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## DASH DARE ON THE STAGE —or— The murder IN THE DRESSING-ROOM By Ed. Strayer.



There across a trunk lay the dead body of Clara Whitson, the actress.

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# Dash Dare On The Stage:

OR,

## THE MURDER IN THE DRESSING ROOM.

By ED. STRAYER.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MYSTERIOUS CRIME.

"RATTLER!"

"What is it, Dash?"

"I am going to take an evening off and go to the theater."

"All right. I don't know of any man who deserves recreation more than you do," said Rattler, Dash Dare's trusty assistant.

"I feel as if I wanted to go somewhere," went on Dash Dare. "I have been knuckling down to hard work for two months without a break, and the strain is beginning to tell."

"It would tell on anybody, Dash."

"I suppose so."

"You worked like a horse in your Man Hunt case, and you haven't taken any rest since. Go along and enjoy yourself."

It was seven o'clock of an early day in the autumn.

Dash Dare and his assistant were seated in the office looking over the papers of a celebrated bond forgery.

The papers were now about ready to be sent to the prosecuting attorney.

A few minutes later Dash Dare left the place.

He made his way to a nearby hotel.

At the barber shop he got a clean shave, and then entered the *café* for supper.

At quarter to eight he was on his way to the Academy of Music.

"Bull Run," a war drama, was being played there.

It was enjoying a short but profitable run, and, when Dash arrived at the theater he found it packed.

He was so well known, however, that he had no difficulty in procuring a seat.

"Why, Mr. Dare, glad to see you!" exclaimed the manager. "How many?"

"Only one."

"Here you are, Box B, left. College boys in there, but all good fellows."

"That will do. How much?"

"Eh?"

"What's the damage?"

"Not a cent."

"Then my money isn't good?"

"Not here, Mr. Dare. Proud to have you favor us."

Dash smiled and handed the manager a fine, imported cigar, and then walked inside.

The orchestra had just ceased playing, and now the curtain went up on the first act.

There were four young men in the box with Dash, but to these the great detective paid no attention.

He had come to be amused, and now, forgetting every business care, he paid strict attention to the play.

Soon he became interested, not so much in the plot as in the acting of the leading lady, Miss Clara Whitson.

The lady was young and pretty, and she fairly took the house by storm from the very first entrance.

"She's the making of this play," thought Dash to himself.

He applauded, and noticed that one of the young men beside him did the same with great vigor.

The young man also threw a bouquet on the stage just as the curtain was going down.

Then the young man got up and left the box.

Dash remained where he was to look over the audience with an opera-glass.

There was a wait of six or seven minutes, enlivened by a selection from the orchestra.

The curtain went up upon a different scene—a negro cabin—and the audience began to laugh over the antics of half a dozen buck-and-wing dancers.

The play went on, but the young man who had sat beside Dash Dare did not come back.

Suddenly things began to drag.

Something was wrong.

The principal male character was on the stage among the colored actors, and he was faking a number of lines to cover the break.

Then a faint bell was heard, and swiftly and silently the curtain rolled down.

As it touched the stage floor a hand was laid on Dash Dare's shoulder.

The great detective turned, to see the manager anxiously bending over him.

"For Heaven's sake, Dare, come with me," whispered the manager, in a hoarse voice.

Dash was about to speak, but seeing the others in the box were watching, he said nothing.

The pair were soon behind the scenes.

Here all was confusion.

"Now what is it?"

"Come to Miss Whitson's dressing room."

The manager was so agitated he could scarcely trust himself to speak.

He led the way under the stage, through the greenroom and along to the row of rooms reserved for the ladies.

At the entrance to the last apartment an excited crowd of actors and actresses was congregated.

"This is terrible."

"Awful; how did it happen?"

"Is it suicide, do you think?"

"No, it looks more like murder."

"But who would kill Clara Whitson?"

"She hadn't an enemy in the world."

"Maybe it's robbery."

So the talk ran on.

"Make way here, please," cried the manager. "This gentleman will take charge."

He nodded toward Dash Dare.

"Who is he?" asked several under their breath.

"Dash Dare, the celebrated detective."

"Oh!"

At once a passage was made for Dash.

Once inside of the dressing room a fearful scene was presented to the eyes of the great detective.



There across a trunk lay the dead body of Clara Whitson, the star of the company.

Her beautiful form, partly disrobed, was drawn up as if in convulsions.

At her mouth several flecks of greenish foam were to be seen.

She was dead, and had died a truly horrible death from some poison.

"What—what shall we do?" asked the manager and several others of Dash.

"Dismiss the audience and notify the nearest police precinct," was the reply. "At present I will take charge of matters here."

At once the stage manager went off.

He had a hard task before him, but he was equal to it.

He knew it would not do to mention the fact that a murder or suicide had taken place in the theater.

He told the audience that one of the leading members of the cast would be unable to go on again, and consequently all money taken in would be refunded at the box office.

This prevented any sign of a panic, and the audience quietly dispersed.

While he was making his brief speech a messenger was sent to the police station.

Soon two officers and a ward detective put in appearance.

The policemen kept the crowd of actors back, while the ward detective started in to gain some clue that would lead to the solution of the mystery.

In the meanwhile Dash Dare had been making a quiet examination.

First he took in every detail of the dressing room.

He noted the various boxes on the stand, the bouquet the young man had given Clara Whitson lying close at hand, and the fact that her jewels still rested in the ivory box into which she had thrown them.

"Not robbery, that's certain," was the first positive conclusion which he reached.

Then he began an examination of the corpse.

He raised up the beautiful head, and looked into the half open mouth.

Nothing but the strange greenish foam was to be seen there.

He was about to lower the head again when a fine black snuff in the nose of the corpse attracted his attention.

He took up several specks of the snuff, and walked over to the light with them.

They looked like plain snuff that is made from tobacco.

Yet Dash was not satisfied.

He put the grains to his nose.

One whiff and he was almost strangled.

His head began to swim, and it was all he could do to keep himself from reeling to the floor.

The stuff was one of the most deadly ever manufactured.

What it was Dash was not prepared to say until he had made a careful chemical analysis.

Dash had scarcely recovered from his temporary weakness when the ward detective arrived.

He knew Dash and bowed stiffly.

The ward detective's name was Ziegler, and he held a private opinion that his detective ability far exceeded that of Dash Dare.

He had done some fair work on several ordinary cases, and this had given him what is commonly called a swelled head.

"Suicide—took poison, no doubt," said Ziegler.

Then he looked about to see if a robbery had been committed.

"All her stuff here when you came?" he asked of Dash.

"All just as you see it," replied the great detective.

As he spoke he took up the bouquet which had been thrown to the murdered young lady from Box B.

He gave a faint and guarded sniff.

It was enough.

The bouquet was doctored with the deadly stuff that Dash had just found in the nose of the corpse.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE POISONOUS BOUQUET.

"LET me see that bouquet," said Ziegler.

Dash had replaced it on the stand.

"Don't smell too hard!" cried Dash, as the ward detective prepared to regale himself with the perfume of the elegant roses in the bouquet.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"The bouquet is poisoned."

"Ah!"

The ward detective handled it gingerly.

A timid snuff sent him staggering backward.

"That's the article that did the business!" he exclaimed.

"Very likely," returned Dash.

"Who gave her that bouquet?"

"It was thrown to her by a young man in Box B."

The ward detective looked crestfallen to think Dash should know so much.

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

"I'll soon find out, Dare. It won't take me long to locate him."

Without another word Ziegler rushed from the apartment.

Dash Dare continued his search around the dressing room.

Presently he saw something on the floor near the door.

He picked it up and found it was an enameled letter E.

It was very small and the back contained some solder.

Evidently the letter had broken off of some badge.

Dash put the letter into his pocket.

It might be of no consequence, or it might be of great value.

The noted detective never allowed anything in the shape of a clue to escape him.

The examination over, Dash called the other actors in the passageway around him.

"Who occupied the room next to this?" he asked.

"I did," replied the soubrette, a young lady named Fanny Kenley.

"And who occupied the room directly opposite?"

For a moment there was no answer.

"That room is empty on account of the wash bowl and pipes being out of order," said the call boy, who stood near.

Dash Dare took Fanny Kenley aside.

"Have you been in your room since the curtain went down on the first act?"

"Yes."

"Were you in the room directly before it was discovered that Miss Whitson was dead?"

"I was, sir."

"Did you hear anything unusual going on in Miss Whitson's room?"

"No, sir. The dancing on the stage made so much noise I couldn't hear anything."

"Then you do not know if Miss Whitson had any visitors?"

"She never entertained visitors while getting ready to go on. She always met her friends in the greenroom."

"There were no privileged characters?"

"I never saw or heard of any. She had several admirers, but she appeared to keep them at a distance."

"Who were those admirers?"

"Oh, I can't tell you their names. There was a very nice young man, who used to send her presents and flowers and such things, and there was another gentleman, somewhat older, but I haven't seen him since we reached New York."

"Can you describe the young man?"

"He was tall and thin and had a high forehead and brown, curly hair."

The description tallied with the man who had sat beside Dash Dare in Box B.

"Have you seen the young man lately?"

"He was in a box to-night. I wonder what he'll say when he learns Miss Whitson is dead?" mused the soubrette.

"Most likely he knew it long ago," thought Dash Dare.

If the young man had given that bouquet to the dead woman it was more than probable he was her murderer.

Yet Dash Dare prided himself on being a good face reader, and he could not believe that the young man who had sat beside him was such a villain.

"By his looks he was a perfect gentleman," thought Dash.

He resolved to go slow on the case.

No one had hired him to take it up, yet he was resolved to solve the mystery, even if he had to do so at his own expense.

Dash Dare, as our old readers know, is quite rich, and dollars do not count much with him.

Dash now interviewed the other members of the company, and then the man who had charge downstairs.

From all of these he could learn nothing which would throw any light on the mystery.

The coroner now arrived to take charge of the corpse.

With him came a doctor who was an old friend of Dash Dare.

The detective at once told both gentlemen of the poisoned bouquet.

The doctor was greatly interested and gathered some of the deadly snuff on a bit of writing paper.

"I will analyze it this very night," he said.

"Do so and let me know what it is," said Dash. "It will save me a good bit of trouble."

Leaving the coroner in charge, Dash left the dressing room and walked out into the passageway.

The floor was as clean as wax and so it was not strange that a bit of crumpled paper thrown in an out-of-the-way corner should attract the great detective's attention.

He picked the paper up and found it was such as is usually used by druggists for wrapping up medicines.

On one end was a part of a label, which bore these letters:

NSON,

Bowery, near

Dash placed the paper in his pocket along with the enameled letter E.

The audience had now departed, and Dash did not hesitate to go back to Box B.

He looked at the chair the young man occupied and examined the box thoroughly.

Nothing relating in any way to the case was found.

"I'll take another look at that bouquet," he said to himself.

The cluster of roses was examined with great care.

The deadly snuff was over every rose, but it did not seem to be sifted in to any extent.

This showed that the bouquet had not been handled much since being doctored.

Dash Dare set to thinking.

Had the bouquet been doctored when it was hurled on the stage, or afterward?

If afterward, then by whom?

Had the young man come below after leaving Box B?

If the young man was guilty what was his motive for the crime?

He had not robbed her.

He was evidently an ardent admirer, perhaps a lover.

In that case jealousy alone would drive him to such a base deed.

If jealousy, of whom was he jealous?

All these were questions easy to ask but difficult to answer.

Again Dash Dare went over the whole ground.

It was barely possible the bouquet was not the one the young man had thrown to the actress.

To make sure Dash set out on a visit to the florists in the vicinity of the Academy.

He had not far to go.

At a place on Fourteenth Street near Union Square he came across the party who had made up the bouquet less than three hours before.

"It was ordered by a Mr. Charles Halloway," said the florist, referring to his book. "Box B, Academy, to be delivered at 8:15 P. M."

"Nothing but large Jack roses, with smilax?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Mr. Halloway order the bouquet himself?"

"I can't say. It was a young man, quite tall."

"Curly brown hair?"

"That's it."

"He paid cash, I suppose?"

"He did."

"Did he ever buy any flowers here before?"

"Oh, yes, several times. I reckon he was smitten with one of the actresses, eh?"

"You've struck it."

Dash Dare left the flower store and walked slowly along toward Broadway.

Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps than he almost ran into Ziegler, the ward detective.

Ziegler had a young man handcuffed to his own wrist.

The young man was the one who had sat in Box B with Dash Dare.

"I've got him, just as I said I would!" called out the ward-detective to Dash.

"You are making a great mistake, sir!" cried out Charles Halloway. "I've done nothing to warrant this arrest."

He was very pale and plainly showed his agitation.

"You just come along to the station with me," cried Ziegler, roughly.

"But, sir—"

"I don't want anything out of you," interrupted the ward detective. "You know well enough what I am taking you in for. Murder ain't no light crime."

"Murder!" gasped Charles Halloway. "Who has been murdered?"

"You murdered Miss Clara Whitson, and you might as well own up to it."

"Clara! Dead?"

The cry seemed to come from Charles Halloway's very soul. He threw up both hands and staggered back completely overcome into Dash Dare's arms.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A YOUNG MAN'S FOLLY.

"He is innocent, I'll stake my reputation on it," thought Dash Dare.

To his way of thinking, Charles Halloway was totally sincere in all he said and did.

Ziegler, however, thought differently.

"Come, none of your funny work!" he exclaimed, as he grabbed the young man by the arm.

"He is in a faint," said Dash Dare.

He was disgusted at the way the ward detective was acting.

"Faint! Not much! He's shamming."

Ziegler shook the young man.

At that moment an empty cab drew up by the curb.

Dash at once hailed it.

"Let us take him to the station house in this," he said.

"Who will pay the expense?" growled Ziegler.

"I will."

"All right then, Dare. But it's strange you are willing to help a murderer."

"We differ on that point, Ziegler," returned Dash Dare, coolly.

The two detectives deposited Charles Halloway in the cab and both followed.

It took but a few minutes to reach the police precinct.

When Charles Halloway came to his senses he was at first completely bewildered.

"Am I dreaming, or did they tell me Clara is dead?"

"She is dead," said Dash, kindly. "Come, brace up, if you can."

"Yes; don't try any more acting," put in Ziegler. "It won't do you any good."

The young man did not reply.

Instead, he dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Dash saw that his sufferings were keen.

"He thought a good deal of the dead woman, that's certain," was the way the great detective figured it.

"I will see to it that he does not escape," said Dash.

"Ah! so you agree with me at last, eh?" cried the ward detective.

With a great show of importance he made the charge of murder against Charles Halloway.

The young man paid no attention to what was said until the officer in charge of the station started to question him.

Then he said he had nothing to confess.

"I—I—wish to be alone," he stammered. "I—I did not expect this."

On this he was promptly locked up in a cell.

Ziegler went off to obtain more evidence against him.

The ward detective was sure he was performing a remarkable bit of work, and that the morning newspapers would ring with his praise.

Dash Dare asked permission to see Halloway alone.

The officer in charge looked surprised.

"I thought Ziegler was working this case alone," he remarked.

"He is working his side of it," returned Dash Dare, dryly.

"You think there is another side, then?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't want to talk to the prisoner."

Dash Dare was too important a man in the secret service to be refused such a request as he had made.

Soon he was let into the cell occupied by Charles Halloway.

The young man was pacing up and down.

He looked a perfect picture of misery.

Dash Dare did not speak until he was certain they were alone.

He placed a kindly hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Halloway, I want to be your friend in this sad piece of work," he said, softly.

"Go away, you are one of the fellows that arrested me."

"No, I had nothing to do with your arrest."

"But you were along—"

"I came to help you."

"I am not guilty! Good heavens! To think I would murder Clara!"

And the young man clutched at his forehead in mental agony.

"I believe you are totally innocent."

"I would not harm a hair of her beautiful head."

"You loved her, then?"

"Loved her? Why, she was my—"

The young man stopped short.

"I thought she might be your wife," remarked Dash, on a venture.

"What made you think so? I did not say so," returned Halloway, in extreme confusion.

"Will you deny it, now she is dead?"

The young man's breast began to heave.

"No, I won't. It must all come out, I suppose, now the law is after me. She was my wife. We were married in Utica three months ago. And now she is dead and they think I killed her!"

And the tears coursed down the young fellow's pale cheeks.

Dash Dare gave him a chance to recover before proceeding.

"Listen to me, Halloway," he said, at length. "I am Dash Dare, the detective—"

"I have seen you before—and to-night," burst out the young man.

"I sat in Box B with you at the Academy."

"Were you watching me?"

"No; I merely went to enjoy the play. I was called by the manager as soon as it was learned that Miss Whitson—I mean your wife—was dead."

"You suspected me?"

"I did at first. I could not help it, from the way in which she was killed."

"How was it done? Remember, I know nothing; and up to this moment I hardly cared, I was so shocked."

"You threw her a bouquet at the conclusion of the first act?"

"I did. I always throw her flowers when I am present at a performance."

"The bouquet contained a deadly snuff which, when she inhaled it, poisoned her."

"What! the bouquet I gave her?"

"Yes."

"Never!"

"It is true."

"Then that florist— But no, I smelled of the bouquet several times before I threw it, and it was all right. You must be mistaken, Mr. Dare."

"I wish I was. But the bouquet was in her room, and a whiff of it nearly strangled me. The coroner now holds it as evidence against you."

Charles Halloway shook his head.

He was completely taken back.

"Who brought the bouquet to you?"

"The florist's boy."

"Did you keep it in your hand after he gave it to you?"

"I did."

"So that none of the others in the box could have tampered with it?"

"No one came near it. I remember holding it between myself and you until I threw it on the stage."

"Then I must find out if any one tampered with it while the boy had it."

"How could they? Didn't I say I smelled of it?"

Dash Dare was silent for a moment.

"Halloway, I am afraid the police will make things look black for you, especially if they find out that you were married to the murdered person. Now, if you will allow me, I will work to clear you."

"I haven't any money. I am poor. It was my poverty kept me from acknowledging our marriage to the world."

"I am not looking for pay. I am rich, and will enjoy teaching Ziegler, the ward detective, who is working to hang you, a little lesson."

For the first time since Dash had begun to talk, Halloway gave him a grateful look.

"You will work for me without pay, Mr. Dare?"

"Yes."

"You are more than kind."

"This case actually fell into my hands, as it were. I will sift it to the bottom."

"Bring the wretch who murdered Clara to justice, and I will repay you, if it takes a lifetime!" cried Charles Halloway.

"But if I am to do anything, I must know everything that you can tell, Halloway. No detective can do good work for a party who does not give him utter confidence."

"I will tell you all I can. Why not? It will come out on the trial, I feel certain."

At once Dash Dare got out a book and prepared to take down notes in shorthand.

"I am an orphan," began Charles Halloway. "My parents have been dead since I was a little boy."

"When my father and mother died they were poor, and I was turned over to the care of my uncle, Randolph Halloway, of Buffalo."

"He gave me a good education, and when he married took me in as a member of his family, and I have occupied that place ever since."

"My uncle has no children, and both he and his wife have agreed that when he dies I am to receive half of his wealth, a sum not less than a hundred thousand dollars."

"I have just graduated from Yale, and next winter expected to enter my uncle's law office in Buffalo, for he is a well-known lawyer."

"My uncle is a peculiar man, and among other things he wishes me to do is to remain single until I am thirty years of age."

"And you met Miss Whitson, and couldn't do it, is that so?" smiled Dash.

"Clara and I were playmates when we were children," went on Charles Halloway. "I loved her then, and that love never died. I was sorry to see her go on the stage, for my uncle had a horror of actresses. When she joined a regular company he told me never to go near her again."

"And you disobeyed him and married her?"

"I did. I loved her, and I simply couldn't help it. I was stopping at a friend's house in Utica, and there Clara became my wife."

"We agreed to keep the marriage a secret for the present. In the meantime she was to save her money, and I was to get along as fast as I could in my profession. I felt certain that when the truth was known my uncle would cut me off with the proverbial dollar."

"Your uncle was liberal otherwise?"

"Oh, yes. I presume some would call me foolish, but I loved Clara, and—and—"

"You were afraid of rivals?"

Charles Halloway turned his face away.

"Well, I suppose I may as well admit it. There was a rival—although Clara told me afterward she did not care in the least for him—and I didn't want him to dazzle her with his offers."

"Who was that rival?"

"His name was Palo Contrain; he was some sort of a foreigner—what, I never learned."

"What became of him after the marriage?"

"Oh, he kept on following Clara around until I gave him a broad hint to quit."

"Where did you see Contrain last?"

"In New Haven."

