

# **Dr. Night**

## **Dr. Night Trilogy, #1**

**by Aidan de Brune, 1879-1946**

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## Chapter I

ROBERT HARDY dropped off the tram at the end of Elizabeth Street and walked sharply up to the Detective Offices at the corner of Hunter and Phillip Streets, Sydney. Passing the Inquiry Office, he turned down a dark passage and hailed outside a door marked "Superintendent of Detectives." Listening a moment he knocked and entered.

A heavily-built man with it strong square face, looked up and nodded. Then he turned again to his task of signing a batch of documents. This completed, he bunched the papers, and, placing them in a wire basket, sat back and looked inquiringly at his visitor. Without a word, Hardy passed a copy of the *Morning Mirror* across the desk, and indicated a paragraph with a heavy blue pencil mark.

"What's the joke, Dixon?" he asked abruptly.

"That came into the office last night by the night roundsman, if the chief sub. hadn't known that he was an unimaginative, stolid reporter who couldn't fix a story on anything but a real happening, it'd have been turned down.'

"And you saw the story in the paragraph, Hardy?" asked Superintendent Dixon of the Mirror's star reporter, smiling. "All I can see in it is one of the peculiar little happenings that frequently amuse our Darlinghurst men."

"You wouldn't be sitting in that chair if that is all you see in that paragraph," answered Hardy. "But I suspect a lot. In my office I have a map of Sydney, and I have marked a blue pencil line around the Darlinghurst and Potts Point districts. Somewhere within that area is a story I want."

"You want that story from me?" inquired the Superintendent with a yawn.

"Wanting and getting are two different things," observed Hardy. "I get from you just what I can pry out by having a better knowledge of the story under discussion than the D.O."

"You are at the beginning of wisdom," said Dixon gravely. "I am going to have great hopes of you, Hardy."

"Good of you, but we'll can that stuff," retorted the reporter. "Here's this yarn, with a story behind it. On the face of it, it's more than queer—improbable, if you like."

He spread the newspaper on the desk and jabbed the paragraph with a stubby forefinger.

"A woman walks into Darlinghurst. Police Station last night, about eight o'clock and tells the Sergeant in charge that there have been mysterious happenings around her house during the past week. When the Sergeant asks questions, she shuts up. Professes she has nothing to say. All she wants is that the men on the beat he required to move on anyone found loitering about the vicinity of her house."

"Not much to worry the brains of the *Mirror* special Investigator," the superintendent observed, smiling. At the same time he keenly watched the younger man from beneath his heavy brows.

"I got some more dope this morning," retorted Hardy quickly. "Went to Darlinghurst and saw the register. The woman's name is *Matthews*. She lives in a flat at Western Street, Darlinghurst. Has three children, a girl about twenty years of age, named Clarice. Nothing of a beauty, but said to be a clever stenographer, employed at one of the big insurance offices."

"Exhibit B?" queried Dixon, quietly. "You're right as to Exhibit A."

"Exhibit B is the limit," replied the newspaper man. "It is a long, lean, scraggy youth, a year younger than the girl. Runs with one of the gun gangs at Darlinghurst. Never been in the hands of the police, but owes that to the fact that his mother has a small private income, sufficient to keep the wolf from the door. Name *Bill* or *William*, if you want to be virtuous with your English. Disappeared lately, after some dispute with the members of the push he favours."

"Again I must, express my admiration for your industry," murmured Dixon. "Let me see, it is not quite half past ten in the morning and you appear to have the history of three quarters of this interesting family."

"I'm go to the other quarter," Hardy smiled. "Exhibit C is somewhat on a pattern with Exhibit B. Knocks about the city a bit here and there. Something of a pimp for politicians; bit of a small town politician himself; gets in where he can and somehow appears to turn in a bit of dough, at times."

"When I have a spare half hour, I must certainly call at the *Mirror* Office and congratulate Mr. Thomas—"

"I wouldn't," interrupted Hardy, with a grin. "Might put the Chief in mind that there is a Police Department in Sydney. He is fond of leaders on The Grossly Inept Methods of—"

Dixon threw up his hands with a gesture of surrender.

"I give in," he exclaimed. "I have a great admiration for your respected Chief, but when he gets the grouch on the best police force in the world, I absolutely come to loathe him."

"Now that you have had your breakfast of good red herrings," observed Hardy. "We'll get back to the story."

"Can you continue it in your next?" asked the superintendent, gravely.

"No necessity." Hardy drew a notebook from his pocket and placed it on the table. "The lady is fond of talking—except, apparently, to the police. She told a neighbour all about it, just before she went down to the police station."

"The next Superintendent of Detectives should certainly be journalistically trained," observed Dixon, to space.

"Won't hurt him," grunted Hardy. "Here it is. Just after dark on the night in question, someone rang the Matthews' electric bell. When Mrs. Matthews answered the door a man inquired for 'Bill'. Mrs. Matthews answered she believed her son and heir had taken a trip to Melbourne. The visitor was hard to convince, but ultimately accepted the statement. An hour afterwards Clarice Matthews was called to the door by a ring, and another man inquired for brother Bill. The same answer was returned and he left."

"There should be at least a column spread in that," said the superintendent, mildly. "You certainly have worked to some purpose, Bob."

"Let me finish. An hour later, Albert—that's Exhibit C—came home. He said that he had been stopped by two men who wanted to know where Bill was. He had replied that, so far as he knew, Bill was in Melbourne. The men then wanted to come in with him and search Bill's room, claiming that he had some stuff belonging to them. Albert disagreed with the plan, and managed to get home, very shaken in nerves. A few minutes later a shot was fired at the house, breaking one of the windows, and embedding itself in the ceiling."

The superintendent sat upright, quickly.

"Are you going to use that, Bob?"

"Why not!"

"I think I shall have to have that conversation with Mr. Thomas."

"He will tell you to go to—"

"He will be rude, certainly. But then, he has some common sense, a form of grey matter that appears to be lacking—"

"—in his subordinates," finished Hardy, with a broad grin. "Still, a promise to let a subordinate, named Hardy in on the ground floor of the game, might take the place of the lacking grey matter."

"I understand." Superintendent Dixon sat back in his chair and nibbled at the end of his pencil. "The trouble in making such a deal is that I have nothing to offer in return."

"In that case—"

"Look here, Bob." The superintendent leaned forward and pointed his pencil at the journalist. "The truth is, that you have given me information that has not yet come into this office. When I had the report from Darlinghurst this morning, I sent a couple of men out to make inquiries. They have not yet reported. Another time, boy, make your bargain before you give your information away."

"All right, superintendent." Hardy rose from his chair, abruptly, and walked to the door. "It'll make a nice front-page story, as it stands."

Illustration:

„All right, Superintendent. It'll make a nice front-page story as it stands.“

"If your editor will publish it. I fear I shall have to call him on the phone, as I am too busy to go round today."

Hardy came to a sudden halt. He was well aware that his newspaper was, at the time, at peace with the Detective Offices. In these circumstances, his editor would think twice before publishing any story the superintendent placed a veto on. Superintendent Dixon watched Hardy's face with interest. For a moment the journalist remained with the handle of the door in his hand. Then, he turned and walked back to his chair.

"I should bring the goods to you and that you would deal straight."

"I'm not going to play otherwise, boy," replied Dixon with a smile. "What you published last night didn't matter. More than probable your man got it from the sergeant at the desk. What you tell me this morning places a different complexion on the matter."

"You think there is a big story behind this?" asked Hardy, eagerly.

"There is something worth inquiring into," said the superintendent cautiously. "You shall have the story, boy. But, you will have to wait for it."

"Very well, then," said Hardy, after a moment's thought. "I'll see the chief and get him to let me go after it."

