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DOORS OF THE NIGHT

FRANK L. PACKARD

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BY FRANK L. PACKARD

DOORS OF THE NIGHT

PAWNED

THE WHITE MOLL

FROM NOW ON

THE NIGHT OPERATOR

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE

THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE

THE WIRE DEVILS

THE SIN THAT WAS HIS

THE BELOVÉD TRAITOR

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN

THE MIRACLE MAN

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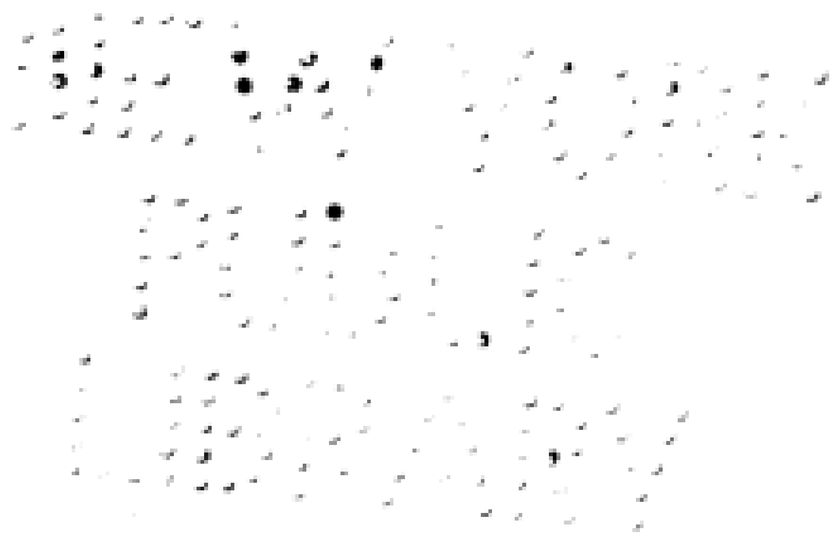
DOORS OF THE NIGHT

BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

AUTHOR OF "PAWNED," "THE WHITE MOLL," "THE NIGHT OPERATOR," "THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE," ETC.



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DOORS OF THE NIGHT

—I—

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

BILLY KANE paused for an instant in the doorway of the room before him, as his dark, steady eyes travelled over the appointments in a sort of measured approval such as a connoisseur who knew his art might bestow upon a canvas in which he found no flaw. The apartment was quite in keeping with everything else that pertained to the palatial residence in that upper Fifth Avenue section of New York. The indirect lighting fell soft and mellow upon the priceless Oriental rug, the massive desk of dark, carved wood, the wide, inviting leather-upholstered chairs, the heavy portières that filled the window spaces and hung before the doors, the bookshelves that lined the walls almost ceiling high and that were of the same dark, polished wood as the desk and chairs. There was luxury here, and wealth; but it was luxury without ostentation, and wealth that typified only good taste and refinement.

He closed the door behind him, and began to pace slowly up and down the room. And now he frowned a little. He had dined alone with his employer as usual, for Mrs. Ellsworth being an invalid was rarely in evidence, and David Ellsworth usually so genial an old gentleman, had not been entirely himself. From the pocket of his dinner jacket Billy Kane took out his cigarette case, selected a cigarette, and lighted it. Mr. Ellsworth had lingered in the dining

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room, and had said that he would come presently to the library—that there was a little matter he wished to attend to. There was nothing strange in that, for they often worked together here in this room in the evenings, and yet Billy Kane's puzzled frown deepened. There was something certainly amiss with the old multi-millionaire tonight, and that anything should disturb the old philanthropist's tranquillity, except when his sympathies had been aroused and the man's heart, that was softer than a woman's, had been touched by some pathetic appeal, *was* decidedly strange.

Billy Kane continued his pacing up and down the room in long, athletic strides, the great, broad shoulders squared back as his hands were thrust into the pockets of his jacket. It was far more than a feeling of respect or mere liking that he held for his employer, for there had come esteem for the old gentleman's sterling qualities, and with the esteem a sincere affection, and out of it all, very curiously, a sort of fathering, or protecting interest for this man of millions.

The frown passed away, and Billy Kane smiled a little whimsically at the somewhat quaint conceit. Fathering! Nevertheless, it was true! There was scarcely an hour of the day that some appeal for charity, ranging from a few cents to many thousands of dollars, was not made upon David Ellsworth—too many of them spurious, and it was his, Billy Kane's, self-appointed task to stand between his employer and these fraudulent attempts. All the world, at least all the world within reach, seemed to be thoroughly conversant with the old gentleman's ask-no-questions liberality—and to lose no opportunity in taking advantage of that knowledge! For instance, though here he was forced to the belief that it was genuinely worthy, there was the case of the deformed beggar, one Antonio Laverto, who, during the last week, had taken up his station on the corner a block away from the house. The beggar had already secured the old gentleman's attention, and also a dollar or two every time David Ellsworth passed; in return for which David Ellsworth had become possessed of a very

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pitiful life history, and also possessed of a desire to set the man squarely on his feet again.

Billy Kane paused abruptly in his stride, as his eyes rested on the portières that hung before one of the two doorways at the lower end of the room. Behind that door, which was one of wood matching the other doors of the room, was a door of solid steel, and behind the steel door was one of the strongest vaults in the city of New York, and in the vault, besides the magnificent collection of rubies that nestled in their plush-lined trays, a collection that, while but a hobby, had yet made their owner even more famous and widely known than had his millions, were thousands of dollars—*the money kept there for the sole purpose of being given away!* Eccentricity? Well, perhaps—but if so, it was a very fine eccentricity, the eccentricity of one of God's own noblemen.

One of God's own noblemen! Yes, he had good reason to call David Ellsworth that! Billy Kane's strong face softened. As a boy is acquainted with his father's companions, he had been acquainted with David Ellsworth for many years, it was true; but he had never known the other for his real worth until the last three months, during which time he had been the retired magnate's confidential secretary. His father had been an old friend of David Ellsworth; and a little more than three months ago his father had died, just as he, Billy Kane, had graduated from Harvard. His father's estate, supposedly large, had turned out to amount to comparatively nothing; the net residue of the estate, which had just been wound up, being represented by the sum now at his credit in the bank, a matter of something less than five thousand dollars. Apart from that, there was nothing. His mother had been dead many years; and, with no ties to hamper him, he had been casting around for some opening where he could utilize his university degree in arts to the best advantage, when he had received the offer from David Ellsworth to act as the latter's confidential secretary. He had accepted at once, and since then he had led a rather singular existence.

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Billy Kane tamped out his cigarette on the edge of an ash receiver, and stood leaning with his back against the desk, facing the hall door. Yes, it was a very singular existence! His new home was veritably a palace, with servants at every beck and call. His work was not onerous; and his salary was over-generous. He, in turn, had a private secretary, or at least a most capable stenographer, who, having been long in David Ellsworth's employ, took care of the daily routine; and it was mostly routine as far as business went, for the millionaire had long since retired from any active participation in the various interests through which he had acquired his fortune. But the work, that is the bulk of it, had now taken on quite a different angle, due to his, Billy Kane's own initiative, than had been thought of when he had accepted the position. He had not been there a week before he had realized that the old philanthropist was being victimized right and left by fraudulent appeals for money. It had been sufficient simply to excite David Ellsworth's sympathy in order to open the ever-ready purse. David Ellsworth had inquired no further. He, Billy Kane, but not without protest from the old gentleman, to whom the loss of the money was nothing, but to whom the uncovering of some pitiful fraud was a cause of genuine distress, had instituted a new régime, and had undertaken to investigate every case on its merits.

The whimsical smile came back to his lips. Born and brought up in the city, he had imagined that he knew his New York; but the last three months had opened his eyes to a new world around him—the world of the Bad Lands, with its own language, its own customs and its own haunts. He knew his New York a great deal better now! Those three months had brought him into intimate touch with the dens and dives, and many of the habitués of the underworld, since it was amongst those surroundings that his investigations had mainly led him. He had even been in the heart of that sordid world no later than that afternoon.

