.

A large, dark-skinned woman of middle age greeted them with a smile that was genuine, and a handshake that was "all there."

"This is Mrs. Ramacciotti," said Drew. "Without her and Rosy this city would be a dreary place."

Rosy stood by the table dimpling and smiling her thanks.

Johnny had seen Rosy before. Now, however, she was dressed for the occasion, and one good look at her made him think of cool meadows, shady orchards, blushing russet apples, and all the rest.

“I don’t blame Drew,” he told himself.

They were invited to take seats before a small square table covered with a cloth of snowy linen. At once a steaming platter was set before them.

“But what’s on the platter?” Johnny asked himself. “Dumplings in meat gravy?”

It was far more than that. The finest of chicken meat, run through a grinder, some fine chopped veal; carrots cut fine, and who knows what else of viands and seasoning had been mixed together and used as the filling for small, turnover pies. These had been boiled for half an hour in salt water. After that they were smothered in rich gravy. A layer of meat pies, then one of gravy, then pies again until they stood a foot high on the platter.

But then, who can describe ravioli a la Tuscany? It is the proudest dish of Italians, and they are an exceedingly proud people.

For a full half hour the time was spent between small talk, and much eating.

As Johnny pushed back his chair with a sigh of regret, Mrs. Ramacciotti put her hand to her hair, and said in a sympathetic tone:

“Your head. What could have happened to it?”

“Haven’t you heard?” exclaimed Drew. “Some gangster beat him up last night.”

“Oh, the miserable ones!” Madame spread her hands in horror. “But why? He is only a boy.”

“I’ll tell you,” said Drew. He proceeded to tell of Johnny’s unusual adventures.

“And the only thing we know,” supplemented Johnny at the end, “is that the man has a hole in his hand. I saw that. I—”

But what was this? Rosy had uttered a low scream, then had dropped into a chair. Her face had gone white.

“Now! Now!” her mother said, placing a protecting hand across her shoulder.

“You see,” the Italian mother’s face took on added character as she spoke in a low, clear, steady tone, “her papa was shot by a man. He wanted papa’s money. He would give. But he not always understand. He move his hand to pocket. Always he did so when he was nervous. This man shoot him—dead! Rosy, she see this man. See hole in the hand. Same man? What you think? Mebby so.”

Johnny and Drew stared at one another.

Johnny was thinking, “So the man who beat me up was a murderer!”

“You never told me this before,” said Drew, speaking to Mrs. Ramacciotti.

“No. I did not know you then. You did not work on the case. The man, he was never found.”

“Well,” said Drew as his lips drew together in a tight line, “now we know, and we have a double reason for getting the man with a hole in his hand. And we will get him. Never fear.”

This unfortunate interruption of their party ended in a prolonged silence. In the end the two boys expressed sincere thanks for the splendid feast and begged to be excused.

Rosy, with an effort, summoned one of her sweetest smiles of farewell. As she stood there framed in the door, a brave little orphan of gangland’s making, Johnny could not help feeling that their common tragic interest in finding the man with a hole in his hand was destined to bring them very close together in the days that were to come. Nor was he far wrong.

CHAPTER XI
SWORN TO STAND BY

Johnny's return to the radio studio that night caused quite a sensation. He arrived somewhat ahead of time. The girl who presided over the switchboard, one floor lower than the studio proper, was still at her post.

"Gee!" She stared at him, wide-eyed. "They nearly killed you, didn't they?"

"Tried it, I guess," Johnny admitted.

"And still you came back?"

"Lightning never strikes twice in the same place," Johnny laughed.

"It does. I've seen it. Very same tree. Going to strike twice here, too. Something tells me that. You'll see. They'll bomb this place. When those Sicilians start a thing they never quit 'til they get what they want. That's what my dad says. And he knows. I'm quitting; to-morrow night's my last. Dad says, 'Let the police do their own work.' And that's what I say, too."

"If the officers of the law were not backed up by the honest people of a great city like this," Johnny replied thoughtfully, "nobody's life would be safe for a moment. In such times as these every man must do his duty."

"Not for me, sonny, not for me! I know where there's a safe place to work, and me for it!"

Johnny climbed the stairs with heavy steps, only to learn that his operator of the night before had also quit.

“Quit us cold,” was the way Bill Heyworth, the sturdy night manager and chief announcer, put it. Bill was thirty, or past. He was a broad shouldered Scotchman with a stubborn jaw. “Said he didn’t want to be shot at. Well,” he philosophized, “guess nobody does. But somebody has to carry on here. This thing is not going to stop because the gangs want it stopped. In time, of course, the city will have a station of its own. That will let us out. But until then the squad calls will go through if we have to call upon the State Militia to protect us. This city, officer and civilian, has set itself for a cleaning up. And a cleaning it shall be!

“What’s that?” he asked, as Johnny drew forth his six foot yew bow.

“A plaything, you might say,” Johnny smiled. “Then again you might say it has its practical side. I’ll demonstrate.”

Picking up a bundle of magazines, he set them on end atop a table against the wall. The outermost magazine had an oval in the center of its cover-jacket the size of a silver dollar.

Johnny drew back to the end of the room, then nocked an arrow and drove it through the very center of that spot.

Bill Heyworth whistled. He whistled again when Johnny showed him that four of the thick magazines had been pierced by the arrow’s steel point.

“Of course,” said Johnny, laughing low, “I don’t expect ever to use it here. But I’ll feel safer if you allow me to turn that chair about so I’ll be facing the entrance to this studio and have this ‘Silent Murder,’ as Drew Lane calls it, close at hand. Do I have your permission?”

“With all my heart, son. With all my heart. And you’ll stick?”

“Till they drag me out by the feet!”

“Two of us!” The Scotchman put out a hand. Johnny gripped it tight, then went to his post.

* * * * * * * *

The days that followed were quiet ones for Johnny. There needs must be many quiet days in every life. These days, calm as a May morning, placid as a mill

pond, give us strength and fortitude for those stormy periods that from time to time break upon us.

But these were not uninteresting days. Far from it. Hours spent in a fresh environment, among new and interesting people, are seldom dull.

There are few more interesting places than the studio of a great radio station. Besides the never ending stream of famous ones, great authors, moving-picture actors, statesmen, musicians of high rank, opera singers, and many more, there are the regulars, those who come night after night with their carefully prepared programs planned to entertain and amuse a tired world.

That he might cultivate the society of those more skilled, more famous than he, Johnny arrived night after night an hour or two ahead of his schedule.

He came, in time, to think of himself as one of them. And he gloried in this rich environment.

Bill Heyworth, the night manager, was himself worthy of long study. A doughty Scotchman, sturdy as an oak, dependable as an observatory clock, brave as any who ever wore kilts, a three year veteran of the great World War; yet withal, bubbling over with good humor, he was a fit pattern for any boy.

Quite different, yet not less interesting, were the comedy pair, one very slim, one stout, who came in every evening at ten o’clock to put on the adventures of a German street band.

Not all the skilled musicians were transients. The Anthony Trio, piano, violin and cello, might have graced the program on many a notable occasion, yet here they were, night after night, sending out over the ether their skillful renditions of the best that other times have produced in the realm of music.

Dorothy Anthony, the violinist, a short, vivacious girl with a well rounded figure and dancing blue eyes, seemed no older than Johnny himself. Many a talk, gay and serious, they had, for Dorothy took her outdoor adventures at second hand. She listened and exclaimed over Johnny’s experiences in strange lands, and insisted more than once upon his demonstrating his skill by shooting at the magazines with his bow and arrow.

As for his bow, it stood so long in the corner that it seemed certain that it would

dry out and become too brittle for real service in emergency.

Though Johnny enjoyed the company of the great and the near-great, he found most satisfaction in his association with a certain humble individual who occupied a small space before the switchboard at the foot of the stairs. And that person was none other than Rosy Ramacciotti. Since Johnny had been told that Rosy was in need of work, he had hastened to secure this position for her.

He had thought at first, because of her father's most unhappy death, she, too, might be afraid. When he suggested this to her he was astonished by the snapping of her black eyes as she exclaimed:

"Me afraid? No! I am Italian. Did you not know that? We Italians, we are many things. Afraid? Never!"

So Rosy presided at the switchboard. Each night, during the hour that preceded Rosy's departure and Johnny's taking up of his duties, they enjoyed a chat about many, many things.

Nor did Drew Lane object; for, as he one night explained to Johnny, his relations with the Ramacciottis were based on little more than a charitable desire to be of service to someone.

"You have heard, I suppose," he said to Johnny one evening, "that there is a society that looks after the families of policemen who lose their lives in the service. That is a splendid enterprise.

"There are also many societies in existence that take care of the interests of criminals and their families. That too, I suppose, is all right.

"But where is the society that cares for the women and children made widows and orphans by the bullets of gangsters, burglars, and robbers? Never heard of one, did you?

"Well, some of us fellows of the Force decided to do what we could for these.

"I learned of the Ramacciotti family. They had inherited a small candy store and a large debt. They were paying sixty dollars a month flat rent, and going bankrupt rapidly.

“I helped them sell out the store. Then I found these two shacks. Used to be fishing shacks, I suppose, twenty-five years ago. Tried to find the owner. Couldn’t. So we moved in anyway. I pay for my room and morning coffee. The furniture is Mrs. Ramacciotti’s.

“I found her a small kitchen and dining room down street, where she serves rare Italian dishes, ravioli a la Tuscany and the like. They are doing very well, and are happy.

“Happy. That’s it,” he mused. “Everyone in the world has a right to be happy. It’s our duty, yours and mine, to be happy, and to do the best we can to help others to their share of happiness.”

“So that was how Drew came to live in such a strange place, and to be interested in these unusual people.” Johnny thought about this for a long time after Drew had gone. His appreciation of the character of this young detective grew apace as he mused. His interest in Rosy and her mother also increased.

CHAPTER XII
FROM OUT THE SHADOWS

Shortly after his discovery that the man who wrecked his broadcasting corner and beat him up was, in all probability, the robber who had murdered Rosy's father, Johnny visited Sergeant McCarthey at the police station. As the days passed, this station was to become a place of increasing fascination for this boy who was interested in everything that had to do with life, and who had a gnawing desire to know all that is worth knowing.

This day, however, his interest was centered on one question: What additional information had the sergeant secured regarding the man who had wrecked his station?

"Little enough, old son." The sergeant leaned back as he spoke. "Visited those pickpockets in the jail. If they know anything about the affair, their lips are sealed.

"As for those young chaps, caught looting a house, they promise even less. Won't tell a thing about themselves; names, addresses, nothing. They're not foreigners. American stock, I'd say. It's my guess that they had nothing to do with your radio affair. They appear to be boys from out of town. Some of those chaps who read cheap detective stories that make the criminal a hero. Came to this city to crash into crime. Got caught. And now they'll take what's given to them rather than disgrace their families. Can't help but admire their grit. But the pity of it all! To think that any boy of to-day should come to look upon crime as offering a career of romance and daring! If only they could know the professional criminal as we do, could see him as a cold-blooded brute who cares only for himself, who stops at nothing to gain his ends, who lives for flash, glitter and sham, a man utterly devoid of honor who will double-cross his most

intimate friend and put a pal on the spot or take him for a ride if he believes he is too weak to stand the test and not talk if he is caught."

Then Johnny spoke. He told of the murder of Rosy's father.

"He did? The same man!" The sergeant sat up straight and stared as Johnny finished. "The man with the hole in his hand shot Rosy's father?

"Let me think." He cupped his chin in his hands. "I worked on that case. Didn't get a clue. There was just one thing. After Rosy's father had been shot, this man fired a shot into the wall. Bullet's there still, I suppose. Few crooks would do that. Likes noise, I suppose, the sound of his gun.

"You know," he explained, "we are always studying the peculiarities of bad men. It pays. You know how a poker player judges men. When his opponent has a good hand, he looks just so, from beneath his eyelashes, or his fingers drum the table, so. But if his hand is bad, and he's bluffing, he looks away, whistles a tune, does some other little thing that betrays him.

"It is that way with the crook. Each man has some little tell-tale action which brands each job he pulls. One man never speaks; he writes out his orders. Another whispers. A third shouts excitedly. One is polite to his victims, especially the ladies. Another is brutal; he binds them, gags them, even beats them. Some prefer silence; some, noise.

"It would seem," he sat up to drum on the desk, "that our friend with the hole in his hand likes the sound of his gun. He fired an unnecessary shot in the Ramacciotti case, and one when he raided your studio.

"Now," he said with a sigh, "all we have to do is to search the records of crimes committed in this city and see if we can find other raids and stick-ups to lay at this man's door. Of course, if the perpetrator of other crimes fired his gun needlessly, it will not prove that Mr. Hole-in-the-Hand did it, but it will point in that direction.

"That bit of research will take some time. I'll let you know what I find."

"In those other cases of that night, the safe-blowing and theatre robbery, was there any unnecessary shooting?" Johnny asked.

“None reported. But then, of course, it is not likely that Mr. Hole-in-the-Hand was on the scene in either case. He was busy with you. If he was in on either of these, the work was done by his gang, not by him.”

That night a curious and startling thing happened. This affair, as Herman McCarthey agreed later, might or might not have a bearing on the problem just discussed.

The detective team of Drew and Howe worked for the most part during the daylight hours. They were assigned to the task of detecting and arresting pickpockets. If you rode a crowded street car, attended a league baseball game, or chanced to be on the edge of a crowd drawn together on the street corner by a vender of patent medicine or unbreakable combs, you might easily sight the nifty hat and flaming tie of Drew Lane, the natty detective. They knew more than three hundred pickpockets by sight, did this young pair. They picked up any of these on suspicion if they were found in a likely spot, and at once haled them into court.

This permanent assignment left Drew with his evenings free. Because of this, he and Johnny enjoyed many a night stroll together.

One of their favorite haunts was a slip which ended some four blocks from their shack, and extended for several blocks east until it lost itself in the waters of the lake. This narrow channel of water was lined on one side by great bulging, empty sheet iron sheds, and on the other by brick warehouses which appeared equally empty. A narrow landing extending the length of the sheds, and fast falling into decay, offered a precarious footing for any who chose to wander there.

It was a spooky place, this slip at night. At the end nearest the shore, half under water, half above, a one-time pleasure yacht lay rotting away. At the far end, an ancient tug fretted at a chain that was red with rust and from time to time added to the general melancholy of the place a hollow bub-bub as it bumped the shore.

One would scarcely say that a horde of gigantic red-eyed rats could add to the attractions or any place, let alone one such as this. Lend it a touch of joy, they did, nevertheless. This became Johnny’s hunting ground. Armed with his bow and quiver of arrows, he stalked rats as in other climes he had stalked wolves and bears.

Drew never tired of seeing his keen bladed arrow speed straight and true. There is a certain fascination about such expert marksmanship. Besides, Drew hated rats. He had said many times, “A great city has two scourges, professional criminals and rats. It’s every honest man’s duty to help rid the city of both.”

On this particular night Johnny and Drew had gone on one of their hunting trips. They had put out a lure of shelled corn during the day. Game was plentiful. In the half light of the smoke-dulled moon, many a rodent whose eyes gleamed in the dark met his death.

Drew had tired of the sport and had walked a dozen paces down the way. Johnny was lurking in the shadows, hoping for one more good shot, when he thought he heard a curious sound. This sound appeared to come from the shadows opposite the spot where Drew, unconscious of any danger, walked in the moonlight.

Then, of a sudden, a terrifying thing began to happen. A hand and half an arm emerged from the shadows that lay against the rotting shed. In the hand was a gun. This gun was rising slowly, steadily to a position where it would be covering Drew.

What was to be done? Johnny’s mind worked with the lightning rapidity of a speed camera.

Should he shout a warning? There was not time. Leap forward? This too would be futile. One thing remained. The movement of that hand was slow, sure. Johnny’s fingers were fast as the speed of light. He nocked an arrow, took sudden aim, and let fly. “Silent Murder” found his mark.

Came a low cry of surprise, then a thud.

“What was that?”

Drew whirled about and snatched for his own gun.

Johnny did not dare answer. What had he accomplished? Where was the hand, the gun, the man? Nocking a second arrow, he crowded further into the shadows. What was to come next? His heart pounded hard against his ribs.

Ten seconds passed, twenty, thirty.

With gun drawn, Drew advanced toward him. Johnny expected at any moment to hear a shot ring out. None did.

Once more Drew demanded, “What was that?”

“I-I saw a hand, half an arm, a-a gun,” Johnny stammered. “I shot—shot an arrow at the arm.”

“A hand, an arm, a gun?” Drew was plainly bewildered.

“The gun was aimed at you.”

“Where?”

“There. Over there in the shadows.”

Gripping his gun tight, Drew threw the light of his electric torch into those shadows. “No one there,” he muttered. “You were dreaming. But no. I heard something.

“And look!” he cried, springing forward. “Here’s the gun. He dropped it. Fled. Thought the Devil was after him. No wonder, when you hunted him with ‘Silent Murder.’

“But I say, boy!” he exclaimed, gripping Johnny’s hand till it hurt. “You saved my life. I’ll not forget that!”

“We’ll just take this along,” he said a moment later as he picked up a steel blue sixshooter with a six inch barrel.

“A forty-five,” he said, turning it over. “Not a bad gun. And full of slugs. Reminds me of one that nearly did for me once. Tell you about it sometime.”

At that they turned and walked quietly away from the scene of the near tragedy.

Where was the intruder? Gone. What of Johnny’s arrow? What damage had it done? Perhaps the light of day would answer some of these questions. At present it was time for Johnny to hasten away to his nightly vigil in the squad call corner.

CHAPTER XIII
A MARKED MAN

Johnny's work at the studio never failed to fascinate him. The noon hours were pure routine. But at night, when squad calls came thick and fast—that was the time!