"Did the company come from New Haven to New York?"

"Yes."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### DASH DARE'S FIRST MOVE.

THE great detective was silent for a moment.

"Halloway, do you think it possible your wife committed suicide?" he asked abruptly.

"Never, sir, never!"

"She was not downcast?"

"No. Why should she be? She was making the hit of her life, as theatrical people express it; her name was on every one's lips."

"Was she naturally of a bright disposition?"

"Very. She sung about as much off the stage as on, and you know she did a good deal of singing in 'Bull Run.' She was to come on right after the darkies."

"Had she any enemies?"

"None that I know of—but—"

Charles Halloway paused and bit his lip.

"But what?"

"She had several rivals—women who were jealous of her success."

"Now in the company?"

"Yes."

"Who were they?"

"Alice Bird, for one."

"Yes."

"And Lurette Dondell for another. Miss Dondell was particularly ill-natured toward her."

"She plays 'heavies,' doesn't she?"

"Yes."

Dash Dare remembered her—a large, well-formed woman, with malicious black eyes.

"It will be well to keep an eye on Lurette Dondell," he thought.

Alice Bird was the soubrette, and Dash at once dismissed

her from his mind. She was too much of a flyaway to be much of a criminal.

"Do you know anything of Miss Dondell—of her past, I mean?"

"Nothing."

At that moment there came a knock on the cell door.

The inspector had arrived to interview Charles Halloway.

At once Dash Dare prepared to leave.

"Don't say too much," he whispered to the young man.

"Give me time and I will clear you."

Charles Halloway grasped his hand.

"You are the only friend I look to, Mr. Dare," he replied.

The inspector nodded pleasantly to Dash as he came in.

"I see you are already at it, Dare," he said. "You lose no time."

"It won't do to lose time in a case like this, inspector," replied the celebrated detective, and he bowed himself out.

It was now past midnight, and Dash Dare returned home, to catch a few hours' sleep before entering upon what he felt was going to be one of the toughest jobs of his career.

Although his head was more than full of business he slept like a top.

Promptly at six o'clock he arose and dressed.

A light breakfast, and disguised as an old sport, or rounder, he sallied forth.

His destination was the Bowery.

He wanted to hunt up the drug store from which had come the scrap of wrapping paper he had found in the passageway leading to Clara Whitson's dressing room.

This was not difficult.

On the Bowery near Grand Street he found a shop with the name, Jason Canson, over the door.

It was a dirty, old-fashioned drug store, which had evidently been located there for years.

Dash Dare stepped up to the window and appeared to examine some patent medicines displayed there.

He peered through the glass.

There were no customers in the store.

Near a rear window sat an old man reading a morning paper.

This was Jason Canson.

He was nearly eighty years old, and exceedingly crabbed in disposition.

Dash sauntered into the store.

"Hullo, Canson, old man," he cried familiarly.

"Mornin'," was the short reply.

"Don't remember me, do yer?" went on Dash Dare.

"I must say I do not, sir."

"I'm Jack Grady, old Full Hand; I've been off the Bowery fer a couple o' years now. Been out ter Chicago."

"Yes?"

Evidently Jason Canson did not care to be interrupted.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Dash Dare turned around and squinted through the door.

"Are yer alone?" he asked, in a whisper, and with a wink of his eye.

"Yes."

"I've got a little private business ter talk over."

"What business?"

"Come back here."

The great detective walked to the rear of the shop, behind the partition where prescriptions were compounded.

"It's dis way, Canson; I'm onto yer," he went on.

"What do you mean?"

"I want ter know wot dis powder is," growled Dash.

He brought out the bit of wrapping paper into which he had previously deposited the grains of deadly snuff taken from the corpse and the bouquet.

"You are talking in riddles," said Jason Canson.

Yet he showed he was much disturbed.

Dash shoved the snuff under the druggist's nose.

Canson sniffed it and turned pale.

"Don't," he gasped and staggered back.

"You put dat stuff up."

"I did not."

"Yer lie, Canson."

"I never put it up; I don't know what it is," gasped the old man.

"Den yer sold der t'ings ter make it cut of," went on Dash.

He watched the old man closely, and saw that he had hit upon the truth.

"Didn't yer? own up now."

Dash caught Canson by the arm fiercely.

"Don't; let me alone."

"Answer me, den."

"Yes, I sold the several articles of which the snuff is made."

"Wot are dey? give it to me straight now."

With trembling lips the druggist named over several poisons.

"An' you say yer didn't mix dem?" demanded Dash.

"I couldn't mix them. The way to do it is a secret."

"How so?"

"They won't mix ordinarily. One article would burn the other up."

"Dis makes a dandy poison, Canson."

"I see it does."

"When did yer sell de t'ings ter make it out of?"

"Three days ago."

"Who brought dem?"

"What do you wish to know that for?"

"Never mind, answer me, if yer know when yer well off, see?"

Jason Canson shivered.

He thought Dash was a regular Bowery bruiser, and would "do him" if he did not do as requested.

"I did not know the fellow," he whined.

"What did he look like?"

"He was rather tall and thin."

"What else?"

"He had thick brown hair, somewhat curly."

Dash Dare started.

This brief description would answer for Charles Halloway.

"What kind of clothing did he wear?"

"A dark-blue suit."

"With a diamond in his scarf?"

"Yes."

"What sort of hat?"

"A dark-brown derby."

The description fitted Charles Halloway perfectly.

What did it mean?

Had Dash Dare allowed himself to be deceived by the young man's rather peculiar tale?

It was possible.

But Dash Dare was inclined to another theory.

This was that the person purchasing the poisons had been disguised as Halloway.

"That person is trying his best to make it appear as if Halloway committed the murder," said Dash to himself.

"The use of the bouquet shows it."

"When was the stuff bought?" he asked.

"At noon."

"Where did the man go?"

"Down the Bowery."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, but—"

"What?"

"I was curious and watched him. At the corner he was joined by a woman."

"A woman, eh? Who did der piece o' calico look like?"

"I can't describe her. They both hurried around the corner out of sight."

"What corner was dat?"

"Hester Street."

"East er west?"

"Going east."

"An' dat's der last yer seed o' 'em?"

"Yes."

"Wot did he pay yer?"

"Three dollars."

"Hully gee! Den yer knowed he was up ter some game?"

"I did not. See here, what are you questioning me for, anyway?"

"Jest fer fun, dat's all," laughed Dash.

And without another word he left the drug store.

He was satisfied that he had squeezed Jason Canson dry so far as information went.

Dash Dare's next move was to walk down to Hester Street.

One thing perplexed him.

Why had the poisoners come to such a low neighborhood?

Charles Halloway was stopping at a first-class hotel and so were all the members of the "Bull Run" company and their friends.

Dash turned the corner of Hester Street slowly, his eyes open to take in anything unusual.

He had walked scarcely a block when a strange noise attracted his attention.

It came from an alley leading to a number of rear tenements.

Dash looked into the alleyway.

"Don't! Let me go, good Father Paulus! Don't hit me again!"

It was the voice of a girl.

She was scarcely ten years of age, pale and thin, with hardly sufficient rags on her to cover her back.

Over her stood a fierce-looking hunchback, a fellow well along in years.

The hunchback had a club and with this he was beating the girl over the back and shoulders most unmercifully.

## CHAPTER V.

### MARY JANE'S STORY.

"Stop!"

"Save me, sir!"

"I will!"

Dash Dare wrenched the club from the hunchback's hand.

A vigorous push sent the rascal rolling over backward in the dirt.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, hitting a girl with a club like this."

"You—you villain!" howled the cripple. "What right hava you to coma here?"

The hunchback was an Italian.

He was strong and his eyes shot forth their hatred as he scrambled to his feet.

He advanced up to Dash threateningly.

He expected the great detective would retreat, but he was mistaken.

"Stop where yer are, or I'll brain yer!" howled Dash, still sticking to the character of the Bowery rounder. "Yer sha'n't strike dis kid again, see?"

"She is my child—I doa wot I pleasa wid her," howled the Italian.

"Oh, save me!" pleaded the girl.

"Do you belong to him, sis?"

"No, sir. I belong in Brooklyn. Some men got my father locked up, and then Father Paulus brought me here."

"Wot's he lickin' yer fur?"

"I wanted to run away and get back home."

"I see. Well, I'll see yer git home all right enough."

"Leava de child to me!" hissed the Italian, again coming up.

"Shut yer jaw!"

Scarcely had Dash spoken when the hunchback leaped upon him.

In his right hand the Italian held a long-pointed knife.

The blade was raised on high but it never descended.

Crash!

Around came the club and the Italian went spinning half way across the alley.

The knife went up in the air, to fall out of sight in a heap of rubbish twenty feet away.

"Now maybe yer will let me have my say," remarked Dash, calmly.

The little girl looked on in wonder.

"My! but you are strong!" she cried.

"I reckon I'm strong enough for him," replied Dash.

"Come on, unless you're got something here you want to get."

"No, no; I want to get away, that is all!"

On hearing this the detective took the girl's hand and led the way toward the street.

The Italian cursed him in his native tongue but did not make another attack.

He felt that if he was not careful the girl's champion would hammer the life out of him.

Once away from the alley Dash Dare commenced to question the girl.

He found her a bright creature naturally, although still badly frightened.

"My name is Mary Jane Chalmers," she said. "I live over in Brooklyn, near the Navy Yard."

"I was stolen by old Father Paulus to do his work, I think. He is very mean and lazy. He sits around nearly all day, smoking his pipe and mixing things."

"Mixing things?" queried Dash.

"Yes, sir."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, powders and medicines and such things. He has a room full of bottles in his home down the alley."

"By Jove! here's blind luck!" thought Dash Dare.

"Does he mix the things to sell?" he asked eagerly.

"I guess so. Sometimes people come there and take stuff away with them."

"How long were you with him?"

"Oh, six or seven weeks; I can't remember exactly."

"Were you in the house all that time?"

"Yes, sir. I wanted to go out many a time, but he locked the door. To-day I crawled out of the window and onto the roof of the woodshed, and then dropped to the ground."

"Do you remember if a man and a woman came to see Father Paulus three days ago?"

"Yes, sir; just after dinner."

"What did they want?"

"I can't tell you exactly, for Father Paulus sent me out of the room. I think the man brought some powders to the mean old thing."

"How long did the man and the woman stay?"

"About two hours."

"Was Father Paulus working during that time?"

"Yes; he was mixing things as usual."

"Did the visitors seem to know him?"

"The man did; the lady didn't."

"What did the lady look like?"

"I didn't see her face. She was dressed in black and wore a heavy veil."

"The man knew Father Paulus, then?"

"Yes. They were awful friendly."

"You didn't hear what was said at all?"

"I heard Father Paulus say: 'That's strong enough for anybody'."

"Nothing more?"

"No, sir."

"What house does he live in?"

"The one away back. It's only two stories high. He lives upstairs. It's empty downstairs."

Dash Dare mused for a moment.

"Do you want me to fit you out, Mary Jane," he said, with a smile.

The girl was delighted.

They walked on until they came to a furnishing store.

Here Dash Dare purchased her a dress, a hat and pair of shoes and stockings.

"Oh, you are too good!" she cried. "You must be an angel, ain't you?"

"Hardly, Mary Jane. Now listen to me. Do you know where Broadway is?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to see you safe home, so that you don't fall into bad hands again. But I haven't the time just now. So I want you to go to Broadway, and I'll give you a letter to a friend who will see you safe. Will you go?"

"Sure, sir, you're the best friend a poor girl like me ever struck."

Without further words Dash Dare wrote out a note for Rattler.

This he sealed up in an envelope and gave to Mary Jane.

"Here is your car fare and a quarter besides," said Dash. "My friend will see to it that you are properly taken care of and that your father's case is looked into."

The great detective saw the girl safe on her way.

Then, stepping into an open hallway, he made several rapid changes in his disguise.

When he came out the transformation was wonderful.

He was no longer a Bowery tough.

He was the exact duplicate of Charles Halloway.

Dash surveyed himself in a pocket glass.

"There, I reckon that goes," he murmured to himself.

Rapidly he retraced his steps down Hester Street to the alley he had left but twenty minutes before.

It was deserted, saving by several dirty children, who gazed at him curiously.

Without hesitation he passed to the rear tenement and knocked on the door.

There was no answer.

Again he knocked, and then walked around the building.

No one was within, so far as he could ascertain.

"Is it possible he has decamped, thinking I was going to bring the police down on him?" thought Dash Dare.

He waited a moment more, and then raising one of the lower windows, leaped into the room beyond.

As the girl had said, the lower floor of the two-story tenement was empty.

Passing from the apartment, Dash ascended the stairs to the floor above.

He paused on the landing.

All was as quiet as a tomb.

He tried the door of the room nearest at hand.



It was locked.

In a second he had his pick-lock out and was working with it.

A half dozen turns, and the bolt of the lock was shoved back.

Dash entered the room cautiously.

There was nothing within to cause alarm. The place was shabbily furnished.

On the walls hung several faded Italian paintings.

"An odd character," thought Dash. "No doubt he is a smart fellow as well as a cripple and cruel."

From one apartment the great detective drifted into another.

Presently he came to a locked room.

Once inside he found it was the old hunchback's laboratory.

Here were crucibles, mortars, retorts and a dozen similar articles. One side of the room was lined with shelves filled with bottles of various sizes.

A pipe that was still warm lay on a table, showing that Father Paulus, as he was called, had but recently departed.

"He's a character worth studying, to say the least," thought Dash. "He certainly mixed that deadly dose, whether he knew what it was for or not."

With a view to discovering something concerning the deadly stuff, the detective began to examine the chemicals at hand.

Many of them he at once recognized, but others were strange to him.

He became interested in a book lying in the table drawer.

It was filled with receipts written in Latin and Greek.

Between the leaves were several counterfeit bills.

"Bogus money," thought Dash Dare. "I suppose he could make a fortune if he started in right."

Suddenly Dash heard a noise outside of the room.

Before he had time to conceal himself Father Paulus came in.

The Italian chemist started back in amazement.

"Whata you doa here?" he demanded.

"Came to see you on a bit of business," replied Dash coolly.

The hunchback laughed craftily.

He picked up his pipe, lit it and gave several vigorous puffs.

"Did not expecta you again," he murmured.

"Now something is up, that's certain," thought Dash.

He resolved to be on his guard.

Father Paulus had said nothing concerning the way he had entered the tenement and the laboratory.

"More business, eh?" went on the Italian after a pause.

"Yes."

"Wanta more stuff mixed?"

"Not exactly."

"Whata you wanta den?"

He threw off his disguise, seeing it would be useless to attempt to deceive the crafty old chemist.

"Ha! dat ees much better!" cried Paulus Rarius, for such was his full name.

"Paulus, you have got yourself in a bad box."

"Whata data, sir?"

"You know well enough."

"You greata detective, eh?"

"I am a detective, yes."

"All righta. Sit down in chair and we talka over, eh?"

Paulus Rarius pointed to a nearby chair as he spoke.

He sat down himself and continued to puff away at his pipe.

Dash dropped into the chair indicated.

Instantly a sharp pain rushed through his body.

He tried to leap up, but found it impossible.

The chair was charged with electricity and he was a prisoner.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OLD ITALIAN'S REVENGE.

"Ha! ha! How you lika dat?" cried the hunchback chemist.

And he grinned horribly at Dash Dare.

"Turn off that electricity!" cried Dash.

"I willa—whena I am done wid you."

The old chemist laid down his pipe, and going to a closet, brought out half a dozen straps.

With these he bound Dash Dare, hands and feet.

All the while he was at work he muttered to himself in his native tongue.

Evidently he was proud to think he had got the best of a New York detective.

When Dash was a close prisoner Paulus Rarius turned off the electric current.

The action had been so powerful that for the moment Dash felt as weak as a sick cat.

"I say, howa you lika dat?" repeated the old wretch.

"Don't like it," replied Dash, coolly.

"Great invention, lika you Americans say, not so?"

"I admit it."

"You no expecta dat whena you come spy on me."

"This may bring you a lot of trouble, old man."

"I riska dat. Now tella me, who you?"

"That is none of your business."

"You speaka out, or—"

The Italian did not finish, but made a motion as if to turn on the electricity again.

"I am Dash Dare, if it will do you any good to know."

"You great detective."

"I wasn't a great detective when I allowed you to capture me," smiled Dash.

"Dat's so. Now, howa you find out about—about dat udder man wot come here?"

"In a roundabout way."

"You thinka to git me into trouble, eh?"

"You are in a bad business."

The old Italian scowled.

"I hava de right to mix what stuff I like," he said.

"You no spy on me no more."

Thus speaking, Paulus Rarius abruptly left the apartment.

Dash Dare heard him descend to the lower floor.

The chemist had gone down to see if any more detectives were around.

While he was absent the great detective strove to free himself from his bonds.

It was without avail.

The old Italian had done his work well, and Dash was still weak from the electric shock.

Ten minutes passed.

Then Paulus Rarius came back.

He had found the coast clear.

"You all alone," he said, suggestively.

To this Dash made no reply.

Walking over to the set of shelves, the chemist got down several bottles.

He poured a portion from each bottle into a flat dish.

In the dish he dipped a dirty towel, saturating the article completely.

Approaching Dash, he held the towel over the detective's head.

"What are you up to now?" asked Dash.

"Me fixa you for awhile," grinned Paulus Rarius.

"Do you intend to murder me?"

"You see soona."

The chemist threw the saturated towel over Dash Dare's head.

At once the fumes from the various liquids entered the detective's nostrils.

Dash held his breath as long as he could.

Finally he had to breathe.

He felt a stinging sensation in his heart, as if he was being burned up.

Then he knew no more.

When Dash came to his senses again he lay for a long while perfectly still.

His mind seemed to have left him, and he could not think.

Gradually, however, he came around to his normal condition, and he attempted to sit up.

It was impossible to do so.

He was chained down to a stone floor.

All about him was pitch dark.

Each hand and foot was fastened to a staple driven into the stones.

"This is a fine position to be in, and no mistake," he thought.

He wondered how long it was since the old Italian had rendered him unconscious.

Where was he?

Probably in the cellar of the tenement, although he was by no means certain.

He was fearfully thirsty, and his tongue burned like a coal of fire.

An hour dragged slowly by.

Not a sound broke the stillness.

It looked as if he had been chained up in the horrible hole and left to die.

He attempted to cry for help, but his voice was weak.

Another hour went by.

Dash Dare would have given a thousand dollars for a drink of cold water.

What if he should be left to die of hunger and thirst?

The thought was maddening.

Yet he could do absolutely nothing to better his condition.

For a whole hour he worked at one of the chains on his hand.

He succeeded in loosening it a bit, but that was all.

Slowly the time went by.

At last Dash Dare heard footsteps.

A door at one end of the vaultlike cellar opened and the old Italian entered.

He carried a lantern, which he set down on the floor close beside Dash Dare.

"Ah! you come around all right, eh?" he said.

"Give me a drink," replied the detective, feebly.

"Drink! Not one dropa."

"You are a fiend!"

"Data is a compliment."

"If I ever get out of here I'll see that you suffer."

"You never geta out, Dash Dare."

"Perhaps I will."

"Nobody know disa place but me."

"Somebody may find it."

"You dead long before data happen."

"You are going to leave me here?"

"Yees."

Dash Dare said no more.

What was the use?

He saw that the old chemist was not to be either threatened or coaxed.

"I will have a fine revenge," went on Paulus Rarius. "I hate all police spies. Did not dey drive me outa my beloved Italy?"

As he spoke the chemist walked to one side of the cellar and opened a trap.

"Now, when you are dying or dead, de sewer rats can come in an' feed on you. Dey soon picka de bones dry, ha, ha!"

He laughed cruelly and took up his lantern again.

"You are going to leave me to my fate?"

"Yees."

As he spoke Paulus Rarius gave Dash a heavy kick in the side.

"Data for de police spy!" he hissed. "I wisha I had dem alla in de cellar, lika you!"

And off he stalked, closing the door after him and leaving Dash Dare once more alone in the darkness.

"He's a saint, and no mistake," said Dash to himself.

The kick in the side hurt a good deal, but he was compelled to bear the pain along with his other discomforts.

Slowly a quarter of an hour more passed.

Suddenly Dash heard a faint patter at the entrance to the sewer.

He listened intently.

He was not mistaken.

The sewer rats had arrived.

Cautiously one of the rats came into the cellar and sniffed around.

He was a big fellow, and would have given any cat or dog a fierce fight.

Behind this leader came several other rodents.

They were hungry, and soon came up to where Dash was lying.