Behind his back, Billy Kane's fingers were drumming a meditative tattoo upon the desk. His train of thought had

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brought him back to the crippled Italian beggar, Antonio Laverto. The man was a pitiful looking object enough—one of those mendicants commonly designated in the vernacular as a "flopper." His legs were twisted under him in contorted angles at the knees, and his means of locomotion consisted in lifting himself up on the palms of his hands and swaying himself painfully along a foot or so at a time. Laverto's story, told in halting and broken English, was equally pitiful. The man had been a photographer, an artist he had called himself, and he had come to America a few years before from some little town in Italy, lured by the high prices that he had heard the rich New World would pay him for his work. But within a few days of landing he had met with an accident in a tenement fire that had crippled and maimed him for life. He had been practically destitute, his sole possessions being the camera and a few of the cherished photographs he had brought with him. The camera had gone to pay for his support during convalescence; and subsequently, reduced to beggary, most of his pictures had gone the same way.

That, in substance, was the Italian's story. Billy Kane shook his head impatiently. The man bothered him. He had been frankly skeptical and wholly suspicious at first; but investigation had only confirmed the man's story. Certainly, an Italian by that name, newly arrived in the country, had been badly hurt and crippled in a tenement fire a few years ago, and had been treated in one of the city hospitals. That much, at least, he had discovered! Also, no more than a few hours ago, he had gone to Laverto's home and found the man existing in a small, miserable room on the East Side, and surrounded by every evidence of squalor and abject poverty; and the man, he was obliged to confess, had got his sympathy too. There were two exquisite little photographs, landscapes, real gems of art, wrapped up in fold after fold of newspaper. Laverto had shown them to him, and had told his story again, begging him to buy one of the pictures—and when he had produced the money the cripple had drawn his treasures back, and had clutched

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them to his breast, and had cried over them, and finally had refused to sell at all.

Billy Kane's fingers continued to drum on the desk. David Ellsworth would undoubtedly want to know about Laverto to-night—and the man bothered him. He had no grounds for further suspicion, fairness compelled him to the admission that the man's story seemed true; and yet, based on nothing more tangible than intuition, there still lingered a doubt about the whole matter in his mind.

Billy Kane straightened up from the desk. Jackson, one of the footmen, had opened the door from the hall, and David Ellsworth, an immaculate little gray-haired old gentleman, in evening clothes, stepped into the library.

The footman closed the door silently.

David Ellsworth wore glasses. He took them off, polished them with nervous energy while his blue eyes swept around the room, fixed on Billy Kane's face, and swept around the room again. He cleared his throat once or twice before he spoke.

"I've kept you waiting, Billy," he said abruptly. "You must have noticed that I had finished dinner at the same time as yourself; but I have been very much disturbed and perplexed all day, and I have been trying to solve a problem before saying anything to you."

"I hope there's nothing seriously wrong, sir," Billy Kane answered quickly. "May I ask what——"

"Yes," said David Ellsworth, a sort of curious reluctance in his voice. He took a letter from his pocket, and handed it to Billy Kane. "It's this."

Billy Kane opened the letter—and, staring at the typewritten words on the sheet in his hand, suddenly an angry red tinged his cheeks and mounted to his temples. His eyes mechanically travelled over the lines again:

> **Like father like son may be an old adage, but like a good many old adages its face value is not always to be relied upon. It might pay you to keep an eye on your confidential secretary—and on the contents of your vault.**
>
> **A Friend.**

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Billy Kane laid the letter down upon the desk without a word—but his lips were tight.

"You understand, Billy," said the old millionaire eagerly, "that the only reason why I did not show this to you immediately when I received it this morning was because I wanted, if possible, to formulate a definite conclusion as to the motive that prompted the writing of the contemptible thing. You understand, my boy, don't you? I could talk to you then about it without hurting you. As for the actual letter itself, there is, of course, but one answer, and that is—this!"

David Ellsworth reached out for the letter—but Billy Kane had already picked it up.

"You were going to tear it up, sir," he said deliberately. "I'd rather you wouldn't. There may be a chance some day of showing this to the cur who wrote it—and I wouldn't like to lose that chance."

"Then keep it, by all means!" agreed David Ellsworth. He nodded his head in vigorous assent, as Billy Kane restored the letter to its envelope, and placed the letter in the pocket of his dinner jacket. "So much for that! But what do you make of it, Billy?"

"It's object is obvious enough," Billy Kane replied savagely. "Somebody appears to have it in for me."

David Ellsworth was polishing his glasses again.

"You've told me that I was the most guileless man you ever knew, Billy," he said, shaking his head slowly; "and perhaps I am, and then again perhaps I'm not—and perhaps it isn't always because I'm guileless that I close my eyes to many things. But I guess, after all, that I can peer as far through a stone wall as the next man. I've had to do some pretty stiff peering in the days gone by to get the few millions together that I've got now. I mention this, Billy, so that you may not confuse my idiosyncrasies with —well, whatever you like to call it. Those dollars, my boy, didn't just drop into my hands—they were *thought* there. And so you think that letter means someone has it in for you? Think a little deeper, Billy."

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"I don't quite follow you," said Billy Kane, in a puzzled way.

"And yet it is quite simple—although I've spent a day over it!" returned the old millionaire, with a wry smile. "I have known you from a child. Nothing has ever occurred to shake my confidence in you. The person who wrote that letter was obviously acquainted with my past friendship for your father and my long knowledge of yourself, and, with nothing to back it up, he would be a madman indeed who would expect a scurrilous missive such as that to have any weight with me. Am I right—or wrong, Billy?"

'Well; yes, sir—I suppose you're right," Billy Kane answered.

"I am sure I am," declared the old gentleman decisively. "Quite sure of it! But suppose, Billy, that to-morrow, or at any time *subsequent* to my having received that letter, something *did* occur here—what then?"

The old millionaire's face was grave. Billy Kane leaned sharply forward.

"What do you mean?" he questioned in a startled tone.

"Sit down there at the desk, Billy, and I'll tell you," said David Ellsworth; and then, as Billy Kane obeyed, he stepped swiftly across the room, opened the hall door, looked out, closed the door softly again, and from there walked to one of the two doors at the lower end of the room, opened this, looked into the room beyond, and closed it again.

Billy Kane watched the other in frank amazement. The door that David Ellsworth had just opened was the door of the "office"—the room that during working hours, which were from ten to five, was occupied by the stenographer. True, the room opened on the back hallway and had a separate entrance from the courtyard in the rear, an entrance always used by the stenographer, but it was always locked by Peters, the butler, at night, and he, Billy Kane, had the only other key.

David Ellsworth returned, and halted before Billy Kane's chair.

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"No, I am not in my second childhood, Billy," he said quietly. "That letter was certainly not written without a purpose; and yet from every angle that I have been able to view it, except one, it would have been exactly that—without purpose. I believe it is the first step in a carefully laid plan that will divert, or fix, suspicion upon you."

Billy Kane shook his head in perplexity.

"A plan?" he repeated. "I don't understand."

David Ellsworth's only reply was to jerk his head significantly toward the other of the two doors at the end of the room.

Mechanically Billy Kane followed the direction of the gesture with his eyes; and then he was on his feet, his face suddenly grim and set.

"My God!" he murmured under his breath. "You mean——"

"Yes," said David Ellsworth evenly. "Why not? I couldn't tell you myself exactly how much those stones in there are worth, but they are ranked as one of the most valuable single collections of rubies in existence, and certainly the figures would run somewhere between two and three hundred thousand dollars. Besides, there's always a little cash there—you know better than I do precisely how much at the present moment."

"Fourteen thousand five hundred odd," Billy Kane answered automatically.