An entire symphony orchestra might be crashing its way through some magnificent concerto. No matter. The squad operator spoke a few words in Johnny's ear. He jotted down those words. He pressed a button twice. For one brief second the air, a thousand miles around, grew tensely silent. Then *Clang! Clang! Clang!* And after that, Johnny's voice: "Squads, attention! Squad 16. A shooting at Madison and Ashland." Ah! There was power for you; a little press of a button and all the world stood by.

Each night brought to his ears a terse description of some new form of violence.

"You'd think," he said to Drew once, "that the whole city had turned criminal."

"But it hasn't," Drew replied thoughtfully. "Only one person in three hundred is a professional criminal. Don't forget that. If you want to know what that means, go somewhere and watch a turnstile. Count three hundred people as they pass through. Then say 'ONE.' Big, like that. That stands for one crook. Then begin all over again, and count three hundred." Johnny tried that, and derived a deal of assurance from the experiment. It gave him the comforting feeling that one might have who has three hundred friends arrayed solidly behind him, row on row, while a single enemy stands across the way.

But were these truly ready to stand back of law and justice? "If they are not," he told himself, "it is because of ignorance. If they do not know the truth they must be told." Johnny hurried back to the shack as soon as his work was done, on the

night of his curious adventure down by the slip. He had no desire to go prowling about those abandoned sheds again that night. He did wish to be abroad the first thing in the morning. He wanted to discover, if possible, how the would-be assassin had made his escape. He was also curious to discover whether or not his arrow had gone with the stranger.

“I am surprised that anyone should attempt to kill me,” Drew said, as they started for the slip early that morning.

“But isn’t a police officer’s life always in danger?”

“Why, no, I wouldn’t say so. Depends, of course, on your record, and the type of crooks you are assigned to.

“Take the matter of arresting a crook. He doesn’t usually resist, unless you’ve caught him red-handed in crime. Rather take a chance with the judge. Figures you’ve got nothing on him anyway. And I haven’t been in on anything really big. They give those things to older men. Howe and I have been following pickpockets for months. That was my first and it’s my last assignment as a detective so far.

“Pickpockets are seldom violent. Sneaking is their game. They seldom pack a gun. If they do, they don’t know how to use it.”

“That man knew his gun,” said Johnny with a shudder.

“Fairly good gun.” Drew had thrown the cartridges out of the revolver. He had hung it on a nail over the head of his bed. There it was destined to remain until a busy spider had spun a web about it and built him a gauzy home inside the trigger guard. For all that, neither the spider, the revolver, nor the former owner of the revolver were destined to rest long in peace.

“It’s plain enough,” said Johnny, as they reached the sheds, “why that assassin was unconscious of my presence. I had been standing silently in the shadows, a long time, looking for a rat.”

“Well,” chuckled Drew, “you got one, didn’t you?”

“That’s what I’ve been wondering,” replied Johnny. “Probably I did; otherwise why did he drop the gun?”

“Quite so. You traded an arrow for a loaded gun. Not so bad.”

“I still have hope of recovering my arrow. The flesh of a man’s arm is a thin target. I put all I had into that shot.”

They found some footprints ground into the cinders where the man had stood. They discovered several breaks in the rusting sides of the shed, where he might have escaped. And yes, true to Johnny’s expectations, they found the arrow where it had spent its force and dropped a hundred or more feet from the spot from which it had been fired.

“See!” exclaimed Johnny as he picked it up. “I got him. Blood on the feathers.”

“I never doubted that for a moment,” Drew said impressively. “As you suggested, the arrow must have gone through the fleshy part of his arm.

“He’s a marked man!” he exclaimed. “You must keep that arrow. Some day, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps ten years from now, it may be needed as evidence.”

“Why, I—”

“That arrow mark will leave a scar that matches the width of your arrow blade. It will have other peculiarities that will tell straight and plain that the wound was made, not only by an arrow, but by one arrow—this one. I’ve seen things far more technical than that, far more difficult to prove, sway a jury and win a hanging verdict.”

So, in the end, the arrow was laid across two nails close to the revolver above Drew’s bed.

And, just by way of providing an easy means of escape if escape were necessary, the spider ran a line from the thug’s revolver to Johnny’s blood-dyed arrow.

“You said something about boxing once,” Drew was at the door of the shack, ready to depart for his day of scouting. “How’d you like to meet me at the club this evening for a few rounds?”

“Be great!” Johnny exclaimed enthusiastically. “You’ll find me rusty, though. Haven’t had gloves on for a long time.”

“Here’s the address.” Drew wrote on a bit of paper, and handed it to Johnny. “I’ll meet you in the lobby at nine o’clock.”

“Fine!”

With Drew gone, and only the distant rumble of the city to keep him company, Johnny sat down in Drew’s rocking chair to think. From time to time his gaze strayed to the wall where the revolver and the arrow hung.

“Life,” he thought, “has grown more complicated and—and more terrible. And yet, what a privilege it is to live!”

For the first time since he arrived on that freighter at midnight, he felt a desire to be far, far away from this great city and all that it stood for.

“Power,” he murmured, “great power, that is what a city stands for. Great power, great weakness, great success, gigantic failure, men of magnificent character, men of no character at all; that’s what you find in a city of three million people.”

At once his mind was far away. In his imagination he stood upon a small and shabby dock. A small and shabby village lay at the back of the dock. At his feet a dilapidated clinker-built rowboat bumped the dock. Oars were there, minnows for bait, and fishing tackle. Two miles up the bay was a dark hole where great muskies waved the water with their fins, where bass black as coal darted from place to place, while spotted perch, seeming part of the water itself, hung motionless, watching.

“Ah, to be there!” he breathed. “The peace, the simple joy of it all. To drop a minnow down there; to cast one far out, then to watch for the move that means a strike!

“And yet—” He sighed, but did not finish his sentence. On the youth of to-day a great city exerts an indescribable charm. Johnny would not leave this city of his boyhood days until he had conquered or had been conquered.

“It’s strange, all this,” he mused. “Wonder why that man beat me up there in the studio? Wonder if Sergeant McCarthey knows any more than he did. Let me see. Pickpockets, boy robbers, theatre holdup men, safe blowers. Wonder whose accomplice that man with a hole in his hand is. Who can tell?”

CHAPTER XIV
JOHNNY SCORES A KNOCKDOWN

Johnny experienced no difficulty in locating Drew's club. It was a fine place, that club; small, but very useful. Not much space for loafing there; a lobby, that was all. A completely equipped gymnasium, showers, a swimming pool, bowling alleys in the basement, a floor for boxing and fencing. A young men's club this was, with a purpose. That purpose was set up in large letters above the desk in the lobby: KEEP FIT.

In a surprisingly short time they had undressed, passed under the showers, gone through a quick rub-down, drawn on shorts and gloves, and there they were.

Drew was five years Johnny's senior. He was taller almost by a head, and thirty pounds heavier. It seemed an uneven match. But Johnny was well built. Then, too, he had a passion for boxing that dated back to his sixth year. When at that early date a boy three years his senior had taken it upon himself to put Johnny in his place, Johnny had emerged from the engagement bloody, tattered and victorious.

For a space of five minutes these two, Johnny and Drew, sparred, getting up their wind and landing comfortable body blows now and then. When they sat down for a brief blowing spell, Drew looked Johnny over with increased admiration. He had expected to amuse this boy and get a little workout for himself. He had found that Johnny was quick on his feet, that his eyes were good, and that his left carried a punch that came with the speed of chain lightning.

"I was going to give you a little sermon on keeping fit," Drew said after a moment of silence. "Guess you don't need it."

"Everyone needs it."

“You bet they do. Hadn’t been for my keeping fit, I wouldn’t be here at all. Come on. Let’s go another round.”

Once more they sparred. This time Drew seemed determined to deal Johnny at least one smacker on the face. In this he was singularly unsuccessful. Johnny was never there when the blow arrived. He ducked; he wove right, wove left, sprang backward, spun round.

Then of a sudden, something happened. In making a desperate effort to reach Johnny’s chin, Drew exposed the left side of his face. Johnny swung hard, but planned to pull the punch. Drew suddenly leaned into it. Johnny’s blow came in with the impact of a trip hammer, just under Drew’s ear.

Drew dropped like an empty sack.

He was out for the count of five. Then he sat up dizzily, stared about him, caught Johnny’s eyes, then grinned a crooked grin that lacked nothing of sincerity as he exclaimed:

“That was a darb!”

Half an hour later, after a second shower, the two boys sat in the small lunch room of the club, munching cold tongue sandwiches on rye, and drinking coffee.

“Boy!” said Drew. “You should train for the ring.”

“Doesn’t interest me,” said Johnny. “Fine thing to box, just to keep fit. But when it comes to making a business of a thing that should be all pure fun—not for me!”

“Guess you’re right.”

“But tell me,” said Johnny. “Is it hard to become a city detective?”

“Not so easy. Many a fellow out in the sticks pounding a beat would like to be on the detective force. It’s more dangerous. But you have more freedom. And you get a bigger kick out of it. If you get there quick you’ve got to get a break. I got a break.

“Queer sort of thing,” he mused as one will who is about to spin a yarn. “I was

off duty, dressed in knickers, driving home in my car, with a friend, from a golf game. Traffic light stopped us. Fellow, tough looking egg, stuck a cannon in my face and said: ‘Stick ’em up!’”

“What did you do?” Johnny leaned forward eagerly.

“What would you have done?”

“You weren’t on duty. Weren’t wearing your star?”

“Not wearing my star, that’s right. But in a way an officer of the law is never off duty. Many a brave fellow has been killed because he stepped into something when he was in civilian clothes and off duty.

“My friend that was with me was a real guy. He wouldn’t have squawked if I had given that bad egg my money and driven on.

“But you know, that’s not the way a fellow’s mind works. No, sir! You say to yourself, ‘This guy’s got the drop on me. I’ve got to get him. How’ll I do it?’”

“What did you do?” Johnny’s coffee was cooling on the table.

“I said, ‘Please, Mister, don’t shoot me. I’m a young fellow. I don’t want to die. I’ll give you everything, but don’t shoot!’ Stalling for time. See?

“‘All right,’ he growled, ‘back the car into the alley.’

“He climbed into the back seat and pressed cold steel against the back of my neck.

“Of course I had to look through the rear window to back into the alley. That gave me an idea. I blinked my eyes as if I saw someone behind the car. He was nervous. They generally are. Who wouldn’t be?

“He turned his head to look back. I had a small 32 in my pocket. I whipped it out and took a pot shot at him.

“My hand struck the back of the seat. The gun flew up. I missed.

“He whirled about and put his gun on my temple. ‘You murderin’ —— ——,’ he

said, and pulled the trigger three times.

“The gun didn’t go off.” Drew paused to smile. “Sometimes a fellow gets a break that makes him want to believe in angels and things like that.

“That gun was loaded with slugs. It had a lock on it. He had failed to release the lock. He threw away his gun and grabbed for mine.

“We grappled, and I went over the seat on top of him, shouting to my friend: ‘Go call the police.’ He went.

“Then we fought it out there alone. That’s where keeping fit came in. He was a tough egg with a record long as your arm. He was strong. He was desperate. The ‘stir’ craze was on him.

“‘Don’t resist me,’ I said. ‘I’m an officer.’

“‘I’ll kill you with your own gun if it’s the last thing I ever do!’ That was his answer.

“We fought and struggled. He banged me here. He banged me there. He bit my hand to the bone. Once he pressed my own gun to my head, but my finger was on the trigger. He couldn’t shoot.

“‘Pull the trigger, —— —— you! Pull the trigger. It’s on your head!’ That’s what he said.

“A stranger heard the noise and came to look at us.

“‘Call the police!’ I yelled. ‘Call the police!’

“You should have heard him hot-footing out of there! I tell you that was funny!

“And then we bumped into the door. It flew open. We tumbled out. I got my chance. I fired one shot. I got my man.

“Hey, waiter!” Drew called with a smile. “Bring us some more coffee. This has gone cold.”

“Of course,” he said thoughtfully, “it’s always too bad when a man has to die.

But it was one or the other of us. He wasn't much good. They wanted him for a dozen robberies, and for shooting a policeman.

"I was in the sticks walking a beat then. They gave me a job on the detective force, and I received a hundred dollars reward from one of the papers. So you see, life as a copper isn't so bad, providing you get the breaks."

"Yes," Johnny said slowly, "Providing you do."

"I suppose," said Drew after stirring his coffee reflectively for a time, "that I should be satisfied. And I am, reasonably so. But you know, pickpockets are very small game. It's necessary enough that they should be mopped up. But it's like hunting rabbits when there are grizzly bears about. I'd like to get in on something big.

"Things are going to happen in this old town. Judges are getting better. The prosecutors are working harder. The honest people are waking up. One of these fine days the order will be given to break up every gang in town; bring them in or drive them out. I want to be in on that."

"You will," said Johnny. "They won't be able to do it without you. They need a thousand like you, a Legion of Youth."

"You are right!" Drew put his cup down with a crash. "College men. That's what they need. Men may sneer at them. They needn't. I'm a college man, and I'm proud of it.

"Know what?" His eyes shone. "They are going to put courses in criminology in the colleges and universities. They'll do more than that. They'll teach young fellows how to be good detectives. Why not? They teach them everything else. Why not that?"

"They will," said Johnny. "And I'd like to take the course myself."

CHAPTER XV
JOHNNY FINDS A MAN

That night Sergeant McCarthey visited Johnny in his cubby-hole by the big radio studio.

“Hello, boy,” he said, putting out a big, brown hand for a shake. “Mind if I sit down awhile? Sort of like to see how the calls go out.”

“Not a bit,” Johnny smiled. “Glad to have company. Little dull lately. Robbery, shooting, burglary, shooting, holdup; that’s about the way it goes. Nothing really new.” He laughed a short laugh.

“Say!” the sergeant exclaimed, “You’ve got to hand it to this old burg. That stuff goes out all over the country. Everybody gets it. And they say, ‘What a terrible town!’

“But it’s not a bad town. I’ve lived in others. I know. They’re all alike. Difference is, others cover it all up. We don’t. You’ll see. When we shout enough, the crooks will begin clearing out. You—”

Johnny held up a finger. He listened. He wrote. He banged his gong. Then—

“Squads attention! Squads 36 and 37. Robbers in the second apartment at 1734 Wabash.”

“That’s the way it goes, is it?” said the sergeant. “Pretty quick work. When we get our own station it will be snappier. And only the squad cars will get the calls. Special low wave-length.”

For a time they sat in silence. Then Johnny’s telephone buzzed.

“Another call?” McCarthey asked in a low tone.

“Just a report on that last call.” Johnny’s eyes twinkled. “Got ’em. Got ’em four minutes after the call went out.”

“Good work. No wonder they hate you, those crooks. This place should be guarded.”

“It is.” Johnny laid his hand on his bow.

“Drew told me about that thing and the way you handled it down there by the slip. Wouldn’t have believed it if he hadn’t told me.

“By the way, I’ve been making a little study of that man’s history, the one who shot Rosy’s father, the one that beat you up.”

“Find anything?”

“Following the hunch about his liking the sound of his gun, and the descriptions given in other robberies, I believe he’s responsible for several bad bits of business.

“This much we know from the case of Rosy’s father. He’s a Sicilian. A tall fellow, and heavily built. Not dark for his race. Got a low, narrow forehead, and blue eyes very close together. He’s never been caught. Probably sneaked into our country from Canada or Mexico. Send him back where he came from if we get him. And we’ll get him!”

“I hope so,” said Johnny, with a furtive glance toward the door. “I mostly manage to keep wide awake. But it’s late by the time I’m through. If I should get drowsy, and he walked in again, well—”

“This place should be guarded,” the sergeant repeated. “I’ll suggest it.”

“No, don’t bother.”

“I’ll lend you a gun.”

“Guns make such a lot of noise. Old Silent Murder here will do as well.”

“Guess I’d better be going.” Herman McCarthey rose. “Got to catch my train.”

“Train?”

“Yes. I live in the country. Little village; one store, one church, post office, few homes. Need the peace I find there to go with the rush of the city and this business of hunting crooks. It’s good to wake up with a breath of dew in your nostrils, and the robins singing their morning song. Nothing like it.”

“No,” said Johnny, “there isn’t.” He was thinking of the woods by his fishing hole in the far away North Peninsula, where the song sparrows fairly burst their throats with melody.

“Good night,” said Johnny.

“Good night, son.” The sergeant was gone.

* * * * * * * *

The State Street Police Court with its humorous Punch and Judy judge became a place of great fascination to Johnny. In the past he had dreamed of courts where trials dragged through weary months; where prisoners languished in jail; and a man might be sentenced to five years of hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed a starving family. How different was this court where a pretty lady might steal a dress she did not need, and never go to jail at all.

The very poor, Johnny soon learned, were treated with consideration. Their poverty was not forgotten.

“And yet,” he said to Drew one day, “I can’t help but feel that there would be less stealing if some of these first offenders scrubbed a few floors in the workhouse.”

“There are many things to be considered,” was Drew’s reply.

And then one day, as he stood in that State Street court room, all eyes and ears for what was taking place, Johnny made a great discovery. He found a man.

This man was not brought to court. He came of his own accord, to plead the cause of another.

He was not quite sober, this man; indeed there are those who would have said he was drunk. And yet he spoke with precision.

Though there was about him an indescribable air of youth, this man's hair was white. His face was thin. Some of his teeth were gone. His clothes were well-worn, yet they showed immaculate care. His linen was clean. "Shabby gentility" partly described him; but not quite.