He gave a cry, and in fright they scampered back into the sewer.

A moment later they came back, and one ran over the detective's body.

Again Dash frightened them away.

But as he did not come after them they grew bolder.

They came back, and when he yelled at them, did not offer to run as before.

Instead, they sniffed at Dash in a dozen different places. Then one bold one scampered directly over the detective's face.

Dash made him leave in a hurry, but the rat did not go farther than just out of reach of his hand.

It was evident that they were getting over their fright and looked at Dash as their prey.

They seemed to hold a consultation, and in the meantime more rodents arrived, until the cellar appeared to be full of them.

Dash Dare recalled the stories he had heard of rats attacking sewer-cleaners and others, and of their eating people up.

What a miserable death to die!

He yelled at the rats, hissed at them, and did what he could to scare them away.

They would no longer budge.

Evidently they began to realize he was powerless to attack them.

They began to form a circle around him, close up to his feet, but further away from his hands.

Then one of the boldest of the rodents began to nibble at one of his shoes.

Hastily Dash kicked him off.

Hardly had he done this when two of the other rats came still closer.

Dash felt a sharp pain in his ankle, as if he had been stuck with a pin.

The rat had bitten him.

In another moment a dozen of the rodents were on top of him, bent on taking his life!

## CHAPTER VII.

### RATTLER TO THE RESCUE.

DASH DARE felt as if his last hour had come.

He could not frighten off the rats, and they were so active that it would not take them long to do away with him.

But at this critical juncture something unexpected happened.

A step was heard outside of the cellar, or that portion of it in which Dash was confined.

The door was opened, and an old man entered.

"Help! Shoot the rats!" cried Dash.

The newcomer hastily lit a match.

Then, holding it up, he quickly drew a pistol and began to bang away, first at one rodent and then another.

Soon four dead rats lay on the cellar floor.

The remaining animals scampered out of sight into the sewer.

"Just in time, I see," said the newcomer.

"Yes, Rattler, thank Heaven!" murmured Dash. "Shut up that trap, so those rats can't come back."

"Been worrying you long?" inquired the assistant, as he did as requested.

"Long enough. In another minute I would have been a dead man."

The match had gone out, but now Rattler brought out a pocket lantern and lit that.

"By Jove, Dash, you are a prisoner and no mistake," cried Rattler, as he surveyed his chief.

He brought out his pick-lock, and soon had Dash liberated.

"How did you manage to find this place, Rattler?" was Dash Dare's first question.

"It's a rather long story. In the first place you sent that girl to me."

"I did."

"Well, I took her to Brooklyn. Her father is out of prison, and she is now safe with him."

"I am glad of that."

"After I got home again I waited several hours for you. As you didn't turn up I made up my mind to come down here and see how you were making out."

"But where am I, and where is that rascal who put me here?"

"I am coming to that. I got on old Rarius' trail without much difficulty. He was in his laboratory overhead. But before I knew it he was on to me, as the saying goes, and he almost took my life."

"How?"

"I'll never tell you exactly, excepting that he threw some sweet-smelling powder over me."

"The same kind of stuff used on that bouquet," mused Dash.

"I fought the stuff off and covered the old hunchback with a pistol. But before I could fire he dropped out of sight behind a table and disappeared."

"Where did he go?"

"I'll never tell you. I searched everywhere, but couldn't find hide or hair of him."

"He's a freak of nature, Rattler. More than likely he is spying on you."

"I guess not; if he is, why didn't he prevent my coming here?"

"That I can't say. But make no mistake, he is a deep one, and isn't running away at the first alarm. How did you find this place?"

"By accident; I searched the whole house and the other cellar, and I was about to leave the latter, when I noticed the odd-looking door leading to this vault. I picked the lock, and here I am."

"An' dare youa vill stay," came in the voice of the old

hunchback. "Neider of youa vill ever get outa alive, minda dat."

Both Dash and Rattler wheeled around, trying to locate the voice.

It came from some place in one of the walls.

Yet from where was a mystery.

Then Rattler leaped toward the door.

It was bolted from the outside.

Both of the detectives were prisoners.

"Oh, what a fool I've made of myself!" growled Rattler.

"I said he was most likely around," replied Dash Dare.

"Never mind; let us make the best of the situation."

"Nowa de rats shall hava two to feed on," went on the old Italian. "Ha, ha! it ees a good trap."

"See here," cried Dash. "Can't we buy our liberty from you?"

"No, not for de money of de Vanderbilts," hissed the chemist. "I hate alla spies."

"We'll make you suffer when we get out," said Rattler.

"Bah! youa nefer get out alive."

Rattler continued to talk to the Italian.

While he was doing so, Dash tiptoed his way around the vault, trying to locate the invisible speaker.

Finally he solved the problem.

Paulus Rarius was concealed behind a loose brick near one corner.

Crouching low, that the hunchback might not see him, Dash reached a spot directly under the loose brick.

Rattler continued to talk to the Italian, making him more angry and bolder every second.

Suddenly Dash Dare raised up.

The loose brick was hurled aside, Dash's arm shot through the opening and he caught the chemist by the throat.

"Wh—what?" gasped the rascal.

He struggled to free himself, but in vain.

Dash was fighting for his life and his grip was like that of steel.

The Italian grew purple in the face.

"Throw the key of the door in here," commanded Dash, sternly.

"That won't do, the door is bolted," put in Rattler.

Dash Dare measured the distance from the door to the opening with his eyes.

It was but a few feet.

"Kick that bolt back with your foot," he went on to Paulus Rarius.

"Good for you!" shouted Rattler.

The Italian was almost overcome.

Another half minute and he would be choked to death.

It was impossible for him to argue the point, even had Dash given him the chance to do so.

Had he had the least possible chance he would have resisted the great detective.

But Dash Dare was giving him no chance.

The hunchback waited a few seconds longer and then kicked at the bolt of the door.

He failed the first time and had to try again.

Then the bolt shot back.

"Go on out and collar him, Rattler," cried Dash Dare.

But now Paulus Rarius began to struggle violently, and it was with difficulty that Dash managed to keep hold of him.

He let go just as Rattler got near the Italian.

A fierce fight ensued between Dash Dare's assistant and the old chemist.

But ere Dash could go to Rattler's assistance a strange thing occurred.

The old chemist managed to get some of the deadly snuff from his vest pocket.

He threw the stuff in Rattler's face.

To escape it the assistant started back.

Instantly Paulus Rarius ran out of the cellar.

Dash Dare leaped after him, but could not catch the villain, who sped away like a frightened deer.

Fearful that Rattler had been severely treated, Dash went to his aid.

The deadly stuff was carefully wiped off before Rattler dared to take a breath.

While this was going on Rattler was as white as a sheet.

"The fiend!" were his first words. "Say, Dash, he is the worst rascal we ever had to deal with."

"You're about right," was the great detective's reply.

Both lost no time in leaving the cellar.

Rattler went on a hunt about the place for the old chemist, while Dash ran upstairs to the man's apartments.

One look around was enough.

Rarius had broken up a number of his bottles.

Evidently he intended to quit the place.

Dash quickly joined Rattler.

They scoured the entire neighborhood and finally learned that the hunchback had been seen making his way down to the East River.

They followed up this trail.

It led them to a saloon not far from the river front.

The hunchback had been seen by a newsboy to enter the saloon, get a drink and then enter a side hallway. It was more than likely he had gone upstairs.

"You hang around outside and await developments," said Dash Dare to his assistant.

Before entering the place Dash walked down into a nearby lumber yard and made a decided change in his appearance, using several things Rattler had brought with him.

First he powdered his face a rosy color. Next he put on a blonde wig and mustache.

After this he donned a red necktie and several heavy rings and an immense bogus diamond pin.

"A regular Powery schwell, don't it haf been," he warbled to Rattler.

"You're a Dutchman and no error," replied the assistant. "The disguise and that accent are perfect."

With a free and easy swing Dash Dare entered the saloon.

Several longshoremen were present, drinking at the front end of the bar.

"Poys, von mit me!" cried Dash, flinging a half dollar on the counter.

"Don't care if I do!"

"Always ready to oblige a gent!"

"Here's your health, sir!"

The longshoremen drank with Dash, and then the latter dropped into a chair near a back table and made as if to write a note on a sheet of paper taken from his pocket.

Seeing this, no one attempted to bother him, even the bartender forgetting the newcomer after serving him.

Watching his chance, Dash Dare left the barroom and glided into the hallway.

Here all was deserted.

The doors, front and back, were locked and bolted.

Whoever came in had to do so through the saloon.

"That proves it's a regular ranch," mused Dash to himself.

He started to go upstairs.

And as he did so a piece of paper on the floor before him attracted his attention.

What led him to pick it up he could not tell.

But he did, and smoothed it out.

He started back.

It was a theater programme.

The same as those being used at the Academy of Music during the run of the war drama in which Clara Whitson, or rather, Mrs. Charles Halloway, had acted.

Dash Dare smiled to himself.

Was it possible that the murderer of the young woman put up in this house and Paulus Rarius was calling upon him, or her?

"Looks that way," said Dash to himself.

He threw the programme away, and mounted the stairs without making the least noise.

Reaching the upper landing, he noticed a stream of light coming from under a door in the rear.

He made his way in the direction.

Loud talking was going on in the room, and he listened with interest.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A NEW MYSTERY.

"I WILL never do it, Palo!"

"Why not, Nell?"

"Because I won't; isn't that enough?"

"It's a woman's reason; but it don't satisfy me."

"I hate Lurette Dondell. She is a false-hearted creature."

"She is far from that," growled the man.

"Oh, you don't know her as I do. Wasn't I her companion once?"

"I know it. That is what brought you and me together, Nell."

"And it was a sorry day for me, Palo Contrain."

"Why, don't you love me any more?"

"Why should I? You love that Dondell woman; you have been crazy after her ever since you saw her on the stage."

"Oh, nonsense, Nell! I love you."

"You can't deceive me any longer, Palo Contrain. And the idea of asking me to make a friend of her is absurd."

"Maybe you imagine she won't make friends with you again," sneered Palo.

"Oh, it's not that. The Force blood is as good as the Dondell, every day," said the young woman, with a toss of her head.

"But she is celebrated."

"And that is why you run after her—and why you ran after Clara Whitson, too."

"Hush! not so loud! Don't you know Miss Whitson is dead?"

"Of course I know it, even if you didn't tell me. I dare say Lurette Dondell was glad to hear of her death, too."

"No, she was very sorry."

The young woman looked skeptical, but said nothing further on the point.

Dash Dare kept breathless, trying to catch every word.

He remembered that Palo Contrain was the name of the man that Charles Halloway had once considered his rival for Clara Whitson's hand.

This man in the room must be that same individual.

Who was the woman?

That question was soon answered.

"Palo," she said in a softer voice, "why don't you let those folks and all the rest of the world know that I am your wife?"

The man let out an oath.

"Shut up, Nell! How many times must I warn you to keep silent on that point?"

"But it is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I know that."

"Then why won't you do as I wish?"

"I don't choose to—just yet."

"It is not treating me right."

"Don't talk to me."

The man dropped into a chair and took a pull from a whiskey flask he carried.

"I believe you are in league with Lurette Dondell," said the woman, after another pause.

"Nell, give me a rest."

"How strange you act! You have something on your mind, Palo."

"Not a thing but your foolishness."

"I know better."

"Be still!"

In his rage the man struck the table with his fist.

At once the woman, a slight-built creature, shrank back. Evidently she was afraid of the brute.

"Any one been here?" asked the man, after a pause.

"I guess so."

"You guess so. Why?"

"Here is a note for you, written in Italian."

The man snatched up the note and read it.

He grew much disturbed and began to pace the floor.

"That's a note from Paulus Rarius, sure," thought Dash Dare.

The man loaded a pipe with tobacco and used the note to light up with.

"Then you went out this afternoon?" he observed, savagely.

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"To see some old friends in Brooklyn."

"I don't want you to go over there any more."

"You don't want me to go anywhere, Palo."

"That's right."

"You want to shut me up like a bird in a cage."

"Because you may get me into trouble."

"How?"

"Never mind how."

"I have been more faithful to you than you have been to me."

The young woman began to cry as she uttered the last words.

"Don't snivel—I can't stand it," growled Palo Contrain. "I am not in the humor for it."

"You want me to give up my place as your wife to Lurette Dondell?" burst out the young woman. "I—I sometimes think you wish I was out of your way altogether."

The man, at these words, leaped to his feet and caught her by the arm.

"How you do go on with your tongue!" he snarled.

"Can't you be still for once?"

He shook her violently and then threw her from him.

She went down in a corner and began to sob as if her heart would break.

He continued to scold her in language that made Dash Dare's blood boil.

Many times the great detective was on the point of

breaking into the room and taking part with the wife against the brute.

But he restrained himself, being anxious to hear whatever might be said about the affair at the Academy.

Presently the woman grew desperate.

She sprang up and faced the man.

Her face was deadly pale and her breast heaved violently.

"Palo Contrain, listen to me!" she cried.

"Nell!"

"Not another word! You have abused me long enough! I won't stand it a minute longer."

The man laughed recklessly.

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going out and tell the world that I am your wife."

"Not much!"

"And then I am going to the police——"

"What!"

"——and have you locked up for your cruel treatment. I am no longer going to be your toy and slave, even if you have money."

As the young woman finished she ran to a corner where hung her hat and shawl.

The man leaped to stop her.

"Nell, don't be crazy!" he shouted.

"I am not crazy. I know what I am doing."

"I'll disown you. You can't prove our marriage. I'll say it's a case of blackmail."

"I'll try to find a way to prove that you lie."

"There is no way. The old minister who married us is dead."

"I know that, but there is that servant——"

"She is dead, too."

The young woman recoiled.

"Mary Ribbotten?"

"Yes, she died last week of heart disease."

"My heavens! And Miss Whitson dead, too! The only three persons who knew of that marriage."

The young woman fell back on a chair. She was all but overcome.

"So you see there is no use for you to go out and howl," went on the man cruelly. "You can't prove a thing."

The young woman did not answer. She began to sob.

Presently she got up again.

"I am going, anyway," she faltered.

"Where?"

"I don't know. Anywhere to get away from you."

"If you take your story to the police I'll make it warm for you, remember that!"

"You can't treat me any worse than I've been treated already."

"Can't I, though? Just wait and see!"

The young woman tottered toward the door.

The man waited until she had her hand on the knob.

Then he leaped at her and dragged her back.

"Stop!"

"Let me go, Palo!"

"I won't have you ruining my name."

"As if it wasn't ruined already!" she responded, bitterly.

He paused and glared at her.

Suddenly he caught her by the throat.

His action was so suggestive that Dash Dare became alarmed.

It looked as if Contrain meant to choke his wife to death.

She tried to escape the man, but could not.

Springing back Dash advanced toward the door with heavy tread.

Then he knocked loudly.

Contrain released his wife.

He opened the door and confronted Dash.

"Well?" he asked, surlily.

"Is Jake Bemann here?" asked Dash, with a broad smile.

"Don't know the man."

"Dot so?" Dash's face fell. "Maybe I was by der wrong house alretty," he went on, meditatively. "Oxcuse me."

As he finished speaking, Nell Contrain endeavored to pass by him.

Palo Contrain sought to stop her, but in some manner Dash got in his way.

"Out of my way, you clumsy Dutchman!" shouted Contrain.

He tried to throw the great detective to one side.

"Look here, vot you doin', annahow?" roared Dash, pretending to get his "mad" up.

"I want you to get out of my way."

"Vy don't you say so, hey? Vot you knock me like a dog around for, hey?"

"Oh, go to grass!"



"And you go to hay, you loafer! I vos a chentlemans, and don't you forgot him!"

Dash Dare squared off in front of Contrain.

In the meantime the young woman had passed on and was in the lower hallway.

Both men heard her trying to unfasten the front door.

Palo Contrain was in a rage.

He flew at Dash.

Bang! whack!

Out shot the fists of the supposed Dutchman, and the man went staggering back into the room.

The attack was so heavy that Contrain was amazed.

"Who in thunder are you?" he groaned.

"Maype you ton't vos know I vos a prize-fighter py my own country," replied Dash Dare. "Next dime you insult a chentlemans, see he vos no fighter mit his fists, ha! ha! Goot day, mine friend. Maype of you vons anudder round some tay I come around to accommodate you, ain't it?"

Contrain was nearly speechless.

Before he could get up Dash Dare had stalked down the stairs.

The front door was wide open, and he followed the young woman outside.

He had not seen anything of Paulus Rarius, but he imagined he had gained several important clues concerning the Clara Whitson murder mystery.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BIT OF NEWS.

DASH DARE felt quite certain that Palo Contrain would come down to follow his wife.

Yet it was doubtful if he would find her, for she was speeding up the street as fast as her feet would carry her.

He looked toward the lumber yard and beckoned to Rattler, who stood there on the watch.

In a moment the assistant was by his side.

"Rattler, keep your eyes on the tall, dark man who is upstairs in there; he may come down soon. And look for Rarius, too. I must stop that woman and have a talk with her."

"All right, Dash."

This settled, Dash made after Nell Contrain.

He saw her pass down a side street leading to the docks.

"Must be on the way to the ferry," he thought. "Perhaps she is going over to Brooklyn to her friends."

As Dash ran after her he made several lightning changes in his disguise, discarding the blonde wig and mustache.

On and on sped the woman as fast as her strength would permit.

Dash could not help but pity her from the bottom of his heart.

She had actually thrown her life away on a worthless man of the world.

"I will help her if I possibly can," was the great detective's resolve.

At last the docks came in sight.

Instead of heading for one of the ferries, the young woman ran out on an empty pier.

She gazed around in a wild way and brushed the flying hair from her forehead.

Then with one glance to heaven, she ran to the string-piece, leaped upon it and hurled herself into the river.

"Suicide!" murmured Dash Dare.

He had not expected this turn in affairs.

He did not hesitate in his actions.

Quick bounds took him out on the pier.

A brief glance showed him that the young woman was drifting rapidly down the stream with the tide.

As straight as an arrow Dash Dare made a dive after her.

The waters closed over the great detective.

When he came up it was directly under the would-be suicide.

He caught her from behind and held her fast.

She struggled vainly to get away from him.

"Oh, let me go! Let me drown!" she moaned.

"Be quiet, madam. You are too young and beautiful to throw your life away," he said soothingly.

"Oh, you don't know what I have suffered, sir!"

"You have suffered enough, I dare say. But it is my duty to save you. Be quiet, or we may both go down."

The last statement was not true, for Dash Dare would have saved the young woman even against her will. But it had a good effect. She at once lay limp in his strong arms.

A few powerful strokes took them under the dock below.

Here there was a rowboat, into which the detective clambered with his burden.

Her eyes were closed.

She had fainted.

With infinite care the great detective pulled the boat over to the side of the dock and mounted to the flooring above.

He looked carefully about.

Several had seen the young woman leap overboard, but no one had seen the two enter the rowboat.

Watching his chance, Dash left the vicinity of the docks, carrying the young woman on his shoulder.

He hailed a passing cab.

"This lady was struck with the water from a burst hose," he said to the driver.

He got inside with his burden and made her as comfortable as possible.

Then he directed the driver to take them up to a private residence uptown.

The home referred to was that of Mrs. Amanda Downes.

Mrs. Downes was one of Dash Dare's closest friends.

He had done her an important service in the recovery of some stolen jewels and she had often said she would like the chance to do something for him in return.

Swiftly the cab rolled on its way until the residence was reached.

By that time Nell Contrain had recovered.

"Where am I?" she asked faintly.

"You are safe with a friend," replied Dash, gently.

"And he—he—"

"He does not know where you are."

"You saved me from the river, did you not?"

"Yes."

"I must have been mad!"

"We won't speak of that just now. Here we are at the house of a lady friend of mine. Let me assist you out of the cab."

Completely bewildered by the change affairs had taken, Nell Contrain allowed Dash to lead her up the stone steps to the door of the residence.

Dash rang the bell.

An Irish girl answered the summons.

"Is Mrs. Downes at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to speak to her. Mr. Jewelry."

"Yes, sir. Please step inside."

The girl went off in search of her mistress.

In the meanwhile Dash led the way to a side room. He knew the house well.

Soon Mrs. Downes appeared.

Dash took her to one side.

A whispered conversation took place.

Then the lady advanced to Nell Contrain.

"Will you come with me, my dear? I will see that you are provided with dry clothes and otherwise made comfortable."

Nell Contrain looked at Mrs. Downes curiously.

Suddenly she gave a cry of recognition.

"Mary Lewis!"