"Quite so!" nodded the old millionaire. "Well, it's worth it, isn't it, Billy? I've never been afraid of any ordinary cracksman's attempt against that vault; but, if I am right now, this wouldn't be any ordinary attempt. I believe we are dealing with—*brains*. I believe, further, that instead of you and I being the only ones who know the combinations, as we have imagined, they are known to someone else. Suppose, then, that the vault is found empty some morning? I immediately recall to mind that letter. I remember that you are the only one to whom I have confided the combinations. And suppose that some additional clue pointing

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to you is left on the scene of the robbery? It would look pretty black for you, Billy, would it not? Naturally the stolen stones and money would not be found in your possession; but the plain, logical supposition would be that, not being a fool, and believing that you were above suspicion, you had secreted the proceeds of the robbery, and were pursuing what you considered the safest course—that is, to brazen it out and indignantly proclaim your innocence. The object of all this, of course, being immunity for the real authors of the crime, for if you were accused and convicted it is obvious that the police would look no further and consider the case closed."

Billy Kane did not reply for a moment. He had been startled at first, but now he was conscious rather of a slight sense of inward amusement. The old millionaire's deductions were, of course, plausible and possible; but, also, they appeared to be a little labored, a little far-fetched, a little visionary. Apart from being based on a premise that entailed somewhat elaborate preparations, there was one very weak point in the old gentleman's argument. The combinations being known only to the two of them, David Ellsworth had failed to explain how, or where the combinations had been obtained by a third party; and Billy Kane was even more than ever confirmed in his mind that there was a very much simpler, and a very much more creditable motive for that letter—spite. Through his efforts there was more than one none too reputable a character who otherwise would have partaken liberally of the old philanthropist's bounty; and that was probably the secret of the letter. That the day's cogitations of David Ellsworth had resulted in the discovery of a mare's nest was the way it struck Billy Kane now; but if the old gentleman found satisfaction in his deductions, he, Billy Kane, was of no mind to dispute them. There was nothing to be gained by it, and on occasions he had known even David Ellsworth to grow stubborn and most unpleasantly irascible.

"You may be right, sir," Billy Kane said deliberately.

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David Ellsworth's two hands fell on Billy Kane's shoulders, and pressed him back into his chair again.

"So you think I may be right, do you?" There was a twinkle in the blue eyes. "Tut, tut! You can't fool the old man, Billy, my boy! What you really think is that I've got a brain storm. But"—his voice grew suddenly grave and agitated—"I *know* I'm right, Billy—I *feel* it. I'm as sure now, as though it had already happened. But we'll beat them, my boy! Take your pen, and a blank card—there are some in the top drawer there. Being forewarned, all that's necessary is to change the combinations. And I guess that will be an answer to their letter that they didn't expect!"

David Ellsworth was already across the room. Billy Kane took a small blank card from the drawer of the desk, picked up a pen, and, without comment, turned in his chair to watch the other. After all, little as he shared the old millionaire's alarm, the changing of the vault's combination was a precaution well worth while under any circumstances. If it even became a habit, so much the better!

The portières were swung back now, the innocent looking door that matched the others in the room was opened, and the nickel-plated knobs and dials of the massive steel inner door glistened in the light. Came a faint musical tinkle, as the dial whirred under David Ellsworth's fingers; then, presently, a soft metallic thud, as the old millionaire swung the handle over and the bolts shot back. The heavy door moved slightly inward, there was the click of an electric-light switch, the vault was flooded with light, and from where he sat Billy Kane could see into the interior. It was as large as a small sized room, and built of the finest steel throughout. Steel shelves piled with document cases lined the vault, and at the far end was a huge safe of the most modern and perfected design. Billy Kane smiled a little to himself. In one thing, at least, that David Ellsworth had said, the old millionaire had indubitably been justified. The vault was as impregnable as human ingenuity and skill

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could make it, and there was very little indeed to be feared from any ordinary attempt upon it.

A few minutes passed while David Ellsworth worked with the key used for changing the combination and with the mechanism on the inner side of the door, and then he began to call out a series of numbers. Billy Kane jotted them down on the card.

"We'll test it now—call them back," said David Ellsworth; and then, as Billy Kane obeyed: "All right, Billy. Now we'll do the same thing with the safe."

He moved down to the end of the vault, spent a moment or two over the safe's dial; and, as this door in turn was swung open, Billy Kane caught a glimpse of the tiers of plush-lined trays that held the famous ruby collection, and of the score of packages of banknotes that lay neatly piled in the compartments inside the safe.

Again David Ellsworth called out a series of numbers, and as before tested the new combination; and then, from beside the open door of the safe, he spoke abruptly:

"Before I lock up again, Billy, what about our friend Laverto? You went down there this afternoon, I believe?"

"Yes," Billy Kane answered—and frowned. "But there's no hurry about it, is there? I'm bound to confess that his story seems to be straight enough, and that I can't find anything wrong, but——"

David Ellsworth chuckled suddenly, as he reached inside the safe and took out a package of banknotes.

"You've been laughing at me up your sleeve for fussing around with those combinations, my boy—I know you have. But you're the old woman of the two, Billy. If you couldn't find anything wrong, I guess everything is all right. If it isn't"—he chuckled again, as he closed and locked the safe—"it would do my heart good to see someone put something over on you!"

The light in the vault went out. The vault door was closed and locked, the outer door shut, the portières drawn back into place, and David Ellsworth, coming back across the room, dropped the package of banknotes on the desk.

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"Take 'em to him, Billy," he smiled; "and take 'em to him now. He'll have twelve hours more joy out of life than if you waited until to-morrow morning." He picked up the card upon which Billy Kane had written the combinations, and placed it in his pocket. "You've got a better memory than I have, Billy," he observed, "and I guess you've got this down pat now; but I'm afraid I'll have to study the memo over a few times before I take a chance on destroying it."

Billy Kane was paying little attention to the other's words; he was riffling the banknotes through his fingers—they were of all denominations, from hundred-dollar bills down to fives. It was, in fact, a package of loose bills that he remembered having counted that morning.

"Do you happen to know how much there is here, Mr. Ellsworth?" he inquired abruptly.

"Not precisely"—David Ellsworth peered over the rims of his glasses at the package—"but I should say around a couple of thousand dollars. I—er—promised him that, if he turned out to be deserving, and I'd——"

"There are two thousand dollars here exactly," said Billy Kane a little curtly. "What I understood that you promised him was that you would start him up in life again, but it doesn't require two thousand dollars to start a man of his type going as a photographer."

"H'm! Don't you think so, Billy?" David Ellsworth's blue eyes were twinkling, and he was drawling his words. "Well, let's see! Now, first of all, judging from the photographic landscape he showed me, the man's a real artist, and he ought to have the best of tools to work with. A good lens is a rather expensive commodity. I'm not much up on photographic apparatus, but I'll bet you could pay as high as a thousand dollars for one outfit. And then there's all the paraphernalia, and a little place to furnish, and a little something to keep things going until returns come in. Two thousand dollars—shucks, my boy! Indeed as a matter of fact, now that you call my attention to it and

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I come to think it over, Billy, I'm not sure that two thousand dollars is——"

And then Billy Kane laughed, and picked up the money, and went to the door.

"All right, sir, I'll go—at once," he said, laughing again.

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— II —

THE CRIME

UPSTAIRS in his room Billy Kane changed from his dinner clothes into a dark tweed suit, a very less noticeable attire for that neighborhood where Antonio Laverto had his miserable home, and choosing a slouch hat, left the house. A bus took him down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, and from there, crossing over Broadway, he continued on down the Bowery.

It was still early; and it was as though the night world here had not yet awakened from its day's slumber. The "gape wagons" had not yet begun to bring their slumming parties to rub shoulders with the flotsam and jetsam of the underworld, and to shudder in pharisaical horror at "planted" fakes; true, the ubiquitous gasoline lamps glowed in useless yellow spots against the entirely adequate street lighting in front of many shops of all descriptions, and the pavements were alive with men, women and children of every conceivable nationality and station in life, but—Billy Kane smiled a little grimly, for he had learned a great deal, a very great deal in the last three months, about this section of his city—it was still early, and it was not yet the Bowery of the night.

Some half dozen blocks along, Billy Kane turned into a cross street and headed deeper into the East Side.