"Judge," he said, tilting first on heels, then on his toes, "Judge, your Honor, you have a man in jail here. He was fined twenty-five dollars for being drunk." He paused for breath. "Judge, your Honor, he can't pay that fine. He isn't a bad man, Judge. He drinks too much sometimes, Judge. Let him go, can't you, Judge?" The man's voice took on a pleading note.

"What's this man's name?" The judge studied the stranger's face.

"Judge, your Honor, his name is Robert MacCain. He isn't a bad man, Judge. Let him go, will you, Judge?"

"He's a pal of yours?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"You drink with him sometimes?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"You took a little drink yesterday?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"And last night?"

"And last night. Yes, your Honor."

"How does it come you were not arrested with this pal of yours?"

"Your Honor," again the stranger tilted backward and forward from heel to toe, "Your Honor, I try at all times to be a gentleman.

"Let him go, Judge. Will you?"

“Are you a lawyer?” The judge leaned forward to stare at him.

“No, your Honor. But I know more law than your Swanson or Darrow or—”

“You should have been a lawyer. What are you?”

Again the stranger went up on his toes. “Your Honor, for seventeen years I was a detective on the police force of New York. I ranked as a lieutenant, your Honor.”

“This fellow is a romancer,” Johnny whispered to an attorney who stood beside him. “He doesn’t know truth from lies.”

“He is telling the truth,” was the astounding reply. “I know him. He was rated high.”

The lawyer scribbled a sentence on a slip of paper. He handed it to the judge.

This movement did not escape the stranger.

“Your Honor,” he pleaded, “don’t let any of this get into the papers. I have a mother eighty-six years old. It would kill her.”

“What is your name?”

“Your Honor, my name is Newton Mills.”

“Newton Mills?” The judge started, then stared in unfeigned astonishment. “You are Newton Mills?”

“Yes, your Honor.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Nothing, your Honor.”

“Yes, you are!” The judge braced himself on the arms of his chair. “You’re drinking yourself to death. You are breaking your mother’s heart.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do.” He reached for an order blank. “I’ll send you down there with your pal. You’ll have a chance to sober up.”

At once the face of Newton Mills became a study in pain. “Don’t do that, Judge. Don’t do it. It will break my mother’s heart. I haven’t done anything bad, Judge. I’ll quit drinking, Judge. I promise. Don’t do it, Judge. I’ll quit. I promise, Judge.”

There had been a time when, quite a young boy, Johnny Thompson had made friends with a homeless dog. At another time he had found a half grown kitten starving under a barn. After much trouble he had caught the kitten. It had scratched him terribly, but he had clung to it and had carried it home to give it a chance.

Something of the same feeling came over him now. Only this time he had found, not a dog, not a cat, but something more precious—a man.

“You—your Honor,” he stammered, scarcely knowing what he was saying, “if your Honor please, I’d like this man.”

“To what purpose?” The judge stared.

“To give him another chance.”

“Can you?” Once more the judge leaned far forward in his chair.

“Drew Lane is my friend. We live together. With his help I can.”

“Done!” said the judge.

“You heard what he said!” he exclaimed, turning to the astonished Newton Mills. “You promised to stop drinking. This young man will see that you do stop.”

Never in all his life had Johnny seen such a look of despair as came over the face of the old-time detective. He had made that promise a thousand times. He had never kept it. Now here was someone with the mighty arm of the law behind him, who said, “You must!”

He glanced wildly about the room, as if looking for means of escape. Then with a look of utter weariness he murmured:

“Yes, your Honor.”

CHAPTER XVI
THE FACE THAT SEEMED A MASK

So it happened that when Drew returned from work that evening he found a man in Johnny's bunk, and Johnny seated near him. The man was asleep, or in a drunken stupor.

"I found a man," said Johnny.

"Looks like a bum," said Drew, casting a critical eye over the stranger.

"He has been."

"Looks like he was drunk."

"He is."

"Then why—" Drew paused to stare at the stranger.

"Drew," said Johnny, almost solemnly, "did you ever hear of Newton Mills?"

"Newton Mills, the great city detective? Who hasn't?"

"That," said Johnny dramatically, "is Newton Mills."

"What!" Drew took a step forward. "It can't be. He disappeared three years ago. He's dead.

"And yet—" He stared at the face of the man on the cot.

Then he tore into a trunk to drag out a bundle of old photographs. One of these he studied intently for a moment. Then turning to Johnny, he said in a voice

tense with emotion,

“Yes, Johnny, that is Newton Mills. You have indeed found a man.

“My God!” he exclaimed in an altered tone. “I wonder if that’s the price? Will I be like that in twenty years?”

To this question he expected no reply. He received none.

He took a seat beside the cot where the man with deep-lined face and tangled white hair was sleeping. For a long time he said nothing. Silence brooded over the shack.

“This man, Drew Lane, is an unusual person,” Johnny told himself. “He is so full of strange deep thoughts.”

This beyond question was true. He was given to actions quite as strange as his thoughts. At one time he had paid a half-dollar for the privilege of taking Johnny to the top of his city’s highest tower. Once there, he had spread his hands wide as he exclaimed, “See, Johnny! Look at all that!”

It was indeed an awe-inspiring sight. Mile on mile of magnificent buildings. Towers rising to the clouds, all the wealth and glory of a great modern city was there, spread out beneath them.

“Johnny,” Drew had said, “there are people living down there who are ashamed of their own city. They don’t believe in its future.

“You can’t blame them too much.” His voice took on a note of sadness. “The badness of it is pretty terrible.

“But think, Johnny! Look! Look and think how many men of great wealth must have believed in this city and her future. Not one of those great towers could have risen a foot from the ground had not some man had faith in the city’s future.

“And, Johnny!” He had gripped the boy’s arm hard. “It’s my task and yours, every young man’s task, to prove to the world that the faith of those men was not misplaced.

“And we will!” He had clenched his hands tight. “We’ll make it the grandest, the greatest, the safest, most beautiful city the world has ever known!”

He had said that. And now he sat brooding beside the form of one who, like himself perhaps in his youth, had thrown himself against the slow revolving wheel of stone that is a great city’s appalling wickedness.

“And now see!” he murmured, half aloud.

“The lawyer who told me who he was said he was ‘just a shell!’” Johnny volunteered. “Do you think you can make anything of just a shell?”

“I don’t know.” Drew’s tone betrayed no emotion. “But who could do less than try?”

“Who?” Johnny echoed.

At that moment the souls of Drew and Johnny were like those of David and Jonathan. They were as one.

“That man,” said Drew as he nodded at the slight form on the cot, “was one of New York’s finest. Many a member of the old Five Point Gang has felt a light touch on his arm, to turn and laugh up into those mild blue eyes. But they never laughed long. That touch became a chain of steel. The chain dragged them to a cell or to a grave.

“There are people still,” he rambled on, “who believe that a detective should be a man of muscle and brawn. In a fight, of course, it helps. But in these days when fighting is done, for the most part, with powder and steel, a slight man with brains gets the break. This Newton Mills surely did. For a long, long time he got all the breaks. But now look!”

“He told the judge he had been living on fifteen dollars a week, sent by his mother,” said Johnny. “What could have happened?”

“Many things perhaps. Herman McCarthey will know. I have heard him speak of Newton Mills. We will ask him, first thing to-morrow morning.”

And there, for a time, the matter rested.

That night as he went to work, walking by preference down the Avenue, then over the Drive that fronted the lake, as one will at times, Johnny received the impression that he was being watched, perhaps followed.

An uncomfortable feeling this, at any time. A late hour, a deserted street, do not lessen one's mental disturbance.

Long ago Johnny had formed two habits. While walking alone at night he kept well toward the outer edge of the sidewalk. Under such conditions it is hard for a would-be assailant to spring at one unobserved. Then, too, he carried one hand in his coat pocket. "For," he was accustomed to say to his friends, "who will know what I hold in that hand? It may be a small gun. If it were, I could shoot it quite accurately without removing it from my pocket. Crooks are, at heart, great cowards. What one of them will face a hand in a coat pocket?" Thus far in Johnny's young life, not one of the night prowlers had molested him.

Though some sixth sense told him now that he was being followed in the shadows, he was not greatly alarmed. He merely increased his pace to a brisk walk. From time to time he looked over his shoulder. Each time he saw no one.

He was passing along an empty lot lined with great signboards, and had reached the center of the block when two men sprang from the shadows.

Not wholly unprepared for this, he gave a sudden leap to one side, then sprang forward to transform the affair into a foot race.

Fortunately at that moment four sturdy citizens turned a corner and advanced in his direction.

This apparently was an unforeseen part of the program, for at once his would-be assailants stopped short, then turned as if to walk in the other direction.

As they turned, the face of the shorter one was suddenly illumined by a light from an auto that had turned a corner.

It was but a flash. Then all was darkness. Yet in that flash Johnny had seen a man, one of those who had followed him. He was a youth with broad, slightly stooping shoulders. His face seemed a mask. His clothes were in the height of style. The light brought a flash from a diamond somewhere on his person.

Darkness followed. Johnny walked straight ahead. He met and passed the four men, who paid him not the slightest attention. Fifteen minutes later he was at his post in the radio station. There, for a time, the matter ended. Of two things you may be sure. Johnny walked that street no more at night, nor did he forget that youth with a face that was like a mask.

CHAPTER XVII
THE SERGEANT'S STORY

When Johnny returned to the shack that night his strange guest was still asleep. A third cot had been set up in the room. Understanding this, Johnny crept between the fresh, clean-feeling sheets, and was soon sleeping soundly.

When he awoke in the morning Drew was gone. His white-haired guest, Newton Mills, the man he had found, was seated on his bunk, chin cupped in hands, staring at the floor.

Johnny lay in his bunk watching him for a full quarter of an hour. In all that time he did not move so much as a finger.

This man fascinated Johnny. Does this seem strange? Who has not dreamed of coming upon a derelict at sea; of seeing her masts broken, bridge and gunwale gone, decks awash, yet carrying on, the wreck of a one-time magnificent craft? Could such a sight fail to bring to the lips an awe-inspired cry? How much more the wreck of a great man?

But was this a true derelict? This was the question that pressed itself upon Johnny's eager young mind. Many a drifting hulk, having been found sound of beam and keel, has been towed ashore to be refitted and sail the seas once more. So, too, it is with men. Thus Johnny's thoughts rambled on.

But what of this strange, prematurely gray man? What thoughts filled his mind at this hour? Or did he think?

Rousing himself, Johnny stepped from his bed, donned shirt, trousers and slippers to glide from the room and knock at that other door. Into Rosy's ready ear he whispered:

“Coffee for two. Stout! Black and strong!”

A short time later as he and the one-time great detective drank hot black coffee in silence, the door opened and Herman McCarthey entered. Johnny understood in an instant. Drew had sent him.

“Hello, Mills!” the sergeant exclaimed heartily. “Remember me, don’t you? We worked together on the Romeri kidnapping case. That was, let me see, twelve years ago.”

“Romeri.” The man passed a hand before his face, as one will who brushes away a cobweb. “Romeri. Yes, I remember the case. And you, Herman McCarthey. Ah yes, Herman McCarthey. There were no stool pigeons in that case.”

“No,” said Herman, “there were none.”

Conversation lagged. Herman sat down to drink a cup of coffee. He sighed, got up, walked across the floor, and sat down again.

“Tell you what,” he said at last, looking at Johnny. “To-day’s my day off. Going out to my place at Mayfair. It’s quiet out there and mighty fine. To-morrow’s Sunday. Supposing I take Mills out there for the week-end. You come out Sunday and stay all night. Then we’ll come back to town in my car, the three of us. What do you say, Mills?”

The white-haired man rose with the air of one who has surrendered his will; like a prisoner who receives orders from a guard.

Herman McCarthey read the meaning of that act, and frowned. He did not, however, say, “Well, let’s not go.” He said nothing, but led the way. The other followed.

Johnny went with them to the sidewalk. There he stood and watched them board a west bound car. After that he turned about and walked thoughtfully back to the room. In his mind questions turned themselves over and over. “When is a man an empty shell? When is he a hopeless derelict?”

He thought of Herman McCarthey, alone out there at his country place with that terribly silent man, and was tempted to regret the steps he had taken.

He ended by drinking a second cup of coffee, then falling asleep in his chair.

* * * * * * * *

Next day Johnny went out to Herman McCarthey's place. He had no trouble finding the house. The town was small, only a tiny village, but filled with many stately trees.

He wondered a little as he walked up the gravel path. How was his man, his derelict? Would anything worth while come of this affair?

He found Newton Mills in the same condition as when he left the shack. He talked little, always of trivial matters. He ate almost nothing. At times a haunting desire was written on his face.

"Been like that all the time," Herman whispered to Johnny. "Can't tell how he'll come out. Seen many like him. Can't help it when you're a cop. They're like a lamp that's been burning a long time and gone dim. Some, if you give them a fresh supply of oil, flare up, then burn steadily again. Some don't. Last spark is gone. How about him? Who knows? Only God knows. We must do our best."

They spent the day in quiet rambles about the village and long periods of loafing on the porch.

Newton Mills retired early. That left Herman and Johnny to amuse themselves; not that the strange derelict had furnished them much amusement. In his bed at least he was no longer a burden.

The two, the seasoned detective and the boy, chose to sit the long evening through on the broad screened porch.

The still peace of the place seemed strange to the boy whose ears had become accustomed to the rattle of elevated trains, the shouts of newsboys and the miscellaneous din of a city's streets.

"It's so quiet," he said, looking away through the motionless leaves of stately trees, across the darkened lawn to the spot where the moon was rising.

"Yes," said Herman McCarthey, "it is quiet. Sometimes I like to feel that the peace of God hovers over the spot. Anyway, it's the only place I'll ever live.

“You know, of course, that you’re supposed to live in Chicago if you’re on the force,” he went on. “But the Chief fixed that for me. It’s only a rule; not a law.

“The Chief and I,” and his tone became reminiscent, “were on the force together when we were young. We were in one fight which the Chief won’t forget. Nor I, either.

“There was a tough gang down by the river. A shooting had been reported. We got there on the double-quick; too quick perhaps. We met ’em coming up the bank, all armed. They didn’t wait for words. Just started in shooting. They got me in the shoulder first round. But I stood up to ’em and let ’em have it back. So did the Chief. One man went down.

“Of a sudden the bullet I had in me made me dizzy. I spun round and went down.

“The Chief stood up to ’em. A dozen rounds were fired before my head cleared. When it did, I propped my eyes open just in time to see one of them bending over the Chief, taking deadly aim. The Chief was down with a bullet in his back. That shot never was fired.”

“You—you got him.” It was Johnny who spoke.

“You said it, son.”

“And that,” said Herman McCarthey, “is why the Chief lets me live where I please.

“But that,” he went on after a moment, “is not why I live here. Of course I’ve always loved the quiet peace of the open country. You need it after the day’s rush and noise and all the squalid fuss you endure as a police officer. Somehow I have a notion that if a lot more of those city cave-dwellers lived out in places like this we wouldn’t have so many to run down and put in jail. But who knows?

“That’s not the whole reason either.” He leaned forward in his chair. “I live here because it’s the place where I spent my honeymoon.”

“You—your—” Johnny stared at him through the darkness.

“Yes.” Herman McCarthey’s tone was deep. “I was married once.

“No. She didn’t die. Just went away. They do that sometimes. She’s living yet, and happy, I hope. Successful too, and prosperous. Buys dresses for a big store in New York, swell dresses they say. Goes to Paris every year and all that. Ten thousand a year, maybe more.

“You see,” his tone became very thoughtful, “she married the wrong man. That happens too. I was only a cop, a plain ordinary policeman. Perhaps she married my uniform. Who knows?

“I brought her out here. She wasn’t happy. ‘Too still,’ she said.

“So we took a flat in the city. But she wanted what I couldn’t give, kind of a society life.”

For a time, he stared away to the west where the first stars were appearing. Then he spoke again.

“I bought this place on payments. When we moved to the city I couldn’t very well keep up the payments, so I let it all go; or thought I had.

“But when she’d left me and gone to New York I sort of felt like I’d like to come out and see the old place—the place where I’d spent my honeymoon.

“And what do you think? The man I’d bought the place from had saved it for me all that time! All I had to do was begin paying again, and it was mine.

“It’s things like that that make me like quiet country places. Men do such things out here. Perhaps they do in the city, too. But somehow I feel that a man is a bit nearer God when he sees the dew on the grass, the red in the sunset, and the gold in the moon.”

Again he was silent for a time.

“All this,” he went on then, “hasn’t made me bitter. It’s the duty and grand privilege of most men to have a home and raise a family of youngsters. It’s the duty of us all, especially of us officers of the law, to make it easy and safe for those boys and girls to grow up strong, clean, and pure. That’s why an officer who doesn’t do his whole duty is so much of a monster.”

CHAPTER XVIII
A SCREAM—A SHOT

That particular Sunday was a happy one for Rosy, the bright-eyed Italian girl. Why not? It was her birthday. She was sixteen. What is more wonderful than being sixteen? Besides, her mother had given her a new dress. It was real silk, the color of very old Italian wine, this dress was, and trimmed with such silk flowers as only the skillful fingers of Mother Ramacciotti could form.

There were other reasons for happiness. Rosy's life had known misery and sadness. Now she had a home; very plain, it is true, but comfortable. She had friends. Were not Johnny and Drew her friends? Many more there were at the radio studio. Rosy was a favorite. Her obliging interest in all that pertained to her duties, her ready smile, won many.

Then too, her mother had said to her that very morning, "Six months more, and we will go to those so beautiful hills that are my home. Your grandmother awaits us among her flowers and her vines. The white-topped Alps will look down upon us from afar. Ah! There is a country! Italy! Oh, my beloved Italy!"

Rosy had not seen Italy. Her mother had painted glowing pictures of that land. Oh! Such pictures! Who can say which one longed most for that land, mother or daughter?