"What?"—Mrs. Downes came closer—"I declare, if it isn't Jennie Force's youngest sister Nell!" she ejaculated.

She took Nell Contrain in her arms. The would-be suicide burst into tears.

It appeared that some years before Mrs. Downes, then unmarried, had been a warm friend to Jennie Force, Nell's oldest sister.

Jennie Force had married a rich Californian, and moved to San Jose, and then Mrs. Downes had lost track of the Forces, and had never thought of them again, excepting to write occasionally to the sister in California.

The rich lady at once did all in her power to make Nell Contrain comfortable.

She took the young woman to an upper room and gave her a change of dress and also something to drink, to check any possible evil effect of the plunge into the river.

Dash Dare remained downstairs until called up.

Then Mrs. Downes took him aside.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Dare?"

"I wouldn't care to say just yet. The young woman is married to a thorough brute, for one thing."

"So she confided to me; well, whatever is wrong, remember I stand ready to aid her."

"Could you give her a home here for awhile?"

"Certainly."

"I'll remember that," said Dash.

A minute later found him closeted with Nell Contrain.

The young woman sat in a low rocker, dressed in a loose gown.

Her beautiful face was still pale and full of agony.

"You have treated me to a pleasant surprise, Mr. Jewelry," she said, using the name Dash had mentioned to the servant.

"I am glad to be of service to you, Mrs. Contrain," he replied.

She half started to her feet.

"How do you know I am Mrs. Contrain?"

"I overheard your quarrel with your husband."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Why—why—"

"Do you remember the Dutchman who came to the door in the midst of the trouble?"

"You are not that person?"

"Yes."

She stared at him.

"Then you must be a detective?"

"You have struck it."

"What were you doing there—spying on my husband?"

"I was looking for an old Italian who went into the place; I did not see him."

"Oh?"

"I want to be of assistance to you, Mrs. Contrain."

"You have saved my life, sir; I will never forget that. I was mad for the moment when I threw myself into the river."

"Mr. Contrain does not treat you well?"

"Alas, no! he is a perfect brute."

"Did I not hear you say something about the theater?"

"Yes; he is fascinated by actresses. I first met him at a theater, while I was playing the part of a maid to one of the stars."

"He neglects you, then, to favor the women on the stage."

"Yes; there were two women he was fascinated by; one is dead now, but the other still stands in the way of my happiness."

Dash knew she referred to Lurette Dondell.

The dead woman spoken of was Clara Whitson.

"When did you marry Palo Contrain?" he asked.

"About eight months ago. We were married in Middletown."

"It was a secret marriage, then? I heard him say something about your being unable to prove it."

"Yes; he wanted a secret marriage. No one was present but the minister, Miss Whitson, who was murdered only recently, and an old servant named Mary Ribbotten."

"The last named was the minister's servant?"

"Yes."

"It's a pity you cannot establish your marriage. But perhaps it is on record?"

"I fear not. Very foolishly, I allowed him to introduce me to the minister by a false name."

"I see."

Nell Contrain began to rock back and forth.

"Oh, I do not know what to do now!" she cried. "I am alone in the world—that is, I have no relative near here. And I am destitute."

"If you will allow me, I will advance you some money; but on one condition."

"Advance money! What condition?"

"That you do not go near Palo Contrain for awhile. Let him think you dead."

"But for what?"

"I will be plain, Mrs. Contrain. I am convinced your husband is a very bad man, and the less you have to do with him the better. I know that hurts your feelings, but the truth must come out sooner or later."

She gazed at him in horror.

"Yes, yes, I know he is bad——" she began slowly.

"Let Mrs. Downes and I befriend you. If you wish we will even see you safe to your sister's in California."

Nell Contrain was more bewildered than ever.

But Dash Dare continued to talk to her, and finally got her to consent to do as he desired.

She was to remain in the house and let Palo Contrain think what he pleased concerning her.

This settled, Dash held another conference with Mrs. Downes, and then left the residence.

## CHAPTER X.

### A SIDE ISSUE OF THE CASE.

LEAPING into a cab, Dash Dare was driven downtown and over to the east side.

He wished to see Rattler, but could find nothing of his assistant.

The front door of the house in which the saloon was situated was unlocked.

Slipping upstairs on the sly, Dash saw that the Contrain apartments were empty.

Taking the opportunity, the great detective searched them thoroughly.

He found no information that would prove of value to him.

"One thing is certain, Palo Contrain is leaving no clues lying loose," he thought.

"That proves I have a shrewd customer to deal with."

Leaving the house, Dash took another look around for Rattler.

Still failing to find his assistant, he dashed off a note, which he sent to the office by a district messenger.

Half an hour later found Dash Dare at the Grand Central Depot.

He took the midnight train for Middletown.

He made himself as comfortable as possible, and caught quite a nap before reaching his destination.

He put up at a hotel and slept soundly until seven o'clock.

Then he went below and had breakfast.

At the table he got into conversation with a regular boarder who had lived in Middletown the greater part of his life.

From this man he learned where the Reverend John McMonie had lived previous to his death.

McMonie was the clergyman who had united Nell Force to Palo Contrain.

The meal finished, Dash lit a cigar and walked over to the residence of the late clergyman.

It was a pretty cottage on a side street.

There was a large garden, and in this an old negro was weeding the flower beds.

"Good-morning! Nice flowers you have there," began Dash, pleasantly.

"Yes, boss, putty nice," replied the old dorky.

He was glad of a chance to knock off, and walked over to the fence as he spoke.

"The old minister is gone, I hear," went on Dash.

"Yes, sah, died a few weeks ago. Werry sad, sah."

"What was his failing?"

"No failing, sah. The hoss kicked him in the barn an' he was too old to git ober it, dat's all."

"Must have been a bad horse."

"Powerful bad, sah; we has him shot de werry next day."

"A good job, that. By the way, wasn't there a girl named Mary Ribbotten lived here?"

"Yes, sah, but she's dead, too."

"You don't tell me!"

As Dash spoke he lit another cigar and handed a weed to the colored man, who accepted it readily.

"Yes, sah, died only last week. It was werry sudden."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sah. She was as well as could be in de mornin', and right after dinner she got cramps an' died afore night."

"Something wrong with the food?"

"Couldn't be, sah. She cooked it herself."

"What did the doctor say it was?"

"Heart disease, sah. I t'ink so myself, for she was riled up in de mornin'."

"Riled up?"

"Yes, sah."

"By what?"

"An old man came ter see her an' dey had a quarrel about somethin'. I didn't know wot it was about."

"Some of her relations?"

"I s'pect it was. It was a tall, dark man wid black, wicked-looking eyes."

Dash Dare smiled inwardly.

The visitor must have been Palo Contrain.

Slowly but surely he was weaving his net about that villain.

"I knew Mary. She was a good woman, and I am sorry to learn she is dead," he said. "Where did they bury her?"

"Over in the cemetery tudder side of town."

Dash continued to talk to the colored man for a few minutes longer. He mentioned the flowers again, and in return for another cigar got a beautiful rose for his buttonhole. When he left the coon the latter had no idea that he had been "pumped."

Dash Dare's next movement was to call on the keeper of the cemetery.

He introduced himself, and asked that what he wished done might be kept a secret.

"Certainly, Mr. Dare, if it is for the benefit of the law," replied the keeper.

"You have the body of one Mary Ribbotten buried here?"

"We have."

"She died rather suddenly?"

"She did."

"Was foul play suspected?"

"No."

"That was rather odd."

"Not in her case. She hadn't an enemy in the world."

"Somebody said she quarreled with an old man on the morning of her death."

The cemetery keeper smiled.

"The coroner took no stock in that tale."

"I desire that the body be exhumed," went on Dash.

"You suspect foul play?"

"Yes."

"Then there must be some case attached to her death in which you are interested."

"There is; but her death is merely a side issue."

"You wish an autopsy performed?"

"Perhaps. I would like to examine the corpse myself first. An autopsy may not be necessary."

"All right; I'll have the body taken up for you."

"Excuse me, but I want the matter kept secret. I would rather dig up the body myself."

On hearing this the cemetery keeper became interested.

"Very well, Mr. Dare; I'll send the men off, and help you."

The laborers were given work in a distant portion of the grounds.

Then Dash and the keeper took picks and shovels and walked over to where Mary Ribbotten had been buried.

The ground was still loose and it came up easily.

Inside of half an hour they were down the full depth of the grave.

The cemetery keeper gave a cry of alarm.

"This grave has been robbed!"

"It looks so," replied Dash, quietly.

"The body snatchers from some medical college have been here."

"I think not."

"But the box and the corpse are gone."

"True."

"Somebody has taken the corpse."

"I admit it."

"Then who would want it outside of the medical colleges?"

"The man who poisoned her."

"Great Scott!"

"He stole her body to prevent an autopsy."

"Oh, I see."

The keeper of the cemetery was curious to know more about the case, but Dash only smiled and shook his head.

"You will know every detail ere long," he said. "In the meanwhile, possess your soul in patience."

Dash Dare made an examination of the ground around the grave.

He found footprints leading to a gate not far away.

Beyond was a back road.

"Where does that road run to?" he asked.

"To Milkton."

"Very far?"

"Less than two miles."

"I'll walk along and see if I can learn anything."

Dash Dare paid the keeper of the cemetery for his trouble and stepped out on the Milkton road.

For a distance the turnpike led through a level country.

Farther on, however, it ran along the side of a steep hill.

To Dash's left the rocks arose to a distance of fifty feet. To his right was a dense hollow, filled with rank weeds and brush.

Struck with a sudden idea, Dash left the road and walked on through the hollow.

His progress was necessarily slow.

The insects were numerous and the walk was anything but pleasant.

But a truly great detective must be willing to stand almost anything in the way of hardship.

Dash had almost reached the end of the hollow when he came to a sudden halt.

To his right the brush showed signs of having been recently disturbed.

Dash surveyed the space and parted the bushes carefully.

He had not far to look.

Ten feet farther on he came across the corpse of a young woman.

It was wrapped in a dirty sheet and was half covered with dirt and stones.

"So this is where her murderer brought her," he murmured to himself.

He unwrapped the body and examined the mouth and nose carefully.

He had half expected to see some traces there of the deadly snuff which had been used on Clara Whitson, but he was mistaken.

He wrapped the body up again and marked the spot.

Soon he was on his way back to the cemetery.

"I have found it."

"What, the corpse?" exclaimed the keeper of the grounds.

"Yes; get your horse and wagon."

The keeper was greatly surprised. He at once did as Dash Dare requested.

It did not take long to drive back to the spot.

The corpse was loaded on the wagon and carried to the city morgue.

Then the coroner and a noted physician were privately summoned.

Under Dash Dare's directions the physician went to work to make an autopsy.

By the middle of the afternoon his work was completed.

It was as the great detective had surmised.

Mary Ribbotten had been dosed with a new and powerful poison, which had most likely been put into her cup of coffee.

The coroner plied Dash with questions, and so did the doctor.

"Wait, gentlemen," was all they could get out of the great detective. "Wait. This is only one portion of a great criminal's work. When I have finished you shall know all, and the truth will astonish you beyond measure."

With this they were forced to be content.

Nothing was said about the autopsy, and the body was once more buried, in secret, in its original grave.

Then Dash Dare returned to New York City, to make the next move toward hunting down one of the worst criminals he had ever sought to bring to justice.

## CHAPTER XI.

### RATTLER MAKES A REPORT.

It was late in the evening when Dash came back to New York.

He was well satisfied with his day's work.

He had proved a crime he had suspected the moment he had heard of Mary Ribbotten's sudden death.

Palo Contrain was a deep-dyed villain.

He had murdered the servant girl in order that she could not testify to his marriage with Nell Force.

The old minister was dead, too, but it was plain he had not died by the hand of the assassin.

But Clara Whitson had been murdered, and it now looked as if Palo Contrain had gotten her out of the way for the same reason that had caused him to remove Mary Ribbotten.

But right here the case was somewhat mixed.

Charles Halloway had counted Contrain his rival.

If that was so, why had Contrain had Clara Whitson as one of the two witnesses to his marriage with Nell Force?

Why had he not chosen somebody else?

Was it possible that he had not cared for Clara Whitson at all?

Did he care only for the Dondell woman, and had he gotten both Mary Ribbotten and Halloway's wife out of the way just to further his suit with her?

"It's funny he didn't murder his wife," mused Dash.

"That would be an easier way out of it."

"But perhaps he didn't have the nerve to do that."

"He thought a good deal of her once, even if he wishes to cast her off now."

Long and deeply did the great detective muse over the different aspects of the case.

He was interrupted by the entrance of Rattler.

The assistant came in, utterly worn out, and immediately threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Rattler, you have had a hard time of it," laughed Dash.

"Hard isn't the word for it, Dash. I've had a dickens of a time."

"Whom did you follow?"

"Both of them."

"Then they met after I left?"

"They did. First Contrain came down to look for the woman. But he couldn't find her, as you know, and then he went to a lodging-house half a dozen blocks up the street."

"And there he met Paulus Rarius?"

"Yes. I had a hard time to follow them into the house, and I am afraid I lost a good portion of their talk that might have been valuable to you."

"Well, tell me what you did hear."

"I heard but very little. But one thing surprised me—Palo Contrain is old Rarius' nephew."

"I thought they might be relations, Rattler. Both have Italian blood in them, and both have the same wicked black eyes."

"That's so."

"Did they remain in the boarding house long?"

"No. Rarius was getting ready to go West. Contrain paid him some money, and then they separated."

"I was in a quandary first as to which to follow, but I decided on the hunchback. I believe we can spot Palo Contrain most any time."

"I followed Rarius part of the way uptown, and in the direction of Forty-second Street; he was evidently making for the Grand Central Depot."

"I noticed that when we got in the vicinity of the depot he began to act queerly; he came to a halt, and then slowly retraced his steps."

"I stopped and pretended to look into a show window and examine the goods displayed."

"Suddenly he came up behind me, and then I got a dose that I never want to get again."

As Rattler concluded he opened his vest and showed Dash where his shirt front had been completely eaten away by some powerful acid.

"The villain tried to throw that stuff into my face, and it was only a quick leap backward that saved me. See, the acid has eaten even into my undershirt. Had I got it in my face I would now be a dead man."

"He is a fiend, and no mistake," said Dash.

"Of course I had to work lively to save myself from injury. I ran into a hallway and ripped off my clothing in a jiffy, I can tell you. I wanted to grab Rarius, but he slid out of my way."

"You did right to save yourself first, Rattler. We are bound to round up that humpback villain some day."

"It took me some time to adjust my toilet again," continued the assistant, "and the rascal took that time to get away."

"Did you search for him at the depot?"

"Yes, and I'm pretty certain he changed his mind about taking a train there."

"Most likely he was afraid we would telegraph ahead to arrest him. Any policeman could easily spot a hunchback."

"That's so. Although Rarius is clever in covering up his deformity."

Dash Dare smiled.

"He is clever at almost everything, Rattler. He and this Palo Contrain make a good team."

And then he told Rattler of what he had learned at Midletown.

"That looks as if Contrain murdered Clara Whitson."

"It certainly does. But I can't quite understand the whole thing. Halloway considered him a rival, yet he got her to witness his marriage to Nell Force."

"Maybe this Lurette Dondell got him to kill Miss Whitson."

"That may be true. One thing is certain—the bottom isn't reached by any means."

"Well, what's the next move?"

"The next move, so far as you are concerned, is to change your identity. I want you to become a thorough man about town."

"All right."

"I want you to scrape acquaintance with Palo Contrain."

"And then?"

"Watch his every movement. Don't let him out of your sight at all, if possible."

"I'll do my best, Dash."

"But be on your guard. If Palo Contrain should suspect you, he wouldn't hesitate to stab you in the back or put a dose of poison in your glass while he drank your health."

"You bet I'll watch him."

"In the meantime I will also disappear."

"You?"

"Yes. I am going to Europe for my health—according to the personals in the daily and society papers. I won't be back for six months, because I am utterly broken down."

"I see. And in reality?"

"In reality, I am going to turn actor."

"Actor?"

"Yes."

"Are you going on the stage?"

"If the manager will allow it."

"In the 'Bull Run' company?"

"You've struck it. I want to watch matters—to keep an eye on Lurette Dondell."

"It's a daring scheme," said Rattler, in deep admiration.

"I fancy it will work."

"Oh, you'll be able to act, no fear of that," laughed Rattler. "If you ever get tired of detective work, turn to the stage, by all means. You would make a star in one of these lightning-change characters."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"When is all this to take place?"

"To-morrow. Now I am going to turn in, for I am tired."

A few minutes later Dash Dare and Rattler separated. Rattler crossed Broadway to where he boarded. Dash Dare went out to look for a cab to take him home. He could see none in sight, and strolled up the street slowly.

It was after midnight, and Broadway was all but deserted.

Before he was aware, Dash Dare covered several blocks. Then he caught sight of a cab down a side street. The driver appeared half asleep on the box. Thinking to hire the man, Dash turned into the narrow street.

Crack!

It was the report of a pistol.

A bullet whizzed past the great detective's ear.

Crack!

Along came another bullet, which passed along Dash's arm, inflicting an ugly scratch.

Instinctively the great detective leaped behind a pair of stone steps leading to a private residence.

The two shots had come from across the street.

Dash strained his eyes in the direction, but could see no one.

The cowardly attack angered him, and waiting only a few seconds he ran out into the open and across the pavements.

Not far up the street was a vacant spot where an old building had just been torn down.

In the direction of this spot ran Dash Dare.

Crack!

Again the pistol shot rang out.

The bullet passed through the great detective's hat, dangerously close to his scalp.

The flash had come from behind a pile of old building material lying in the gutter and in this direction went Dash, in hopes of ferreting out the would-be assassin.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DASH DARE ON THE STAGE.

THERE was a lantern hanging out over the building material, but it gave such a faint light that it was useless.

Dash Dare took a big risk in thus exposing himself to another shot, but he cleared the street before the unknown could fire again.

The pile of old lumber gained, Dash came to a sudden halt.

He listened and heard somebody moving around the other side.

He ran around the pile, but before he could reach the unknown the latter had skipped through the vacant lot and into a small courtyard beyond.

Dash made a thorough search of the premises, but could not find his man.

At last he went back to the street.

The cabby with his cab was gone.

But not far away Dash found another cab.

He was soon on his way home.

Despite the excitement he passed a comfortable night.

He wondered who the would-be assassin could be.

Was it Paulus Rarius, Palo Contrain, or some old enemy?

Early on the following morning Dash Dare betook himself to the Morton House.

Here he met Mr. Andrew Birchwood, the owner and general manager of the "Bull Run" company.

Birchwood had been introduced to Dash before.

He was glad to see the great detective.

"Well, anything new?" he asked pleasantly.

"Several clues, Birchwood."

"Ziegler, the ward detective, says he can prove Charles Halloway guilty beyond a doubt."



Dash Dare only smiled at this.

"Birchwood, I want you to give me a job."

"A job? What do you mean?"

"I am anxious to go on the stage."

"Dare, you're joking."

"Never more serious in my life. You leave New York in a few days. I want to join your company and go with you."

The theatrical manager stared at the great detective for a moment.

Then a light seemed to break in on him.

"I see; you want to watch somebody in the company."

"Yes."

"They will be onto you."

"Not if you manage it right. Isn't there somebody in the cast you wish to get rid of?"

"Yes; Paxton, the heavy villain, is no good. I want to discharge him just as soon as I can get the right person to take his place."

"Then try me. I fancy I can play heavy villain. I have hunted down many a heavy villain in my time."

"I don't know," mused Birchwood. "Certainly a great detective like you ought to be able to take the part. But you don't know the lines."

"I'll guarantee to learn them in an hour. Three readings will be sufficient."

"You must have a good memory."

"Have to have in my business."

"I'll try you," laughed Birchwood. "But you mustn't spoil our success."

"If I do I'll pay all damages," replied Dash Dare, promptly.

"When do you want to go on?"

"As soon as possible."

"Well, come over and see Nelson, my stage manager."

"Very well. By the way, give me a chance to make up as Harvey Gilder, your old-time friend, just from the Star Theater, Melbourne, Australia."

"You want to be known only as Harvey Gilder?"

"Yes."

"All right. Anything you say goes, Dare. I want to help you clear up this awful mystery."

Dash Dare retired to a private room and changed his appearance to that of a well-dressed Englishman who has followed the stage.

When he again joined Birchwood the theatrical manager gazed at him curiously.

"I am ready," drawled Dash.

"Why—er—great Scott, what a transformation!"

"Might do for the stage, eh?"