And now Billy Kane's forehead drew together in puckered furrows, as he approached the lodging of Antonio Laverto, the cripple. In the inside pocket of his vest were two thousand dollars in cash, for the outlay of which, in spite of the old millionaire's attitude in reference to it, he, Billy Kane, held himself morally responsible. The frown

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deepened. It was strange, very strange! He had logically convinced himself that Laverto's was a worthy case—but the intuition that something was wrong would not down, and the nearer he approached the miserable and squalid dwelling in which the Italian lived, the stronger that intuition grew.

And then Billy Kane shrugged his shoulders. He could at least put the case to one more test, and if Laverto came through that all right that was the end of it, and the man got the money. Laverto would certainly not anticipate another visit this evening, so soon after the one of the afternoon; and if he could come unawares upon the man, and observe the other unawares perhaps, the chances were decidedly in favor of Laverto being caught napping if he were sailing under false colors.

Billy Kane, reaching his destination, paused in front of a tumble-down and dilapidated frame house, and glanced around him. The little side street here was dirty and ill-lighted, but populous enough. Small shops, many of them basement shops with cavernous, cellar-like entrances opening from the sidewalk, lined both sides of the street; for the rest, it was simply a matter of two rows of flanking, dingy tenements and old houses—save for the usual saloon, whose window lights were bright enough on the corner ahead.

The house door was wide open, and Billy Kane, pulling his slouch hat down over his eyes, stepped into the dark unlighted interior. The place was a hive of poverty, a miserable lodging house of the cheapest class; and the air was close, almost fetid, and redolent with the smell of garlic. How many humans eked out an existence here Billy Kane did not know; but, though he knew them to be woefully many, for he had seen a great number of them on his visit here that afternoon, the only evidence of occupancy now was the occasional petulant cry of a child from somewhere in the darkness, and a constant murmuring hum of voices from behind closed doors.

Antonio Laverto's room was the second one on the

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right of the passage. Billy Kane moved quietly forward to the door, and stood there in the blackness for a moment listening. There was no sound from within; nor was there any light seeping through the keyhole or the door panels, which later, he remembered, were badly cracked. Satisfied that the cripple, unless he were asleep, was not inside, Billy Kane tried the door, and, finding it unlocked, opened it silently, and stepped into the room.

He lighted a match, held it above his head, and glanced around him. It was a pitiful abode, pitiful enough to excite anyone's sympathy—as it had his own that afternoon. There was a cot in one corner with a thin, torn blanket for covering, a rickety chair, and an old deal table on which stood a cracked pitcher and wash basin, and the remains of a small loaf of bread.

The match went out, and Billy Kane retreated to the door, and from the door to the street again. It was pretty bad in there, and evidently just as genuinely on the ragged edge of existence as it had been that afternoon—but still the persistent doubt in his mind would not down. It was a sort of dog in the manger feeling, and he did not like it, and it irritated him—but it clung tenaciously.

He lighted a cigarette, and, frowning, flipped the match stub away from him. In any case, he had to find the man before he went home, whether it resulted in his paying over the two thousand dollars or not. His eye caught the lighted window of the saloon, and he started abruptly forward in that direction. If there was anything at all in his suspicions, the saloon was the most likely place in the neighborhood where they would be verified; but in any event, the barkeeper, who probably knew everyone in the locality better than anyone else, could possibly supply at least a suggestion as to where the Italian spent his evenings and might be found.

Billy Kane chose the side entrance to the saloon—it would probably afford him a preliminary inspection of the place without being observed himself—and entered. He found himself in a passageway that was meagerly lighted by a gas

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jet, and that turned sharply at right angles a few steps ahead. He reached the turn in the passage, and halted suddenly, as a voice, curiously muffled, reached him. The passage here ahead of him, some four or five yards in length, was lighted by another gas jet, and terminated in swinging doors leading to the barroom; but halfway down its length, in a little recess, most thoughtfully situated for the privacy and convenience of the saloon's perhaps none too reputable clientele, was a telephone booth.

Billy Kane drew back, and protected from view by the angle of the passage while he could still see the telephone booth himself quite plainly, stood motionless. The booth, like a good many others, was by no means sound-proof, and the voice, though muffled seemed strangely familiar to him. Billy Kane's brows drew together sharply. Through the glass panel of the upper portion of the booth he could see the figure of a man of about his own height, and he could see, as the man stood a little sideways with his lips to the transmitter, the man's profile.

And then Billy Kane, with a grim smile, reached suddenly up to the gas jet over his head and turned it out. This left him in darkness and made no appreciable diminution in the lighting of the passage leading to the barroom. The man who stood upright in the booth at full height, and who was speaking most excellent English, was Antonio Laverto, the maimed and broken cripple whose pitiful and heart-rending story had been so laboriously told in the few halting and hardly understandable words at his command!

And now, Billy Kane, listening, could make out snatches of what the man was saying.

". . . That's none of your business, and I guess the less you know about it the better for yourself. . . . What? . . . Yes, Marco's—the second-hand clothes dealer . . . What? . . . Yes, sure—by the lane . . . The back door's got a broken lock—it's never been fixed since he moved in two weeks ago. All you got to do is walk in. It's a cinch . . . Sure, that's right—that's all you got to do. Marco don't keep open in the evening and besides he's away, you

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don't need to worry about that. . . . Eh? . . . No, there won't be no come-back. . . . You pull the break the way I tell you, and you get a hundred dollars in the morning . . . What? . . . All right then, but don't make any mistake. You got to be out of there before a quarter of eleven! Get me? Before a quarter of eleven—that's all I care, and that's give you all the time you want. . . . Eh? . . . Yes—sure. . . . Good-night."

The grim smile was still on Billy Kane's lips, as he crouched back against the wall. The door of the telephone booth opened, and Laverto stuck his head out furtively. The little black eyes, staring out of the thin, swarthy face, glanced up and down the passageway, and then the head seemed to shrink into the shoulders, the body to collapse, and, with legs twisted and dragging under him, there came the *flop-flop* of the palms of the man's hands on the bare wooden flooring, as he started along the passageway.

But Billy Kane was already at the side door of the saloon—and an instant later he had swung around the street corner, and was heading briskly back in the direction of the Bowery. He laughed shortly, as his hand automatically crept into his inside pocket. The two thousand dollars were still there—and they would stay there! His intuition, after all, had not been at fault. The man was a vicious and damnable fraud, and, as a logical corollary to that fact, was moreover a dangerous and clever criminal. What was this "break" that was to be "pulled" at Marco's before a quarter of eleven?

Quite mechanically Billy Kane looked at his watch. He and David Ellsworth had dined early, and it was even now barely eight o'clock. Billy Kane's face hardened, as he walked along, reached the Bowery, and, by the same route he had come, gained Washington Square, and swung onto a Fifth Avenue bus. Why Marco's? There was surely nothing worth while there! Marco's was little more than a rag shop. He happened to know Marco, because on the corner next to the tumble-down place that, as Laverto had said, Marco had rented a week or so ago, there was a small notion shop

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kept by an old Irish widow by the name of Clancy, where, more than once on his visits to the East Side, he had dropped in to buy a paper or a package of cigarettes. Why Marco's? It puzzled him. The old white-bearded, stoop-shouldered dealer did not seem to have much that was worth stealing!

The bus jolted on up the Avenue. Billy Kane shifted his position uneasily on the somewhat uncomfortably hard seat on the top of the bus. His first impulse had been to confront Laverto on the spot, but quick on the heels of that impulse had come a better plan. With rope enough the man would hang himself. If there was anything in this Marco affair, a robbery as was indicated, Marco would obviously report it to the police as soon as it was discovered, and he, Billy Kane, being in possession of the evidence that would convict its author, would then be in a position to put an end, for a good many years at least, to Laverto's criminal career; and besides this, there was David Ellsworth—he did not want to wound or hurt the other's finer sensibilities, but that David Ellsworth should see Laverto for himself in the latter's true colors was essential, for it would and must make the old philanthropist in the future less the victim of that over-generous and spontaneous sympathy which was so easily excited by those who preyed upon him.