A gay time they had that day. Drew was in for dinner. They had ravioli a la Tuscany, and after that some very rare fruit cake that had come only the week before from sunny Italy.

So proud of her new dress was Rosy, that she needs must wear it to her work. Her friends, all of them, must see how very beautiful it was. So, with a smile on her lips, and a dimple in each cheek, she departed, waving goodbye. Rosy, happy

Rosy!

At the studio she was greeted with many smiles and hearty congratulations. In time, however, all her friends had passed to their work on the floor above, leaving Rosy there alone.

It was always a little dreary down at the foot of the stairs. Only an occasional buzz at the switchboard disturbed the silence of the place. Faint, indistinct, seeming to come from another world, the mingled notes of many musical instruments floated down from above. Some tunes were merry; some sad.

On this particular night, for no reason at all, they all reached her ears tinged with melancholy. What was it? Is great happiness always followed by a touch of sadness? Was a shadow of the future stretching out to engulf her?

In one studio was a massive pipe organ. At 9:30 the organist, ascending to the console, left the studio door ajar. The pealing, throbbing notes of this organ drifted down to Rosy.

For each of us there is some musical instrument whose notes stir us with joy, another that awakens a feeling of sadness. To Rosy the pipe organ carried a feeling of infinite pain and sorrow. On that tragic day, when her murdered father had been carried to his last long rest they had led her, at her mother’s side, to a great dark, damp and lofty room that was a church. There for one long, torturing half hour she had listened to the most mournful tones she had ever known. The tones had come from a pipe organ.

Now, as she sat listening, it seemed to her that the dampness, the darkness, the gloom of that vast church were once more upon her.

She shuddered. Then, though the night was warm, she threw a wrap about her shoulders. Her fingers trembled.

“That door,” she thought. “I will go up and close it.”

She had risen and was turning about when, of a sudden, her blood froze in her veins. Directly behind the place where she had been sitting, were two men. One was half concealed by a door. His head and shoulders were within a closet. The other looked squarely at her.

Two things Rosy's startled eyes told her at a glance. The man who looked at her was young. His face was like a mask. The other man had a hole in his hand.

It was enough. Without willing to do so, she screamed. It was such a long-drawn, piercing scream as one utters but once or twice in a lifetime.

* * * * * * * *

In the meantime, under quite different circumstances, Johnny and Sergeant McCarthey were discussing their latest problem, the derelict from New York.

"Has he told you how it all came about?" Johnny asked.

"No. He won't tell that. What's the use? He knows I am a detective. He knows I know all that's worth knowing."

"Someone has told you?"

"No. They never need to. I've seen it before; too often. Too often!" Sergeant McCarthey's tones were sad. For some time he said no more. When he did speak it was with the voice of one who has resolved to tell much.

"You're young, son," he began. "You don't know a great deal about this business of hunting down criminals. You heard Mills say there were no stool pigeons used in that kidnapping case we solved?"

Johnny nodded.

"To me that remark was significant. He hates stool pigeons. Everyone does. A stool pigeon is a person who, for pay or for immunity from arrest for some crime he has committed, tells on some other person.

"There are men on every police force, good men too, who believe that criminals cannot be captured without the aid of stool pigeons.

"But how one must come to hate them when he is obliged to deal with them constantly. Perhaps you think of stool pigeons as poor, weak-eyed, slinking creatures who can earn a living in no other way. If so, you are wrong. Some are rich, some are poor, some men, some women. All are alike in two particulars. All want something; for the most part protection for some form of petty vice or

crime. And they all crawl. How they do crawl!

“Perhaps you don’t quite understand. It’s using the little criminal to catch the big one. Take an example. Some Greek runs a cheap gambling house. With card games and roulette wheels he entertains laborers and takes their money. He breaks the law. But he knows of a man who has robbed a bank. He is afraid of having his place raided, having his evil means of living taken away. He becomes a stool pigeon by informing on the robber. After that the detective uses him on many cases.

“But how must the detective feel who has dealings with such a man? You can’t play with snakes unless you lie down and crawl.

“Little by little, the thing gets you. To associate with stool pigeons you must do the things they do. You begin to drink. You do other things. You break the law. But the law forgives you, for you are working for it.

“Can’t you see? No matter how high your ideals were in the beginning, how lofty your aims, you step down, down, down, when you deal with stool pigeons.

“It was so with him.” He nodded his head toward the room in which the white-haired one was sleeping. “I happen to know. When I worked with him there was no finer man on any force. A college man, born to his task, enthusiastic for it from his youth; no one promised more. But his Chief believed in stool pigeons. He had a complicated, well guarded system of informers. Newton Mills was forced into this system. A man of sensitive nature and much native honor, he went down fast.”

“And you—”

“I have never used a stool pigeon in my life. I never will. Perhaps I am wrong. Crime must be punished. It’s a matter of method. I have informers, but they are all honest citizens. They tell what they know, and ask nothing in return. They are my friends. They are more than that. They are true Americans. It is the duty of every honest citizen to inform the officers of the law when he learns of any flagrant violation of the law. Perhaps if every citizen did his full duty, there would be no need of stool pigeons. Who knows? I—

“There’s the telephone,” he broke off suddenly. “Go answer it, will you?”

Johnny sprang through the door and disappeared into the dark interior of the house.

* * * * * * * *

The young man with a face like a mask was not one of those who love the sound of his own gun overmuch. But he was, by nature, a killer. When Rosy screamed, indeed even as she did so, he whirled about and, without removing his hand from his hip, fired one shot.

Rosy crumpled to the floor. Soon a scarlet stream began disfiguring her bright new birthday dress. Her eyes closed as in death. Her cheeks were white with pain.

When a throng of musicians and operators, electrified by Rosy's scream, at last came to their senses and, led by Bill Heyworth, came pouring down the stairs, they found Rosy lying unconscious on the floor. Otherwise the place was deserted.

Some time later it was found that a wire had been cut in the closet back of Rosy's chair. This wire ran through the closet to the studio above. It was the private wire from the Central Police Station to the radio squad call room.

CHAPTER XIX
A BULLET

Johnny Thompson was not at the telephone for more than the space of one minute. When he returned to the porch where Herman McCarthey sat placidly smoking, he was choked with emotion.

“It’s Rosy,” he said in a scarcely audible voice, “Rosy! They have shot her!”

“Who?” Herman sprang to his feet.

“The crooks!”

“Where?”

“At the radio station.”

“Why?”

“No one knows. A wire was cut. The private wire of the police. She was shot. No one was seen by anyone but Rosy.”

For one distressing moment they stood there silent. Then a voice came from the half darkness of the house door.

“The bullet!” that voice said. “Have they found the bullet?”

No one answered. They were too greatly astonished. Standing there in the doorway, before Johnny and Herman, looking like a ghost, dressed in a white bathrobe as he was, and with white hair flying, stood Newton Mills, the derelict detective.

“I say!” his voice rose shrilly insistent. “Have they saved the bullet?”

“Here!” said Herman McCarthey a trifle shakily, “let’s have a light.”

“There! That’s better.”

He peered into the face of Newton Mills. The face was wan, ghastly. But the eyes! a fresh fire burned there.

“They didn’t tell you, did they?” Herman said, speaking quietly to Johnny.

“Tell me?”

“The bullet.”

“They didn’t say anything about a bullet.” Johnny was at a loss to know what it was all about.

“You must call them,” said the gray detective. “Tell them to preserve it carefully.”

“I will call them at once.” Herman McCarthey’s tone was that used by a subordinate officer to his chief. He went to the telephone immediately.

He got Drew on the phone, talked with him for a little time, then ended by saying, “We will drive in at once. Yes, at once.”

“She’s not dead. The doctor says there is hope.” There was relief in his tone. “She has been conscious for a brief time. The man who fired the shot was a youth with a mask-like face.”

“A mask!” Johnny exclaimed.

“You have heard of him?”

“More than that. Seen him. He and another crook nearly waylaid me on the Drive.”

“You have the best of me. I never saw him. But I fancy the fellow has a record. Question is, what were the rascals about?

“And the other man,” he exclaimed quite abruptly, “was the man with a hole in his hand! He was the one who beat you up. Matters appear to have come to a head. We will put all these together and arrive at something.”

“And the bullet?” It was Newton Mills again.

“I was unable to learn anything. However, I cautioned them to save the bullet.”

“Good!” muttered Mills.

“We are driving to the city at once,” said Herman. “Shall you go with us? May I ask you to assist us in this case?”

Newton Mills’ slight form stiffened perceptibly. “I will gladly do all I can.”

Johnny understood. He loved Herman McCarthey for his generosity, his foresight, his extreme benevolence.

“It may save this man Mills for a great service,” he told himself, “and who knows better than he how to bring these inhuman ones to justice?”

In an incredibly short time Newton Mills was clothed and ready to go. He took the seat beside Herman McCarthey. Johnny sprang into the back seat. The motor purred and they were away.

As they sped toward the city Johnny sat hunched up in one end of the seat, the greater part of the time immersed in deep meditation. From time to time Newton Mills leaned over to speak to Herman McCarthey. Johnny caught snatches of the conversation. Always it had to do with bullets.

“Bullets?” Johnny said to himself. “What can one learn from a spent bullet?”

So they sped on through the night. As the hand on the dial of the great illuminated clock that overlooked the city pointed to 1:00 they slid into Grand Avenue and came to a stop before the shack.

As they passed the Ramacciotti cottage on their way to the shack, Johnny noted that the place was illumined by a single tiny lamp.

“Rosy is dead!” was his melancholy thought. “That is the light of the death

watch.”

This was not true. Rosy was in the hospital. Her mother had gone to her bedside. That she might not be obliged to re-enter her cottage in darkness, she had left the light.

Drew awaited them in the shack. The tragic story was soon told. The birthday party, the new dress, the return to work, the silent house, the strange men, the hand with a hole at its center, the face that was a mask; the scream, the shot—no detail was omitted.

“And now,” concluded Drew, “the poor girl hovers between life and death.”

“And the bullet?” insisted Newton Mills excitedly.

“It has been removed. I have it. Here it is.” Drew dropped a pellet of lead into the trembling hand of the old-time detective.

Johnny shuddered and turned away at sight of it.

Holding it between thumb and finger, as a jeweler might a pearl, Newton Mills examined it with a critical eye. He turned it over and over. He studied it from every possible angle.

“The forceps,” he commented at last, “have done harm, but not too much.”

“This,” he said, turning it over once again, “is a precious thing.”

Thrusting his hand in his pocket, he drew forth a small leather pouch. From this he poured a handful of coins. He put the bullet in their place, wrote a few words on a slip of paper and thrust it after the bullet.

“There must be no mistake,” he murmured as he drew the strings of the pouch tight and put it back into his pocket.

As if to say, “Money is of little consequence,” he scooped up the coins and dumped them loose into another pocket.

Then Herman McCarthey, Drew, and the strangely reclaimed derelict sat down to discuss the various aspects of the case and map out plans.

As for Johnny, he felt a need for solitude. He left the shack, made his way to the street level, and there wandered amid the shadows that are a city street three hours before dawn.

For a long time he found himself incapable of thinking in a rational manner. The whole affair had come to him with the force of a blow on the head. That such a thing could have happened in a city in a civilized country seemed incredible, monstrous.

“A girl!” he fairly cried aloud, “A mere child in a birthday dress. She is at her post of duty. She sees a hand, a face. She is frightened. She screams. She is shot!”

In an instant his mind was made up. He would leave this city. He would leave all cities. Cities were all bad. Man has made them. Man is evil. God made the country. God is good.

“But no!” he cried. “I will not leave. I will never, never go from this city until those monsters are trapped like the beasts they are, and punished!”

Calmed by the firm resolve, he returned to the shack. There he listened quietly to the council of seasoned warriors as they mapped out a campaign in which he was to have a definite part.

When at last they all tumbled down upon bunks or in great chairs for a few winks of sleep, Johnny’s eyes did not close at once. He was still thinking of the man with the hole in his hand. He had conceived a great and, beyond doubt, a just hatred for that man.

Upon what was this hatred based? Three counts. First, he had beaten Johnny up when his back was turned. He had not given him the least shade of a fighting chance. No person had so much as attempted this before. It should not go unpunished.

Far mightier was the second count. This man with his accomplice, the youth of the masked face, had shot a defenseless girl, and for no better reason than that she had screamed. The shot might prove fatal. For this, whether the girl died or not, these men deserved the electric chair.

Third, and most important of all, based not at all upon revenge, but upon a desire

for the good of all,—these were dangerous men. The man-killing tiger in his jungle is not more deadly. For this reason they must be speedily brought to justice.

Has anyone in all the world ever known better reasons for wishing to accomplish a given task than Johnny had as he entered upon this new field of endeavor?

CHAPTER XX
A CARD FROM THE UNDERWORLD

Long before Johnny and his companions were awake, newsboys were shouting:

“Extra! Extra! All about the radio studio murder!”

The newspapers, as is their custom, had exaggerated a little. Rosy had not been murdered. She was not dead. Yet, so slender was the thread that held her once abundant life to this earth of ours, it seemed that a breath of air, a thought, might snap it, as the lightest feather may snap the spider’s web.

Her mother, sad faced, patient, resigned to the many sorrows that fate, or what is worse than fate, crime, had bestowed upon her, sat at the girl’s side.

From time to time in her mind’s eye she saw the sunny hills of her native land, and seemed to catch the gleam of perpetual snows on the Italian Alps. This vision lasted but a moment. Yesterday, as she had talked with Rosy, it had seemed very near, very real indeed. But now it was far away.

“Rosy! My Rosy!” she murmured, as a stubborn tear splashed on her toil-worn hands.

Then, as if powerful hands suddenly seized her by the shoulder and stood her upon her feet, she rose from her chair. The tear was gone. Gone, too, was the expression of pain from her face. In its stead had come a look of sudden, stubborn resolve. Her eyes glistened like cold stars.

She left the hospital to board a street car. At her cottage she dug deep into an ancient Italian trunk. From its depths she extracted a single square of cardboard. At the center of the card was a name; in one corner an address, in another, done

in red ink with a pen, was a number; that was all.

With this card in her hand, she marched to Drew's shack and knocked.

No answer. She pushed the door open. No one there.

She returned to her cottage. There, for a full half hour, she sat in silent meditation. At the end of that time she spoke aloud to the empty room:

"Yes, I will do it. If it is the last thing I do, that I *will* do!

"They have killed my husband, who was a good man. Now they shoot my Rosy, who is a good girl. Yes, I will do it!"

With the air of one who has formed a purpose from which she will not deviate, she thrust the card within the folds of her dress.

The card was a secret token. The number on that card was a password. It belonged to the underworld. It admitted one to secret places. How had the Ramacciottis come into possession of this card? Who can say? When people speak a common language in a foreign land, strange things will happen. It was enough that she had the card. She meant to use it; had purposed to deliver it to Drew. Drew was not there. Very well. She could wait.

* * * * * * * *

Newspaper reports of the bold attack, of the ruthless shooting, roused the usually apathetic public. Two thousand dollars in rewards were offered. A thousand humble men in all walks of life became, overnight, zealous detectives.

"They have gone too far. This must end! We must put a stop to it all!" These were the words on every honest person's lips.

But how? Who were the culprits? Where were they to be found?

These questions could be answered best by the city's detective force. And this force, in the person of Drew Lane and Herman McCarthey, together with those recently drafted ones, Johnny Thompson and Newton Mills, were doing their best to answer them.

The Chief of Detectives had granted Drew Lane a leave of absence from his position as pickpocket hunter in order that he might work on this special case that had assumed such a personal aspect for him. The pickpockets, however, could not be neglected. It was necessary for the team of Drew and Howe to dissolve partnership for a time. Tom Howe was given another partner while Drew Lane joined Sergeant McCarthey.

They were gathered in Sergeant McCarthey's office at the police station. For his broad sheets of paper the sergeant had substituted oblongs of cardboard not unlike playing cards.

"Here are the clues, the possibilities," he said, thumbing the cards with nervous fingers. "You will recall," he said to Drew, "that when those miscreants beat Johnny up in the radio studio, three cases were reported which might have a bearing on the case; that is, they happened within a half hour of the time the boy was slugged.

"In the first place, let me say that this last instance, when the girl Rosy was shot, appears to eliminate one possibility. You remember I had a sheet on which I proposed to record the names of those who might have wrecked the radio station on that first occasion because their criminal ventures had been interrupted in the past by radio squad calls.

"That's off, I guess. This time the man with a hole in his hand was engaged in cutting wires. That's all he meant to do. The shooting was an accident. That makes it certain that he wanted the radio silent. Why? He was afraid a squad call would go through. If he cut that wire the police report could not come in, and the squad call could not go out.

"Now here." Once more he thumbed his cards, as the others leaned forward eagerly. "Here are the records of last night's doings in gangland, during the half hour after Rosy was shot.

"Card No. 1. A daring theatre holdup on State Street. It was to have been a rather large affair, involving several thousand dollars. Fortunately, it did not come out so well. The greater part of the money had been spirited away by the proprietor fifteen minutes before the robbers arrived. They got only about seven hundred dollars.

"This robbery was pulled off by two heavy-set men of dark complexion. They

made a fruitless attempt to locate the balance of the money by going to an office in the basement. Had a squad call gone through they might have been caught. The cutting of those wires saved them."

"The man with the hole in his hand and old Mask Face are their men!" Johnny exclaimed impetuously.

"Not so fast." The sergeant held up a hand. "There was another case. A fur store was robbed. More than ten thousand dollars in furs is gone. They jimmied the back door and hauled the stuff off in a truck.

"A watchman in the building adjoining saw them working. Suspecting something crooked, he called the police station. Had a squad call gone through, these men, too, would have been caught. They were not.