"We won't have to teach you anything about making-up, that's certain," laughed Birchwood.

When the Academy of Music was reached the pair sought the stage.

Here they ran across Nelson, the stage manager.

He was having a quarrel with a middle-aged man, who had a bloated face and an exceedingly red nose.

"You must do better, Paxton," the stage manager was saying. "To my way of thinking you don't try to act any more."

"Ah, you are too critical," growled Paxton. "I know my business!"

"And I know mine," went on the stage manager, warmly. "You must do better."

"I do better than all the rest of the company now," howled the red-nosed man.

He had been drinking more than was good for him.

At that moment Birchwood stepped up.

"Paxton, we have had enough of your loud-mouth on this stage. You can't act in this company any longer."

"Can't I?"

"No; I warned you before. Now we are done with you."

"I won't go."

"If you don't I'll have you fired out."

"I'll sue for two weeks' notice."

"Do so."

"You can't bluff me."

"It's no bluff. Get right out. We won't have a man like you around."

As Paxton scowled and moved off, Nelson caught the owner of the company by the arm.

"Excuse me, Mr. Birchwood, don't be hasty," he whispered. "We have no one to fill his place on a moment's notice."

"Yes, we have, Nelson. Let him go."

Paxton wanted to argue, but Birchwood would not listen, and finally the heavy man stalked off, vowing he would bring on a lawsuit without delay.

When he was gone, Birchwood introduced Dash Dare.

"Mr. Gilder is an experienced actor," he said. "I am sure he can take Paxton's place on a jump and do very well."

"All right; that's what we want."

Dash Dare did not tell Nelson who he was, or that he had seen part of the play on the evening of the tragedy.

He took the written part and studied it well. Then he listened carefully to all the stage instructions given him.

Many an actor would have felt nervous, but not so Dash Dare.

To him, acting a part on the stage was child's play.

It was acting a part among shrewd criminals that was work for the great detective.

During the afternoon Nelson called a hasty rehearsal of the company, in order to give Dash a chance to go over the stage business.

At the rehearsal the detective was introduced to the rest of the cast.

He found the people very agreeable, especially Miss Grace Hayley, the actress who had been engaged to play the part Clara Whitson had enacted.

"I am a newcomer, too," she said to Dash. "Now I won't feel quite so strange."

Lurette Dondell smiled at him when introduced, but she had nothing to say.

Dash made himself popular at once, and several expressed their satisfaction to learn that Paxton had been dismissed.

That night Dash Dare made his first regular appearance on the stage.

The Academy of Music was crowded.

The new actress, Grace Hayley, was making almost as much of a hit as had Clara Whitson.

Dash Dare had not been on the boards five minutes before the manager knew that he had made a hit.

"Who is that new actor?"

"He is certainly better than James Paxton."

Then it was whispered around that he was from Australia.

"He's a good one."

"They certainly have a strong company now."

The upper galleries went wild over Dash Dare's perfect impersonation of villainy.

He had studied villains too long to make any mistake in the way they were used to doing.

"Gee! but he's a corker!" cried one newsboy. "Dey ought ter hang him on der spot. Ain't he a bad egg, dough?"

And when he was finally killed by the hero the audience seemed glad he was out of the way.

"Well, does it go?" asked Dash of Nelson as the curtain came down.

"Very good, Mr. Gilder. Paxton never did half as well."

And Birchwood squeezed Dash's hand silently.

During the last act Dash had noticed a tall, heavily-bearded man hanging about the wings.

The man had now gone below.

Dash followed and saw the stranger pass a note to Lurette Dondell.

The actress read it and frowned.

She hurried to her dressing room and the stranger disappeared.

Lurette Dondell had torn the note into two parts and cast it into a corner.

Watching his chance, Dash Dare picked up the torn bits of paper.

In his dressing room he fitted them together.

The note ran as follows:

"Come to the Blue Swan at once. Important. I dare not come to theater. PALO."

No sooner had the great detective read the words than he resolved to follow Lurette Dondell.

He got out of his stage dress as quickly as possible and took up a position in the corridor.

A little later Lurette Dondell came along.

As she passed him she gave him a condescending smile.

"I wonder what she would say if she knew I was spotting her," thought Dash Dare.

She did not look back and he easily followed her to the street.

Here she called a cab.

Dash did the same.

"Follow that cab over there," he said to the driver.

"Yes, sir."

"And take care the other driver or the lady inside don't discover that you are doing so."

As Dash finished he winked and handed the cabby a five-dollar bill.

"I understand, sir. I'll be careful."

And then both cabs rolled away from the Academy of Music.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### EXCITING TIMES AT THE BLUE SWAN.

THE Blue Swan was a well-known resort on Fourth Avenue, kept by Giles Echart, a former theatrical manager.

Echart was the first man to introduce living pictures in this country.

He brought them out in Chicago and was soon suppressed.

After that he left the theatrical business, came to New York and opened up the Blue Swan.

Ostensibly it was a hotel, but in reality it was a drinking and gambling resort, where the fastest men in town congregated.

Gambling was carried on in three of the upper rooms.

On the second floor of the place was a large dining hall where the finest dinner in the metropolis could be had, if one wanted to pay the price.

Twice the resort had been raided, but each time Echart and his helpers escaped punishment.

The truth was, he stood in with several politicians and they gave him warning when anything was about to happen.

The cab containing Lurette Dondell drew up at a side entrance, and the actress alighted and quickly entered the building.

She was heavily veiled, so no one standing around recognized her.

She went directly upstairs.

In the meanwhile Dash Dare also alighted and dismissed his cabman.

While in the cab he had changed his disguise to that of a gilt-edge sport.

He entered the side door and also sought the stairs.

At the upper landing a well-dressed negro hallman stopped him.

"Dat's a private stairs, sah," he said, politely but firmly.

"I know it. I came up to tell you there's a colored man on the sidewalk wants to see you," replied Dash Dare.

Then he pretended to go out again.

The colored man followed and looked for the individual Dash had mentioned.

Watching his chance, the detective slipped in again unobserved and ran upstairs rapidly.

The hall was dimly lighted.

On the second floor was a door leading into the dining room.

On the next floor were a dozen doors, all tightly closed.

Slipping up to the first of these doors, Dash Dare listened intently.

Several men, all strangers, were having a quiet game of poker.

The second room was empty.

As the great detective approached the door of the third room he heard a faint cry from within:

"This is robbery, gentlemen!"

"Not much!"

"I say it is. That was not a fair game by any means!"

"Oh, you simply say that because you lost."

"Why don't you pocket your loss like a man?"

Dash peered through the keyhole.

Three men were inside of the room.

One was a young man, evidently from some village some distance from New York.

The other two were older.

By their general appearance Dash knew them to be old-time gamblers.

The young man stood beside a table on which rested several piles of bank notes.

His face was flushed and it was plain to see he was greatly in earnest.

The two gamblers were cool.

But suddenly the young man showed his nerve.

He reached forward and, in a twinkling, swept the bank notes into his pocket.

With loud curses the two gamblers leaped on him.

"Give up that money!"

"We won that stuff and we want it!"

"Stand back!" ordered the young man. "It is my money and you shall not cheat me out of it. You watched my hand through that mirror, which was not there when we sat down to play."

The young man, while speaking, backed to the hallway door and unlocked it.

But, ere he could pass through, the gamblers sprang upon him.

They bore him to the floor, and, while one of them placed his hand over the victim's mouth, the second attempted to obtain the money.

Dash Dare now thought it time to interfere.

Boldly he pushed open the door.

For the moment he gazed at the scene.

Then he glared at the young man.

"By gum!" he cried, with a drawl. "So here ye air, Ben Baker! And thet stolen money, too! Come along with me, d'ye hear?"

And, pushing the astonished gamblers aside, Dash dragged the young man from the floor.

"See here, what does this mean?" demanded one of the gamblers.

"It means thet I hev found him at last," cried Dash. "Now, not a word outer ye"—this to the young man, who was too bewildered to say a word—"come on this minit!"

The gamblers wanted to interfere, but Dash gave both such a terrorizing look that they fell back without delay.

Grabbing the young man by the shoulder, Dash marched him out into the hallway and down into the street.

When at the nearest corner, he turned the young countryman around.

"Now listen to me," he said. "I am a detective. I saw those fellows were cheating you. I have saved your money—maybe your life. Go back home and don't attempt to do New York any more."

And he sent the young man on his way dazed and bewildered, but thankful he had come out of the encounter with a whole skin.

Without delay Dash Dare returned to the Blue Swan.

As he went in he saw the two gamblers in the hallway talking earnestly together.

The rascals couldn't understand it at all.

Dash had made a slight change in his disguise, so they did not recognize him.

Dash made a thorough search of the resort.

Finally he reached a room in the rear.

He found Palo Contrain and Lurette Dondell within.

The two were drinking champagne, and were as merry as could be.

Whatever the business was between them had evidently been spoken of before the detective came.

Suddenly, however, Lurette Dondell caught Contrain's hand.

"Palo, they tell me that Charles Halloway will be electrocuted for the Clara Whitson murder."

"Lurette, don't mention that to me again!" he burst out.

"Why don't you let that matter rest?"

"All right, I will. Here's your health."

And Lurette Dondell tossed off a glass of champagne with great gusto.

"You will not come to the theater, then?" she asked, after a pause.

"No."

"And when we leave New York?"

"Oh, I will not be far off."

"When we leave, I imagine that mystery will quickly die out," went on the woman.

"I hope so."

"By the way, where is the hunchback?"

"He is going to leave New York, too."

"Tired of it here?"

"Yes."

Thus the talk went on.

In the midst of the conversation, a colored waiter came upstairs.

He knocked on the door and entered the room.

He had a slip of paper, which he handed to Palo Contrain.

The man read it and leaped to his feet.

"The deuce take the luck!" he cried.

"What is the matter, Palo?" questioned Lurette Dondell.

"There are spies about!"

The negro had left the room right after delivering the note, so the two supposed themselves entirely alone.

"Spies?"

"Yes."

"After us?"

"So it would seem."

"Who sent that note?"

"A particular friend of mine."

"Do I know him?"

"No."

Scarcely had Palo Contrain ceased speaking when a commotion below was heard.

There were loud cries, then came hurried footsteps and the smashing of glass.

"The police! The police!"

"They are going to raid the ranch!"

The report was true.

The police had come down upon the Blue Swan most unexpectedly.

For once, his political friends had not been able to notify Giles Echart.

Bluecoats stood at every door and window.

Other bluecoats ran into the resort.

"Quick, we must get out!" exclaimed Palo Contrain.

"We don't want to figure in a police court scene in the morning."

He flung open a door leading to another room.

Dash Dare tried the door to the room just vacated and found it locked.

He put his shoulder to the barrier.

Crash!

It fell down and he burst into the apartment.

He reached the second room just in time to see Lurette Dondell and Palo Contrain making their way up a ladder to a skylight.

The skylight was flung open and both hopped out on the roof.

Palo Contrain acted as if he knew the place pretty thoroughly.

From the roof of the Blue Swan the pair were able to drop down to that of the building next door.

They dropped into a gutter.

Close at hand was a dormer window, leading into a garret.

"This way, Lurette! Here the police will never find us," cried Contrain, in a low voice.

"You know where you are going, Palo?"

"Yes, I know every foot of it."

The garret window was closed.

Contrain shoved it up.

Leaning over the edge of the roof, which had just been left, Dash Dare watched the pair.

He had heard what Contrain had said.

As the window went up a faint cry came from the interior of the garret.

"Palo Con—"

"Hush!" cried the man, fiercely. "Hush, you fool!"

"Have you come to release me? You shall suffer—"

Dash heard no more.

The garret window went down silently but swiftly, and a dirty curtain was drawn over the panes of glass.

Then the great detective felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Consider yourself under arrest, sir."

Dash turned to find himself in the grasp of a policeman.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE TRAGEDY IN THE GARRET.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation Dash Dare was compelled to smile.

This made the officer mad.

"It's no laughing matter!" he cried. "You can't bluff me."

Without replying the great detective showed his badge.

"Don't you know me, officer?" he asked.

He removed the false beard he wore.

The policeman looked at him closely for a moment.

"Dash Dare!"

"Exactly."

"Excuse me, Mr. Dare, I—I—"

"It's all right. You were only trying to do your duty."

"I thought I saw several people come up here."

"I will attend to them. Go down and I'll shut up the skylight."

There was no time to argue matters, and the policeman hurried below again.

After closing the skylight, Dash Dare dropped from the roof to the gutter beyond.

The curtain had not quite covered the entire window, and the great detective peered through an uncovered corner.

All in the garret beyond was pitch dark.

He listened intently.

Not a sound broke the stillness.

Not far away on the sloping roof was a trap door.

He crawled to this and tried the door.

It was unfastened, and he easily raised it up several inches.

Nothing but darkness and silence was beyond.

Without hesitation Dash Dare dropped down into the garret.

He felt he was on dangerous ground and drew his pistol.

Cautiously he moved forward.

The garret was but scantily furnished.

He came to a box, and then struck against a cot.

Fearing to go farther without a light, he halted and cautiously lit his pocket lantern.

As the rays of the lantern fell upon the cot, Dash Dare started back.

And well he might.

For there lay the body of a murdered man.

Over his face lay a plain linen handkerchief.

Dash raised the handkerchief up.

It was filled with a peculiar liquid which gave forth a most sickening odor.

Evidently the man on the cot had but recently been put out of the way forever.

"Must be the fellow who spoke to Contrain when the rascal entered the garret," thought Dash Dare.

That the man had been sick was evident.

His cheeks were sunken, and on the box rested several bottles of medicine.

Leaving the garret, Dash Dare went below.

Throughout the house all was silent.

The rear door was open, showing that Palo Contrain and Lurette Dondell had escaped in that direction.

The lower portion of the house seemed undisturbed.

The man and the woman had escaped through an alleyway to the next street.

Leaving them for the time being, Dash returned to the garret to make an examination.

The murdered man was well dressed.

He was in his street clothes, showing that he did not live in the garret.

Dash Dare turned out his pockets.

In one he found several bank bills.

He was about to put them back again when something peculiar about the bills attracted his attention.

The bills were counterfeit, of the same kind as those found in Rarius' apartments.

Dash Dare gave a low whistle.

In the inside of the man's coat the great detective ran across a note book.

Most of the leaves were gone, showing where memorandums had been made and detached.

A single memorandum still remained in the book.

It read as follows:

"\$5000 to Mercer at New Haven, at twenty-five per cent. Per order P. C."

As Dash Dare read the memorandum a light flashed across his mind.

He understood it perfectly.

The dead man had been a handler of counterfeit money.

He had sold some to one Mercer of New Haven, at twenty-five cents for every dollar's worth.

The sale had been made by order of Palo Contrain.

Here was a brand-new side to the case.

Palo Contrain was in league with the handlers of the queer.

"What made him murder this man?"

Dash Dare could answer that question in but one way.

Contrain must have feared the man was about to die, and would make a confession of his misdeeds.

Murder had sealed the dying man's lips forever.

"I believe Palo Contrain was just fiend enough to do it," murmured Dash to himself. "The equal of that cold-blooded rascal has not been born."

He searched around the garret and found several clues which told him that the man had belonged to a regularly organized band of bad money manipulators.

There was nothing to show what the man's name was nor where he was from.

Having concluded his search, Dash Dare left the garret.

The raid next door was over and all the prisoners had been taken to the police station.

Dash Dare concluded it would be useless to attempt to follow Contrain and Lurette Dondell that night.

Probably they had separated, and the woman had returned to the hotel at which the others of the theatrical company were stopping.

At the rehearsal on the following morning Lurette Dondell appeared the same as usual.

Nothing about her manner indicated the stirring scenes through which she had passed the night before.

"She has a magnificent nerve," thought Dash. "She is a fit companion to such a fellow as Palo Contrain."

That night Dash duplicated his success on the stage. It was the last appearance of the company in New York.

From the metropolis they were to go to the Auditorium in Chicago.

"Well, how are you making out?" asked Birchwood.

"Getting there slowly," replied Dash.

It was all he would say.

The great detective began to think he had a very large piece of work on hand.

Rattler's report, made a little later, confirmed this idea.

"I have been trying to locate Paulus Rarius," said Rattler. "I am now satisfied that he has gone to Chicago."

"I leave for there myself with the company on Sunday," replied Dash.

"Do you know, I imagine Rarius is shoving the queer."

"How did you learn that?"

"I traced him to a restaurant he had visited. The cashier was stuck on a bad two-dollar bill."

"You are right, Rattler," returned Dash, quietly.

And then he told his assistant of the tragedy in the garret and its sequel.

Rattler listened with rapt attention.

"Do you want me to go to Chicago, too?"

"By all means, my boy. We have mountains of work before us, to my way of thinking."

"That just suits me, Dash. I never want to be without a job."

"We must be careful. Contrain has spies, and that Rarius is the Old Nick himself."

Matters were talked over for half an hour, and then the two separated.

On Sunday both took the same train west, although occupying different cars.

Lurette Dondell appeared to be alone.

Yet, on watching her closely, Dash saw her at different times make signs to a very old man who sat several seats away.

Dash Dare studied the old man thoroughly.

"Palo Contrain," he said to himself.

Dash was right.

Contrain's make-up was wonderful, but Dash was too keen-eyed to be deceived.

On and on rolled the train.

Dash took particular pains to cultivate Lurette Dondell's acquaintance.

At first she paid but scant attention to him.

But gradually she warmed up.

The old man (Contrain) went into the smoking car, and then the woman gave Dash more of her attention than ever.

She asked him about Australia and the theatrical business done there.

Fortunately the great detective was well posted, so he made no bad "break" in answering her.

"Pay ain't up to what I expected," he said later on; "and the worst of it is, a chap hasn't much chance to make side-money."

"Did you make much extra in Melbourne?" she asked.

"Did I?" Dash gazed at her and winked one eye. "I made more extra than I did regular."

"How?"

"Oh, I had a way," he replied lightly.

"What way?"

She was becoming more interested than ever.

"Well, I used to teach tricks with cards, for one thing," he replied, looking her full in the face.

"What kind of tricks?"

"Oh, you wouldn't understand even if I told you, Miss Dondell."

"Maybe I would."

"I used to show fellows how they could win a game even with a poor hand."

She laughed at this.

"You rogue, you used to teach them how to cheat," she said slyly.

"I didn't say so."

"But you meant it. It's all right, I'm not shocked." She laughed again. "I say all is fair at cards."

"So do I," said Dash, growing bolder.

"And how else did you get extra money?" she went on, with a deeper interest.

"She is sounding me now," thought the great detective. It was just what he wanted and what he had been working for.

"Oh, I had several little games. I used to advertise things in the papers to sell."

"Fakes, sure," said Lurette Dondell.

"Well, I always sent something for the money that came to me," said Dash, flatly.

In this strain the conversation went on for nearly an hour.

Apparently Dash was a fellow after her own heart.

"Yes, unless I get a chance to do a little something outside, I'm going back to Australia," said the great detective, finally.

"What do you want to do?"

"Oh, anything—that pays."

"You are not particular then?"

"Not if there is enough in it."

"Then just you wait a few days. Maybe I can put something in your way in which you can make a small fortune," said Lurette Dondell.

Dash had done his fishing well and was now about to land a first haul.

## CHAPTER XV.

### DASH DARE'S CHICAGO APPEARANCE.

"WHAT will you put in my way?" asked Dash, after a suggestive pause.

"You'll see."

"Don't hesitate to trust me. I am in any game you may mention."

At that moment another member of the company came up and the interesting *tele-a-tele* was broken off.

Dash and Lurette Dondell exchanged significant glances, and then the subject was changed.

The great detective was well satisfied with the progress he was making.

Once into Lurette Dondell's confidence, he imagined the rest would be easy enough.

Awhile later Dash left to go into the smoker for a smoke.

He loved a good cigar about as much as he did anything.

While in the smoker Dash Dare saw Contrain sitting in a corner, smoking vigorously and looking over a packet of letters.

Occasionally Contrain would make a note on the envelope of a certain letter.

Dash thought this course queer but said nothing, nor did he attempt to look over the rascal's shoulder.

He knew that Palo Contrain would fight shy of any such movement.

He must be dealt with shrewdly, or not at all.

The day glided by and then night came on.

Riding had made every one tired, and by ten o'clock most of the passengers on the express had sought their berths.

Before he retired Dash sought out Rattler, but the assistant had learned nothing which Dash did not already know.

Contrain's berth was but a few steps from that occupied by the great detective.

Evidently Contrain was tired, for he retired long before the last of those on board had done so.

An hour later the lights were turned low.