The thought of David Ellsworth brought back again the thought of David Ellsworth's anonymous letter. Billy Kane lighted a cigarette, and smoked it savagely. It was someone of the same breed as Antonio Laverto, and for the same reason that Laverto would soon have for revenge, who had written that letter. He was quite sure of that in his own mind. What else, indeed, could it be? Not David Ellsworth's explanation! That was entirely too chimerical! One by one he reviewed the cases where he had uncovered fraudulent attempts upon the old millionaire's charity during the past three months; but, while more than one was concerned with characters vicious, dissolute and criminal enough, not one seemed to dovetail into the niche in which he sought to fit it.

A second cigarette followed the first, and his mind was

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still busy with his problem, as he pressed the button at the side of his seat, clambered down the circular iron ladder at the rear of the bus, stepped to the sidewalk as the bus drew up to the curb, and stood waiting for the bus to pass on—David Ellsworth's residence was on the first corner down the cross street on the other side of the Avenue. The bus creaked protestingly into motion, and Billy Kane, in the act of stepping from the curb to cross the Avenue, paused suddenly, instead, as a voice spoke behind him.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Kane, sir, may I speak to you for a moment?"

Billy Kane turned around abruptly. He stared at the other in surprise. It was Jackson, the footman.

"Why yes, of course. But what on earth are you doing out here, Jackson?" he demanded a little sharply.

"I was waiting for you, sir," the man answered hurriedly. "I knew you'd gone out, Mr. Kane; and I knew I couldn't miss you here, sir, when you came back, as you always come by the Avenue, sir. And, begging your pardon again, sir, would you mind if we didn't stand here? You wouldn't take offense, sir, if we went in by the garage driveway where we could be alone for a minute, sir?"

Billy Kane eyed the man critically. Jackson, immaculate in his livery, appeared to be quite himself; but Jackson at times had been known to possess a greater fondness for a bottle than was good for him.

"What is it, Jackson?" he demanded still more sharply. "Did Mr. Ellsworth send you here?"

"No, sir; he didn't," the man answered nervously. "But, if you please, Mr. Kane, sir, that is, if you don't mind, sir, I'd rather wait until——"

"Very well, Jackson!" Billy Kane interrupted curtly. "I suppose you have a reason for your rather strange request. Come along, then, and I'll listen to what you have to say."

"Thank you, sir," said the man earnestly.

They crossed the Avenue, passed down the cross street, turned the corner, and a moment later, entering by the gar-

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age driveway, gained the courtyard in the rear of the house. It was dark here, there were no lights showing from the back of the house itself or from the garage; and here, close to the private entrance to the "office" and library, Billy Kane halted.

"Well, Jackson, what's it all about?" he inquired brusquely.

"If you please, Mr. Kane, sir"—the man's voice had taken on a curious, quavering note—"don't speak so loud. We—you—you might be heard, sir, from the servants' entrance over there. I—Mr. Kane, sir—Mr. Ellsworth has been murdered, and the money, sir, and the rubies are gone."

Billy Kane was conscious only that he had reached out and grasped the footman's arm. They were very black, the shadows of the house, and it was dark about him, but strange quick little red flashes seemed to dance and dart and shoot before his eyes; and in his brain the man's words kept repeating themselves over and over in an insistent sort of way, and the words seemed meaningless except that they were pregnant with an overwhelming and numbing horror.

"For God's sake, sir, let go my arm—you're breaking it!" moaned the footman in a whisper.

The man's voice seemed to clear Billy Kane's brain. David Ellsworth—murdered! The horror was still there, but now there came a fury beyond control, and a bitter grief that racked him to the soul. David Ellsworth, his second father, the gentlest man and the kindest he had ever known—*murdered!* His hand dropped to his side, and, turning, he sprang up the few steps to the entrance just in front of him. He whipped out his key, opened the door, and stepped forward into the passageway. At his right was the door to the stenographer's room, and beyond, opening from that room, was the door to the library. He felt for the door handle, for there was no light in the passage, and, finding it, opened the door—and stood there rigid and motionless like a man turned to stone. Across the blackness of the intervening room the library door was partially open,

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and sprawled upon the floor lay the figure of a white-haired man, only the hair was blotched with a great crimson stain —and it was David Ellsworth. And something came choking into Billy Kane's throat, and a blinding mist before his eyes shut out the sight.

"In Heaven's name, don't go in there, sir!" Jackson was beside him again, whispering in his ear, and pulling the door softly shut. "Don't, sir—don't go—they'll get you!"

"Get—*me!* What do you mean?" Billy Kane whirled on the man.

"For the love of God, sir," pleaded Jackson, "don't speak so loud! I'm risking my neck for you, as it is, sir. There's a couple of plain-clothesmen waiting up in your room, sir, hiding there, and there's another two hiding in the front hall."

"Are you mad, Jackson!" Billy Kane's voice was low enough now in its blank amazement.

"I'm telling you the truth, sir," Jackson whispered tensely. "They've got you dead to rights, sir. There ain't a chance, except to run for it—and that's what I'd do, sir, if I were you, Mr. Kane. I didn't mean you to enter the house at all, but you acted so quick I couldn't stop you."

Billy Kane's two hands fell in an iron grip on the other's shoulders, and in the darkness he bent his head forward to stare into the man's face and eyes.

"You mean, Jackson," he said hoarsely, "that *you* believe I did that?"

The man wriggled himself free from Billy Kane's grip.

"It's not for me to say sir," he answered uneasily. "I—I can only tell you what they say."

"Tell me, then!" Billy Kane's voice, low as it was, was deadly in its even, monotonous tone.

"Yes, sir," said Jackson. "Keep your ear close to my lips, sir If anyone hears us, it's all up. They found him, Mr. Ellsworth, sir, lying there dead in the library with his head split open, about half an hour after you went out, sir. You were with him in the library after dinner alone, sir; and no one was with him after that, and—don't grip me

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again like that, sir, or I can't go on. You don't know your own strength, sir, Mr. Kane."

"Go on, Jackson!" breathed Billy Kane. "I'm sorry! Go on!"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. It was Peters, the butler, sir, who found the body, and he sent for the police. Mrs. Ellsworth doesn't know anything about it yet, sir. They're afraid to tell her, she's so delicate and sick, sir. It was about half an hour after you went out, sir, as I said, that Peters went to see Mr. Ellsworth about something, and found him there like you just saw, sir. And then the police came, sir, and they figured that you did it before you went out, and that you went out to dispose of the money and jewels, sir, in some safe place, and maybe also as a sort of alibi like, so that they'd think it was done while you were away, sir, and that when you returned, if you did return, sir, you would profess horror and surprise, sir."

"Are you mad, Jackson!" Billy Kane said again.

"No, sir—you'll see, sir—they've got you dead to rights. Both the vault and safe doors were open, and the money and rubies gone, and on the floor of the vault, way in by the wall under the lower shelf, like it had fluttered in there without you noticing it, sir, was a card with the combinations on it, and it was in your handwriting, Mr. Kane, sir. And in Mr. Ellsworth's hand, clutched there tight, sir, was a little piece of black silk cord, and on the floor, under the table, sir, where it must have rolled without you knowing it, sir, was a black button."

"I don't understand." said Billy Kane, a little numbly now. There had been something grotesquely absurd, something in the nature of a ghastly, hideous and ill-timed joke, something that was literally the phantasm of a diseased brain in the murmur of this man's voice whispering out of the darkness; but there was creeping upon him now a prescience as of some deadly and remorseless thing that was closing down, around and upon him with inexorable and crushing force. "I don't understand," he said again.

"Yes, sir." Jackson's low, guarded voice went on. "It's

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not for me to say, sir. You'll remember, Mr. Kane, that you were wearing a dinner jacket, and that before going out you went up to your room and changed. I suppose it was excitement, sir, and you never noticed it, and it's not to be wondered at under the circumstances, sir. The button had been pulled off the jacket, sir, and had taken the black silk loop with it. And the button had rolled under the library table, Mr. Kane, sir, and the loop was clutched in Mr. Ellsworth's hand."