"That will suit me, Bob," answered the superintendent; "Of course the old agreement stands. Bring what you get to me and I'll see you get first talk for publication."

Outside the Detective Offices Hardy stood for some minutes undecided as to his next course of action. He had six hours before he could hope to see Alphonzo Thomas, the Editor of the *Mirror*. True, he could have found the day editor in his room, but he was convinced the story he had to tell was of such Importance that only the chief could deal with it.

As he was turning away from the building, a man touched him on the shoulder. "Looking for a story, Bob?"

"Have you anything, Frost?" asked Hardy, eagerly, recognising in the speaker one of the headquarters' detective-inspectors.

"Doing anything?" asked Frost.

"Nothing that will not keep," replied the journalist, truthfully.

"Wait for me, then," said the Inspector, turning to ascend the steps. "There's something happened out at the Point you may get a story out of."

## Chapter II

INSPECTOR FROST did not remain in Police Headquarters many minutes. On rejoining Hardy he suggested an adjournment to the nearest café.

"A man was found in Darlington Road this morning, in an unconscious condition," he commenced, with a preface.

"Nothing unusual for that particular part of Sydney," observed Hardy. "I understand police records state there are more sly-grog shops in Darlinghurst than in all the other districts of Sydney combined."

The Inspector took no notice of the newspaper man's remarks. From an inner pocket he produced a few papers and laid them on the marble topped table.

"There are one or two things about this case that may interest you, Hardy," continued Frost. "There was little on the man. To be exact, four shillings in silver and three pennies. A two-bladed knife showing signs of hard usage. A cheap watch and silver change, both well worn. Two pieces of string, one of them tied with several peculiar knots, and one letter."

"Where is the man?" asked Hardy.

"At the Sydney Hospital," replied the Inspector; "He has not recovered consciousness and the doctors do not seem to know what is the matter with him. At all events, they won't tell, if they do know."

"Anything strange about his clothing?" asked the journalist.

"A cheap blue suit, well worn, made by Dent and Sons, a soft hat, with the maker's name torn out. Striped shirt, low, turned down collar and black knotted tie. Brown shoes, well worn at the heels, and showing signs of having been half-soled several times, laces broken and joined, one mended with a piece of string. Undergarments cheap and almost in rags."

"Any body marks?"

"None whatever. A few moles and minor scars but nothing distinctive. I had finger prints taken and submitted to the office. Was just going to see if they had produced results when I met you. They know nothing of him, so he's never been through our hands."

"Then, he is nothing but one of the usual finds. Appears to me, Frost, you are trying to make a lot out of one of the common incidents of police work. Do you mean to tell me that this is the first man in a state of unconsciousness the police of Sydney have found?"

"There jumps the journalist to unconsidered conclusions," retorted the Inspector. "There is one uncommon matter and I have refrained from mentioning it so far. In fact, there are two uncommon features in the case."

"One at a time, please."

"First, the man was unconscious. That, itself is not unusual, but it is remarkable that the doctor at the hospital does not seem to be able to give an explanation for his condition."

"Go on."

"The second is this letter." The Inspector drew an envelope from his pocket, and, extracting a piece of paper, passed the envelope over to Hardy. It was a common, commercial envelope, with the address written in pencil thereon. It was addressed to "Mr. Carl Humberson, 133 Cascade Street. Darlinghurst."

"I presume you suggest that Mr. Carl Humberson does not live at that address," remarked Hardy.

"I had the pleasure of interviewing Mr. Carl Humberson," replied the detective. "He was good enough to prove, conclusively, that he had never received the letter. Certainly, his appearance is totally different from the man we found."

"What of the contents?" asked Hardy stretching his hand across the table. Frost gave him a half sheet of note paper, badly torn, and containing the lower portion of a letter. It read:

*...that when you receive this, my patience is at an end. I have tried to do my best for you, but you are not only disobedient but have placed me in great danger by your reckless disregard of my instructions. You must be aware of the penalty you are incurring by this behaviour. I have warned you before and again tell you, that my patience is exhausted. In three days you will meet your punishment—the punishment I have meted out to others you know of.*

—Dr. Night.

"Dr. Night" Hardy looked across at the Inspector, "I have never heard of this man. Have you looked him up, Frost?"

"There is no person of that name on the British Medical Association's register," stated the Inspector positively. "There is not a Dr. Night known to any religion, medical or scientific association or society in Australia, nor, so far as I can discover, in the world."

"That seems pretty conclusive," laughed the journalist. "The question seems to be: who, and what, is Dr. Night?"

"And, when we have answered that question I want to know what powers he possesses to punish his enemies to the very date, and apparently from a distance."

"What, you mean?" The Inspector picked up the envelope and pointed to some faint pencil marks at one corner. They indicated a date three days previous.

"Dr. Night appears to be a very interesting gentleman," observed Hardy. "Anyone would be interesting who could produce a state of coma that is unrecognisable by the medical profession and also produce that coma from a distance; for I suppose we may presume that Mr. Carl Humberson had, after receiving that letter, conceived a strong distaste for the worthy doctor's company."

"That is your opinion, eh?" asked Frost.

"It is your's too," challenged Hardy. "Now, tell me what you want me to do. Publish this?"

He indicated the letter on the table. "It will make a fair story, but not so good as the one I took to Dixon this morning, and got wrecked."

Frost was inquisitive and Hardy recounted the Matthews story, very much as he had told to Superintendent Dixon.

"I wonder if there is any connection?" mused Frost.

"Improbable, I should think. The only connecting link I can find is that the two matters occurred within the danger zone."

Frost laughed at Hardy's remark. It was a time worn joke that Hardy attributed all the ills from which Sydney suffered to the Darlinghurst area.

"You may laugh as you will," retorted the journalist, carelessly. "One of these days you will find that only a spring cleaning in Darlinghurst will prevent a wave of crime sweeping Sydney, as it has lately swept Melbourne."

Hardy took a careful copy of the letter and envelope and went down to the *Mirror* Office. There he had a long interview with the day editor and then out to lunch. On

returning to the newspaper offices he found a message waiting for him, to ring up Inspector Frost, at the Detective offices.

Obtaining the connection he had to wait some time as the detective was engaged with the Commissioner of Police. At last Frost rang up the newspaper.

"He's dead," announced Frost briefly, immediately he heard the journalist's voice.

"Have the doctors learned anything more?" asked Hardy.

"If they have, they're darned close about it," replied the Inspector. "Anyway you can write it down as *murder*."

"Murder?"

"Sure thing." Frost's voice sounded puzzled over the phone. "There's not a scratch or bruise on him, and so far as the doctors can tell there's no sign of poison. Yet, I'll stake my life that someone hangs for it."

When he had handed in his copy, Hardy walked up to Elizabeth Street and caught a Darlington tram. A call at the Police Station resulted in the information that Mrs. Matthews was still disinclined to talk. The journalist then turned back towards the city and called on police headquarters. Superintendent Dixon and Inspector Frost were both out, and the office men had but a general knowledge of the two happenings.

The journalist then went to the city mortuary and was allowed to view the dead body.

For some time he examined the corpse, closely, but could find no clue of consequence. There was some trouble in obtaining permission to view the dead man's clothing, but, at length, they were produced. Inch by inch, the journalist went over the well-worn garments. The suit was badly crumpled and very dirty. The underclothing was soiled and ragged. The hat was broken and discoloured.

## Chapter III

THE quest appeared hopeless, yet Hardy persevered. He was relying on a peculiar instinct that seemed to lead him on. So far as he could see the clothing contained no clue to the mysterious death or the owner. Again and again, with a patience almost hopeless, he held up for inspection the various articles.