"There you have it!" He leaned back in his chair. "What do you say? Does our friend Hole-in-His-Hand belong to the holdup gang, or the fur store robbers?"

"Well," said Drew thoughtfully, "you've got to go back to that other night when the radio station was wrecked and Johnny was beaten up. There were three cases that night, weren't there?"

"Three. A robbery by two boys in an empty apartment, a stickup of a theatre and the dynamiting of a safe.

"I think," the sergeant went on, "that we may drop the two boy robbers. They don't seem to fit into the picture. But how about the others?"

"They go in pairs," Drew spoke again. "Two theatre stickups go together. Men who dynamite safes are likely to rob a fur store. Those go together. Two and two."

"Sounds like sense." The sergeant pinned two cards together. "We'll play 'em that way. But after all, the question is, where do the radio station wreckers belong?"

"With the theatre stickups," said Drew. "The dynamiters and fur robbers," said Johnny. "They require most time for their work."

"You can't both be right," the sergeant grinned. "All I have to say is, you'll have

to scurry round and find out.

“This is our job. It’s a mighty big one. And the reward is large. Not alone the two thousand dollars, but tremendous acclaim by the people awaits your success.”

All this time Newton Mills, the veteran, had sat listening in silence.

“But the bullets?” he exclaimed. “How about the bullets?”

“What bullets?” The sergeant looked at him in surprise. “There was but one shot fired. You have that bullet.”

“On this last occasion, yes. But on other occasions, no. When the girl’s father was killed a random shot was fired. When this boy was beaten up,” he nodded toward Johnny, “a shot was fired. These bullets doubtless remain where they lodged. You are aware of the fact that through the use of forensic ballistics we have been able to convict many criminals. The bullets in this case are likely to prove of vast importance.”

“And are you equipped to handle that side of the case?” asked the sergeant.

“Equipped?” The veteran, Mills, opened his hands. They were empty. “We will need tools and instruments.”

“I have an expense account and access to the station equipment. You may draw upon these in my name. I will write you an order. Anything else?”

“One—only one more thing.” Newton Mills appeared to hesitate. “I—I shall need an assistant. I should like this boy.” Again he turned to Johnny.

“How about it?” The sergeant’s eyes were on Johnny.

“If I may be excused from my duties at the station,” Johnny said eagerly.

“I’ll arrange that.”

“So now you are fixed.” The sergeant turned once more to Newton Mills.

“We will begin work at once.”

The veteran left the room. He was followed by Johnny.

That was the manner in which Johnny became the assistant of a veteran detective whom he had saved from disgrace. The enterprise promised adventures of a fresh and interesting character. Johnny entered upon it with unlimited enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XXI
THE SECRET NUMBER

When Drew Lane returned to the shack an hour later, he was treated to a great surprise.

Seated in his most comfortable chair was a slender girl of some eighteen summers. Her hair was dark; her eyes, of the eager sort, were brown. Drew had never seen her.

As he entered the room she sprang up.

“Where is he?” she demanded.

“He? Who? Why—” Drew was astonished.

“You have him locked up. They told me at the police station that you would know where he is. Where is he?” Her voice rose to a shrill note.

“Why, I—” Drew’s mind was in a turmoil. Who was this whirlwind? Whom did he have locked up? At that moment, no one.

He looked into those eager eyes. He studied those high cheekbones, that sensitive mouth, and read there the answer to at least one of his questions.

“Why! You—you are Newton Mills’ daughter.” He sat down quite suddenly. “He—he never told us—”

“That he had a daughter? He wouldn’t. He’s that way.” Her tone went cold.

“Sit down, won’t you?” Drew offered her a chair. “What’s your name?”

She ignored the chair, but answered his question. “Joyce Mills. Where is my father?”

“Your father? The last time I saw him he was going out of a door. He’s been assigned to a case, a rather big case. Has to do with what he calls ballistics. He __”

He came to a sudden pause. The girl’s face was a study. Surprise, doubt, joy, sorrow, laughter, tears; they were all there, registered in quick succession.

“A case! A case!” she fairly shrieked. “And I thought he was in jail.”

She crumpled into a chair.

“Well,” said Drew quietly, “he might have been. But he isn’t. And he’s not likely to be. So you can set your heart at rest on that.”

Having regained her self-composure somewhat, she leaned forward as if expecting to be told more.

Drew humored her. He told, so far as he knew it, the whole story of the downfall and the redemption of Newton Mills.

“Oh!” she breathed. “And you saved him. You and that boy!”

“Johnny Thompson saved your father,” Drew smiled. “The rest of us only helped a little.”

She rose and advanced toward him.

There is no telling what might have happened. But at this moment the subject of their conversation, Newton Mills himself, opened the door and entered.

“Joyce!” he exclaimed. “You here?”

“Father!” There was an indescribable touch of something in her tone that caused the tense muscles of the man’s face to relax. “Father, I had to come.” She laid a hand on his arm. “And now you have a case, a very hard case. He has told me. I must stay and help you.”

“No! No! You must not!” The words came like a startled cry from the lips of the veteran detective.

“But, father, I used to help you.”

“Yes, yes. That is all in the past. This case is a dangerous one. It has to do with desperate characters. It may mean death. I cannot take you with me. You are too young.” He said these last words as if he were speaking of going to the grave.

Dropping into a chair and cupping his chin in his hands, he sat for some time thinking. As he thought the blood vessels swelled and throbbed on his broad temples.

“I have it!” he exclaimed at last, springing up. “Your cousin Doris Mills lives in Naperville. She is married. They are fine people. I haven’t a doubt of it, though I have never seen them. You must go there. When this affair is over, I, too, will come. We will have an enjoyable time together.”

The girl, who had measured the emotions that flowed through his being, did not say, “I will go,” nor yet, “I will not go.” She said nothing.

After opening a leather bag and fumbling about among his belongings, her father handed her an envelope.

“The address is on that,” he said.

At once he appeared to forget her. Having taken some small articles from his bag, he thrust them deep in his pocket. One was a very thin automatic pistol.

One glance about the room, a halting puzzled stare at the pistol and arrow hanging over Drew’s bed, then he was gone.

“He was always like that.” There was a look of tenderness and a smile on the girl’s face.

She turned again to Drew. “I can’t thank you enough,” she said. “I must find Johnny Thompson and thank him, too. It was terrible when father lost interest in everything, and took to forgetting in that horrible way.”

“He’ll be all right now, I think,” Drew replied.

“But I must help him!” she exclaimed, springing to her feet and walking the length of the room. “I must! I will!”

“I am afraid,” said Drew in a quiet tone, “that this is no task for a girl.”

“Girl!” She gave him a look. “I’m eighteen. As long as I can remember, I’ve been helping him.

“When I was thirteen we went to live in the worst corner of New York. Department orders for him. Mother wouldn’t go. Grandmother is rich. She’s in society. Mother’s in society. Society folks don’t go to live on a street where they’re all Sicilians. I went. I made him let me come.

“Learned the language, I did. Played around with the kids. Found out things. Say! I found out things he’d never have learned any other way!”

“Maybe so.” Drew’s tone was still quiet. “But this is not New York.”

She looked at him for a moment in silence. When she spoke it was with some effort. “Big cities are all alike. I know!”

Dropping into a chair she remained silent for a time. Then she said in a changed voice:

“Tell me about this case.”

Because he was beginning to like this girl, Drew told her. “And we’ll get them,” he concluded. “Justice is an arrow of fire. It burns its way in time to every evil heart.”

Joyce took in every word. Then she asked a question:

“Where is Mrs. Ramacciotti?”

“In the cottage just ahead of this shack.”

“Take me there.”

Drew led the way.

The instant the girl entered Mrs. Ramacciotti’s cottage she began talking. She

spoke in Italian, and Mrs. Ramacciotti, smiling for the first time since the tragedy, answered her in Italian.

“I’ll leave you,” said Drew. “I have some things to do.”

“Please do.” The girl sat down.

The two, the tall girl and the stolid Italian mother, talked for a solid hour, always in Italian.

When they had ended, the mother said, “If you are going to this place, you will not be safe. They will kill you. Unless I give you this, they are sure to murder you.” She drew from the folds of her dress the square of cardboard and pointed to the secret number in red.

“Oh!” the girl exclaimed. “I understand. How perfectly grand!”

“And, Miss,” Mother Ramacciotti ran her hand across her face, “your hair, it is dark. Your eyes also. There is this which comes in bottles. Fine ladies who want to seem tanned, they use it. You speak so good Italian. Put this on hands and face. They will think you are Italian. It is better so.”

“Thanks a lot,” Joyce responded, “I will.”

Joyce Mills did not go to Naperville. She went instead to a drug store and then to a men’s furnishing store. After that she went into a barber shop and got a hair-cut.

As night began to fall upon the city, she took a car on Madison Street and went west. She dismounted at Ashland Boulevard and walked slowly toward the south.

CHAPTER XXII
STARTLING TRANSFORMATIONS

Some twenty blocks from the shack, in a south-westerly direction, well out of the city's business section, and just off a broad boulevard, there was a club. This was a very unusual club. Entrance was by card. The man at the door was old and very wise. He had lived in Sicily in the days of the Mafia.

The place went by the name of the "Seventy Club." It is not certainly known what the "seventy" stood for. There are those who said it was the club of seventy thieves. Others insisted that there were more than seventy members and that not all were thieves. Be that as it may, the police held no cards of admission, and were granted entrance only when accompanied by search warrants.

On several occasions the police had entered. Always they had found no cause for complaint. At the front of the place was a lobby and reading room; at the back, pool tables and other tables for card playing. In the center was a grill, where excellent food was served.

Men, for the most part of dark complexion, shot pool and shuffled cards at the back. They dined, often with ladies, in the grill and went to smoke in the lobby.

The manager, a short, broad-shouldered man, with deep set, gleaming eyes, presided at a desk near the door and scrutinized all comers.

To this man, on the very night of which we are speaking, there came a youth. This youth was dressed in a suit of modest gray. He wore a dark tie, a gray shirt and black shoes. He was dark complexioned with dark eyes and close cropped hair. He was very slender of build. His fingers were extremely long; his feet small.

In his hand this boy bore a card. In one corner of the card was a secret number done in red ink. Truth is, everyone who entered here possessed such a card, marked in just this manner. Without the card, they did not enter.

The manager questioned the boy in his native tongue, studying him the while. The boy replied politely in the same tongue.

The manager scribbled a note, gave it to him, then nodded toward the door at the back of the lobby.

The boy went back. Half an hour later he might have been found dressed in a dark brown suit trimmed in gold braid, clearing dishes from the tables in the grill. He had been given a position as bus boy.

The building in which the club was located rose only a single story from the ground. Did it have a basement? To all appearances it did not. The heating plant was situated back of the billiard room. There were no outside entrances to the place save the one at the front. There were no stairways leading down.

The grillroom possessed one slightly unusual feature. Six telephone booths, standing in a row, occupied one corner of the large grillroom. One would have said that one, or at most two booths, would have sufficed for such a place. But no; here were six. And, if one judged by the number of people who entered the booths, one might have said there were not too many, for people were constantly entering and leaving them.

Two things were strange about these booths. They were not constructed as other booths are. True, they were just as broad and just as tall; but they contained far less glass. The windows were narrow and high. In fact, once a person was inside and had closed the door, nothing at all could be seen of him.

This, one would say, was an improvement, for who wishes to be seen grinning and gesturing at a telephone, as one is forever doing?

The other feature was far more startling. It was a thing you might not notice until you had dined there many times. Did the new bus boy take cognizance of it on that first night of service?

If one were to hazard a guess one would answer, “He probably did.” That guess, however, might easily be wrong; for, during the entire evening the boy rendered

faultless service. He did not drop a dish, spill a glass of water, nor do any of those things one is so likely to do when startled.

The peculiarity of these six booths was that they did not always disgorge the identical persons who had entered them.

Now such a thing will seem strange under any circumstances. If a short dark man dressed in brown enters a telephone booth, and three minutes later a short blonde man in gray comes out, it might seem a curious circumstance. But when a short, broad, dark complexioned man in a blue suit enters and, after five minutes, a tall blonde lady in a pearl gray dress emerges, it is enough to cause the most phlegmatic person to stare.

As for the guests, they paid not the slightest attention to the succession of transformations that were being made in these booths. They went right on laughing and talking, drinking coffee and munching salad, just as if nothing unusual was happening in the world.

CHAPTER XXIII
MANY BULLETS

For Johnny Thompson the events of that day were full of interest. They provided him with a whole volume of speculations.

While Newton Mills was returning to the shack for certain articles in his kit, Johnny had been sent to a seed store. There he purchased two hundred small cloth sacks. In this manner he missed meeting Joyce Mills. Since her father did not as much as mention her name, he was not even aware of her existence.

Armed with a hammer and several small chisels, they went first to an unoccupied store-room.

Having presented his papers to the janitor, and procured the key, Newton Mills led the way into this dingy cavern where dust lay thick and cobwebs festooned the walls. This room had known tragedy. It was here that Rosy Ramacciotti had seen her father shot down. Johnny fancied that if one were to brush away the dust, he might still find blood stains on the floor. He did not brush away the dust. Instead he shuddered.

Then, so that his mind might be occupied with brighter thoughts, he set himself at the problem of picturing the place as it was before the tragedy. Bright lights, gleaming show cases, boxes of candy, their colorful wrappings lending a note of cheer to the place, and behind all this, smiling, happy to be of service, Rosy.

“And after that,” he thought, “there—”

His thoughts were interrupted by Newton Mills, who was speaking aloud.

“The cash register was about there. Rosy’s father had just waited on a customer.

He would not be far from this spot. The man with the gun must have advanced from the door, but not too far. He would aim so. The bullet would take this direction. It lodged in that wall."

During all this time the veteran detective went through a small dream which took him about from place to place. He now marched across the room at an acute angle from the door, put his hand to the wall, felt about, then uttered a low sigh of satisfaction.

"The medium sized chisel, please." He held out a hand toward the boy.

Johnny supplied the required instrument.

After prodding about, first in the plaster, then in a wooden lath at the back, the detective gave vent to a second sigh as a leaden pellet dropped into his hand.

"Here we have it," he murmured. "And not badly preserved. It should present no difficult problem."

He placed the bullet, which had been fired at Rosy's father several months before, in one of the white cloth bags. To this bag he attached a tag. He wrote a number on the tag, recorded the same number in a small notebook, and scrawled a few words beside the number; then, having placed both notebook and bag in his pocket, he turned to go.

"That is all here. We will go next to your radio studio." He led the way out of the gloomy place.

At the studio they searched the padded walls until they located the bullet that had been fired on the night when Johnny was beaten up.

This bullet was also secured, placed in a bag, labeled and recorded.

"We will return to the police station." Once more Newton Mills led the way.

They spent the remainder of that day in a vacant basement room at the police station. To Johnny their occupation seemed passing strange.

First they filled a barrel with cotton waste. Next they went to a room in the station where a great number of used arms were stored. These had been taken

from hoodlums, suspects, and police characters. With his arms full of pistols of all possible descriptions, Johnny returned to the basement.

For four hours after that, they practiced the same bit of drama over and over. Newton Mills loaded a pistol and fired it at the barrel of waste. Johnny retrieved the bullet from the waste. This bullet was bagged, numbered and recorded. After that a different pistol was fired, and the identical process repeated.

Darkness fell before they finished. As Johnny left the basement he fancied that he still heard the sharp crack of small fire-arms.

“We will return to the shack,” said Newton Mills. “No. First we will go to the laboratories.”

They took an elevator, mounted five floors, then entered a room. The walls of the room were lined with all manner of instruments. With some of these Johnny was thoroughly familiar. Others were of a sort of which he knew nothing.

Newton Mills requested the loan of two microscopes, some prisms, a curious type of camera and various odds and ends of equipment. These he wrapped in a bundle. He tucked the bundle tightly under his arm.

“To-morrow,” he said as they descended to the main floor, “I shall not require your services.”

Johnny was disappointed. His curiosity had been roused by the strange occupation of that day; it had been redoubled by the package under Newton Mills’ arm. He had hoped that the morrow would reveal the purpose of it all.

“But now,” he told himself with a sigh, “I am left out.”

During the three days that followed, Newton Mills never left the shack. He rigged up a curious affair made of microscopes and prisms. With this he studied bullets. Bullets, bullets, and more bullets were studied, measured, compared, and studied again.

He ate little, drank much black coffee, took numberless tiny photographs, sent these out to have them enlarged, then pored over the numerous enlargements, hours on end.

Since he had no part in this, and understood it not at all, Johnny returned to the radio studio and his squad calls. In this he found slight comfort. Rosy was not there.

From time to time he made inquiries regarding the girl. She was holding her own, that was all. Time alone would tell whether or not this bright world of sunshine and shadows, of moonlight, springtime, birds' songs, and budding flowers was to exist longer for her.

CHAPTER XXIV
NOT ON THE PROGRAM

The new bus boy at the Seventy Club was making progress. The boss liked him. He had eyes in his head and a tongue in his cheek. He also knew what they were for. He did his work in an intelligent manner. He talked little and asked no questions.

From time to time the boss called him to his desk. There he plied him with questions regarding their mutual friends in another city. The boy knew an amazing amount about this man's underworld friends there.

On the third night the boss pressed a telephone slug into the boy's hand, and said:

"Go call your friend." He added a wink.

The boy entered one of the six booths, closed the door firmly, slipped the slug into its place, heard it click, then felt himself slowly descending.

There are those who might have cried out at this extraordinary occurrence. Not this boy. He merely mumbled:

"So that's it."

After that he was all eyes for what was to come. He had not long to wait.

Having dropped some fifteen feet, in the manner of a slow elevator, his curious conveyance stopped. At the same time a door directly before him slid open. He passed out. The door closed.