At one end of the long car sat the sleepy porter, ready to answer any call made for him—providing he heard it.

Dash Dare waited for an hour.

At last, satisfied that all were in their berths, and either asleep or too tired to be aroused, he left his compartment and glided like a ghost across the aisle.

Palo Contrain occupied a lower berth.

He was sleeping soundly.

Close to his head rested a small satchel he had carried.

This contained the bundle of letters.

Adroitly Dash removed the satchel and returned to his own compartment.

He lit his pocket lamp and picked the lock of the bag.

A moment later and fifty or more letters were spread on his lap.

All were addressed to James Ellerton, at a certain post office box, New York City.

Dash wondered if Palo Contrain had taken the package from the man left dead in the garret.

He read several of the communications.

They were from people in various large cities and seemed to be written in reply to some letter asking them to handle counterfeit money.

Many of the people wished to know more of the particulars of the scheme, while others said they would go into it.

All of the latter answers Contrain had marked, so he would know them from the others.

"If he stole these letters from James Ellerton, he ex-



pects to continue Ellerton's work," was the way the great detective summed it up.

While Dash was looking over the letters a bright idea struck him.

Taking one that was postmarked Chicago, he erased the name at the bottom and substituted a fictitious one occasionally used by Rattler.

He also changed the address to one that would suit the assistant.

"Now Mr. Palo Contrain can deal with my man while Madam Lurette Dondell deals with me," said Dash to himself.

Placing all of the letters back into the satchel, Dash locked it again.

Then he crossed to Contrain's berth and put the bag back into its original place.

Contrain stirred in his sleep, but he did not wake up.

A little later the great detective himself was in the land of dreams.

It was broad daylight when the passengers aroused one after the other. They were just entering Fort Wayne. In three hours more they would be in Chicago.

It was Dash Dare who escorted Lurette Dondell to the dining car.

The others in the company began to notice the intimacy.

"He's stuck on her," they said among themselves.

They would have been dumfounded had they suspected the truth.

The breakfast over, Dash strolled back to the smoker.

As he did so he saw a sight that chilled his blood.

Rattler, in disguise, was standing on the platform between the cars.

The vestibule doors were open, and the young detective was getting a whiff of the fresh morning air.

He was so absorbed in thought that he had not noticed the close approach of another man.

This man was Palo Contrain.

By some means Contrain had spotted Rattler as the fellow who had followed him in New York.

In his disguise of an old man Contrain was now at Rattler's very elbow.

He looked around cautiously, and Dash Dare saw him prepare to hurl his plucky assistant from the train.

As the express was moving at the rate of forty-five miles an hour, this could mean but one thing—death.

Dash made a mighty bound through the doorway.

He grabbed Contrain by the arm.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"Why—er—what's the matter?" stammered the rascal.

Rattler turned quickly and saw his danger.

"You were about to throw me from the train!" he cried.

"Oh, no, he only stumbled against you," put in Dash, hastily. "It was a very unfortunate accident. For the moment I fancied he did it intentionally."

Contrain looked puzzled. He did not suspect Dash. Yet he felt something was wrong.

Rattler, too, knew not how to act. Should he let Contrain know that his disguise had been penetrated?

He looked to Dash for instructions. They were given by a sign.

"You ought to be more careful, old man," growled Rattler, and moved off into the car.

Contrain still looked puzzled.

He gazed sharply at Dash Dare.

"So you thought I was going to push him off the car?" he said, slowly.

"So you were," replied Dash, boldly, but in a low voice.

"What's the deal, old man?"

"You are mistaken," growled Contrain.

"Mistaken? Come now, don't treat me like that after I saved you from getting into serious trouble."

"Who are you?" asked Contrain, although he thought he knew very well who Dash was.

"I'm a theatrical man—and a little besides. I'm always up to something new. Say!"

"Well?"

"You ought to do the handsome thing by me for not giving you dead away."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, you might in a number of ways."

"I am not rich."

"Oh, pshaw!"

Apparently in deep disgust at this announcement, Dash Dare re-entered the car.

Palo Contrain watched him narrowly.

Then he turned and walked in the opposite direction.

He kept out of Rattler's way.

He was puzzled and hardly knew how to act.

When the train reached Chicago the platform at the depot was crowded.

Contrain thought to escape easily, but at a sign from Dash Dare Rattler shadowed him.

That day Dash was kept busy at the theater.

On the stage in the evening he made another hit.

Birchwood looked sad.

"What's the trouble?" asked the great detective.

"To tell the truth, I don't know what I'm going to do toward filling your part after you leave," said the owner of the company.

"Well, I haven't left yet," smiled Dash.

But he did not expect to remain on the stage long, and Birchwood knew it.

During the acts, Lurette Dondell called Dash to her side.

"Will you accompany me this evening, after the performance?" she asked.

"Where to?"

"I want to introduce you to a friend of mine who has a little game he may wish to interest you in."

"Thanks; I'll go," returned Dash, promptly.

The woman gave him a significant smile.

"I guess you're a man after my own sort," she whispered.

"Yes, I am after all of your sort," said Dash to himself, grimly. "Somebody will wake up to a big surprise ere long."

Little did he just then dream of all that was in store for him in the near future.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CELEBRATED GREEN BAND.

WHEN the performance was over, Dash hurried into his street clothes and waited in the greenroom for Lurette Dondell.

It was not long before she appeared.

There was a happy smile on her face.

The pair went outside.

"Shall I call a cab?" asked the great detective.

"It is not necessary. I already have one handy, Mr. Gilder."

She pointed to a carriage standing near the Alley elevated road.

The driver saw her and promptly came over for her.

The two got in and the turnout started west, across the river, and then southward.

"We have quite a drive," remarked Lurette Dondell. "But you see my friend has injured his ankle and cannot leave his bed."

At last the carriage came to a halt before a tall building, built of stone.

The two alighted, and Lurette Dondell led the way up the steps.

She rang an electrical bell, and the door was instantly opened by a colored man.

"I came to see Mr. Edgars."

"Yes, madam," replied the man.

He ushered Dash Dare and Lurette Dondell through the hallway into a middle room.

"Just wait here until I tell Mr. Edgars that you is here," said the colored man.

"Is Mary in?" asked Lurette Dondell.

"Yes, madam."

"I will go below and see her before I go upstairs," said the actress. "I will be back in a moment," she went on to Dash.

"Very well," rejoined the detective coolly.

He already felt that something was wrong.

He must be on his guard.

Possibly he had walked into a trap.

The woman went out and the negro followed.

The door closed with a sharp click and Dash Dare was left alone.

He did not move from the chair into which he had thrown himself.

Although alone, he felt that unseen eyes were gazing intently upon him.

Ten minutes passed.

Then Dash gave a yawn.

He got up and pretended to examine the paintings on the walls.

There were two windows in the room, each with heavy lace curtains drawn over it.

Carelessly Dash pushed one of the curtains aside.

The window was heavily barred.

Was it fancy, or did a low, mocking laugh reach his ears,

"I believe I've made a fool of myself and put my foot into it," he thought.

He had a pistol ready for use, but it was of no avail in such a situation as this.

Half an hour went by.

As he had surmised, Lurette Dondell did not come back. She had merely brought him to the place and left him in the hands of his enemies.

"And I thought I had her confidence," said Dash to himself. "That shows what a sharp woman she is. Hang it, I ought to be kicked!"

The great detective was very angry with himself for having been taken in so slickly.

But now was no time to upbraid himself.

He must be on the alert or his life would pay the penalty.

He walked to the door and tried to open it.

Finding it locked, he hammered loudly on one of the panels.

A minute later a voice was heard coming from a hole in the wall:

"Sit down and keep quiet."

"Who are you?" asked Dash.

"No. 3."

"No. 3 what?"

"You'll soon see."

"Why am I a prisoner?"

"Because you are a detective and have been spying on our members."

"Who says so?"

"Nos. 7 and 9 say so."

"Who are they?"

"Nos. 7 and 9. We have no names here."

"Is this the meeting place of your gang or league?"

"You will find out later. Now be silent, or I'll put you under the influence."

"Under the influence of what?"

"A drug that will put you into a sound sleep."

"Some of that accursed Paulus Rarius' preparations, I suppose?"

"It is one of No. 13's drugs."

"How many members have you?"

"Thirty-nine."

"What is the object of your organization?"

"To kill off detectives and spies."

And the speaker laughed at his own joke.

Then followed a click, and although Dash asked several more questions he got no replies.

Another half hour went by.

Suddenly Dash sniffed the air.

There was a peculiar sweet smell entering the room.

He became alarmed, for the smell made him drowsy.

In vain he tried to fight it off.

He could hardly keep his eyes open.

He started to walk around the room to discover from whence the smell proceeded.

Scarcely had he gone a dozen steps when he fell headlong upon the carpeted floor.

As he went down the door opened, and eight men entered.

All wore loose gowns of green material.

Over the face of each was a green mask.

Three of the men seized Dash and, after disarming him, bound his arms tightly behind him.

As soon as the men came in the sweet scent left the room.

When Dash came to his senses he found himself in the middle of a large stone apartment situated underground.

Electric lights made the stone interior as light as day.

The apartment was furnished with chairs, and at one end was a long table covered with writing material and with packages of counterfeit money.

Dash Dare was in the rendezvous of the celebrated Green Band.

This organization flourished for years throughout New York, Ohio, Illinois and Michigan.

In vain had detectives and government officials endeavored to track them down.

They were at once the most secret, and at the same time most powerful band of wrong-doers in the United States.

Many detectives refused to make an effort to hunt them out, knowing the Green Band members would kill them if their intentions became known.

Four detectives who had started to expose them were already numbered among the "missing."

Never had it been discovered who led the band or who the various members were.

A reward of ten thousand dollars had been offered for

three years by the government for the capture of even a single member of the band.

Dash Dare was placed on a chair in the center of the apartment.

A man stood on either side of him armed with a keen-edged sword.

At the long table sat three men, evidently the leaders of the band.

The great detective counted the members present.

There were twenty-two of them.

Each had a number pinned on his breast.

He was guarded by No. 3, the man who had previously spoken to him, and No. 11.

Nos. 1, 2 and 4 sat at the table.

"Well, prisoner," said No. 1. "I believe you fully understand why you have been brought here."

"I do not," replied Dash Dare.

"You were caught spying on several members of our band."

"Is Lurette Dondell a member?"

"Silence! We allow no names to be mentioned here," was the stern response.

All the things taken from Dash Dare were placed on the table before the leaders.

"Do you know the penalty for spying upon us?" questioned No. 4.

"I suppose it is death."

"Exactly. You have half an hour to live."

"Perhaps I'll live a little longer," returned the great detective, as calmly as he could.

"Not one minute longer, so you had better prepare."

"Have you any statement to make before you die?" asked No. 2.

"I would like to know more concerning your band."

"You already know too much."

"Are you afraid to tell a man you have in your power?"

"We are bound by an oath to reveal nothing to any outsider."

"What harm does it do if that outsider is to die?"

To this no answer was given.

The men at the table began to write, and called up the other members one after another.

Evidently the men were making their reports of business in different sections of the state.

Dash tried hard to catch what was said, but learned little or nothing.

The men spoke in very low tones, and they were fully fifteen feet from where he sat.

Eagerly the detective calculated the chances of escape.

All looked black indeed.

There was but one door to the underground apartment, and this was guarded by a tall man with a razor-like short sword.

There was no telling how many guards there were on the outside.

The two guards beside Dash never took their eyes from the great detective.

They seemed to comprehend that he was no ordinary prisoner.

In vain Dash tried to penetrate the disguises, in hope of learning if Palo Contrain and Paulus Rarius were present.

Certainly if the two rascals were present they had not yet spoken.

At last the making of reports came to an end.

Twenty minutes of Dash Dare's half hour had flown.

"Prisoner, you have ten minutes more in which to make a statement," said No. 1.

"I have nothing to say."

"Perhaps he would like to join the band," said one of the others.

"We would not trust him."

Dash Dare started when he heard the suggestion made concerning himself.

He thought he recognized that voice.

If he was not mistaken, the man who had spoken up for him was Rattler!

And yet the assistant's voice sounded strangely like that of Palo Contrain.

What did it mean?

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

"PERHAPS he might become a valuable member," went on the speaker.

And now Dash was sure it was Rattler.

The leaders looked at each other and shook their heads.

"You know the rule, 17. It cannot be broken."  
 "The rule cannot be broken," came in solemn tones from all sides of the apartment. "The prisoner must die!"

No. 1 pointed to a clock hanging on the wall. It was a large affair, and the Roman numerals on the dial were composed of human bones.  
 "Five minutes of the hour! Open the grave!"  
 The large table was pushed aside.  
 The leader touched a spring in the wall.  
 At once a trap door slipped open, revealing a dark pit beneath, at the bottom of which ran swiftly-flowing water.  
 "That will be your grave, prisoner. You die in three minutes."

The band gathered around Dash Dare.  
 As they did so No. 17 glided behind Dash.  
 A slash of a keen-bladed knife and Dash's hands were freed.

A pistol was thrust into them.  
 Before he could be stopped, No. 17 leaped toward the door.

"He has a pisto—"  
 It was a cry from one of the guards.  
 The man never finished the sentence.  
 Crash!

It was a terrific blow that Dash Dare gave him.  
 It struck him in the left ear, and over he toppled into the yawning opening directly beside him.

The second guard made a lunge at Dash with his sword.  
 But the great detective leaped aside, caught the blade close to the handle and twisted it from the man's grasp.

"Down you go!" he cried, and made the man back into the hole, where he fell on top of his companion.  
 By this time the entire room was in excitement.

At the door Rattler was fighting with the guard.  
 Bang!

It was Rattler's pistol that spoke, and the doorkeeper fell back, seriously wounded in the neck.

Every member of the Green Band drew some sort of a weapon.

"They are both spies!"  
 "They must never leave here alive!"  
 "If they get out the band will be ruined!"  
 "To the door! To the door! They can get out in no other way!"

So the cries ran on.  
 A rush was made for the door.

Rattler had taken the key from the doorkeeper and was trying to open the heavy wooden barrier.

A pistol was aimed at the assistant's head, but even as it was discharged Dash Dare knocked up the barrel.

He leaped to Rattler's side.

"Open it, my boy, I will hold them back!"

"Somebody is holding the door from the other side!"

panted Rattler.

"Both together then!"

Bang! crash!

Dash Dare and Rattler hurled their full weight against the door.

It was strong, but it went down with a crash.

More pistol shots rang out, and Dash was clipped in the shoulder.

But he paid no attention, saving to fire back into the midst of the Green Band.

Beyond the door was a narrow passageway.

Here stood two men with drawn pistols.

"Surrender!" cried the first man.

He never spoke again.

Both Dash and Rattler leaped upon him.

As quick as a flash Dash lifted the man up and hurled him bodily into the face of his companion.

There was a cracking of human bones, and both men went to the floor with a sickening thud.

The passageway was now clear, and on went the two detectives, with the Green Band shouting and cursing at their heels.

At the end of the passageway was a flight of stone steps.

They led to the ground floor of the mansion.

"Beware of traps," cautioned Dash. "Remember Paulus Rarius is a member of this accursed band."

His warning was timely.

Rattler had scarcely reached the hallway of the mansion

than he saw a number of wires on the floor.

He leaped up to avoid them.

One just brushed his clothing and gave him an electric shock from his head to his heels.

"Beware of the wires," he sung out.

"Ah, he will escape!" came from a landing overhead.

The speaker was Rarius.

Dash Dare wished he could go after the villain.

But now was no time to think of that.

There were too many of the band to stand and fight them.

The two detectives ran to the front door, to find it doubly locked and barred.

"Come to the back!" cried Dash.

As they passed through the hallway a heavy weight descended from above.

It was an electrical machine hurled down by Paulus Rarius.

It came close to Dash Dare's head, but he saw it in time to leap out of harm's way.

The kitchen of the mansion was reached.

Here stood the negro who had let Dash and Lurette Donnell in.

He was armed, but quickly threw his pistol away when both detectives covered him.

"Doan shoot me, please, sah!" he yelled in terror.

"Open the back door!"

"Ain't got de key, sah—"

"You lie! Open it at once!"

Dash Dare placed his pistol at the negro's forehead.

Shaking with fear the colored man produced two keys for the door.

As Rattler unlocked the door six of the members of the Green Band poured into the room.

Several pistol shots were exchanged.

No one, however, was seriously hurt.

"Out we go!" yelled Rattler. "Come on!"

He dashed into a small yard and his chief came after him.

Here all was dark, but the pair were able to make out a high board fence, which they readily scaled.

They were free at last.

"To the nearest police precinct!" whispered Dash to his assistant. "I will guard the house. Send the policeman here, if you can find him."

Rattler went off to obey orders.

Dash peered through a knothole in the fence.

The members of the Green Band had already closed the door and locked it.

He walked around the house, which was isolated from any others.

The lights went out inside, leaving all in darkness.

With his pistol ready for use, the great detective kept guard as well as he was able upon every exit.

He half expected the band would make a dash for liberty, but he was mistaken.

All remained as dark and silent around the mansion as though it were a tomb.

"They are up to some crooked work, that's certain," mused the great detective.

Yet for the present he could do nothing.

Quarter of an hour passed and Rattler reappeared.

With him came a sergeant and seven policemen.

"Here are eight officers," he said. "And ten more will be here in a few minutes."

Dash Dare held a brief consultation with the policemen.

He told them what was wanted of them, and that they must prepare to do their whole duty.

Then the entire party advanced upon the front door.

"Open in the name of the law!"

But one demand was made.

Then the door was struck down with an ax one of the policemen had brought along.

Lanterns were lit, and later on the electric lights in the resort were turned on.

Not a soul was found on the ground floor of the place.

Half a dozen policemen climbed the stairs.

All the upper rooms were searched with great care.

Not a corner or closet was missed.

"Not a soul up there, that's certain," growled several of the bluecoats.

Leaving several men on guard upstairs, Dash and half a dozen others went below.

In the passageway was found the body of one of the guards, the fellow who had been tossed at his companion by Dash Dare.

The rascal was stone dead.

The door to the meeting room was found down, and the officers quickly ran inside.

Not a living soul was to be seen there.

What did it mean?

The trapdoor, with the water flowing beneath it, was still open, but the guards thrown in by Dash were gone.

"Dash, what do you make of this?" asked Rattler, in disgust.

"They have a secret exit, that's all," was the quick re-

ply. "Scatter, boys, and find it. Ten dollars to the man who discovers it first."

The policemen ran in all directions.

With great care Rattler looked at the walls of the apartment.

In the meantime Dash examined the hole beneath the trapdoor.

"Here we are!" he suddenly shouted.

All gathered around him.

"Watch me disappear," he went on.

He dove into the hole and caught hold of a couple of iron rings fastened to one side.

With his swinging foot he kicked open a small door.

"Well, that beats the Dutch!" cried Rattler.

Dash Dare sprang into the opening beyond the concealed door and lit his pocket lantern.

"Come on," he said to his assistant.

"Shall I notify the others?"

"Yes."

In a moment more Rattler was down beside Dash Dare.

The police gazed curiously at the hole, and after a brief consultation several decided to follow the two detectives.

In the meantime Dash Dare advanced several yards into the stone passage, which led toward the southward.

Suddenly he stepped on a loose board lying across the way.

As the board went down half an inch beneath his weight a clicking sound was heard.

Then came a flash of light.

"Back!" yelled the great detective. "Into the water for your life!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE GREAT EXPLOSION.

THERE was no time to say more.

Dash Dare knew what that flash of light meant.

The villain, Rattler, had set another trap for whoever might try to follow the fleeing Green Band.

Stepping on the board had closed an electric circuit connected with some dynamite stored in the passageway.

As Dash Dare yelled out Rattler leaped back.

Down came Dash on top of him and both went with a splash into the water below the trapdoor.

Bang!

Crash!

The explosion was something terrific.

The passageway was completely demolished, and the wreckage flew in all directions.

The chamber above was torn up, but luckily the police escaped without serious injury.

And Dash and Rattler?

Down into the water they went in each other's grasp.

As the water closed over them they found themselves caught in a strong under current.

Dash endeavored to brace himself against one side of the opening, but found it useless.

Rattler was swept down into the sewer-like conduit and Dash followed.

On and on they went in the darkness.

They held their breath and wondered how long the under-water journey would last.

Dash held one hand above him, in hopes of feeling some opening as they tumbled along.

At last they came out with a rush—into the Chicago River!

Both were much surprised.

"Well, Dash, what do you think of that?" gasped Rattler, as soon as he could speak.