Illustration:

Somewhere in that tumbled heap of clothing  
lay the clue he was seeking.

Then, as he dropped the trousers carelessly on the table he found his first clue. The trousers were cuffed, and as they fell, a few grains of white powder sifted from the fold. Waiting until the attendant had wandered to another part of the room. Hardy cut the stitching and turned down the cloth. There lay a few grains of white powder. The journalist sifted them into an old envelope.



The second leg of the garment yielded a few more grains and its small piece of glass. Pocketing his find, Hardy left the mortuary and went down to the newspaper offices. Mr. Thomas had just arrived and the star man sought an immediate interview.

Alphonzo Thomas managing editor of the *Morning Mirror* was a short, fair man, partially bald, but wearing, with evident pride, a large light-brown moustache which he continually pulled when excited or disturbed. Hardy placed the two cases he had investigated before his editor.

To the journalist, the mystery of Mrs. Matthews and her family and informal callers appeared the most intriguing. The dead man at the Sydney morgue might yield a story, possibly a good one, when the identity of Dr. Night was discovered.

For nearly an hour the two men discussed the stories, and finally Alphonse Thomas resolved that, while neither story warranted the journalist devoting the whole of his time to it, he should for the next few days, hold a roving commission on the two. This arrangement suited Hardy. Somewhere in the two mysteries lay a good story.

As Hardy was leaving the room, his telephone bell rang. Thomas picked up the receiver and then called to Hardy. "Phone for you, Rob. Switched through to here, as it was said to be a hurry call."

The young man took the receiver. "Hullo! Hardy, of the *Mirror*, speaking."

"Robert Hardy, of the *Morning Mirror*?" queried a very precise male voice. "I believe, Mr. Hardy, that you are investigating the case of the man found unconscious in Darlinghurst Road, last night?"

"Yes, Who's speaking? What do you know?"

"I will answer your last question first. Mr. Hardy. I know a great deal of the matter. I am of the opinion you have undertaken an investigation beyond your capabilities."

"Really?" All Hardy's fighting instincts were aroused at the remark. "May I ask the name of my critic?"

"Before I say more," replied the man. "I would like to offer you a word of warning. I believe you found a piece of a letter enclosed in an envelope in the pocket of the unconscious man. Is that not so?"

"The police found a letter in the pocket of the man," replied the journalist, resisting an impulse to hang up the receiver. "You are in error in referring to the 'unconscious man.' He is dead."

"I regret the mistake, Mr. Hardy, I should have spoken of the dead man. May I inquire the time of his death?"

"About noon today. The detective in charge of the case will no doubt give you the exact time. Now, may I again ask your name, and where I can see you? From your remarks you appear to possess a lot of interesting information about this dead man."

"Dear me." The tone was quite regretful. "The drug should have worked earlier. I calculated that he would die not later than six o'clock this morning."

"Who the devil are you? Haven't you got a name?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hardy. I should have given you my name at the commencement of the conversation. It was pure forgetfulness on my part. Now, let

me warn you to keep out of the affair, if you value your—er—health. I cannot have impertinent newspaper men interfering in my affairs. My name is Dr. Night."

Then came the sharp click of the receiver being hung on the hook. For a moment Hardy stood, staring, at the instrument before him. Then he seized the lever and jerked it viciously.

"Switch speaking," came the calm voice of the *Mirror's* operator.

"Find out the number and place of the person who has just been speaking to me. Hurry up; it's urgent!"

Hardy turned to face his chief. Mr. Thomas was sealed well back in his chair, calmly watching the excited journalist.

"Do you know who that was?" exclaimed Hardy. "That was Dr. Night, and he had the infernal check to tell me to keep off the Darlington Road case."

If the journalist had expected sympathy or amazement from the *Mirror's* editor, he was mistaken. Thomas grinned broadly at the excited man for a moment, and then turned to his desk.

"Well, get him, Hardy. It's your job."

Hardy knew his editor well enough to realise that in those few words lay his course of action. Thomas was leaving the hunt for Dr. Night in his hands. He would be able to call for all the help he wanted, but above all, it was up to him to "get him" or give a very complete and satisfactory explanation for a failure.

For the next half-hour the journalist sat at the end of the telephone line. From exchange he received the information that the call had been put through from a public booth, he had expected that. Dr. Night would never have been foolish enough to use an instrument through which he might be traced. Getting through to the Superintendent of the city exchange, Hardy requested that every departmental effort should be made to trace the call and the caller. Then he rang police headquarters to find that Superintendent Dixon and Inspector Frost had left for the night.

The desk man, once assured of the urgency of the business, promised to get in touch with Inspector Frost and ask him to telephone Mr. Thomas. Outside the *Mirror* offices Hardy jumped into a taxi and went down to the city exchange. There the night superintendent was awaiting him with the information that the call had originated through the William Street exchange.

Hearing a message for the inspector the journalist drove down to William Street. Here he was informed that the call had been booked at 7.25 p.m., and originated at its public call box attached to the Oxford Street post office. Street, post office. Busy as the last hour had been, Hardy had constructed a mental picture of the mysterious Dr. Night.

A man who spoke so precisely would certainly be precise in his dress. Following a sub-conscious line of reasoning the journalist constructed a man of middle height, pale, aesthetic features, grey hair and eyebrows, and, being an indoor man, wearing a dark overcoat and hat, probably grey.

Had he been asked why he pictured Dr. Night in this manner, the journalist could not have given a satisfactory reply.

The picture had come into his mind during the brief telephone communication. Dr. Night was a "grey" man, and although Hardy laughed at himself for the thought, the greyness persisted.

Arriving at Oxford Street post office, Hardy found it closed for the night. The three telephone booths stood empty and dark, and the few loungers about could not remember any person answering to the description the journalist had constructed for Dr. Night.

Several of the surrounding shops were open and Hardy started a systematic inquiry of the attendants and customers, but with no success. Many persons, said to have been seen using the telephone booth, were carefully described by people questioned, but in no one case did the description appear to warrant investigation.

Hardy was almost discouraged when the Inspector arrived, somewhat excited, at the prospect of getting on the trail of the one man who appeared to be able to explain the death of the mystery man of Darlington Road. The journalist explained the steps he had taken to trace the telephone message, and then spoke of the mental picture he had drawn of Dr. Night. As he had expected, the detective laughed heartily at the idea.

## Chapter IV

"NOTHING to do here," grumbled Frost, after he had sharply questioned one or two of the loungers about the Post Office corner. "We'll get up to the station and see if they have anything new on the two affairs to report."

At the Police Station the Sergeant in charge could tell them nothing now on the matters of Mrs. Matthews and the mystery man of Darlington Road. They stood talking to him for some time.

Just as they were about to leave, the constable who had been relieved from duty in Oxford St. walked in.

"Seen a man, this evening in Oxford Street between seven o'clock and a quarter to eight, near the Post Office?" asked Frost, with a wink at the man at the desk. "Middle height, very grey, thin features, greyish skin, looked like a doctor or a university professor. Wore a dark overcoat and a dark hat, constable?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, promptly. "Soon after seven o'clock a man answering to that description crossed Oxford Street at the Crown Street intersection. Appeared somewhat absent-minded. Nearly run over by one of them buses."

"What?" shouted the inspector, staring at the man in amazement, with a puzzled glance at the Sergeant.

"Come from up near the old gaol. Saw him under a light standard. Heavy, grey eyebrows and sort of peculiar eyes. Seemed to look through you, he did is he wanted, sir?"

Frost hung on to the desk, a bewildered look in his eyes. The sergeant was looking at the constable as if he had never seen him before. Hardy felt a glow of satisfaction at the useful work his *hunch* had put in, but was very puzzled at the outcome.