He found himself in a second dining room. At the back, too, there were tables for cards. But how different it all was! Here was music, dancing, drinking, gambling; just such a life as the hard working members of gangland demand while off duty.

From that night on, the new boy carried dishes and brushed crumbs from the tables on the floor below, this secret meeting place of gangland. Did he prefer it so? Who could have told? He went about his work in the same mechanical, precise manner. He talked little. He asked no questions. When the boss descended to the floor below, he rubbed his hands and seemed pleased.

Despite the drinks, the music, the dancing in this place, it possessed a somber air.

Pure unadulterated joy never comes to those who attempt to extract pleasure from that which has cost other people days of arduous toil. This is a law of nature. Like the laws of the Medes and Persians, this law altereth not.

Men and women did not frequent this place for pleasure alone. We have said it was a club. Men meet in their clubs for purposes of business. It was so here. That this business might be transacted in the strictest privacy, booths had been provided. It was the duty of the new boy to bring away dishes from these booths.

On the second night of service here on the floor below, the boy saw a tall, broad man with the features of a southern European, but the complexion of an Anglo-Saxon, with close-set eyes of blue, and a mass of tumbled hair, enter the second booth from the center. He had a companion. The companion was younger than he. At times this youth’s face seemed a mask; at others, when he smiled, it changed. They ordered a sumptuous feast, these two: chicken, Italian style; creamed new potatoes; lobster salad; and a great black bottle. They ate in silence.

As the bus boy removed the dishes, he noted the large man’s hand. It appeared to give him a start. He barely avoided spilling a glass of water on the table. Perhaps this was because there was a hole in the center of the man’s hand.

Dinner disposed of, the younger man of the pair left the booth, walked out upon the floor, talked for a time to one of the entertainers, a tall blonde, then held out his hand for a dance.

Shortly after that he returned to the booth, poured a drink from the black bottle,

then sat in the semi-darkness talking in guarded tones to his companion, him of the hole in his hand.

At that instant a curious thing happened. Against the wall, on the darkest side of the booth, appeared a singular phenomenon. A red arrow as long as a man's forearm was distinctly to be seen. And even as the two stared at it in astonishment, the arrow appeared to flame, as if perhaps the walls were on fire.

The younger of the two men shot a startled glance at his companion. Then, with fingers that trembled ever so slightly, he drew a chain that flooded the booth with light.

Instantly the arrow of fire vanished.

The light was extinguished. The arrow did not return.

Once more the light was thrown on.

Chancing to glance down at the table, the younger gangster uttered a low exclamation, then put out a hand to grasp a note that had appeared from nowhere.

Holding this up to the light, he read aloud these words:

"*Justice is an arrow of fire. It goes straight to hearts that are evil. It burns as it strikes. No one shall escape.*"

The thing was done on white paper with a typewriter.

For a full moment the two men stared at one another in silence. Then they rose abruptly to disappear into the secret booths where one does not telephone.

It is a curious fact that no man ever grows so hard, so stoical, so impervious to emotions that he fails to retain a superstitious fear of that which seems unnatural and uncanny. The flaming arrow, the mysterious note, stirred up within the hearts of these killers a sense of dread such as no display of arms, no great body of police, could ever inspire within them.

This little affair most certainly was not on the program as it had been prepared by the heavy-set, stolid man who presided over the door. Yet, strange to say,

neither the man with a hole in his hand, nor his companion, spoke one word to the manager regarding the affair as they left the clubroom above, for the cooling air of night.

The name by which the younger of these two gangsters was known was Jimmie McGowan. Jimmie was not the name his mother had given him at birth. Nor was McGowan the one he had inherited from his father. His face was dark. His parents had come to America from a foreign land.

This gave Jimmie no occasion to be ashamed. That foreign nation has furnished the world many of her bravest warriors, her wisest statesmen, her sweetest singers. Still Jimmie had chosen another name.

On the following night Jimmie and his companion, who was named Mike Volpi, returned to their booth on the lower floor of the Seventy Club. The slender bus boy who hovered about the place did not appear to notice them.

They had ordered dinner and were seated in the shadows talking when, of a sudden, the flaming arrow once more appeared on the wall.

Like a flash Jimmie's hand threw on the light. His sharp eyes looked for a note. There was none. The need was not great. The message of the flaming arrow was burned on his brain:

"Justice is an arrow of fire."

The two men rose without a word. They left the place without dining. They did not return. Their actions spoke louder than words. They appeared to say:

"Here is something alarming, sinister, terrifying. Are we warned or threatened? Who is to stand up against such an invisible force?"

Was there, from time to time, about the corners of the slim bus boy's lips on that night the suggestion of a smile? Who can say?

CHAPTER XXV
A WOLF SEEKS CULTURE

Jimmie McGowan was no ordinary cheap crook. That is to say, he did not deal in small change. He never picked a pocket nor snatched a purse. He did not jimmy a door to enter and carry away the silver while a family was away.

He preferred to deal in matters pertaining to thousands. He did not, however, disdain a few hundreds if opportunity came his way. By all this you may be led to conclude that he belonged in a class with Robin Hood; that he robbed only the rich, because they were rich, and perhaps even slipped a little of his quickly secured wealth into some poor man's hand. But Jimmie was no Robin Hood, as you must know from what follows.

It chanced on a certain night that he saw a man draw a sum of several hundred dollars from his bank. The man walked away from the bank. Jimmie, noting his direction, walked around the opposite corner and, by doing a double-quick down an alley, managed to meet him at a dark corner two blocks farther on.

"Hands up!" commanded Jimmie.

The man hastened to comply. But at once he began to plead with Jimmie. The money was the result of two years of careful saving. He meant to use it in paying a skillful surgeon for straightening his child's spine. This child, his only son, had been a cripple since birth. But now he might be made to walk.

It chanced that the man was telling the truth. But must a high class robber believe all that he hears on the street? Was he to be expected to accompany the man to his home and see for himself that the truth was being told?

Most certainly not. At least, so concluded Jimmie. He struck the man on the

head, took his money and departed.

The man went to the hospital. His son remained a cripple. And Jimmie, being one of those persons known among his friends as a “hot sport,” put on a party that very night which was the envy of all his pals. Such a feast, such drinking, such dancing! Well, that was Jimmie.

Jimmie knew how to dress. Never doubt that. His suits were tailor-made. His shirts were custom-made to match his suits, and his ties to match the shirts. At all times Jimmie was immaculate. It pays in his line of business. A natty burglar gets fine notices in the papers.

Nor was Jimmie entirely devoid of culture. Back in his family somewhere, there had been a musical strain. At the symphony orchestra opening concert or the opera first night, unless too greatly annoyed by the troublesome police, Jimmie was present. And invariably he was accompanied by a person described in the papers as a stunning blonde. The blonde was dressed in an opera cloak of dark, dark purple, trimmed in richest white fox. It was not always the same blonde. It was always the same cloak. Jimmie provided that. For how is one to enjoy culture unless he has a lady on his arm? Well, that was Jimmie.

On the night following that disagreeable affair of the flaming arrow, Jimmie was not at the Club, nor was he with Mike Volpi. Instead he was out in search of culture. With a lady on his arm, he was strolling a certain park where, every summer, opera is put on in the open air. Drew Lane was also there.

Drew saw Jimmie. He had never seen him before, nor even heard of him. For all this, instinct, trained by experience, said to him:

“Here is a crook. He has a gun.”

Now there is one trinket which no plain citizen may carry—a gun.

Drew stepped up to Jimmy and patted him on the back, exclaiming:

“How are you, son?”

That instant Jimmie’s face became a mask. Well for him that Drew was not looking at his face. Instead he was watching Jimmie’s hands. Also his own hands were busy. They were extracting a gun from a hidden pocket in Jimmie’s coat.

“You haven’t a thing on me.” Jimmie’s tone was low. It was also the snarl of a wolf. “You can arrest me for that, but it will do you no good.”

Drew knew he spoke the truth. A man may be fined or imprisoned for carrying a gun, but only when the officer who takes the gun has a search warrant.

“I am glad to have met you, old son.” Drew spoke in a tone of counterfeit cordiality. At the same time he displayed a little corner of his star.

“I will be glad to meet you under different circumstances.” Once more it was Jimmie the wolf who spoke in scarcely audible tones.

“No doubt you will,” said Drew. “And here’s luck to the best man.”

Drew lost himself in the crowd. Jimmie’s gun was in Drew’s pocket.

Had Drew been asked just how he knew that Jimmie was a crook who carried a gun, he could not have told.

His reasons for taking the gun were clear enough. A snake without fangs is harmless. So, too, is a crook without a gun. The fewer guns there are in a night crowd such as this, the better. For all that, Jimmie seldom mixed business with pleasure. Without doubt he carried that gun for defense only. For the moment he was defenseless; quite as defenseless as his many victims. What a pity that the victims did not know this! As it was, Jimmie and his companion imbibed fresh culture without further disturbance.

That night when Drew returned to the shack, he found the slight form of Newton Mills still bent over his microscope.

“There you are, Old Timer!” Drew exclaimed as he removed the clip from Jimmie’s gun and let it drop with a clatter on the table. “There’s another little plaything for you.”

Newton Mills looked at the gun for a space of ten seconds. Then, as his weary eyes became focused upon it, he seized it eagerly.

“It’s the type!” His words were tense.

“What do you mean, the type?”

“It is the type of gun from which that bullet was fired.”

“What bullet?”

“The one that may have ended the life of your good friend Rosy.”

“No!”

“It is.”

“We will try it out, examine the bullet to-night. Now.” Drew reached for the gun.

“Not to-night.” Newton Mills made that old familiar gesture seeming to brush cobwebs from his face. “My eyes are gone for to-night. To-morrow will do.”

Drew started to hang the gun on a nail beside the one that had hung there so long. Newton Mills took it from him and buried it deep in the bottom of a chest. He then locked the chest and hid the key.

“You can never be too careful,” he said quietly. “Things happen when we least expect them.

“By the way!” He changed the subject. “Where did you get that gun?” He pointed to the one hanging close to Johnny’s blood-stained arrow.

Drew sat down and told the story of the gun and the arrow, as it was enacted that dark night on the deserted slip.

Newton Mills drank in his every word.

“It’s strange I never told you about that before,” said Drew.

“It is,” agreed the veteran detective.

Reaching up, he took the gun from its nail and brushed away the spider’s web. After that he unlocked the chest and placed this gun beside the other. Without another word, he undressed and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI
THESE ARE THE GUNS

Johnny was awakened early next morning by the sound of muffled shots.

Drew too was awake. He was sitting up in bed, listening. The Old Timer's cot was empty.

"Wha—what is it?" Johnny asked.

"Shots," Drew replied.

"Where?"

"In the basement of the Ramacciotti cottage, I would say."

This guess was correct. Having awakened before dawn, Newton Mills had removed the two guns from the bottom of his chest, had searched in a box for cartridges, then had crept quietly out of the room.

He had meant to go down to the beach and fire shots into the sand. However, having found Mrs. Ramacciotti in her kitchen, he had stuffed a keg with rags and had retired to her basement. There he fired three shots from the young gangster's gun and three from the one that had so long been hanging on the wall of the shack.

He left the cellar, as soon as he had retrieved and labelled the bullets, and returned to the shack.

"Out gunning rather early," Drew commented.

“Hey? Yes. Important, I’d say.” Newton Mills seated himself at his bench, switched on a light, and at once lost himself in a study of the freshly fired bullets.

At a certain time, had one chanced to observe him closely, he would have noted that intense excitement gripped him. His fingers trembled. Three times he dropped the same bullet. His lips trembled as if with palsy.

A few moments later he became a creature of marble calmness. Turning about in his chair he stood up, stretched his arms, straightened his tie, then announced quietly:

“These are the guns.”

“What guns?” Drew looked up.

“This,” he said, patting Jimmie McGowan’s gun, the one Drew had taken the night before, “this thin automatic is the gun that fired the shot that has perhaps taken the life of Rosy Ramacciotti.”

Had he exploded a bomb in the center of the room, he could not have caused greater excitement. Drew leaped to his feet, overturning his chair with a crash. Johnny allowed a glass of water to slip from his hand.

“That gun!” Drew exclaimed as soon as he had regained possession of his senses. “Why! I had that man in my hands, unarmed, defenseless, last night!”

“Can’t help that,” Newton Mills smiled a dry smile. “Bullets don’t lie, not to me.

“What is more—” He laid a hand on the other gun, the one that had been taken from a murderous hand on the deserted slip on the night Johnny shot an arrow, “this is the gun that killed Rosy’s father. It is also the gun that fired the shot in the studio on the night that Johnny was beaten up.”

The two boys stood there for some time, silent, dumfounded by such startling revelations.

“Since you know this much,” the Old Timer went on at last, “you may as well know the rest. Let me explain to you how it is that I can know these things with such certainty. I will explain it to you just as I would to a jury. May take a little

time, but in view of the large place this new science of forensic ballistics is sure to play in future detection of crime, I am certain it will be time well spent."

There was a tap at the door. Mrs. Ramacciotti appeared with the morning coffee.

"Good!" exclaimed the Old Timer. "Coffee and bullets. What could be sweeter!

"Forensic ballistics," he said musingly as he sipped hot coffee, "sounds rather impossible, doesn't it? It means only this. Forensic, having to do with the law; ballistics, the science of projectiles. Forensic does not interest us. Ballistics, for us, means the science of bullets.

"Now," he said, reaching for Jimmie's automatic and glancing down its barrel, "you know that the barrels of revolvers are rifled; that is, there is a series of spiral grooves running through each barrel. That is done to make the bullet go straight. A smooth surface causes the bullet to tumble end over end the instant it leaves the gun."

Taking three small white sacks from his bench, he emptied their contents on the table before him: three bullets.

Displaying two of these on the palm of his hand, he asked:

"Are they alike?"

"Yes," replied Drew after a moment's scrutiny.

"No," said Johnny.

"In what way do they differ?" The detective's eyes lighted.

"I don't know. Let me have them." Johnny studied them closely.

"The grooves in one are wider than in the other," he said at last.

"Correct. In other words, there is one more spiral groove in the barrel of one gun than the other. So we know at once that if a bullet killed a man it could have been fired from only one of these guns.

"In fact the guns are of different makes. No two manufacturers rifle their barrels

in the same manner. Some cut more grooves. Some cut deeper grooves, and so on.

“We have got this far,” said the veteran detective, taking a long drink of coffee, “but that isn’t very far. There are thousands upon thousands of automatics in this country, manufactured by the same company. They are of the same rifling, same caliber and all. Suppose a bullet has been fired from a revolver. It has killed a man. You think you have the gun. You wish to say to judge and jury, ‘I have the gun that killed the man. This is the gun. I will prove it to you by a study of bullets fired from it.’ In view of the fact that there are thousands of such guns in existence, of the same caliber and manufactured by the identical machinery, are you able to prove that one particular gun fired the fatal shot?”

“Don’t seem possible,” said Johnny.

“It is possible, nevertheless.” Newton Mills’ eyes shone. “With the aid of a comparison microscope and micro-photography, it can be done.

“In the first place, the spiral grooves in a gun are made by passing a narrow cutting die many times through the barrel. No metal has ever been found that will not wear. The cutting die wears. Its edge becomes rough. You cannot see the roughness with the naked eye. A microscope reveals it. This rough cutting edge imparts just such a roughness to the spiral groove.

“Since the cutting die is constantly wearing, the roughness of the spiral groove of one gun, when studied under the glass, will not be exactly the same as that of any other barrel, though cut by the same machine on the same day.

“Now, when a soft bullet is shot from a gun, the rough edge of the groove leaves scratches upon its surface. You cannot see these scratches with your naked eye. The microscope again reveals them.

“When you put two bullets fired from two guns of the same identical type under a comparison microscope, you can see them both at once and can place their scratches side by side and end to end, and you know at once that they were not fired from the same gun.

“But if the scratches match perfectly, then you know that the two bullets were fired from the same gun, and no other.”

By this time both Johnny and Drew were listening with all their ears.

“This study,” said Mills, “is sure to be of great service to the forces that make for justice. Every crook has his weakness. A weakness common to many is love for a particular gun. A man has carried a gun and used it many times. It has saved his life by taking the life of another. The gun becomes his pal, his defender. He does not willingly part with it. And in this he reveals a great weakness. That gun has left its trademark, its bullets, behind. By these, man and gun may be traced. If the gun falls into the hands of the law, woe to the crook!

“As you know,” he turned to Johnny, “we secured the bullet that wounded Rosy; also the one that was fired that other time in the studio; and the one imbedded in the wall at Ramacciotti’s old place.

“After examining these, we fired test bullets from all guns taken by the police from suspects during the past six months.

“An exhaustive study of these showed that the guns from which our three bullets were fired had not been taken by the police. That was a discouraging discovery.

“But now, as so often happens, just as we seemed at a standstill, Drew takes a gun from a suspect; he hauls another down from the wall, and behold: here we have the very guns we seek!

“The test bullets fired from the gun of Drew’s suspect are exactly the same as the one fired into Rosy’s body. The ones fired from the gun you took in such a strange manner beside that deserted slip are exactly the same as those fired by the man with the hole in his hand. I will be able to prove this to any jury by the use of enlarged photographs of the bullets. I now have evidence that will convict these two men. Bring me the men!”

“Ah yes!” Drew sighed. “That’s it! Catch the men!”

“But we will do it!” he exclaimed, springing to his feet. “Such men are a menace to any community. No decent, law abiding citizen is safe as long as they are at large. We will get them. We will! We *must*!”

CHAPTER XXVII
AN ARROW SPEEDS TO ITS MARK

While the old time detective was making these brilliant discoveries, Herman McCarthey and Drew had made little progress in their endeavor to find the men in the case.