Dash Dare smiled.

"Rather a rough trip, Rattler, my boy. We ought to be thankful we are alive, I suppose."

"That's true."

"We want to get back and see what damage that explosion did."

"And see if we can spot the Green Band."

"Sure."

All wet as they were they hailed a cab and got in.

The journey back to the rendezvous took but a short while.

They found a crowd collected, all attracted by the explosion.

The police were still in charge of the building, but had done nothing.

As has been said, the underground passageway had been almost totally destroyed.

Yet Dash Dare had part of it opened, and soon learned that the passageway led to a vacant lot in the rear of a lumber yard.

None of the Green Band could just then be traced, and for the time being the chase was given up.

Then, for the first time, Dash questioned his assistant concerning Palo Contrain.

"You impersonated him, Rattler. Is he a prisoner?"

"No, but I reckon we can catch him."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw him take the whaleback steamer to Milwaukee."

"Alone?"

"No, there was another man with him. Who it was I do not know."

"How did you learn about the Green Band?"

"Heard him talking about the band to that other man, and learned some of the secrets."

"You were foolish not to notify me or the police before you went in there."

"I sent you word by special messenger."

"I never got it," replied Dash Dare.

Before making a move to run down Palo Contrain he visited the hotel at which the theatrical company were stopping.

As he had surmised Lurette Dondell had flown, bag and baggage.

No one had seen her go—no one knew she had gone.

At once Dash Dare sought out the manager.

For the present, at least, my career on the stage must come to an end," he said.

"Sorry to lose you, Mr. Dare."

"I may be back. In the meanwhile let the substitute do the part and report me sick at a friend's house."

"I will."

Dash Dare made inquiries as to when the boat in which Palo Contrain had taken passage for Milwaukee would arrive.

"Get in Milwaukee to-morrow at noon," said the agent.

At the railroad station the great detective learned that no train would leave for Milwaukee which would get there until two o'clock, two hours after the arrival of the steamboat.

It was useless to telegraph ahead to arrest Contrain.

He would be most likely in disguise and on his guard.

"Can't I get a special to take me to Milwaukee?"

The agent stared at Dash.

"A special?" he remarked slowly.

"That is what I said."

"You must be in a big hurry?"

"I am."

"A special would cost you a round sum of money."

"I suppose it would."

"I can't put on a special unless the superintendent consents."

"All right; go see the superintendent," returned Dash Dare coolly. "Or, hold up, I'll go with you."

The agent eyed Dash curiously as they walked from the station to a brick building not far away.

"Either a crank or a big man," he said to himself.

Dash Dare was introduced to the superintendent.

"I will see you in private, sir," said Dash.

When the pair were alone he told the railroad official the nature of his business.

"Ah, yes," I remember you, Mr. Dare," said the railroad superintendent. "You did some fine work for my friend, Mr. William Lansdown, of Boston, once."

He referred to Dash Dare's wonderful railroad case, as told in "Dash Dare on Time." (See OLD CAP. COLLIER LIBRARY No. 560.)

"Yes, I did some work for him," replied the great detective modestly.

"You shall have the special at once."

"Thank you!"

The necessary orders were given.

In ten minutes a locomotive, attached to a single car, rolled into the station.

Orders were telegraphed ahead to look out for the special.

After giving Rattler a few instructions concerning the way he might best learn if the Green Band members were still hanging about Chicago, Dash Dare boarded the car.

A toot of the whistle and they were off.

The night was pitch dark.

For several hours Dash sat in the car alone, smoking.

Gradually his eyes closed and he dropped off asleep.

The train went on at the rate of forty to fifty miles an hour.

Presently it came to a halt at a crossing.

It was a lonely spot and, near at hand, was the camp of half a dozen tramps.

The tramps saw the single car apparently empty.

"Dan, look at that," cried one.



"There's a chance for a free ride," exclaimed another. The train waited so long that all of the tramps roused up one after another.

They held a brief talk, and just as the locomotive started ahead again, all the tramps got on the car.

There was one brakeman on the train.

He was amazed at the sudden appearance of the knights of the road out of the darkness.

"Hi! you can't come aboard!" he yelled. "This is a special!"

"Special be darned! We're goin' ter Milwaukee!" growled the leader of the tramps.

Each of the toughs carried a big club, and evidently they would not hesitate to enter a fight if they were angered.

"I say you can't come on," went on the brakeman.

But the tramps merely pushed him to one side and took possession.

Then the brakeman started to pull the bell-cord.

"None o' dat, sonny!" yelled one of the tramps. "Try it on an' we'll fire yer out of der back door; see?"

The brakeman was cowed and knew not what to do.

The loud talking aroused Dash Dare.

He sat up and it took but a few seconds for him to realize the condition of affairs.

He felt compelled to smile.

He waited until matters had reached a crisis and then got up.

Pulling out a brace of pistols he calmly reached up and gave the bell rope a yank.

The train slackened its speed and then came to a halt.

"Now march, every one of you!" he commanded. "I want no company on this car."

The tramps viewed the two pistols in alarm.

"Look here, boss, we—"

"I don't want a word out of you," interrupted Dash, sharply. "Off you go, everybody that don't want to get plugged full of holes!"

"Yes, but boss—"

Bang!

A bullet whistled through the speaker's matted hair.

That settled it for the tramps.

They saw that Dash Dare was altogether the wrong man for them to attempt to parley with.

They made a rush for the rear door of the car.

Down beside the track they landed in a heap.

One club was thrown at Dash and the thrower got a bullet in his leg for his trouble.

Then Dash Dare pulled the bell-cord again and they moved on.

"Gee! but you are a cool one," said the brakeman, in deep admiration. "You must be a special officer."

"I am. Here, have a cigar to quiet your nerves," replied the great detective.

And, passing over the weed, he went to sleep in his seat again, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

The special rattled on, making but few stops.

It was quarter to twelve when the special arrived in Milwaukee.

Leaving the car in which he had passed a fairly comfortable night, Dash made his way to the steamboat landing.

Here, hiding behind several bales of goods, he waited for the arrival of the whaleback.

It was coming up the Milwaukee River.

Soon it made the Bend, and moved slowly up to the dock.

There was a great crowd on board.

Ten minutes later the whaleback was made fast and the gangplank thrown out.

Dash Dare kept his eye on the crowd.

Men and women passed him by the score, but Palo Contrain was not among them.

At last the few remaining passengers came onto the dock and the gangplank was roped off.

Dash Dare looked perplexed.

Had Palo Contrain deceived him in some clever disguise, or had Rattler made a mistake concerning the man?

## CHAPTER XIX.

### OUT ON LAKE MICHIGAN.

For some time Dash Dare puzzled over the question. Then he approached one of the deck hands of the whaleback.

"I want to find out if any of the passengers left the boat before she tied up," he said.

"Don't know," was the reply. "Hi, Jackson!"

Another deckhand came forward at this call.

"What's wanted?"

"Did anybody leave the boat while we were coming up the river?"

"Yes, a couple of men left at the Bend."

"How did they leave?" questioned Dash Dare quickly.

"Jumped from the lower deck into a steam launch."

"Did the steam launch seem to be waiting for them?"

"I can't say as to that."

"What was her name?"

"The name was covered up by a bit of sail cloth hanging over it."

Dash Dare waited to ask no more questions.

As rapidly as he could he made his way along the river front to the Bend.

Here he found a number of men at work unloading boats.

Several had seen the steam launch and remembered that the two men had leaped from the whaleback into her.

From the description of the men Dash felt sure one of them must be Polo Contrain.

One thing was certain.

The poisoner intended in the future to keep shady.

He knew his crimes had found him out and that he must now flee from justice.

"In what direction did the steam launch go?" asked the great detective.

"Straight out into the lake," said one of the men.

"Would you remember her again if you saw her?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen her before."

"Then come with me. I'll pay your wages, and more."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind that. Here, if you are suspicious, I'll let you have a couple of dollars in advance."

"That's all right, boss. You're an officer. I'll go willingly, but where to?"

"I'm going after the launch. Where can I charter a boat around here—a steam tug?"

"Just below here."

The man, whose name was Karney, led the way to a steamboat office.

Here Dash Dare called the manager aside and explained matters.

In half an hour a steam tug came up to the dock ready to take Dash Dare on board.

In the meantime Dash was not idle.

He realized that he had a desperate criminal to deal with.

More than likely the man with Contrain was a member of the Green Band.

Besides this, there was no telling how many members of the same crowd were on the launch.

Going to the chief of police Dash enlisted the service of two first-class officers.

The steam tug was manned by three men, and this would make a party of seven all told.

When the tug was ready all got aboard and proceeded down the river and out into the lake with all possible speed.

From several incoming vessels they learned that the launch had been seen heading northeast.

At this the men in charge of the tug looked surprised.

Was it possible those on board of the launch were going to attempt to run across the lake?

They spoke of this to Dash.

"How about provisions?" was the great detective's first question.

"Oh, we have plenty on board," was the reply.

"Then we'll follow her, no matter where she goes."

The afternoon passed slowly.

Dash Dare sat in the bow with a powerful marine glass.

Just before sunset he caught sight of a craft far ahead.

He called the attention of the tug captain to it.

Then Karney was allowed to look through the glass.

"It's the same launch," he said, after a searching examination.

"Put on all steam, captain," was Dash's order.

This was done.

Slowly but surely the steam tug drew closer to the launch.

But night was coming on.

It was a question if they could make the fleeing craft.

It was not long before Dash knew that Contrain and the others were aware of the fact that they were being pursued.

The speed of the steam launch was increased, and it was nip and tuck between her and the tug.

Half an hour went by.

The steam tug was slowly gaining.

But now darkness was settling everywhere.

"We can't make 'em," said the captain to Dash Dare.

"Never mind; keep on running for them," was the reply.

At last the darkness of night shut out the launch from view.

As soon as it could no longer be seen, Dash ordered the engine stopped.

"Now keep your ears open," he said.

All on the tug did so.

For awhile nothing was heard, then came a faint sound a trifle to the northward of them.

"They are moving in that direction," said Dash.

"Shall I follow?" asked the tug captain.

"Wait."

Soon the sounds died away in the distance.

"Now follow, but as silently as possible."

On they went.

They carried no light, nor did the men on the launch.

Hour after hour of the night went by.

All on board took brief snatches of sleep, but that was all.

Once during the night the lookout gave a wild cry.

"To port!—to port!"

The steam tug was swung around.

All sprang to their feet.

They were in the track of a big tramp steamer.

The steamer came on swiftly, and they had all they could do to get out of the way.

In a minute more the danger was past.

But after that no more sleep was indulged in.

At five o'clock it began to grow light.

Eagerly the surface of the lake was scanned.

Only a small sailing vessel was in sight, far to the southward.

The captain of the tug came to Dash for instructions.

"Are there not a number of small islands dead ahead?" asked Dash.

"Yes."

"They would afford good hiding-places for these criminals, would they not?"

"Oh, yes. They are full of rocks and trees."

"Steer for the nearest of these islands, then."

This was done.

At eleven o'clock the first of the islands was sighted.

It was a long, irregular affair.

"Run around it; and if nothing turns up, steer for the next nearest."

The run around the island took less than half an hour.

It was found to be deserted.

The captain of the steam tug lost no time in moving on to the next island, but a mile distant.

As they approached, Dash Dare noticed a bit of smoke in a cove on the northeast shore.

The glasses were gotten out.

"Looks as if it might be the launch, true enough," said the tug captain.

"Run slow, and all hands be prepared for a fight," said Dash. "Remember I am a United States officer, and we are on the side of the law."

The speed was slackened, and presently the shore was rounded.

They were right. There at anchor lay the steam launch, which Karney readily recognized as the one he had seen at the mouth of the Milwaukee River.

It took but a few minutes to run up alongside.

Two sailors sat in the launch smoking their short clay pipes.

"Hullo! where's the rest of your crowd?" questioned Dash Dare.

"Captain's gone ashore," replied one of the sailors.

He pretended to be surprised at the arrival of the tug—as if he had not heard or seen anything of the happenings of the previous day.

"All the others ashore, too?"

"Ain't no others."

"You lie, my man. Tell me the truth."

Dash leaped into the launch.

He caught the sailor by the shoulder sternly.

"Ain't nobody but the captain," growled the tar.

"That's so," put in the other sailor.

"What became of your two passengers?"

"Passengers?"

"Yes; the men you took on at the mouth of the Milwaukee River."

"Oh, they jumped off before we left shore. They were only on the launch a few minutes."

By his manner Dash Dare knew the man was lying.

"Take them in charge," he said to the policeman.

"And, captain, you look after the launch," he added to the tug captain.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"This is an outrage!" howled one of the sailors.

"We'll sue ye fer damages!" went on the other.

"Very well," smiled Dash Dare. "But let me tell you one thing—you are aiding desperate criminals to escape, and unless you give me the information straight it will go hard with you."

The sailors looked at each other.

Both felt uncomfortable, but Dash Dare could not get them to make a true statement.

But this he did not mind so much.

The sailors were bound and placed on the tug in charge of the captain.

Then the launch was hauled away from shore.

Dash, the two Milwaukee officers and Karney went ashore.

All were fully armed.

"Those fellows may be setting a trap for us," said the great detective.

"Which we don't want to walk into," added one of the policemen, with a grave shake of his head.

"We might better scatter."

"That's so."

"We can fire two shots or whistle twice in case of an alarm," went on Dash.

This was agreed upon.

The island was very rocky.

Toward the center was a small woods.

Not a habitation of any sort appeared.

Indeed, the island was rarely visited by the people from shore.

Dash Dare went on straight ahead, while the others scattered to the right and the left.

Before the rocks were passed Dash felt certain he was on the right track.

Bruised and broken bushes showed where some persons had recently pushed their way along.

The rocks and uneven ground left behind, the great detective entered the woods.

Here was a bit of marshy ground where the tracks of three men were plainly visible.

"Contrain, his companion from Chicago and the captain of the launch," said Dash Dare to himself.

He passed the marshy ground and came to a little opening in the very center of the island.

He listened and heard his companions pushing along on both sides of him.

As Dash stepped into the glade a curious thing happened.

A man popped up from behind a flat rock.

It was Contrain.

As quick as lightning the villain leveled a pistol at the great detective.

Crack!

Dash attempted to dodge.

It was too late.

The bullet struck him a glancing blow in the temple.

He staggered forward and fell to the ground unconscious.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CAVE ON THE ISLAND.

WHEN Dash Dare came to his senses he found himself on the lake shore with one of the policemen bending over him.

The blood from the pistol wound had flowed all over his face and down his neck.

At first the great detective could scarcely speak.

The wound was bound up, and he was made as comfortable as possible.

Dash was thankful he had escaped.

Had the bullet come half an inch nearer he would have been a corpse.

"I heard the shot and ran in the direction," said the policeman. "It was several minutes after that I found you."

"Did you see the man who fired the shot?"

"No."

"We hunted everywhere, but could find nobody," put in Karney.

It was some time before Dash Dare felt able to stand up.

The steam tug was hailed, and stimulants were procured and the wound patched up with court plaster.

Then the great detective announced his intention to go back to the center of the island.

"My, but you have nerve!" cried Karney.

"Have to have in this business," smiled Dash. "You can stay behind if you wish."

"Not much."

All of the men were too brave to do that.

Yet each now advanced with extreme caution. They felt they had desperate criminals to deal with, men who would stop at nothing to gain their end.

Dash remembered the spot well where Palo Contrain had stood when the shot was fired.

He now examined the vicinity with care.

No tracks of any kind were to be found.

Contrain had disappeared, leaving not the slightest trail behind.

This was certainly a queer situation.

Dash thought of some underground trap.

Yet if there was such an opening, he and the others failed to find it.

After spending an hour in the vicinity, the party again separated.

One thing gave Dash considerable satisfaction.

Contrain was on the island and could not escape so long as he had no boat.

"I'll keep him a prisoner and starve him out, if I can't do anything else," thought Dash, grimly.

The policemen and Karney started north and south, while the great detective pursued a course toward the west shore.

His head pained him not a little, and coming to a grassy bank, he sat down to take a few minutes of needed rest.

It was only Dash's strong constitution and iron nerve that kept him up.

Any ordinary man, instead of being out on the search, would have been in bed.

It felt good to rest, and for a minute Dash closed his eyes and sunk back.

A footstep sounded behind him.

He started to turn, but a bag was thrown over his head.

"Silence, Dash Dare, if you value your miserable life."

The command came from a voice he knew well.

The speaker was Sandy Scott, a Philadelphia thug.

Dash had once had the man arrested, and Scott had but recently been discharged from prison, after serving a two years' sentence.

Before Dash could offer to struggle he was surrounded by Scott, Contrain and Heiper, the owner of the launch.

Heiper was a notorious counterfeiter, known in the Northwest as the pioneer in that traffic around the lakes.

He had been under arrest, but had broken from jail before being brought up for trial.

The three men were too much for Dash Dare in his weakened condition.

They wound a rope around the bag and then lifted Dash up in their arms.

A hundred feet from the spot they came to a large flat rock, resting against several others.

Heiper pushed the rocks aside.

Beyond was revealed the entrance to an immense cavern.

The three men lit lanterns, and Dash was taken inside of the great opening.

The party passed along for a distance of fully fifty feet.

Then they came to a natural apartment, fifty feet square and from ten to fifteen feet in height.

To one side was a smaller cave, scarcely eight feet square.

Into this Dash Dare was thrust.

The opening was small, and over it a heavy stone was rolled.

The three men then sat down to hold a consultation.

It was plain to see that the cave was one which had been visited before.

To one side were several couches and a big box containing a variety of canned goods, such as milk, meat and vegetables.

In a far corner was a rude chimney, with pots, kettles and pans beside it.

Evidently this place was used at times by the counterfeiters as a rendezvous.

"Well, now we have captured him, what do you want to do with him?" asked Heiper of Contrain.

"Kill him!" growled the villain.

"Better question him first," said Sandy Scott.

"That is so, Contrain."

"We want to know how much the police have found out."

The crowd talked the matter over for an hour.

Then of a sudden a bright idea seemed to strike Contrain.

"I'll get the boat back," he said. "And I'll release our men, too."

"How will you do it?" asked his companions.

"Easy enough. I'll put on Dash Dare's clothing, fix up my face, wrapping it up as if I was wounded, and tell the

tug captain I want the launch, and send him off to join the sailors."

The others thought this a good plan.

They at once brought Dash out of the hole in which he had been placed.

He had previously been disarmed, and now they handled him roughly as they stripped him of his outer garments.

"You can put on mine, if you're cold," laughed Contrain, roughly. "I don't want you to die just yet—now I have you in my power."

"Thanks, I would just as lief have something on," said Dash Dare, coolly.

And he proceeded to dress himself in Contrain's discarded suit.

As soon as he had the clothing on, Heiper and Scott bound him, hands and feet.

Contrain wrapped his head in bandages, and otherwise altered his appearance.

It was evident he was an adept at the art.

"Now I'm ready to go," he said. "Scott, come down to the shore and watch for the launch at the big rock."

"All right," replied the Philadelphia thug.

Soon Dash Dare was left alone with Heiper.

The notorious counterfeiter began to question him, but could get very little out of the detective.

"Ain't in a talking mood, eh?" grumbled the counterfeiter. "Well, I reckon I'll find a way to make you talk later on."

"Is this the island on which you manufacture your counterfeiters?" asked Dash.

"I can be as mum as you," was all the answer Heiper would make him, and then he thrust Dash Dare back into the hole.

In the meanwhile Palo Contrain had made his way down to the other side of the island.

He took great pains to avoid the two policemen and Karney, who were still on the hunt some distance away.

When he arrived in sight of the two craft at anchor but fifty feet away he beckoned to the captain of the tug.

"Bring in the steam launch."

The captain took him to be Dash Dare, and of course at once complied.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"Down at the south shore," replied Contrain, in a faint voice. "They have three prisoners. Go and help them bring the men up. I am too weak."

"All right. Thought you couldn't stand it after being shot," went on the tug captain, sympathetically.

He at once armed himself and hurried off toward the other end of the island.

As soon as he was out of sight, Contrain sprang into the launch and moved her out to the side of the tug.

Leaping on board he released the two launch hands.

"Fire up on the tug," he said; "there is no time to spare."

"Contrain!" cried both men.

They were dumfounded.

"Yes, it's me, but don't waste any time in words just now," rejoined the villain.

The fires were started up and the launch taken in tow.

Soon the end of the island was rounded, and they came up to what Contrain had designated as the big rock.

He waved his hand, and Sandy Scott came sneaking from the bushes.