"You've broke it this time, man," gasped Frost at length. "Want him? I'd have given a year's seniority to have been alongside you. That was Dr. Night."

"Dr. who, sir," asked the bewildered constable. "There's nothing on the book about him, sir."

"There will, be tomorrow, constable," answered Frost grimly. "I want a talk with that bird and I want it badly. You're the only one of us who has seen him. If, you can pick him up it'll be as good as a stripe to you."

For a full half hour Frost questioned the constable and Hardy as to the personality of the man seen in Oxford Street, and the voice on the telephone. At the end of the time he had a fairly accurate description of the person supposed to be Dr. Night. This was immediately placed on the book and telephoned to all the police stations around Sydney. The person described was to be detained until Frost had had an opportunity of questioning him.

"Suppose I am going a bit far," commented the Inspector, as he and the journalist left the police station. "But you've given me a jolt this evening, Bob. Lord, you're lost in a newspaper office if you can't see a man at the other end of a telephone line."

"It may not be Dr. Night," said Hardy thoughtfully.

"It may not, and it may be," retorted Frost. "I'm not taking chances. I want a word with that bird—and I want it bad."

For some minutes Frost strode down Oxford Street, in silence. At the junction with Liverpool Street he halted.

"There's nothing more we can do to-night," he said slowly. "I'm getting home, Bob. Suppose you'll do the same. You've done a good day's work, my boy, and you've given at least one member of the New South Wales police department a bigger jolt than half a dozen questions in Parliament, could have done."

Hardy had stepped off the pavement to board a Circular Quay tram when the detective called him back.

"By the way Bob. You're sitting on the inside of this game. Mind your steps in that paper of yours. I know you like sensation and the way things are moving it looks as if you'll get plenty. Don't spoil things by too much talk at the moment. There's a right time to open out, you know."

Nodding assent, Hardy swung on to the tram and went down to the *Mirror* Office to report. There he found that orders had been left on the board for him to report direct to the editor.

Thomas looked up expectantly as Hardy entered his room. In a few words the journalist reviewed the night's happenings, and finished with Frost's warning against premature publication of the story. Thomas frowned at the warning and sat for some moments tugging at his moustache.

"Suppose we'll have to let the gist of the story pass tonight." he said, at length. "I don't want to get upsides with the police at present. It's a good story, Hardy, and you appear to be on the inside running. Yes, it'll keep. You'd better sign off now. You're on this story until I call you off."

The managing editor turned to his work. Hardy sat quid. In a minute Thomas looked up, inquiringly.

"Until the story is cleared up?" asked Hardy stolidly.

"Of course!" Thomas spoke impatiently. "I'm not likely to take you off anything as good as this looks. Good night, lad."

## Chapter V

HARDY searched the next morning's newspapers eagerly. Only the *Mirror* contained a "starred story" of the mystery man of Darlington Road. The Journalist's story of the torn letter from Dr. Night was a scoop.

When he arrived at the newspaper office he found a note from Thomas in the rack asking him to bring Inspector Frost to the editor's room that afternoon at one o'clock. A scribbled postscript wished the journalist luck on the day's hunting, and instructed him to place his copy in the editor's "private copy" basket.

The newspaperman was somewhat of a loss how to proceed on the double inquiry. Mrs. Matthews was, for some reason, disinclined to give any further reason for her complaints to the police: the search for the "grey" man would now be taken in hand seriously by the police.

One point remained; the little packet of white powder and broken glass he had taken from the cuffs of the dead man's trousers.

Leaving the newspaper office, Hardy walked down to the corner of Pitt and King Streets, and entered the chemists shop of Masters Bros. & Co.

A tall, thin man, with a worn, clean shaven face, came from behind the prescription desk to meet him.

"Bad nights, again?" asked Hardy, with a rapid glance at his friend's face. "Neuritis will kill you, Ted."

"It's hell," answered Ted Chaffers, the manager of the shop. "Enough to drive one to drink or drugs."

"It's the latter I've come to see you about," remarked the newspaper man, casually.

"Lord, man! You've never taken to the dope?" asked Chaffers, with real concern in his voice.

"Not yet," answered Hardy, with a quiet smile. "One never knows what's in store for a newspaperman. Some of our assignments are enough to drive anyone to it. Have it look at this and tell me what you make of it."

Ted Chaffers took the packet behind the desk. In a couple of minutes he returned, the paper open in his hand.

"Dope, Bob. Where did you get it? There's a lot of dirt and fluff mixed up with it. More of your mystery work?"

"You've hit it, Ted. That stuff came out of the cuffs of the trousers of the man found dying in Darlington Road. Of course, this is confidential. I'm telling you so that you may be able to identify it, if necessary."

"Then the man was a cocaine addict," answered Chaffers, positively. "This is not the stuff you get at a reputable chemist. It's full of fake, but there's enough *snow* there to satisfy an addict."

"What about the piece of glass?" asked Hardy, picking up the fragment, from the paper.

"Looks like a piece of one of the tubes this stuff is sold in," replied the chemist after a moment's examination. "I had a tube of the stuff in my hands the other

day. Man brought it in and wanted to sell it. I told him I would have nothing to do with the muck. It's not only impure, but it's dangerous to have on the premises. Yes, I'll swear this piece of glass came from a similar bottle."

The journalist had expected information of this nature.

Leaving the shop he walked up to the Sydney Hospital. There he asked to see Dr. Streatham, the medical superintendent.

"Another mystery story?" grinned the doctor, when Hardy was admitted to his room. "Perhaps I can guess. The *Mirror* made a sensation of the story of the man picked up in Darlington Road the night before last. Guess that's your business, Bob."

"I shall have to recommend you for a job at the Detective Office," drawled Hardy. "You doctors would make great investigators."

"We are investigators," replied the doctor, seriously. "We investigate humans when they are brought to us by disease, accident and death. I've never yet had the opportunity to investigate the brain of a newspaperman, but there's still time. It will be an interesting study."

"Not for the newspaper man," grinned Hardy. "Your guess counts one to you. I'm on the Darlington Road mystery. Now I'll have my guess. That man was a cocaine addict?"

"Good man. Where did you get it? I was going to ring up Frost and tell him that, among other things. Wondered why he never asked the question of me when he was here yesterday."

Hardy produced the packet of cocaine and dirt, and handed it to the doctor. "I got that out of the cuffs of the dead man's trousers," he explained. "Another little point against friend Frost, eh?"

The medical superintendent sifted the mixture about on the paper.

"Cocaine of a poor quality, much diluted with some foreign matter. I'll have to make a record of this, Hardy. In future, when a mystery man is brought into the hospital, I will have the cuffs of his trousers turned out, as well as his pockets."

"What of the glass, doctor?"

Dr. Streatham left the room to return shortly, holding a thin glass tube about two inches long and half-an-inch in diameter. "There's the whole article," he said, handing the tube to the journalist. "I got it off one of my patients about a month ago. There's cocaine in it—the stuff the runners sell."

Hardy held out his hand for the packet of dirt and cocaine the doctor had continued to hold, but Dr. Streatham shook his head.

"You'd better let me retain this, Bob," he said, significantly. "Strictly speaking, it belongs to the Crown and there might be awkward questions asked if it became known that you had it. I shall hand it to Frost the next time he comes to see me—that is, after I have made an analysis of the stuff. There may be something in this mixture that may lead to a determination of the cause of the man's death."

"Good enough, doctor. I shall expect you to let me have a copy of your notes on the analysis after you have informed the police."

Leaving the hospital the journalist went down to the Detective Office. Superintendent Dixon was not in his room, and Inspector Frost was engaged with the Commissioner. After a wait of quarter of an hour, the Inspector came down the

stairs and joined the journalist. Hardy gave him Thomas's message, and the detective promised to be at the *Mirror* offices at the time stated.