They had taken to riding a squad car at night. A special car of great speed was assigned to them. This car was equipped with a loud gong. They worked only on radio squad calls. The moment a call was announced, they threw on the gas. If the case reported was within a certain distance of the place where their car was parked, they set their gong clanging and dashed away.

In this manner, during a two nights' vigil, they had run down more than twenty squad calls and had learned not one thing to their advantage.

They did not despair. "The fish are here," was Herman's sage remark. "We may be obliged to let down the net many times. At last we will get them."

On the night following Newton Mills' great discovery, both the Old Timer and Johnny decided to accompany the others on their squad calls. Since Johnny was once more on the late squad calls at the radio station, he took with him his bow and arrows.

"We'll just drop you off there later in the evening," was Herman's word to him.

It was well along toward midnight. They had chased down four radio calls to no purpose. It was beginning to look like another wasted night. They were parked north of the river on Main Street, when of a sudden there struck their waiting ears a call that promised much.

“The Roosevelt on Main!” Herman exclaimed in a breath. “That’s the place they picked the night Rosy was shot. Same gang. Came back for the rest of the roll. Step on the gas!”

The motor purred. The gong sounded. They were away. By some unusual chance, theirs was the first car to arrive.

They had not come to a standstill before Herman, Drew, Mills and two men in uniform were out of the car and bounding through the theatre door.

“Down there!” cried an excited youth in a green cap. “They went to the basement!”

Down the stair they plunged.

In the meantime Johnny, gripping his bow and arrow, and urged by who knows what instinct, raced around the building to enter an alley which ran at the back of the theatre’s stage.

Halfway down the stairs, Herman McCarthey suddenly found himself facing two stocky men. The foremost of these whipped out a gun and fired. The bullet grazed Herman’s cheek and lodged in a policeman’s thigh.

A second shot followed instantly. Newton Mills had gone into action. His bullet entered the robber’s heart. He fell back dead. The other man turned to flee down the stairs. He was struck down by a blow from Herman’s gun.

In the meantime, what of Johnny? Astonishing things were happening to him. Hardly had he entered the alley than someone sprang around a corner of masonry and, without noting him, began to approach.

The light of a street lamp fell on his back. Johnny recognized him instantly. He had a face that was like a mask. It was Jimmie McGowan.

Scarcely had Johnny stepped back to nock an arrow, than the other saw him.

Among people of his own kind this youth, Jimmie McGowan, was known as the quickest trigger in all gangland. Nor was an automatic lacking.

What saved Johnny? One curious circumstance. As the gangster came to a halt, a

weird red light, from no one will ever know where, fell upon Johnny and his bow. His arrow was turned to a thing of flaming red.

It was this weird light that sent cold terror to the gangster's heart. The hand that did not falter at the dealing of death was paralyzed by fear of that which could not be understood, the arrow of fire.

Before the gangster's hand could regain its cunning, a missile came crashing into his shoulder. It was Johnny's arrow. The gun went clattering to the pavement. Next instant, with the force of a tiger, Johnny leaped upon mask-faced Jimmie McGowan and bore him to the ground.

In the meantime Herman had made fast work of the second robber. Having knocked him down, he had him in handcuffs at once. As he turned the fellow over, more than five thousand dollars in currency dropped from beneath his coat.

Drew had noted the direction Johnny had taken. As soon as possible he followed in his wake. He found Johnny sitting on the chest of Jimmie McGowan. A feathered arrow protruded from Jimmie's shoulder.

"I got him!" exulted Johnny. "I got the one we want!"

"Silent Murder," murmured Drew. "So you have. But not so fast. Not another word at this time."

Jimmie McGowan went to the hospital in the jail to have Johnny's arrow removed. Drew called the radio station and had Johnny released from duty that night. Then they all adjourned to the shack.

"We win!" said Johnny exultantly.

"Not so fast," said Herman McCarthey. "What was this bird doing when you shot him with that arrow?"

"Coming down the alley. Preparing to shoot me."

"Can you prove that he meant to shoot you?"

"No. But anybody knows—"

“Sure. But not in court. Crooked lawyers, and all that. This poor boy, meaning Jimmie McGowan, was obliged to go out at night. He carried a gun for protection. He met a stranger. The stranger attempted to massacre him with a murderous six foot bow. Can’t you see how they’ll shape it up?”

“Yes, but Rosy will identify him.”

“Perhaps, if she lives. There are still grave doubts regarding her recovery. But if she does live, this boy has two faces, a smile and a mask. He will show her the smile. She must pick him from among other men. She was frightened that night. Will she recall the face? Well, perhaps.”

“But there are the bullets. They are absolute proof.”

“They are our best bet. We must guard them well.”

A little later Newton Mills spoke to Johnny in a low tone. At the same time he pressed a package into his hand.

“You keep these until to-morrow,” he said. “I’m a marked man. They won’t suspect you of having them. It’s the bullets, the little pills that will send that man of the masked face down for life.”

Perspiration started out on Johnny’s brow as he listened to these words. Nevertheless, he stowed the small package deep in his innermost pocket.

“They won’t get them,” he muttered. “None of them will.”

As an afterthought, he drew the package from his pocket, seated himself at a table, then wrote his name and address on the outside of the package. He then replaced it in his pocket.

This was a habit of Johnny’s, of long standing. Not for ten years had he carried a package a distance of so much as one block without first writing his name and address upon it. Absent-minded people should keep their records well. Johnny was, at times, absent-minded.

CHAPTER XXVIII
TAKEN FOR A RIDE

As often happens when men have a good piece of work well off their hands, Drew Lane and Newton Mills went to bed almost at once, and were soon fast asleep.

Not so Johnny. He sat in a chair thinking. The room was dark. That did not matter. The men he had most feared were in prison and in the hospital. One was dead. He had not seen the dead man, nor his accomplice who surrendered. As one will, he had assumed that one of these was the man with a hole in his hand. What could be more natural? Those two, the youth of the mask-like face, and he of the hole in his hand, had been together on every other occasion.

As Johnny thought the thing through now, the whole affair seemed clear. On the night he had been attacked in the studio, this gang had planned to rob a theatre. Two had come up to silence the radio. Another pair had pulled off the robbery.

On the second occasion they had not dared to enter the radio studio, so had planned to cut the private wire of the police. In doing this they had frightened Rosy, and shot her, either without purpose or to cover their escape.

On this, the third night, they had feared to approach the radio station. Without doubt they knew that now the station was strongly guarded. They had disregarded the peril of a squad call and had staged the robbery with all hands on board.

In drawing these conclusions, Johnny may have been partly right. In one matter he was completely wrong. The man with the hole in his hand had not been captured.

As Johnny was thinking of retiring he touched a pocket. The pocket gave forth a crackling sound.

“A letter,” he thought. “Meant to mail it. Forgot. May as well take it to the box now.”

As we have said, Johnny believed the entire gang that had been troubling them were in jail. He had no fear of the dark and empty street. Indeed, as he walked the two blocks that lay between the shack and the mail box, he was thinking of that dark fishing hole on the far shores of Lake Huron where the black bass lurk.

He did not note the two men who lay in hiding beneath the shadows of the Ramacciotti cottage. Nor was he conscious of their presence as they pussyfooted along after him. Only when he was within ten paces of the mail box did he turn his head half about, to see them out of the corner of an eye.

It was with the greatest difficulty that he suppressed a start.

“The bullets!” he thought. “They know. They are after the bullets.”

What should he do? Like a flash a plan of action came to his mind. Quickening his pace a little, he allowed his left hand to drop to his side, revealing the letter. At the same time his right sought the inner pocket of his coat.

Arrived at the mail box, he put up both hands, as one will; one to lift the metal flap, the other to drop the letter. All this was true to form, except that he dropped two parcels instead of one.

As he turned about he was seized from behind. A car glided to the curb. Three men sprang out. He was overpowered, gagged and thrown into the car.

Just as the motor purred a shadowy figure sprang from the darkness, to leap upon the spare tires which this car carried, and cling there as the car sped away.

“Well,” Johnny thought grimly, “they have me; but they won’t get the bullets. The trial will go on.”

The next instant he received a shock. As the light from a passing auto flashed upon them, the man at the wheel of the car shifted his position and Johnny saw his hand. He was the man with a hole in his hand.

As the car sped swiftly westward, Johnny realized that he was, in the language of gang-land, being “taken for a ride.”

His heart stood still. He felt a sudden chill pass over him and the terror of it all came to him. To-day, to-morrow, perhaps the next day his bullet-ridden or fire-charred body would be found beside some deserted road. That was how they did it. They were possessed of no heart, no compassion, no conscience. “Dead men tell no tales.”

No greater falsehood was ever uttered than this. Dead men have told many tales. More than once a dead man’s tales have brought men to the gallows. But gangsters have not learned this. They are a stupid lot.

One fact consoled Johnny. These gangsters wanted something. They wanted the telltale bullets that were capable of sending their fellow gangster, him of the masked face, to the electric chair or to prison for life. These they would have at all cost. They undoubtedly expected to find them on Johnny’s person.

“They will question me,” Johnny told himself. “I can stall; hold them off. They may torture me!” He shuddered and turned his thoughts to other channels.

He thought of that slim, dark-eyed girl, Joyce Mills. Drew had told him all about her. He was sure he would have enjoyed knowing her. Frank, friendly, fearless, she would have made a great pal. He regretted not having seen her. Had she gone to her cousin’s in Naperville? Somehow he doubted that. She had said she could help her father; that she *would*. She had seemed very determined about this. Was she trying to help? How? He had seen no sign of it.

At that moment they approached the end of a street. A blank brick wall loomed darkly before them. Of a sudden, above the blur of white caused by the car’s lights, there appeared a spot of vivid red which formed itself into an arrow of fire, then as quickly lost form and vanished.

At the same instant the car swerved sharply to the right and missed an iron post by a narrow margin.

The man sitting beside the driver seized the wheel with a curse.

The driver muttered something about the “arrow of fire,” then settled down once more to steady driving.

The thing puzzled Johnny. At the same time it cheered him. He had not forgotten the words of Drew Lane: “Justice is an arrow of fire.” It seemed to him that he felt the presence of someone hovering near him, someone who cared and would help if such a thing were possible.

The shadowy creature that had sprung out to attach itself to the spare tires when the car started, still clung there.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE NIGHT RIDE

The car sped on and on into the night. Past low narrow cottages interspersed with apartment buildings, past long rows of modern apartments, across countless railway tracks, in and out among great looming factory buildings, they glided.

Into the open country where the air was heavy with the scent of weed dust and fresh cut grain they went, and the end was not yet.

A stretch of broad paved road ended in gravel and dirt. The car bumped and swung from side to side.

Farmhouses, drowsy with night, flashed by them.

At last, with a lurch, they swung off the road and entered a narrow lane and arrived in the back yard of a house that appeared abandoned.

The grass, damp with dew, was up to their knees as they alighted.

“No more likely place could be found for dark deeds!” was Johnny’s mental comment. Once more he shuddered.

Still he did not wholly despair.

Pushing him before them, the gangsters approached the house.

At the same time a dark shadow, that might have been a dog, a wolf, or a skulking human being, glided from the back of the car toward a great barn that loomed away to the right.

Arrived at the door of the house, the man with the hole in his hand gripped the doorknob and shook it. The door did not open. Producing a small flashlight, he turned it on the door.

“Padlocked,” he grumbled. “Tony’s been here. Got no key.”

“Let’s go to the barn,” suggested a gruff voice.

Without another word they turned and started for the barn.

Had they flashed their light against the one small window on that side of the barn, they might have seen there a frightened, staring, but determined face.

When they entered the large room that had doubtless at one time been a granary, the place was deserted.

Had they looked carefully they might have noted that the dust on the stairway leading to the loft had recently been disturbed by fleeing feet. They did not look. Their minds were concentrated upon the telltale bullets.

“Now, young man.” It was Volpi, he of the hole in his hand, who spoke. “Where are them slugs?”

“Slugs?” said Johnny.

“Bullets then. Them bullets?”

“I have no bullets. I use no gun. I shoot only with bow and arrow.”

“Ah, yes! With those you are skillful!” Volpi’s words carried infinite hate. He knew what had happened to Jimmie McGowan. Jimmie had been useful to him in many ways. And now, who knows? Ah yes, he must have those bullets at any cost.

“Look here, you!” He advanced upon Johnny in a threatening manner. “You know what slugs I mean. Them slugs that this New York bull’s been makin’ evidence with. You’re goin’ to give ’em up!”

He did not wait for Johnny to give them up. He stepped up and thrust his hand into the boy’s inner coat pocket.

A look of blank astonishment overspread his face. When he had gone hurriedly through all the boy's pockets, he stood back to stare into Johnny's face. His fingers worked convulsively. His small eyes became buttons of staring blue. It seemed that he would spring at the boy and tear him to pieces.

At that instant a curious thing happened. The room, lighted as it was only by a small flashlight, was more than half in darkness. Into that darkness there stole a strange red light. On the floor, at the gangster's feet, there appeared the flaming arrow of fire.

"O-oof!" The man sprang back as if from a ghost. "The arrow!" he mumbled. "The arrow of fire!"

As on those other occasions, even as he spoke, the apparition vanished.

Whatever may have been the gangster's intentions in the beginning, they had been changed by the arrow of fire. Leading his men into a corner, he began to talk to them in whispers. Was he recounting to them in detail the history of that mysterious arrow? No one but they will ever know.

CHAPTER XXX
MANY PERILS

The person who leaped upon the back of the car as it went speeding out of Grand Avenue, who left it only as it arrived at the abandoned farmyard, and who now found himself in the mammoth hayloft of that barn, was none other than the new bus boy of the Seventy Club.

You may have guessed that this person was not a boy, but a girl, and that her name was Joyce Mills. This is true.

The thought of going to Naperville, of lolling about in white duck skirts on summer porches or playing tennis with well-to-do and self satisfied suburbanites had been abhorrent to her. The love of adventure was in her blood.

More than that; she had come to this city with the expectation of finding her father in jail. Instead, thanks to a boy, a young detective, and a sergeant of the force, she had found him free and employed as he should be at the task for which God had created him. She wanted above everything else to prove herself of service to those who had brought so much joy into her life. She wished to assist in the capture of Jimmie McGowan and his gang.

This was not the first time she had masqueraded as a boy. More than once, while living in the Sicilian quarters of New York, she had dyed her face brown, donned trousers and haunted dark places of crime, as a newsboy or a city waif.

Having secured the secret card, she had donned her disguise and had succeeded in getting herself employed at the Seventy Club.

She had been able to shadow the gang. She had witnessed the capture of the crook, Jimmie McGowan, had learned of the intended reprisal, had ridden to the

shack on the back of the gangster's car, and had seen them spying there.

There had been no opportunity for warning Johnny. She had ridden on the car to this deserted spot in the hope that here she might be of some service.

Her best course at present appeared to be that of leaving the barn and going for help.

But how was this to be effected? There appeared to be but two entrances to the hayloft: the trapdoor which led to the room now occupied by the gangsters, and a large one very high up, through which in days of farming the hay had been drawn. Both of these were too dangerous. The way seemed blocked.

As her eyes became accustomed to the light, however, she saw a ladder leading to the very peak of the barn. It ran up one end, and was only a dozen paces from the spot where she stood.

The floor was strewn with chaff. Her light footsteps, as she moved toward the ladder, made no sound.

With one hand on the first round of the ladder, she paused to remove her shoes and tie them about her neck.

Nimble as a squirrel, she darted up the ladder to the very peak of the barn. A small opening there gave her a view of the overgrown pasture that lay dizzy depths below.

The moon was out. She could distinguish every detail of the scene beneath her. Beyond the narrow pasture was a field of wheat in the shocks. These shocks cast dark shadows.

"Like so many tombstones in a cemetery," she told herself with a shudder.

She measured the distance to the ground, and then shook as with a chill.

"No use," she told herself. "I'm trapped."

Turning about, she tried to peer into the dark depths of the hayloft.

As she did so, she became conscious of a beam that lay directly before her. This

beam, which ran the length of the barn, was suspended by iron bars at a distance of two feet from the peak. It formed a track along which, in haying time, a car carried great bundles of loose hay to all parts of the loft.

As she looked she saw that stray moonbeams lighted this track at regular intervals.

“Cupolas,” she told herself.

She had noted that curious little structures, perfect little barns, some four feet square and six feet high, had been placed along the ridge of the barn. These were in truth cupolas. Their sides were made of slanting slats. These let in air, and kept out rain. They were for the purpose of ventilation. New made hay needs air.

She studied this beam with dawning hope.

“If I could climb out over that beam,” she told herself, “I could swing up into the first cupola. I might then be able to reach the roof and at last the ground.”

It was uncertain, but worth the risk.

Gripping the beam with both her strong hands, she let go her feet and, swinging in midair, made her way hand over hand along the beam until she was beneath the cupola.

Now for swinging up. This seemed easy. It was difficult. Was it impossible? Twice she swung her legs up. Twice she failed.

Her arms were tiring. If she failed again could she make her way back to the ladder? She doubted it. And to fall!

One last desperate endeavor. A toe caught. She swung the other foot over. She clung there a moment. Then, after executing a revolving motion, she lay panting atop the beam, beneath the cupola.

Ah! How sweet life was! How cool the air from the cupola that fanned her cheek! How good it all was!

But there remained much to be done. She roused herself; dragged herself to her knees, then stood erect in the cupola.

At once there came a wild and noisy whirring of wings. Pigeons were sleeping there.

She caught her breath. Would the gangsters hear? Would they find her? She wore the bus boy's brown uniform. They would understand. She would never return alive. And life was so sweet!

The pigeons were gone. There came no other sound. If the gangsters had heard they had thought nothing of it. Who would?