Billy Kane said no word. There was a strange whirling in his brain. Some insidious and abhorrent thing was obsessing his consciousness, but in some way it was not fully born yet, nor concrete, nor tangible. He raised his hand and brushed it across his eyes.

"But that's not all, Mr. Kane, sir." The whispering voice was coming out of the darkness again, and it seemed curiously fraught with implacability, as though, not content with its unendurable torture, it must torment the more. "They found a letter in the pocket of your dinner jacket, Mr. Kane. It was a letter addressed to Mr. Ellsworth, which the police figure you must have intercepted so that he wouldn't see it, you being the one who opens the mail, sir. It was a letter warning him to look out for you, sir."

And now it had come like a flash, the clearing of Billy Kane's brain, and now it was brutally clear, clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding; and, as a man walking in a fog that had suddenly lifted, he found himself reeling, in the full consciousness of its horror, on the brink of a yawning chasm.

"My God!" he cried heavily. "This is damnable! I——"

"Keep quiet, sir!" implored Jackson frantically. "They'll hear you! If you care anything about a chance for your life, don't make a sound. The police figured that you would do one of three things, sir. They figured that after you had hidden the loot somewhere, you would walk back here as though nothing had happened, and pretend innocence, not knowing about that button and the cord, sir; and so there's

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a couple of them waiting for you in the front hall, sir. Or they thought that you might discover you had lost the card with the combinations written on it and remember the letter in your dinner-jacket pocket, sir, and try to get back unobserved, just as you've come in now, sir, and hoping that the murder hadn't been discovered in the meantime, try to recover the card and the letter before you played any other game; and they meant to let you, sir, only, as I told you, there's a couple more hiding up in your room, and you couldn't step into the library without the fellows in front seeing you. Or they thought you might just simply make a break for it, make your getaway, sir, and never come back at all; and so there's an alarm out, and your description, sir, in every precinct in the city, and all the railway stations are being watched. But that's your only chance, sir, to run for it."

It was silent here in the great house, ominously, strangely silent; and the silence grew heavy, and grew *loud* with great palpitating throbs that hammered at the ear drums—and then, in the distance, from the other side of the door in the long passage leading to the front of the house, faint but nevertheless distinct, there came the sound of an approaching footstep.

"There's someone coming!" whispered Jackson wildly. "Run for it, sir—while you've got the chance!"

Billy Kane's lips were thinned into a hard, straight line. Run for it! He had never run from anything in all his life! And now his brain was working in a sort of lightning debate, battling it out—logic that bade him go, against that finer sense that bids a brave man drop where he stands rather than turn his back.

Still nearer came that footstep.

"Run!" prompted Jackson again. "In another minute it will be too late!"

Billy Kane's hands were clenched until the nails bit into the flesh. David Ellsworth had been right. That letter was but part of a deliberate plot; and the plot had been framed with hellish ingenuity, not only to secure the fortune in

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the vault, but, safeguarding its authors, to fix irrevocably the guilt upon someone else, upon *him*, Billy Kane. Not a loophole for escape had been left, every detail had been worked out with a devil's craft; the evidence was damning, incontrovertible, and if, in spite of all, there might still have lingered a doubt in any jury's mind, he, Billy Kane, by an ironic trick of fate had——

"Run, I tell you!" came Jackson's voice again. "Run, or—" And then Jackson's voice lost its deference, and his whisper was like the snarl of a savage beast—the door along the passage was opening. "You damn fool! I gave you your chance, and you wouldn't take it—now take this!"

Billy Kane reeled suddenly back from the impact, as the man sprang viciously upon him—and for a moment again his brain groped blindly in confusion, even as he fought.

Jackson was yelling wildly at the top of his voice.

"Help! Here he is! Quick! Help! I've caught him!"

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—III—

INTO THE UNDERWORLD

IT had been dark before the opening of the door had thrown a dim glow along the rear of the passage, and Jackson, in his onslaught, had missed what was evidently intended for a throathold, and his hands, slipping down, had caught at and bunched the shoulders of Billy Kane's coat. But now Billy Kane was in action. His arms, straightened, shot back behind him—and the coat alone was in Jackson's hands.

With an oath, the man dropped the coat to the floor, and wrenched a revolver from his pocket. But there was light enough to see now—to see the murder in the other's eyes—and to see something there as well that brought a surging fury whipping through Billy Kane's veins.

"You devil! I understand it now!" he gritted, as he snatched and gripped at the other's wrist.

Jackson was twisting, squirming, fighting like a maniac.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Help! Here he is!"

Cries and shouts answered the man. There came the sound of racing feet. Then a blinding flash—a wild scream. And Jackson, the revolver going off in his hands as they struggled, sagged limply, and, with the revolver clattering against the wall, slid to the floor—and Billy Kane, with a bound, was through the back door, and leaping down the steps to the courtyard.

There was no question in his mind now as to whether he should run for it, or not. Jackson was one of the murderers . . . there must . . . be others. . . . Jackson could hardly have staged it all alone . . . but to remain there and be caught was but to play into their hands! His brain was

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working in flashes swift beyond any measure of time. If there could still have remained a lingering doubt favorable to him in any jury's mind, fate had played him an ironic trick that would dispel any such doubt instantly. *He had two thousand dollars of the money from that vault in his vest pocket at that moment!* And to be caught there, having presumably gained entrance stealthily by the rear door, would condemn him out of hand. To run, too, was to condemn him, that was their hell's snare that they had laid for him . . . but there was a chance this way! A rage that was merciless was upon him now. There was a chance this way . . . one chance . . . the only chance, not alone of saving his own life and clearing his own name, but of bringing to justice the inhuman fiends who had taken David Ellsworth's life . . . there was a chance . . . one chance . . . this way . . . that someone would pay . . . if he, Billy Kane, lived, that someone *would* pay!

There came a short, curt shout from behind him, an imperative order to halt He had gained the courtyard now, and was running along the garage driveway, heading for the street. He glanced back over his shoulder. In the darkness he could just make out a number of shadowy forms rushing down the steps.

The order came again. Then the tongue-flame of a revolver split through the black. And as though a red hot iron had been laid suddenly across his left shoulder, Billy Kane gritted his teeth together in pain—and stumbled—and recovered himself—and plunged out through the driveway gates to the street.

Halfway down the block, he remembered, was an alleyway; and, running like a deer now, Billy Kane again glanced behind him. Forms, a great many of them, though perhaps his fancy exaggerated the number, were pouring out into the street in pursuit. The men servants had evidently joined forces with the detectives; and yelling hoarsely, a pack of human hounds in cry, with the blood-scent in their nostrils, were some twenty-five to thirty yards behind.

How curiously warm his shoulder was! He clapped his

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right hand upon it, and drew his hand away, red and dripping wet. He began to feel strangely giddy. The shots were coming now in a fusillade—but they missed him. He was even gaining a little, and if it were not for that queer giddiness, that sense of nausea that seemed to be creeping steadily upon him, he could have outdistanced them all, and laughed at them—except that the entire district would soon be aroused, and speed and lightness of foot would therefore ultimately avail him little.

He laughed out harshly in grim, mirthless facetiousness. Logically then, it made small difference whether he had been hit, or not! It was his head, and not his feet, that must be depended upon to save him! If he could only get out of the immediate neighborhood . . . yes, that was it . . . and his head must find the way . . . only, and he was not very logical after all, his head seemed possessed with that sick, swimming, impotent sensation.

He reeled again. Then his teeth clamped hard, and the sheer nerve of the man asserted itself, and fought back the purely physical weakness. There was a way, at least a chance, perhaps a desperate chance, but still a chance—if the alleyway, that was just ahead now, was dark enough, and if——

A yell, chorused wildly, went up from behind him, and a bullet struck the pavement with an angry *spat*, as Billy Kane swerved into the alleyway. And again he laughed, gasping out the laugh in a sort of desperate relief. Yes, the alleyway was black enough, he could not distinguish an object twenty yards ahead; and that other "if," something that would furnish temporary sanctuary, was here, too, at his right—and five yards in from the street, he sprang for the top of a board fence, flung himself over, dropped down on the other side, and lay motionless upon the ground.