"I've been handed the Matthews matter to look into," remarked Frost at length, "You're interested in that, too? Brought the dope to the Superintendent, I'm told. Got a twist on it yet?"

"Only a *hunch*," answered Hardy. "There's no ground for the *hunch* so far as I can see. Yet I'm willing to stake a good bit on it."

"Go to it, Bob," laughed the inspector. "After your guess at Dr. Night yesterday, this office is willing to carefully consider your 'hunches.' I haven't recovered from the shock, yet."

"Mrs. Matthews and the mystery man are linked together in my mind."

"And—by Jove, Bob! I believe you've hit on something. I have some information that seems to bear out your theory."

"Police secrets, or share?" inquired Hardy. "I've some information, too. A little matter the police, in the person of Inspector Frost, appears to have overlooked."

"I'll risk it," grinned the detective. "Appears to me that you, and the police are fifty-fifty on this game. We'll sit it over a cup of coffee." A few minutes later the two men entered a café and seated themselves at a marble-topped table in a vacant corner.

"You blow first?" asked Frost.

"Don't mind. My 'hunch' is that we are in on a dope story. Yesterday I went down to the morgue to see the corpse. Fiddling about with the poor devil's clothing, I found cocaine in the cuffs of the trousers."

"Of all the—" Frost's face fell. "I missed a bet there. Got the stuff?"

"You can get it from Dr. Streatham, at the Sydney Hospital," replied Hardy. "He is making an analysis of the dirt. Says he will have it ready in a couple of days."

"Good move, Bob. Anything more?"

"A point I let slip, yesterday," confessed the journalist. "When I found the dirt from the cuff contained cocaine, I remembered a peculiar look in Mrs. Matthews' eyes. I am willing to stake that she is a cocaine addict, also. That's all there is in my packet, Frost."

"Not bad, Bob. As to Mrs. Matthews, I'd say that you were right. I had a talk to her this morning and noticed the same thing. But beyond that, I've got certain proof that we are correct in our surmise."

"Good."

"You know that she has three children. Seen them, Bob?"

"No. Guess they're on the same wicket, from what you say."

"They are. All three of them have the same look. To test the matter I've gone into the history of the family. Not much results yet, but enough to lead to a pretty story. You know of the elder boy?"

"Exhibit B?"

"Yes. The chief said that you had named him that. Well, Exhibit B, otherwise William Matthews, has disappeared."

"But William Matthews and the mystery man of Darlinghurst Road are not one and the same person," objected Hardy. "The mystery man is not a day under thirty-five and William Matthews is only about nineteen."

"There you slip," laughed Frost. "I have not tried to make out the two are identical. All that I have stated is that William Matthews has bolted."

"For what reason?"

"Again you beat me." Frost spread out his hands in a deprecating manner. "William Matthews is not the mystery man. But William Matthews has a history, and that history appears to link him up with the mystery man, if what you say about him is correct."

"I've had two experts on the dirt and they both say cocaine," stated Hardy. "I'll take their word for it."

Illustration:

"I've had two experts on the dirt and they both say cocaine," stated Hardy.

"Then here's William Matthews story," answered Frost. "He's been running dope between the importers and he salesmen. Collects the stuff, heaven knows where, and hands it over for the price agreed upon. Last lot, he made a bad break. Suppose he thought he was not getting enough out of it, so emptied out the tubes of dope and filled them up with a mixture of borax and sugar."

"Sweet youth!" murmured Hardy.

"Humph! The runners didn't think so. They found out the exchange and called on Matthews to hand over the goods. William wouldn't, or couldn't. The gang got nasty. William did a bolt and left his family to face the music. Gang went to the house and demanded William. He had disappeared, so they, tried to force the mother and children to come across. They wouldn't or couldn't. So the gang tried shooting."

"A fair explanation," observed Hardy. "How do you connect the mystery man?"

"My guess is that he is either one of his runners that Matthews served or he got wise as to who were the importers and tried to hold them up for the stuff."

"I think we'll say *importers*," suggested Hardy, with a smile of knowledge.

"How's that?" asked Frost.

The journalist drew a copy of that day's *Mirror* from his pocket and pointed to the 'star' article on the front page.

"Dr. Night," he quietly answered.

## Chapter VI

"I WANT to know why this man, Dr. Night, telephoned to Bob Hardy last night," asked Alphonzo Thomas. For over an hour Inspector Frost and Bob Hardy had sat in consultation with the managing editor of the *Mirror*. The two investigators had spoken at length on the parts of the quest they had dealt with, the sharp-witted editor of Sydney's leading morning newspaper questioning and probing.



Quite early in the conference it had been decided that the mystery man of Darlington Road was linked in some manner with Mrs. Matthews and her family and that, for the sake of convenience, the two stories could be dealt with as one.

Then Alphonzo Thomas had voiced the one question that had been in the minds of all three men from the beginning of the conversation.

"Dr. Night was betrayed by the letter in the pocket of the dead man," Hardy reminded his chief.

"That letter did not contain a distinct threat to murder," objected Thomas. "Had not Dr. Night betrayed himself by telephoning direct to Hardy, it would not have been difficult to link him up with this affair."

"He may have thought otherwise," observed Frost. "It is well known that criminals make the most simple mistakes. We police would not have a show against them, otherwise."

"I am in doubt as to the *simple* mistake, Frost," said Thomas sharply. "Take the case at your valuation. Dr. Night learns by some means that you have discovered this letter or part of a letter, on his person of the man he killed. In a fit of nerves, he telephones a threat to Hardy to try to prevent him investigating and publishing the story. Why telephone to Hardy? Why not telephone to you and warn you to drop the matter?"

"I am afraid he would have wasted the call fee, had he done so," laughed the detective.

"Why not think the same in reference to Hardy?" continued Thomas, "The *Mirror* men have a reputation for getting what they go after. Hardy has been in a few tight corners when engaged on investigations, but I have yet to observe signs of loss of nerve."

"Hardy had a lot of luck at the jump-off," admitted the detective. "I'm saying nothing against his work, but he got on the trail in a manner likely to induce a fit of nerves in any criminal."

"In that case, why did Dr. Night not only issue a warning, but convey to Hardy the definite information that he committed the murder. Further, he informed Hardy that the drug should have proved fatal at a certain time. In that case, there is a definite clue to the murderer."

"A small one, I'm afraid," interjected Hardy. "I asked Dr. Streatham if he knew of a drug that would kill without a sign at a definite time, between six and ten hours after it was administered and, as well, produce a state of coma between the time of its administration and death."

"What was his reply?" asked the detective inquisitively.

"He laughed," Hardy grinned broadly, as he answered.

"I consider that telephone message a challenge to the *Mirror*, and I am going to accept it as one," continued Thomas definitely. "Hardy, will you write your story from that point of view? Dr. Night has challenged the *Mirror* to keep out of the investigation, or to take the consequences. My answer is that the *Mirror* will hunt this man down until his history and deeds are laid bare to the public eye. Get that, Hardy? Good! You will, of course, consult with Inspector Frost as to what details are to be published and what kept back. All I want at the moment is to start the hue and cry."

The journalist rose from his seat and beckoned to the detective. As Hardy held the door open, Thomas continued: "There will be a directors' meeting this evening. I shall make it my business to be there and to ask the directors to take up the challenge of this very impertinent murderer, by offering a reward for his discovery. That's all, Hardy. Good afternoon, Inspector."