The slats of the cupola fitted loosely into grooves. She had only to lift them out. She took out five and laid them down without a sound. Then she crept out into the moonlight.

One look told her that at the end farthest from her, the barn ended in a lean-to. The eaves of this lean-to reached within ten feet of the ground. Close by these eaves was an old straw pile.

"What could be sweeter?" She straddled the ridge of the roof, then hunched herself along until she was at the end. There, by clinging to the edge, she let herself down to the roof of the lean-to. Down the lean-to roof she glided. Then, with a spring, she landed on the straw pile.

She slipped, did a somersault, then tumbled into a patch of weeds.

She was just picking herself up from this patch of weeds when she caught a slight sound to her right. She looked. There was a man, a guard. He had turned. He was looking her way. Without doubt he had heard a sound as she struck the straw pile. But had he seen her?

Her heart pounded against her ribs as she crept deeper into the mass of protecting weeds.

CHAPTER XXXI
THE CREEPING SPOT

In the shack on Grand Avenue, Drew Lane stirred uneasily in his sleep. He awoke at last. With that feeling which so often comes to us in the middle of the night, that something is not right, he sat up in bed.

He stared about him. Johnny's cot was empty. He could not understand. He threw on a light. Johnny was not in the room. He went to the door and looked out. He was nowhere to be seen.

The creaking of the door awakened the veteran detective.

"What's wrong?" he asked sleepily.

"Johnny's gone."

"Gone?"

"Nowhere to be seen."

"Gone!" Newton Mills sprang out of bed. He began to walk the floor.

"Gone! I should have warned him. That's the trouble with a boy. There are so many things he must be told. Judgment; that's what a boy lacks. Judgment comes only with years of experience. Gone; and the bullets gone with him! They have him. They have the bullets. The case is lost!"

"I wouldn't say that exactly." Drew Lane spoke in a quiet, even voice. "He must have left the shack for something. They must have got him. That is unfortunate. Will they get the bullets? I doubt it. Johnny is an unusual boy. I haven't lived

with him all this time without knowing that.

“And if the bullets are gone, we have a witness, Rosy.”

“If she lives.”

“She must live. Life is too beautiful for such a girl to part with it so soon.”

“And yet it has ended for many at her age.”

The two men fell into silence.

“I’ll call up headquarters,” said Drew at last. “The night chief will send some men over to question old Mask Face, who says his name is Jimmie McGowan. They’ll make him tell where the gang hangs out. We’ll get Johnny back yet.”

Jimmie McGowan was one person who talked only when he chose to talk. The men from the Detective Bureau learned nothing of any importance from him.

* * * * * * * *

In the meantime Joyce Mills, in her bus boy costume, was creeping through the weeds down a one-time cattle lane that led away from the barn toward the wheatfield.

Once she reached the field, she rose on hands and knees to crawl toward a wheat shock. She was nearing the dark shadow cast by one of these shocks when a shot rang out.

Dropping flat in the shadows, she waited and listened, breathless. She heard the blood beating in her temples. It was like the ticking of a watch in the dark.

Creeping around the shock, she started toward another. She had just reached the second shadow when she heard a gruff voice say:

“What you shoot at?”

“Something dark moving out there. Dog, maybe.”

“Wolf, maybe.”

“Might be.”

Again the girl’s blood raced. Would they come to search for her?

An idea occurred to her. These shocks were like miniature tents. The bundles were long. They were set two and two, one against the other. The shocks were long. There was room for a slim person like herself to creep in there without disturbing a single bundle.

No sooner thought than done. Wriggling like a snake, she worked her way into the center of the shock. She lay there, head upon one arm, quite still.

The day had been warm. The night air was chill. The earth beneath the shock and the shock itself were still warm. How cosy it was! What a sweet place for a few pleasant dreams. The night was well on. She felt the need of sleep.

“But I must not sleep!” she whispered fiercely. “I must get away. Somehow I must get to the city.”

For half an hour she lay there wide-awake. No further sound came to her. Without doubt the dark spot had been forgotten.

She crept from beneath the shock. She crawled from the shadow to another shadow, and another, until the barn was far away. At last she sprang to her feet and ran for a cornfield.

Once in the cornfield she was safe. The corn was above her head. Ten men on horseback could not have found her there.

By following a row of corn she came at last to a fence and a road.

She tramped the road for an hour. Then a truck driver gave her a lift. He stared at her strange costume, but thought of course that she was a boy.

He was on his way to the city. Did his truck carry flour, melons, green corn, or moonshine? The girl will never know because she did not ask. She curled back in one corner of the seat and went fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXXII
SKY HIGH

In the granary room of the abandoned farmstead, Johnny was being questioned by some very angry men.

“You had the slugs. You can’t deny that!” Volpi exclaimed with an oath. “What have you done with them? Did you drop them in the car? Where are they?”

Johnny was puzzled. What should he say? He might tell them the whole truth, that he had dropped them with his letter into the mail box back there in the city. As far as the bullets went, this would do no harm. They could not possibly return to the mail box and rifle it before the collector arrived and carried the package away. But would not this hasten his own death? Once in possession of the whole truth, they would not hesitate to kill him.

His reply was: “I do not know where the bullets are.”

In this he told the exact truth. For who can tell at what hour mail is collected from street boxes at night? Or is it collected at all between midnight and 6:00 A.M.? Johnny did not know. Perhaps the package still lay in the box. Perhaps by this time it was in a branch post office.

“You don’t know!” The gunman sprang at his throat. A companion pulled him back.

“Not so fast, Mike,” he grumbled. “Plenty of time. He will tell.”

He whispered a few words in Volpi’s ear. Volpi nodded.

The man left the room. Johnny thought he heard him jimmying a window to the

house.

No doubt he interpreted the sounds correctly. The man returned presently. Then they all marched to the house, pushing Johnny before them.

Arrived at the house, they thrust Johnny unceremoniously into a dark cellar and barred the doors behind him.

The place was cold and damp; full of evil smells. There were rats. He could hear them scurrying about as he made his way over the uneven floor.

There were two windows. These were high up and very narrow. If he pried one of them open could he escape? The thing seemed dubious. Soon enough he discovered that his captors had left nothing to the imagination. The windows were heavily barred on the outside.

“Been used as a prison before!” His blood went cold at the thought of the dark deeds that might have taken place in this evil smelling and gloomy hole.

Feeling his way back to the stairs, he crawled part way up, then sat down. He would not dare sleep because of the rats. On the stairs he was safest from them.

He heard the gangsters rattling the lids of a stove.

“Going to cook a meal,” he told himself.

He did not expect to be fed. He was not.

Very soon he began to realize that there was something besides food in the house. There was intoxicating drink. The party became noisy. Moment by moment the hubbub increased in volume until it was a revel.

After that, by degrees, it subsided. “All drunk and gone to sleep,” he told himself. “What a time to escape!”

Search as he might, he could find no means of breaking the bars of the windows. The plank door was impregnable. At last he gave up and seated himself once more on the stairs to await the dawn.

What occupied his thoughts during these long hours? One might well be

surprised. He was thinking of dark, shadowy forests, where the ferns grow rank and the pheasant rears her young. He was seeing a deep, blue-green fishing hole where black bass lurk and great muskies fan the water as an eagle fans the air. Who can say what relief one may find, from surroundings that are terrible, by contemplating that which is beautiful, though very far away?

* * * * * * * *

Drew Lane had just returned to the shack from a disheartening search for some clue that would lead to a knowledge of Johnny's whereabouts, when an apparition burst in upon him; a person he had known for a girl, but who wore torn and soiled boy's clothes, and whose complexion had turned a very dark brown.

"You are Joyce Mills!" He stared at her in amazement.

"Yes," she admitted, dropping into a chair. "And I know where Johnny Thompson is."

"You know—"

"Listen!" She held up a hand.

In just three minutes by the clock, she had sketched the whole story.

"But do you know the exact way to this farm?" Drew demanded.

"I—I'm sorry, I do not. I—I fell asleep. I—"

"Would you know the barn if you saw it?"

"Oh, yes. Surely. It is a large red barn. The paint is old. There are three cupolas. Five slats from one cupola are gone. I took them out myself."

"Good! Here's where the police use an airplane. You're not afraid to fly?"

The girl sprang to her feet.

"Sit down. Drink this." He poured a steaming cup of coffee. "Eat these." He slammed a plate of doughnuts on the table.

He dashed to the phone. One call, then another, and another.

Joyce had just swallowed her third doughnut when Drew seized her and whirled her, dirty rags and all, into a squad car.

“CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!” went the gong. They were away.

Half an hour later, in an aviation suit three sizes too large for her, the girl saw the earth drifting away from her as she rose toward the fleecy clouds that floated lazily in an azure sky.

* * * * * * * *

That morning the mail collector on Grand Avenue was not a little puzzled over a package which was quite properly addressed to a Johnny Thompson of a certain address on Grand Avenue. All the package lacked was postage. The place addressed was but two blocks away. Since he would be passing it in a very short time, he might easily have dropped it there. This, however, would have been contrary to postal regulations. He carried the package to a branch office. There a clerk made a record of the affair. After putting in the mail a card notifying Johnny Thompson that a package mailed to him without sufficient postage lay in that office, subject to his order, he threw the package in a pigeonhole and promptly forgot about it. And that, as you will know, was the package of incriminating bullets which had caused great commotion in more than one quarter.

CHAPTER XXXIII
THE SHOW-DOWN

Had it not been for the anxiety that filled their hearts, the airplane flight would have been an affair crowded with joy for Drew Lane and Joyce Mills. The day was perfect. A faint breeze wafted fleecy clouds about them. The fields, squares of gold and green, dotted here and there by white houses and red barns, were an ever changing picture.

Straight as a crow they flew for twenty miles. Then swooping down low, they began to circle. With never tiring eyes Joyce searched the earth beneath her for the object she sought.

Barns aplenty passed beneath them, but not *the* one.

Joyce was beginning to despair when, upon entering their fourth great circle, she spied a barn with a gaping cupola.

Gripping the young detective's arm, she pointed away to the west. He understood. They circled back. The barn loomed within their view. He studied her face, read there the look of joy; then he understood again. He directed his plane at full speed back toward the city airport.

An hour later, the fastest squad car in the city's service sped westward toward the suburbs and into the open country. It carried six burly detectives, one machine gun, two riot guns and four rifles. Crowded between Drew Lane and Herman McCarthey, still clad in her much damaged brown suit, rode Joyce Mills.

* * * * * * * *

At the abandoned farmhouse the gangsters, drowsy from the poison they had taken into their systems the night before, slept late. When at last they awoke, they were in a quarrelsome mood.

Johnny, still sitting on the stairs, hungry, thirsty, longing for sleep, heard them, and trembled.

After half an hour of raving and tramping about the house, the men calmed down and appeared to hold a consultation.

They approached the cellar door. As one heavy bar was thrown back, Johnny dropped noiselessly to the cellar floor.

“The end has come!” he told himself. At the same time he resolved to sell himself as dearly as possible. These were wicked men who richly deserved to die.

The second bar was removed. The door was thrown open. Mike Volpi appeared on the threshold. In one hand, supported by a strap, he carried a three gallon glass jug. The jug was filled to the very top with some colorless liquid. Still carrying the jug, the man made his way unsteadily down the stairs.

“See here!” He spoke with the fierce growl of an angry dog as he looked at Johnny through bleared eyes. “You know where them slugs are. You are going to tell!”

“I do not know where they are,” Johnny answered in a steady, even tone.

His tone angered the gangster.

“Har, har!” he laughed. “Did you hear him? He don’t know where them slugs are. Well, that’s good! He don’t. Nobody does. Well then, they don’t tell no stories.

“No—nor you don’t neither!” He turned fierce, glistening eyes on the boy. “You’ll tell no tales. Do you hear me?

“Know what’s in this jug?” He laughed a fiendish laugh. “It’s alki—alcohol you’d call it. Alki’s hard to get these days. But we don’t grudge the cost. We’re going to give you a mighty sweet death, we are.

“Some cheap ones would use kerosene. Bah! Kerosene stinks!

“But this. How sweet it smells!” He removed the cork and put it to his nose. “Mm! How sweet! Pity to waste it!

“But there, we ain’t tight. We ain’t. We’ll use it, every drop!

“Know what?” He dropped his voice to a whisper. “There’s a patch of woods over yonder a mile. Forest Preserve. Campers make fires there. Nobody notices smoke. We’re going to light a torch there, a flamin’ torch. You and this alki. Do you understand?”

Johnny did understand. His heart paused. They meant to soak him in alcohol, then burn him alive. He had heard of such things, but had not believed them.

“It’ll be a sweet death,” the half drunk man raved on. “Such a sweet death. All alki, hundred per cent. A sweet—”

He broke off short, to stare at the wall. His face went white. His lips remained apart. His hands began to tremble. The glass jar dropped to the floor. It broke into a thousand pieces. The alcohol filled the air with a pungent odor as it flowed across the floor.

On the wall before Mike Volpi had appeared the arrow of fire.

“The arrow of justice!” he murmured thickly.

The next instant there came the sound of other breaking glass; a window was smashed from without. A voice said: “Don’t move! Stick ’em up! Quick now! We’ve got you covered—machine gun!” It was Herman McCarthey’s voice. The squad had arrived.

By way of emphasis a machine gun went *rat-tat-tat*, and three bullets spat against the wall. The gunmen acknowledged a master. Up went their hands.

Johnny was not long in securing their weapons. Then they were marched, single file, out of the cellar, and each one handcuffed to a police officer.

On searching the house, besides other articles they found a number of ladies’ garments, all new and in original packages. These, beyond doubt, were part of

the loot taken from some store. Joyce Mills was glad enough to accept the loan of some of these, and so embraced an opportunity to become once more a lady.

The gangsters were taken to the city in the squad car. Two police officers commandeered the gangster's car. There was room for Johnny, Drew and Joyce in the back seat. So they rode happily back to town.

"Do you know," said Drew, "I heard good news this morning. Rosy is past danger."

"Good!" In one word Johnny uttered a prayer of thanksgiving.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "We will get the reward, won't we? Two thousand!"

"Between us," said Drew.

"My share goes toward sending Rosy and her mother back to Italy."

"Between us," Drew answered again.

For a time they rode on in silence. Joyce Mills was fumbling with something beneath her jacket.

All at once there appeared on the back of the seat before them a faint red arrow. It flamed up in a peculiar manner.

Drew and Johnny stared. Joyce laughed a low laugh.

"It's a trick," she explained. "I've used it before. Sometimes you can do with a trick what you can't do with a cannon. You can frighten gunmen. They are very superstitious.

"It is really very simple." She displayed a long black tube. "One flashlight, plus a reading glass, makes a small stereopticon. Over the glass of the flashlight I pasted a black paper in which the figure of an arrow had been cut. Before this I set a strip of glass. The glass is red, but is darker in some spots than others. The reading glass focuses the light so that the arrow becomes definite in form and intensely red. By moving the strip of red glass back and forth I am able to make the arrow appear to be on fire. Very simple, isn't it? But it worked!"

“Yes,” said Johnny. “It worked. Once it worked too well; came near causing us to crash into a wall.”

“So you know I rode the back of the gangster’s car all the way out?”

“I guessed it.”

Joyce told Johnny the rest of the story.

“I think,” said Drew when she had finished, “that it is time we had some real women on our detective force.”

“Give me a job,” laughed Joyce.

* * * * * * * *

Two days later the Seventy Club was raided. This time the detective squad did not stop at the main floor. There was room for three men in each of those curious telephone booths. Three times six is eighteen. Each officer carried two guns. Two times eighteen is thirty-six. That was too many for the gunmen and the ladies down below. They surrendered without a fight. The place was padlocked. Five of the men and three of the ladies taken had been wanted for some time by the police. Joyce attempted to give credit for this discovery to her father. He would have none of it. He told on her.

Johnny had no trouble in retrieving the package of bullets which he had entrusted to the care of Uncle Sam in such a strange manner. The cases against Jimmie McGowan, Mike Volpi and their confederates were complete. For once a well selected jury and an unimpeachable judge gave a gang of gunmen their just deserts.

The reward was paid.

A month later, a scene half cheerful, half sad, was enacted at the Ramacciotti cottage. Rosy and her mother, smiling their best to keep back the tears, walked out of the cottage for the last time. A taxicab was waiting. They were on their way to the depot, bound for Italy. They were just an Italian mother and daughter; simple, kindly folks, just such people as we almost all are. Yet they mattered much to some; to Johnny and Drew, to Herman McCarthey and Newton Mills.

Johnny and Drew helped them into the cab, gripped their hands in a last farewell; then they turned to walk back to the shack.

Drew paused to lock the cottage which had been Mother Ramacciotti's. He had bought the furnishings.

"What will you do with the cottage now?" Johnny asked.

"Listen." Drew's look was serious, sad. "We are going on a vacation, you and I, Herman, Newton Mills, and Joyce. Before that vacation is over, unless conditions change, the gunmen will have provided us another widow and more orphans to fill that cottage. I mean to keep it till there are no more. God grant that the time may soon come!"

A week later Johnny, Drew and Joyce were seated in a clinker-built rowboat over a deep, dark hole that lies close to shore on the north side of Lake Huron. On the shore was a cabin. In a sunny spot before the cabin Herman McCarthey and Newton Mills sat spinning yarns. For life must not be all work. Man's nature demands a change. They were enjoying the change along with those who were younger.

Drew Lane's experiences as a detective were not over. They were but well begun. The problems of enforcing the law and maintaining order in a great republic are never fully solved. They go on from year to year and from generation to generation. Drew Lane was destined to do his full part. And Johnny Thompson, as his understudy, was not to lag far behind. If you are to realize this to the full, you must read our next book entitled *The Gray Shadow*.

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