It was a matter of seconds—no more. The pursuers swept into the alleyway, and tearing down its length, shouting as they went, rushed by that spot, so *innocently close* to the street, where their quarry lay.

And now Billy Kane was on his feet again, and cautiously,

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silently, raised himself to the top of the fence once more. He had counted on just this exactly, it was simply what was naturally to be expected, and he knew no elation on that score. The chance, the one chance he had, still lay ahead of him, and was still to be taken—and to be taken without an instant's loss of time before the neighborhood became aroused to the extent of pouring curiously out-of-doors. Across the intervening street the alleyway extended in the opposite direction, and if he could gain the other side, double on his tracks, he would, for the time being at least, be safe.

The sound of the pursuit came from well down the alleyway now, and the pursuers were lost to sight in the blackness. He swung himself over the fence, dropped without a sound into the alleyway, and keeping close against the fence, crept forward to the edge of the street.

And then Billy Kane's lips moved in a silent prayer of fervent thankfulness for that quiet and sedate neighborhood that had not instantly responded to the disturbance. It had seemed hours, of course, since that shot had been fired at him in the courtyard of David Ellsworth's home, but in reality he knew that it could scarcely have been much more than a minute ago. The street, to all appearances, was deserted; and Billy Kane, quick now, running again, darted out from the lane; and, mindful that if he crossed the street in a direct line, he would be in the light, and that any one of those in the alleyway behind who might chance to look back would see him, made a slight detour, and a moment later gained the alleyway again where it continued on from the opposite side of the street.

He ran on now breathlessly. It had been raining hard that morning, and the ground under foot was soft and slippery. He reeled once, and fell—and rose splattered with grime and mud. He laughed again, but his laugh was desperate now. It had been bad enough before—coatless, and with a blood-soaked shirt—but his appearance must be disreputable beyond description now, so disreputable that he would attract instant suspicion the moment he were seen by

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anyone, and this quite apart even from the fact that before very long the net spread for the "murderer" of David Ellsworth would widen, and every man and woman abroad in that great city to-night would automatically become allies of the police in apprehending him.

He stopped. He was at the end of the alleyway, and it did not seem to extend again on the other side of the next street. But he must go on—somehow. He brushed his hand across his eyes. His shoulder pained him, and those dizzy flashes kept recurring, though perhaps not now with such great frequency. He must go on—somehow. That was essential. He must put as great an immediate distance between himself and the Ellsworth mansion as possible; later, if by some means he could get there, if luck broke for him just a little, his chances would be better, thanks to those three months of intimacy with the underworld, if he could get somewhere into the maze of the East Side.

He peered out into the street, waited for some pedestrians who were near at hand to pass further on, and then, moving quickly forward, crouched down in the shadows made by the flight of front door steps of the nearest house.

If he only had a coat! He could walk boldly then along the street without the blood showing on his white shirt, and it would cover up enough of the mud so that no one would pay any particular attention to him. If he only had a coat! He had two thousand dollars in his vest pocket—but it was not worth a coat. Anybody would sell him a coat for two thousand dollars, but—— His hands went to his eyes, and then pressed against his throbbing temples. Yes, certainly, his brain was verging on delirium! Why should he think of Marco's? Yes, yes, he remembered now! Somebody was going to break into Marco's to-night . . . and Marco was a second-hand clothing dealer . . . and the back door had its lock broken . . . and the way was open. He could steal too . . . a coat . . . at Marco's . . . and that was the only way he could get a coat . . . to steal it . . . he dared not make any attempt to buy one . . . and he must have a coat.

His brain cleared again, and he smiled a little ironically

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at himself. But the thought of Marco's now stuck persistently. It was possible, of course—if he could get to Marco's! But Marco's was a long way off. Marco's was a long way downtown on the East Side. He shook his head, smiling ironically again. Yes, he would very much like to be there now! That was where he wanted to be—in the East Side, instead of here!

Billy Kane peered up and down the street again, and again moved stealthily forward. He repeated these tactics over and over, sometimes covering only a few yards at a time, sometimes making as much as half a block, and sometimes even more when a friendly lane or alleyway offered him the opportunity. And at the expiration of half an hour he had covered a distance that surprised even himself, for, though still uptown, he had succeeded in getting entirely away from the more wealthy neighborhood.

Another ten minutes passed, and hidden again in the shadows of a porch, he was staring now with feverish eagerness at a great, covered motor truck, a furniture van, that was drawn up in front of what appeared to be a truckman's office across the street. The driver had gone into the office, but there was the street to cross—and two men were coming leisurely in his direction along the sidewalk. He clenched his hands fiercely at his sides. Here was the chance flaunting him in the face and tantalizing him, the chance that was a far greater chance even than he had dared hope for, and he was powerless to avail himself of it unless those two men passed by before the driver came out again. He could read the name and address in the huge letters on the side of the van. It belonged down on the East Side. This was probably only a small uptown branch office, and the odds were a hundred to one that the van would be going home now. And if the driver took a direct route he was bound to use a cross street that would intersect that lane in the rear of Marco's, and intersect it within at least a few blocks of the second-hand dealer's shop. Billy Kane's hands clenched tighter, and his face was strained and drawn, as from his hiding place he alternately watched the van and

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the two men. Those few blocks through a lane would be nothing! God, if he could only reach Marco's—and a coat! A coat! It seemed an absurd thing to be of such moment—a coat! But it meant life or death. A coat would cover his blood-stained shirt, and he would be able to move with freedom enough to give him at least a fighting chance, and——

The two men had passed by; there was no one else in sight. He waited another moment until they were still further away—and then, in a flash, Billy Kane was across the road, and had swung himself over the tail-board into the van. It seemed like some vast cavernous place here inside, for the van was empty, save for what appeared to be, as nearly as he could make out in the gloom, some large pieces of crated furniture piled at the front end just behind the driver's seat. Billy Kane's eyes swept the interior anxiously—and the drawn, strained look in Billy Kane's face relaxed. By lying flat on the floor of the van the driver would hardly be likely to notice him in any case; but, to make assurance doubly sure, some bits of sacking, evidently used to wrap around and protect furniture from being scratched and marred, were strewn about on the floor. Billy Kane pulled off his slouch hat, that had been jammed down over his eyes, drew a piece of the sacking over him, and lay still.

And then presently he heard the driver come out from the office. The man climbed to his seat. The van jolted forward. Billy Kane's hand, under the sacking, felt tentatively over his shoulder. It was paining him brutally, and was burning and hot, but it seemed to have stopped bleeding, and the sense of nausea and giddiness had passed away. It was a flesh wound only, probably; or, at least, the bullet had not fractured any bone, for he could move both shoulder and arm readily.

And now, safe for the moment, Billy Kane's mind was back on the events of the evening; and for a time grief for the man he loved had its sway; and then came fury, pitiless and remorseless, and a cry in his soul for vengeance; and then a quiet, measured analysis of every detail, an

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analysis that was deadly in its cold, unnatural calm. Jackson's acts in that back passageway, Jackson's possession of a revolver, and Jackson's words at the end stamped the footman irrevocably as being one of the men in the murder plot. And with Jackson's guilt established as a premise, the rest unravelled itself step by step, clearly, logically, irrefutably.

David Ellsworth's deductions had proved themselves in ghastly truth. The letter had been written as the initiatory step toward incriminating him, Billy Kane, in the robbery that was to follow; and this demanded, even as he had argued before, that the vault and safe combinations should be known to a third party. Who knew them? The answer came now quickly and emphatically enough—someone within the house—Jackson. He remembered now, though he had paid no attention to it before, that Jackson had been in the library on several occasions when he, Billy Kane, was opening the vault. It had probably taken the man a month or two, perhaps more, watching both David Ellsworth and himself at every opportunity and with infinite patience, to pick up little by little, possibly but a single number or turn at a time, the combinations—but he had undoubtedly accomplished it finally.