The next morning the contents bills of the *Mirror* announced the offer of a reward of £500 for information leading to the discovery and arrest of Dr. Night. Hardy's story, under a triple column, spread on the front page, told in crisp, clear sentences of the finding of the mystery man in Darlinghurst Road and his death. Then it dealt with this attack on Mrs. Matthews' house, linking the two mysteries together. In a large panel was starred the telephone conversation Hardy had with Dr. Night; the threat to keep out of the investigation or to take the consequences being prominent in big type.

The story took the imagination of Sydney's million. Throughout the day information and queries poured into the newspaper office and the continued ringing of the telephone bell drove the day editor to a frenzied desperation bordering on resignation.

Then followed a flood of correspondence, most of the writers' professing to have seen the mysterious Dr. Night in various parts of the State and Australia. Hardy and Frost took over the examination of this correspondence and spent considerable time each day sorting out the few letters that appeared to contain information of value.

At the same time the police were not idle. Darlinghurst and the surrounding districts were carefully combed for any one who at all resembled the 'grey' man seen by the constable in Oxford Street.

Late on the third night following the publication of the big story in the *Mirror* and the offer of the reward for the capture of Dr. Night, Frost rose wearily to his feet. He had just finished examining a collection of letters from the *Mirror's* correspondents, all certain that they had lately seen the hunted man.

"Call it a day, Bob," he suggested, stretching his arms, wearily. "I did not know there were so many cranks in Australia. Every dead-beat who has managed to raise the price of a stamp appears to have the one clue we have overlooked."

"Another fifteen minutes will see me through," replied Hardy, stifling a yawn. "Here's a letter that might interest you. The lady, who lives just outside Bourke, is of opinion that a swaggie who called on her two days previous to the date of her letter is Dr. Night. She wants the reward sent to her by return post."

"And the next will be from that particular swagman, informing us that that identical woman is Dr. Night in petticoats. What's the matter, Bob?"

"I think we have a clue here," said Hardy, slowly. "There is not much in the letter, but it rings true."

Frost leaned forward and caught the letter from Hardy's hand. It was but a scrap of paper and bore only two typewritten lines:

***Meet me any night, Roslyn Garden steps, 11 sharp.  
One week from tonight, alone—D.***

The detective dropped the note carefully on the table. Then he produced a pair of tweezers and lifting the note into the middle of a clean sheet of foolscap, wrapped it up.

"I shall want your finger prints, Bob," he said. "Let us go round to the office."

"What's the game?" asked Hardy, curiously.

"I may be mistaken, but this has the appearance of coming from Dr. Night."

Frost picked up his hat and led the way to the street. "If our good friend, the doctor, has been careless, there may be finger prints on this paper. It's a chance, but we won't miss it."

At police headquarters the Inspector handed over the precious packet to the man on duty in the fingerprints department, with copies of his own and Hardy's fingerprints. He requested that if any strange prints appeared on the paper he be immediately advised.

Outside the department Hardy looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes to eleven. Too late to keep the appointment, tonight, Frost."

"I was waiting for you to make the remark," observed Frost with a grin. "I'm in doubt how we are to keep that appointment."

"There's the word 'alone' included in the message," remarked Hardy. "I intend to keep the appointment, and alone, tomorrow, Mr. Detective."

"The hell you won't," retorted Frost, roughly. "The thing's a damned catch."

"It may not be."

"We'll argue that out tomorrow," Frost yawned. "I'm tired. Do you think there'll be many of those fool letters tomorrow?"

"Shoals of 'em," Hardy assured him with a grin. "What are you objecting to? We've struck something that looks good."

"The only thing that looks good to me at the moment, is bed. Advise the same prescription for you, Bob. Good night, and no fooling with that letter. We're playing with something that's worse than dynamite."

Frost turned down towards Circular Quay leaving Hardy to catch the Bondi tram at the corner of King Street. When the Inspector had left him, the journalist stood motionless, in the same spot, for some time. Then, with sudden decision he walked up to Queen's Square and caught a Darlinghurst tram. At King's Cross he alighted and walked down. Darlinghurst Road to Elizabeth Bay Road.

At the top of the passageway leading down into Roslyn Gardens he moved with caution. Carefully examining all the dark spots, he slipped silently down into Roslyn Gardens' he moved corner at the bottom, looking around him.

There was no one in sight.

Hardy had not expected the mysterious "D" to wait at the appointed spot for any length of time. If, and when, he kept the appointment, he must be there within five minutes of eleven, and in that short space of time lay the danger of the adventure.

Leisurely sauntering along, Hardy scrutinised the houses as he passed. Somewhere in that district lived Dr. Night. If he kept the appointment with "D" he might have the opportunity of meeting the murderer face to face. What kind of man would this Dr. Night prove to be?

Again the mental picture flashed across the journalist's brain. A cold-blooded, scientific, precise murderer; killing by intent, and not by the more forgiving lust of

passion: an intellect arrogating to itself a supremacy over the common laws that made community life possible.

Frost had not been too sympathetic in his views of the message. He had doubted its honesty, but the journalist was convinced that the note bore no sinister aspect. The Inspector would want to police the whole district and mass a force of men convenient to the meeting place That would attract attention a and most likely prevent the mysterious correspondent keeping the appointment.

Left to himself, Hardy would have gone to the rendezvous unaccompanied, ignoring all thought of danger, and trusting to his wits and never-failing luck to bring him through unscathed. At the back of the journalist's mind was a determination to keep the appointment "D" had made and to keep it alone. The Inspector was the difficulty. He would not consent to such a course and Hardy knew that he would have the greatest difficulty in evading the safeguards the Inspector would try to enforce.

Gradually a plan grew in Hardy's mind for circumventing the Inspector and his safeguards. Turning back, the journalist again covered the ground around Roslyn Garden steps. That, conning carefully the idea, he walked down to the tram stop. He had found a way to get from within the guards the Inspector would certainly surround him with.

At Bondi Junction he left the tram and walked quickly down Acacia Road, turning in at a doorway of a high block of flats. On the third floor he let himself into his rooms and switched on the lights. Then, on the instant, Hardy froze, tense with expectation.

Someone had been in his rooms, and within the last hour. There was a subtle perfume in the air of the rooms that was strange to him.

Cautiously looking around, examining every inch of the apartment, his eyes came to the table. On it lay a small packet, wrapped in white paper and tied with coloured string.

Illustration:

In the centre of the table lay a small packet,  
wrapped in white paper

Moving with every caution, he approached the table and examined the package without touching it. It looked innocent but, after the warning he had received from the mysterious Dr. Night, Hardy was disinclined to take any thing on trust. Leaving the package untouched, the journalist proceeded to carefully examine the remainder of the flat.

In the other rooms there were no traces of the strange visitor. The lock on the front door did not show signs of being forced, and it was a matter of impossibility for anyone to gain access to the flat from the windows. The intruders must have obtained a key to the rooms.

Returning to the sitting room, Hardy again examined the package carefully. It looked innocent enough, but some instinct warned him that he was facing a deadly peril. A short search and the newspaper man found an old pair of leather motor-gauntlets.

Donning those, Hardy cut the string and unrolled the parcel.

Beneath the white wrappings was a small box. Lifting the lid with great precaution, the journalist discovered a small tube of white powder lying on a bed of cotton wool. He recognised it at once. Only a couple of days before he had seen a similar tube in the hands of Dr. Streatham, at the Sydney Hospital. It was a tube of cocaine, of the sort dealt with by the illicit drug smugglers.

"Now, who the devil is making me a present of a tube of cocaine?" Hardy muttered. "Of all the crass foolishness—"

Carefully he lifted the tube from its bed of cotton wool and held it to the light. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he replaced it in the box and put on the lid. For some time Hardy sat, staring at the innocent looking box on the table, lying beside the heavy leather gauntlets. Then, with sudden resolution, he locked the box in a drawer of his desk, and, picking up the gauntlets, donned them. In the bathroom he scrubbed and disinfected them, thoroughly.