"Tell Heiper to come on board with the prisoner," said Contrain.

"All right, Palo."

"Take care, so you don't fall into the hands of the policemen and the tug people."

"I will."

Contrain and the two sailors kept a sharp lookout.

They might be discovered at any moment.

Contrain smiled to himself.

He knew what he would do should a discovery be made. He would sail away and leave his two companions to their fate.

He was a thoroughly selfish man, and thought only to assist Heiper because he expected the counterfeiter would help him to become wealthy.

Quarter of an hour passed.

Then Scott came back, followed by Heiper, who carried Dash Dare.

As they came out on the shore several shots were fired from the bushes.

Their flight had been discovered by Karney and one of the Milwaukee policemen.

The shots flew wide of their mark.

"Into the tug!" cried Contrain. "Quick!"

The two tumbled into the boat and pitched Dash Dare on a pile of old bagging.

But as this was done something quite unexpected occurred.

Dash Dare leaped up.

With a bound he went over the side.

A few seconds later he was on the steam launch.

He cut the launch free from the tug and started her for the shore.

"The dickens take the luck!" roared the head of the counterfeiters.

He fired three shots after Dash.

But the great detective was wise enough to keep out of range.

He had no weapon, so it was impossible for him to return the fire.

The policeman and Karney now came into view.

They pointed their weapons at those on the tug.

"Out of range!" shouted Contrain.

No second warning was needed.

In three minutes more Dash Dare was aground with the launch.

Karney and the officer sprang aboard.

"Hullo, what's this?" cried Karney.

He pointed to Dash's change of raiment.

"We swapped, that's all," laughed Dash. "Summon the others."

The signal was given.

In the meanwhile the tug was making out of the harbor as fast as her engine would drive her.

It was fully ten minutes before all the party reached the launch, and by that time the tug was almost out of sight.

She was bound down the coast of Michigan.

The party crowded the little launch pretty well, but this could not be helped.

All the available steam was crowded on.

The tug captain knew exactly how to manage the launch, and he got as much speed out of her as she was capable of producing.

It was soon seen that those on the tug were at a disadvantage.

"They don't know how to run her," chuckled the tug engineer. "Ten to one they blow themselves sky high."

"Let 'em," growled one of the policemen.

He was heartily sick of the chase.

Overloaded as she was the launch gained slowly upon the tug.

Several miles were passed and the coast of Michigan appeared.

It was plain to see what the rascals on the tug intended to do.

They would land anywhere, satisfied that they could more easily hide their trail on land than on water.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

DASH DARE watched proceedings anxiously.

"They will land?" he said to the tug captain.

"It looks so."

"We must catch them before they have a chance to do that."

"I don't see how we can."

"Can't you crowd the launch a little more?"

"I'll try."

The captain was as good as his word.

The steam pressure was so high that the launch fairly quivered from end to end.

But they gained rapidly now.

Those on the tug saw it.

Their faces fell.

"Looks like the jig was up!" cried Sandy Scott.

"I'll never give up!" roared Heiper.

"Nor will I!" put in Contrain. "Ah, I have it!"

He began a rapid search.

Soon he found the tug's signal gun.

He brought her out and also a good round of powder.

He loaded the piece and stuffed it with iron bolts and anything else he could find.

"Going to give them a dose, eh?" said the thug.

"Yes."

"All right, go ahead."

The piece was carefully sighted.

The launch was barely three hundred feet away.

Dash Dare saw the move.

"Steer to one side, quick!"

The launch was thrown out of her course.

Bang!

The gun went off with a loud report.

The bits of iron flew out in a large circle and one of the policemen was seriously injured.

Dash and the others escaped.

The tug and launch went on, but the latter had lost her headway.

Besides that the captain was scared, and time was lost in caring for the wounded man.

When at last the launch did resume her proper course it was plain to see that capture just then was out of the question.

The tug struck a bit of meadow land, and was run up almost clear of the lake.

The three rascals leaped from her deck to the land.

Crack! crack! crack!

A dozen shots rang out, but to those on the launch it looked as if nobody had been hit.

"The rascals have injured my boat!" growled the tug captain.

"I will see that every damage is paid for," said the great detective.

A second later the launch struck the shore, and Dash leaped out.

The three villains were making for a highway some distance away, and after them went the great New York detective.

One of the policemen followed, and so did Karney.

But it was Dash Dare alone who could keep up with the fleet-footed criminals.

The trio reached the highway.

They looked up and down anxiously.

Coming along the road was a man in a carriage to which was attached a fine team of horses.

To think with these men now was to act.

"The carriage!" cried Contrain. "Halt it!"

They ran down the road.

The driver of the turnout was taken completely by surprise.

At the command of Contrain he stopped his horses.

The three men leaped into the carriage.

"Out you go!" yelled Heiper.

"What—what does this mean?" gasped the astonished driver.

He was not even answered.

Heiper and Sandy Scott grabbed him up and flung him bodily into the dirt of the road.

In the meantime Contrain caught up the reins, and turned the carriage about.

Up went the whip and down it came, first on one horse, then on the other.

The team leaped forward with a mad bound, narrowly escaping trampling the owner of the rig to death.

Then down the road shot villains, horses and carriage.

Soon they were lost to sight in the dust.

Dash Dare reached the dazed and bewildered man and raised him up.

"Are you hurt?" he asked kindly.

"Who—who are they?" asked the man as he glared at Dash.

"Criminals. I am a United States officer in pursuit of them."

"It's a pity you didn't catch them before they tackled me."

"I was willing enough," smiled Dash. "Where can they go in that direction?"

"To a dozen different places. There are three branches to the road a mile long."

"Can I get a horse anywhere around here?"

"Nearest house is quite a distance back."

Dash's hopes fell.

It looked as if the rascals were going to get away, after all.

But just at that moment there came from the opposite direction a tandem bicycle, ridden by a young man and a young lady.

As the tandem came up the young lady gazed curiously at the man who had been pitched from the carriage.

"Why, pa, what has happened?" she burst out.

"Met with an accident?" put in the young man.

He was the girl's lover.

"Worse than an accident," grumbled the man.

And he gave the particulars.

"Supposing you and I go after the rascals?" said Dash Dare to the young man, eagerly.

"Can you ride?"

"Sure!"

"All right, I'm with you. Jennie, you'll have to get off, I'm afraid."

"I will stay with papa," said the girl. "Dick, take good care of yourself."

"I will."  
 "Bring back my turnout!" called the man. "Let that officer capture the men if he wants to."  
 Dash Dare took the seat the young lady vacated. Along the level road spun the tandem.  
 Both Dash and the young man pedaled with all their strength and speed.  
 In but a few minutes they came to a cross road. Not a carriage was in sight.  
 Dash examined the roadway.  
 "We'll go straight ahead," he said. "They didn't make any turn here."  
 Once again they went on.  
 "You're a dandy rider," said the young man, with a smile.  
 Dash was pushing him pretty strongly.  
 "We must be able to do almost everything in my line of work," was Dash's answer.  
 "You are a detective?"  
 "Yes."  
 No more passed between them for several minutes. Dash strained his eyes.  
 A carriage was in sight.  
 "Is that the one?" he asked of the young man.  
 The other took a long look.  
 "Yes."  
 "Then on we go!"  
 Slowly but surely the tandem riders gained upon the turnout ahead.  
 Evidently those in the carriage did not expect to be followed so soon, as they had allowed their horses to decrease their speed.  
 But suddenly Contrain looked back.  
 "The dickens!" he cried.  
 "What's up now?" exclaimed Heiper.  
 "Look!"  
 All three of the men sprang up and looked behind.  
 "That detective and a stranger on a double bicycle!" howled Sandy Scott.  
 "I've a good mind to plug him," said Contrain.  
 "Are they alone?"  
 "It seems so."  
 "I know a trick," said Scott suddenly.  
 "What's that?" asked Heiper.  
 "We'll run over them. I know just how to handle this team."  
 Before Contrain or Heiper could stop him Scott turned the team around.  
 Crack! down came the whip.  
 The horses were high-spirited and they leaped forward with a mad bound.  
 Then Scott guided them directly for the tandem.  
 "My heavens!" shrieked the young man.  
 "To the left!" commanded Dash Dare.  
 They tried to steer out of the way.  
 Too late!  
 Bang! crash!  
 The horses struck the tandem almost in the center. It was completely smashed and the young man went under the very hoofs of the team.  
 Dash made a quick leap.  
 He was knocked flat on his back, but that was all. Scott brought the team to a halt.  
 They were horribly cut, but the heartless wretch did not care for this.  
 The others glanced at the young man.  
 He lay in the dust, both eyes closed.  
 He was unconscious, but not dangerously injured.  
 Then they turned their attention to Dash Dare.  
 The plucky detective was struggling to his feet.  
 Heiper produced a sandbag.  
 With unerring aim he launched it forth at the great detective's head.  
 It struck Dash on the neck and he staggered forward and fell like a log.  
 He tried to rise, but could not. His head swam around and then his senses left him.  
 "Into the carriage with him!" cried Heiper.  
 He and Contrain sprang out.  
 Dash's form was thrown into the back of the turnout.  
 He was tied with straps, and gagged.  
 Then the team was turned about again and went on.  
 Three miles were covered.  
 Presently they reached the outskirts of Lakepoint.  
 "Is this the town?" asked Contrain.  
 "Yes," replied Heiper. "But we won't dare to drive in with this rig. Turn to your left."  
 The turn was made and they soon reached an old deserted barn.

Here Contrain and Scott waited with Dash Dare, while Heiper went off.  
 Half an hour slipped by.  
 It was growing dark.  
 Dash Dare came to his senses to find himself blindfolded. A bag had been placed over his head.  
 Soon Heiper returned with a close carriage.  
 The other team was turned loose on the road.  
 Then Dash was bundled into the new rig and driven to an ancient-looking building on the other side of town.  
 The building stood on the edge of Lake Michigan.  
 Years before the settlers in that vicinity had used it as a fort against the Indians.  
 Heiper owned the place and used it as one of the resorts of the counterfeiters.  
 Dash Dare was placed in an upper room which was strongly barred.  
 "I guess you won't get away just yet," said Contrain grimly, as he chained the great detective to the floor.  
 Dash Dare did not reply.  
 Contrain soon after joined Heiper, Scott and the keeper of the place downstairs.  
 "A boat is coming in," said the keeper while the crowd were having a quickly-cooked meal. "See the signal?"  
 He pointed out on the lake.  
 Far out was a large steam tug, showing a peculiar light.  
 The light lasted for several minutes and then went out.  
 The keeper of the old fort responded by burning a red and then a green light.  
 This meant that the coast was clear.  
 Soon the steam tug came up to the landing, making no more noise than was necessary.  
 Twelve men landed.  
 They were members of the Green Band, who had succeeded in escaping from Chicago.  
 With the crowd was also a woman.  
 It was Lurette Dondell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE SECRET REVEALED—THE CAPTURE—CONCLUSION.

THE arrival of the members of the Green Band was somewhat unexpected.  
 Yet Contrain, Heiper and the others were glad that so many had escaped the clutches of the law.  
 In a few minutes the counterfeiters, and those who assisted in passing the bogus money, were safely in the fort.  
 Then the tug passed down the lake in the direction of Manistee.  
 Contrain assisted Lurette Dondell to the most comfortable room in the old fort.  
 All hands were hungry, and several turned in to prepare a big supper—something almost in the shape of a feast.  
 They felt that, for the present, at least, they were safe from the police.  
 "A good night's rest and we'll reorganize," said Crowley.  
 He was the head of the Chicago band.  
 While they were eating he consulted with Heiper.  
 "We had a hard job of it getting out of Chicago," he said. "That confounded detective's assistant, Rattler, got after us."  
 "What became of him?"  
 "Oh, we shook him off at last."  
 "I have Dash Dare safe here."  
 "You're fooling!"  
 "No; he is upstairs, chained to the floor."  
 "Good enough! Then we have nothing to fear—after he is out of the way."  
 "He won't escape me this time," growled Contrain.  
 Among the number who had arrived was Paulus Rarius.  
 The old Italian hunchback had never been at the fort before, but he made himself perfectly at home.  
 He agreed, if the band remained at the old fort, to put up an electric alarm, so they could not be surprised.  
 He grinned horribly when told that Dash Dare was a prisoner.  
 "I woulda love to torture heem to death!" he hissed.  
 "Mea makea heem suffair!"  
 "You bet!" laughed Sandy Scott.  
 After filling themselves, most of the members of the Green Band laid down.  
 They were overtired and slept like logs.  
 In the meanwhile Dash Dare heard the arrival of the tug, but could not make out what it meant.  
 He listened intently, but only a faint murmur of many voices reached his ears.



No food was given him, nor drink.  
He was left entirely alone.  
Two hours went by.  
Dash Dare was not idle.

After a great amount of twisting, he succeeded in getting his left hand in a secret pocket in the bosom of his shirt.

Here, secured by the starch and ironing, was a small but exceedingly sharp and hard file.

He tore the file from its fastening and began to work away at the chains which bound him.

It was slow work, but one by one the iron bands about his wrists were severed.

At last he was free.

From another pocket in his back he brought forth a small but first-class pistol.

With extreme caution he surveyed his surroundings.

A narrow stairway led from the ground floor to this room above.

Below were eight apartments, all in a row.

The stairs led into the center one, which was the main living room.

To go down into that would be useless.

Dash looked about him.

The place where he had been confined contained no windows, the ventilation being supplied through the gun holes on all sides.

He examined the roof.

It was built of heavy logs.

But one of the logs was loose, and soon he raised one end nearly a foot.

Through this opening he crawled.

The edge of the sloping roof was but twelve feet from the ground, and this distance he readily dropped.

He was now free.

He looked about him to see how the old fort was situated.

As he did so a figure crawled up close beside him.

Thinking a spy was at hand, Dash seized the man and bore him to the ground.

A moment later he released his hold, and silently the pair withdrew from the vicinity of the counterfeiters' resort.

"Dash!"

"How did you get up here, Rattler?" asked the great detective, in a whisper.

"I came up from Chicago on their tug. Got a free passage in the coal bunker."

"Then they are in the fort?"

"Twelve of them, or more, are. We got several prisoners."

"Where is their tug?"

"Down at the town."

"I see. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what to do. Go to town and get every policeman to be found."

"I will."

"Tell them they will be well rewarded if they will aid us in capturing this whole gang."

"All right."

"Don't lose a minute more than you can help."

"I won't. What are you going to do?"

"Keep watch. If they attempt to move away, I will pin instructions on a bit of paper to yonder tree."

"I understand. By the way, Lurette Dondell is with the men."

"I am glad to hear it."

Rattler made off, and Dash Dare returned to the vicinity of the old fort.

He was extremely cautious in his movements, as he knew the members of the Green Band must have somebody on guard.

He walked from one side of the building to the other.

Suddenly he almost stumbled on a man lying behind a clump of bushes.

It was a guard, who crouched with pistol drawn.

"Who are you?" cried the man, in alarm.

"It's all right!" laughed Dash.

As he spoke he came up closer.

Whack!

The pistol flew up into the air, and clapping his hand over the man's mouth, Dash bore him to the earth.

The struggle was of short duration.

Dash Dare was taking no chances, and when the man began to struggle, hit him a blow between the eyes that fairly knocked him out.

Then the great detective dragged him some distance away and bound and gagged him.

The coast was now clear, for there were no more guards on land, although one was out in a rowboat on the lake.

Cautiously Dash approached the row of windows.

The curtains were drawn, but the windows were open to admit the fresh air.

From one of the apartments came the voices of Lurette Dondell, Palo Contrain and Heiper.

Evidently they considered themselves safe, for they talked freely of their plans.

"We can settle down in San Francisco all right enough," Heiper was saying. "This little flip up won't destroy the band by any means."

"Of course not," put in Contrain. "We must reorganize, and Lurette can be our queen."

"I guess I worked hard enough for it," said the woman.

"Didn't I put that stuff on the bouquet that killed Clara Whitson?"

"Are you sure she knew about the band?" asked Heiper.

"Of course she did," said Contrain. "Didn't she threaten to expose me? That's the reason I went to old Rarius."

"He's a relative, isn't he?"

"Yes—a long way off."

"Well, how is it you cast the suspicion on Holloway?" asked Heiper.

"I wanted to clear myself."

"He wanted to get square because Holloway used to be his rival when he was sweet on that Whitson girl," laughed Lurette Dondell.

"I wasn't sweet on her," growled Contrain.

But his manner showed that he was not telling the strict truth.

"Never mind, Palo," smiled Heiper. "You marry Lurette, and it will be all right."

"If I'll have him," put in the woman, but she showed that behind it all she thought a good deal of her companion in crime.

"By the way, something was said about you marrying a woman up in Middletown, New York," went on Heiper.

"She can't prove it."

"Why?"

"All the witnesses are dead," put in Lurette. "The minister died, and then Palo finished the servant girl who knew about it—"

"And got you to finish the actress," laughed Heiper.

"Say, Lurette, I would be afraid of him."

"I am afraid of no man!" cried the woman.

"Whatever I've done, I'll never harm Lurette," said Palo Contrain. "I know she will—"

Contrain got no farther.

Rapid footsteps beneath the window were heard.

"Boys, a spy!"

"Where?"

"Out here. Quick!"

"Catch him!"

"Kill him!"

"He must never escape!"

In a minute, as if by magic, the inmates of the old fort were in alarm.

Lights flashed in every room, and the members of the Green Band prepared to fight, if necessary.

The relief guard had come up behind Dash Dare, and taken the great detective somewhat by surprise.

But he reckoned without his host when he tackled the great detective.

Like lightning Dash threw him down.

In a moment more the fellow was disarmed.

Dash started to fall back to the bushes, but it was too late.

A dozen men came pouring out of the old fort, and he was immediately surrounded.

"Shoot him!"

A dozen guns and pistols flashed in the light of as many lanterns.

It looked as if Dash Dare would be murdered ere aid could reach him.

He sprang back.

Crack! bang! crack!

He fired and so did several of his opponents.

Dash was unharmed, but one of the members of the Green Band was stretched lifeless on the grass.

Then Contrain, Rarius and Heiper joined the crowd.

"Stab him! Tear outa hees hearta!" screamed the hunchback.

With a long knife he rushed at Dash Dare.

He took two steps, and they were his last.

Dash's pistol spoke once more and the electric wizard and fiend dropped with a bullet through his brain.

"He has killed Rarius!"

"At him, men!" yelled Contrain.  
 "The detective!" shouted Larette Dondell, from the window.  
 And then she urged the men to go at Dash Dare.  
 But now a score of forms appeared on horseback.  
 They were policemen and others, led by the trusty Rattler.  
 "This way!" shouted Dash. "Surround the fort, and don't let a man escape—or the woman! Shoot to kill if they try to run!"  
 "Put out your lights!" cried Heiper. "They are too many for us."  
 Every lantern was quickly extinguished.  
 But this did the counterfeiters no good, as several of the police were provided with cans of colored fire, procured at the last moment at the town drug store.  
 The colored fire, when ignited, made all as bright as day.  
 The promise of a big reward had its full effect.  
 Not a man of the counterfeiters was allowed to escape.  
 Rattler captured Heiper and Sandy Scott, and Dash Dare made a prisoner of Contrain, and also caught Larette Dondell.  
 The woman fought furiously, showing how much she was in earnest.  
 When the fight was over the field looked as if a regular battle had taken place.  
 Those of the band who were not too seriously wounded were made prisoners. They numbered nine and were all

lodged in the town jail. The wounded were taken to a hospital in Grenley.

On the following day the news of the important capture was telegraphed all over the United States.

The daily papers were loud in their praise of Dash Dare and Rattler.

When Ziegler, the New York ward detective, heard of what had been done, and that Charles Halloway was innocent, he felt sick all over, as the saying is, and had not a word to say.

Larette Dondell was tried for the murder of Clara Whitson, but committed suicide before the case could be concluded.

Palo Contrain tried to escape while on his way East from Michigan, and was shot and killed by the deputy who had him in charge.

All the other members of the notorious Green Band are now in prison, serving sentences of various lengths.

Nell Contrain, or rather Nell Force, for she has resumed her maiden name, now makes her home with her friend, Mrs. Downes. She has a warm friend in Dash Dare.

Charles Halloway has returned to Buffalo. His uncle has forgiven him for having married in secret. The tragedy took much of the nonsense out of the young man, and now he bids fair to become one of the smartest lawyers in the country.

But although he may be smart, his smartness will never equal that of the man who saved him from electrocution, Dash Dare, the world-famous detective.

[THE END.]

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