The original plan had certainly not contemplated the murder of David Ellsworth, for the letter was primarily intended to make the old millionaire one of the first to accuse him, Billy Kane, of the crime—there having been left on the scene of the crime, of course, in that case, as David Ellsworth had also reasoned, some further damning evidence of his, Billy Kane's, supposed guilt. But the changing of the combinations had completely upset that original plan. Who was it, then, who knew that the combinations *had* been changed? Again the question answered itself almost automatically. It must have been someone in the house at the time, and someone who was both listening and watching —Jackson. True, David Ellsworth had looked out into the hall, and had opened the door and looked into the unlighted stenographer's room, but he had done it only cursorily, and

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Jackson all the time might well have been hiding in that room—in fact, must have been hiding there.

The rest was self-evident. Without the combinations they were helpless, but the new combinations were on a card in David Ellsworth's pocket. It had been necessary, then, only to add *murder* to the theft, employing as accessories the card, the letter, the button and the black silk loop, in order to seize the opportunity of the moment; for, the card bearing the combinations once destroyed or out of reach, the months of work that had been put in to secure the old combinations would have to be repeated to obtain the new—and with very little likelihood of success, since Jackson would know that David Ellsworth's suspicions were thoroughly aroused.

The van rolled rapidly downtown. Billy Kane, peering out from under the sacking, kept watch on the streets through which he passed. But his mind was still busy with its problem.

Jackson's act in accosting him on the corner, and afterwards luring him by suggestion to the rear of the house, had puzzled him at first, but that, too, was clear enough now. There was a grain of truth in what the man had said about giving him a chance, though Jackson would care little enough whether he ultimately got away, or not. Jackson's idea, or perhaps the idea of a keener brain behind Jackson, was to prevent him, Billy Kane, from entering the house at all, and so, by inducing him to run for it, to corroborate the evidence of guilt against him, in which case, being a self-elected fugitive, he would be doubly condemned if eventually caught. On the other hand, if he refused to listen and insisted on entering the house, as they were afraid he might do, they meant to see to it that his entrance was made by apparent stealth, and here again he but added the final touch to the evidence against him, and discredited himself beyond any hope or possibility of recovery. Jackson had taken no personal risk or chance in doing this, as far as the police were concerned; and it was evident now that Jackson had meant to *kill* him there in that back passageway should he, Billy Kane, persist in refusing to run. The case

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and all investigation would have ended automatically if he, Billy Kane were killed under such circumstances. It was all simplicity itself! Jackson had only to call for help, as he had done when the issue was forced by that approaching footstep, pretend that he had discovered him, Billy Kane, creeping into the house, and had rushed upon him—that he, Billy Kane, had drawn the revolver, but that in the struggle had been shot himself. With the evidence as it stood, with his, Billy Kane's guilt so apparently obvious, Jackson would not only have been believed, but would have been rewarded and lauded as a hero.

Still the van rolled on—mostly through deserted streets, for the traffic was light at that time of night. Perhaps another twenty minutes passed. Then Billy Kane began to edge toward the rear end of the truck. He was in the East Side now, and approaching the neighborhood of Marco's second-hand clothing store.

Was Jackson dead? Billy Kane shook his head. He did not know. A grim smile twisted his lips. He hoped not—not from any sympathy for the man, for the man's punishment in that case had been almost too merciful a retribution, but because in Jackson was embodied the clue that would lead, if he, Billy Kane, escaped, to that day of reckoning that, cost what it might, he meant should come.

The van was in a narrow and ill-lighted street now. Marco's was still two streets further downtown, but in the block ahead was the lane that, running north and south, passed the rear of Marco's place.

Billy Kane sat suddenly upright on the tail-board of the van, the piece of sacking thrown now around his shoulders. If the driver happened to look around and see him, the supposition would be that he had hopped on to steal a ride; and if the driver ordered him off it mattered very little, since, in another yard or so anyhow, the van, as far as he was concerned, would have lost its usefulness. He leaned out, and glanced ahead of him up the street. There were a few people about, but not many, and none in the immediate vicinity of the lane that was now just at hand; but even if

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he were seen for an instant as he left the van, he would not be running any very great risk for he would be out of sight again before any particular attention could be riveted upon him; and, besides, in that miserable and sordid quarter a man might do many things out of the ordinary, for instance, dive suddenly into a lane and disappear, without exciting even passing curiosity or notice.

He jerked his slouch hat over his eyes, flung off the sacking, dropped to the ground, and slipped across the sidewalk into the lane. And now he was running again. He reached the next intersecting street, and was forced to draw back under cover to wait for an opportunity to cross unnoticed. And then the chance came, and he continued on down the lane on the opposite side of the street again.

Marco's was the second store in from the next corner on the street that paralleled the lane, and halfway down he stopped running and began to move forward cautiously. It was very black in here, and he wished now that he had looked at his watch when he had had the opportunity; but it must be somewhere around ten o'clock. It was two hours, then, since he had overheard that telephone conversation in which Laverto had said that all he cared was that the man to whom he was telephoning should be away from Marco's before a quarter of eleven.

Billy Kane was crouched now in the darkness against the back door of the second-hand shop. The chances were that whoever Laverto had been telephoning to had already been here and gone. Certainly two hours would have given any one ample time, and as Laverto had said that Marco did not keep open in the evening there would have been no cause for delay on that score.

He placed his ear to the panel of the door, and listened. There was no sound, and he tried the door. It stuck a little in spite of its broken lock, and gave with a slight squeak. Billy Kane drew in his breath sharply, and listened again. There was still no sound. He closed the door behind him, and crept forward, feeling his way with his hands along the wall in the pitch blackness. The flooring was old, and once

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it creaked under his foot, causing his lips to tighten rigidly, and his face to set in a hard, dogged way. He had no matches—they, in the match-safe that he usually carried in the ticket-pocket of his coat, were gone with the coat. A coat! All sense of absurdity in the length to which he was going to obtain so common-place an article as a coat had vanished. It was the one, final, ultimate, essential thing that he must and would have if he was to know a single chance for life. Without it he might as well throw up the sponge at once, but if his luck still held he would get one now. Marco's stock of clothing would naturally be in the shop in front, and——

His hand dove suddenly forward into space, and he halted for an instant. He had come to an open doorway on his right. He felt around him in all directions. The passage seemed to end a foot or so ahead, and to lead nowhere but into what was probably the back room here at his side. The entrance, then, to the shop proper would be through the back room.

Again he moved forward, crossed the threshold, and again halted. It was dark, intensely dark, and he could see nothing; and it was still and silent, and there was no sound. But suddenly he found himself standing in a tense, strained attitude, his head thrown a little forward, his eyes striving to pierce the darkness. He could hear nothing, see nothing —but the sense of *presence* was strong upon him.

A minute passed, the seconds dragging out interminably—and he did not move. And then it seemed that close to him he caught a faint stirring sound. But he was not sure. It might have been his imagination. The silence, so heavy and prolonged, had taken on strange little noises of its own.

Billy Kane's lips thinned. He was bare-handed, wounded and unarmed, but he had a stake that he would fight for with a beast's ferocity. And that stake was a coat! If there was anyone here, if it was more than his excited and wrought-up fancy playing tricks upon him, it was certain at least that it was not the police, for the police would have no incentive to play at cat-and-mouse, and therefore it

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was probably the man, not yet through with his work, to whom Laverto had telephoned; it was probably a *fellow* thief, fellow since he, Billy Kane, had also come to steal—a coat. Well, he would at least end the suspense! He turned in the direction from which he thought the sound, imaginary or real, had come, took a step forward—and stood still, hands clenched at his sides, as he blinked, through the ray of a flashlight that was suddenly thrown full in his face, at the round, ugly muzzle of a revolver that held a steady bead upon him on a level with his eyes.

A voice came through the silence in a savage, guttural snarl:

"Throw up yer mitts, youse——" The words ended in an amazed and startled oath. The revolver muzzle sagged downward, as though the hand that held it had become suddenly powerless. "Well, fer Gawd's sake, if it ain't de Rat!" gasped the voice in a hoarse whisper. "When did youse get back? I thought youse was hobnobbin' wid some of de swells youse used to know, an' was givin' Noo Yoik de icy paw until next month!"

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