"I may be an ass," he muttered to himself, with a whimsical smile. "But—"

Then he turned out the light and went to bed.

"Well, and what did you do then?" inspector Frost asked the question impatiently. He was seated in Hardy's room at the *Mirror* office, and the journalist had been recounting the story of the box of cocaine he had found in his rooms the previous evening.

"Went to bed," replied Hardy, laconically.

"Did you bolt the front door?" retorted the detective, with an attempt of sarcasm. The journalist had taken the finding of the tube of cocaine in his-room so calmly that the Inspector was curious.

"What for?"

"Your strange visitor might have returned after you had gone to bed."

"He might," drawled Hardy. "But I give him credit for keeping better hours than I do."

"You've got a nerve, young man," was the Inspector's only comment. "S'pose you slept like a top?"

"Always do. Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, nothing happened to disturb your rest? No one entered your flat again?" The Inspector asked the questions as if he did not require answers. "What about it tonight?"

"What about it?" The journalist was immediately on his guard. He had made up his mind to keep that assignment alone and he knew that he would meet with the keenest opposition from the detective. From the moment Frost had entered his office the newspaper man had sensed the struggle of wits that was to come.

Frost would go to any length to gain his ends and surround the meeting with the unknown "D" with all the precautions at the command of the Department. Hardy had to meet this opposition alone and without resources. It was a battle of wits and he was determined not to accept defeat.

The Inspector had already taken certain precautions. He was well aware that Hardy was determined to shake off his companionship and protection. Already Hardy was under hidden and constant espionage. Men had been detailed for special duty in the vicinity of Roslyn Gardens steps and at ten o'clock that night a large body of police would take up strategic positions in the neighbourhood,

enclosing a huge area of ground into which anyone might enter but none escape from unquestioned.

Within that ring the Inspector had determined that he and the journalist would pass, with a few chosen men, specially detained to seize "D." The moment the capture was made, the ring would be closed only to reopen when the Inspector was satisfied that he had the mysterious Dr. Night in his grasp.

Frost had sensed the opposition of the journalist. He was waiting for some overt act on the part of Hardy that would bring matters to a head. Then, and then only, would he finalise the disposition of his men. But he was determined that the break should originate with the newspaperman and, until it occurred he would stick to his side like a burr.

Slouching low in his chair, Hardy watched the detective with half closed eyes. He could guess the thoughts passing through the official mind. Already he had guessed the detective's plans for the night, and was determined that no action of his should give the Inspector cause for complaint.

The "burr" idea was so apparent that the newspaperman almost laughed aloud. For the first time in his life he was under police espionage. Many times he had tried to imagine what his course would be in such circumstances. Now the occasion had arisen. It was his brains against the whole police force, directed by one of the cleverest detectives in Australia.

It was his intention to shake off that espionage; to slip away from the inspector; to hold the interview with "D" unwatched; and to return to his office or home unaccompanied by Frost or any of his subordinates.

Throughout the day Hardy deliberately reversed the position between himself and Frost. Together they went about the routine of enquiries, the visit to the various stations with which they were in touch, the examination of the enormous mail at the *Mirror* offices. In apparent friendliness, but hidden antagonism, they lunched together in Hardy's room in the *Mirror* office, which had, for the time being, become the headquarters of the hunt for Dr. Night.

Late in the afternoon Thomas arrived at the *Mirror*, and immediately sent for the journalist to learn the latest news of the hunt for Dr. Night. The inspector accompanied the journalist to the room of the managing editor and urged on Thomas the advisability of Hardy acting, during the interview with "D," with police instructions and requirements.

To the detective's surprise, Thomas refused to interfere. The situation amused him, and in a few terse sentences he made the inspector understand that he had placed the hunt for Dr. Night in Hardy's hands, and that it was not his habit to interfere without sufficient cause. Finally, and somewhat bluntly, he intimated that he considered the police held the big end of the stick, and that it would be difficult for a single person, however clever, to evade police protection, if the police were serious in their determination. During the evening meal Frost was somewhat silent and made but short answers to Hardy's easy flow of conversation.

Once more out on the street, the journalist proposed that they turn in to one of the picture shows for the few hours of waiting. Frost grimly assented. Here, he suspected, was the commencement of the journalist's plan of evasion. Well, he could try. The Inspector was confident that he would get an unpleasant shock.

It happened that the principal picture of the programme was an American detective story. In spite of his attitude of watchfulness over the journalist, Frost became interested, noting with some distaste the many abnormalities of police methods introduced by the author. If that story in any way interpreted police methods of the United States of America then no wonder that continent was over-run by crooks.

The picture was working to its climax when the Inspector felt a touch on his arm. Hardy was on his feet.

"Time to move on, old man," whispered the newspaperman, and led the way out of the building. Outside; half-a-dozen men were standing idly by the curb. As Frost passed he made a sign for them to follow. Markedly unconcerned, Hardy led the way up King Street and boarded the Darlinghurst tram. Frost, silent but watching intently, kept pace with him.

The men following, guessing their leader's intention, had disappeared.

## Chapter VII

THE short journey up William Street passed almost in silence. At King's Cross the two men alighted, and three men from another compartment of the tram followed, them. Crossing the road Hardy, murmuring something about cigarettes, entered a soft-drinks shop. Frost waited outside. Here was a chance to pass the necessary instructions to his waiting men.

In a few moments the journalist rejoined the Inspector and the two men with their shadows, sauntered along Darlinghurst Road. Just opposite the short lane leading to the head of the stops, Hardy paused.

"I propose to the head of the steps exactly at the hour," he said casually. "I shall wait there two minutes, and then walk down the steps to Roslyn Gardens at a fair pace. If I reach the foot of the steps before five minutes past, then I shall wait there until the time is up."

"So you have no objections now to my accompanying you?" asked the Inspector, with some surprise.

"I am leaving that decision to you."

Hardy registered astonishment in a nearly perfect manner.

"I warn you that if you insist on accompanying me it is possible that my correspondent will not show up. Still, there is a chance that I may be mistaken."

"I'm coming."

Frost was doggedly determined, that in no circumstances would he lose sight of the journalist that night, or at least not until well past eleven o'clock.

Across the road, the lane leading to the head of the steps lay silent and dark. In the distance a deepening in the blackness denoted the head of the steps. For a minute the two men stood side by side, looking down the lane. Within the next half-hour that quiet spot might be the scene of one of the most sensational episodes in police history of Sydney.

Hardy looked at his watch.

"What do you make the time, Frost?" Hardy spoke casually. "We had better set our watches together. I make it three minutes to the hour, by the G.P.O. clock, this morning."

The Inspector set his watch, which happened to be a few minutes slow, by the journalist's. For another minute they stood, quietly talking.

"Time's up!" said Hardy, briskly. "Coming?"

Without looking round, he led the way across the road and down the lane to the head of the steps. Half way down a large tree cast a heavy shadow across the steps. It was necessary to proceed with careful watchfulness. Frost was on the lighter side of the passage and forged slightly ahead.

Once again, when the light of the lamp lit the path, he turned and spoke to the journalist. To his surprise Hardy had disappeared.

#### Illustration:

To his astonishment, the journalist had disappeared.

Inspector Frost was startled. He could have sworn that Hardy had stood beside him within the last five seconds.

Immediately he became the alert police officer. Quietly turning on the steps, he surveyed his surroundings. On his right was a low wooden fence bordering a somewhat untidy garden. There was little shrubbery in that garden, certainly not enough to cover a man. The light of the lamp illuminated the garden fairly well, and after a careful look over the Inspector decided that the journalist could not have escaped that way.

On the left side, the steps were bordered by a high cement wall, too high, in the police officer's opinion, for Hardy to have surmounted so quickly and quietly. Away behind him the steps ascended to the path. It would take a very active man nearly half a minute to have run up the steps and around the corner of the lane. Certainly, no one could have run that distance in quick time without making considerable noise, and the disappearance of the journalist had been absolutely noiseless.

The only remaining avenue of escape was down the steps to the Gardens, and that would have necessitated passing before the police officer. Suddenly Frost darted towards the cement wall, right in the heart of the shadow. There was a low door, almost indistinguishable in the darkness. Throwing his weight against it, the Inspector found it was locked. Yet Hardy might have found it open until he had passed through, and then shot the bolt.

With a spring the Inspector got his hands on the top of the wall and pulled himself up. Straddling the wall, he saw below him a well-groomed flower garden. From his seat he could see every inch of the ground, and Hardy certainly was not concealed there. Decidedly puzzled, Frost came to the conclusion that the journalist must have doubled back up the steps. It seemed impossible, but there was no other solution of the mystery.

Running up the steps and along the lane, the Inspector came out under the lamp in Darlington road. He gave a low whistle and a man came out of the shadows towards him.

"Anyone come up the steps, Thompson?" asked Frost abruptly.



"No, sir," replied the plain-clothes constable. "Not a soul been along here since you and Mr. Hardy went down there."

"Did Mr. Hardy come this way?" The Inspector disliked asking the question. He had been hoodwinked, and he did not wish his subordinates to know it.

"Mr. Hardy, sir?" inquired the man. "No sir. He went down the steps with you and has not come back again. Did you separate?"

"Yes!" half-lied Frost. "Keep a sharp look out. Something queer is happening in this neighbourhood. Whistle immediately you see anything suspicious."

At that moment the clock of a nearby church chimed the four quarters, and then commenced to strike the hour. Instinctively, the Inspector pulled out his watch.

"That clock's slow," he remarked.

"Not much, sir." The man pulled out a large silver watch. "Just two minutes."

"Your watch is dead wrong," exclaimed Frost heatedly. "That clock is seven or eight minutes slow."

"I put my watch right by the station clock just before I came out," replied the officer doggedly. "I ain't a minute out."

"But Mr. Hardy and I put our watches—" Frost stopped suddenly in the middle of the sentence. He had remembered comparing watches with Hardy and that he had advanced his watch five minutes to make it coincide with the journalist's watch. Hardy had claimed that his watch was exact, and Frost had carelessly accepted that assurance.

The journalist had set his watch five minutes fast. Frost had not to think long to guess the puzzle. All through the day he had watched the journalist carefully, expecting some trick. Then, for one moment he had been off his guard, and in that moment Hardy had planned and made his get-away.

For some moments Frost stood wondering at the cleverness of the journalist. It had been a simple trick; so simple that it had caught him off his guard. He had been suspicious of the sudden acquiescence of the newspaper-man to the companionship of the police. He had expected Hardy to make some attempt to evade the continued espionage, and had anticipated with grim humour the sudden and effective counter-move he had prepared. Then, at the one moment when he could not retrieve any error, the journalist had fooled him—tricked him as if he were but a novice.

In the police force, Frost had built up a reputation for dogged perseverance. It had become a tradition that any criminal on whose trail he had camped would be run down and certainly captured. He was "Bulldog" Frost, and any man on whom his hand rested was a safe and sure prisoner.

One consolation the detective had. Hardy was within the lines he had drawn round the steps, and he could not get out without his permission. Walking quickly up the road, Frost passed the word to close the net and bring everyone within it to him.

Then, slowly and methodically, he started to make the circuit of his lines. At the end of Roslyn Gardens he came upon his first clue. A few minutes after eleven a closed car had driven up to the policeman on duty, and had been passed through the lines. A young lady had driven the car. She had stopped when challenged by

the police, and explained that she had been visiting friends in the Gardens. She had given her name and address, and had been alone in the car.

"Anything in the car?" demanded Frost.

"Only rugs and things motorists litter up their car with," replied the man.

Frost knew that he was beaten. The girl was "D" or an agent of "D," and under those rugs littering the back of the car had lain Robert Hardy, a prisoner or a free agent.

Frost cursed his luck as he made his way back to the steps. There he made a careful examination by the light of his electric torch. He could see the marks which he had made in climbing the cement wall. There were no other marks.

Climbing on to the wall again, he made a careful inspection of the beds and paths. Again he confronted a blank. Back on the steps, he glanced over the wooden wall at the patch of ground bordering the wall and flashed his torch over the loose soil. There were no footmarks. Hardy had disappeared as if he had been snatched up into the clouds.

"I'll make him come across with the trick when I see him again," muttered Frost savagely. "He put one over on me that time. I'll give him credit for that."

In Darlinghurst Road once more, Frost called his men off duty and went down to the Mirror offices. There he sought an interview with Thomas, after learning that Hardy had not returned.

"Any luck, Frost?" asked the managing editor when the detective entered his room.

"Hardy's disappeared," replied the Inspector, sinking into a chair.

"What?" Thomas jumped as though he had been seated on springs. "What do you mean, Frost? If anything's happened to that boy, I'll—"

"He played the disappearing trick himself," retorted the Inspector baldly. "You remember how I urged that you should forbid him to part from me. You refused to interfere. So he disappeared on his own."

"Put one over on you?"

Thomas was grave for a moment, and then laughed. "Rather a come-down for the police force."

"I'll give him his due; it was smart, work." Frost was, at last, able to laugh at his own discomfiture. "That young man would make a criminal that would turn white the hair of a force of Commissioners."

## Chapter VIII

FOR a few minutes the two men enjoyed the joke. Then the inspector went over the night's happenings, step by step, not trying to cover his confusion when he found that Hardy had succeeded in giving him the slip. At the end of the story the two men looked at each other and again laughed heartily.

"I hope that nothing will happen to the boy," said Thomas at length. "He is a smart lad, and a bloodhound on the trail of a story, but he is inclined to take too many risks."

"I'm not going to say that I'm not worrying about him, Mr. Thomas," said the detective candidly. "I am. But if he can get me in such an easy fashion, I'll back him to get out of any difficulty he wanders into with a whole skin, too."

The telephone bell rang. Thomas picked up the receiver and listened for a minute, a broad grin spreading over his face. Then he passed the Instrument over to the inspector.

"Hardy wants you, Frost."

"Is that Inspector Frost, of the New South Wales Detective Department?" came over the wire, faintly, in a well-known voice.

"It is," replied the detective grimly. "May I ask what your highness has been doing since I set my watch by your very inaccurate timepiece?"

"I've been for a joyride with a lady friend." The voice on the wire held a hint of laughter. "At the moment I am at home, going to bed, as a pattern for all good detectives."

"I suppose the lady's name commences with a capital D?" suggested the inspector, grinning in spite of himself.

"It does." Then came a low laugh. "Say, Frost, she's some peach!"

Hardy laughed silently as he heard the rapid footsteps of Inspector Frost running up towards Darlinghurst Road. He was crouching under the low wooden fence, hardly daring to breathe. Immediately the steps of the detective died away in the distance, he stood up and stepped on to the hard gravel path. A few gardening tools were lying about, and picking up a rake the journalist carefully smoothed out the footmarks on the soft bed. Then he strode rapidly down towards the Gardens and vaulted the low wall.

It had been absurdly easy. Frost had been thrown off his guard and had not acted with his usual resource. Hardy had anticipated this. The unpremeditated action of the detective would give the necessary time to meet "D" and get away before the inspector returned to the stops to make a more systematic search. As Hardy vaulted the fence the church clock chimed the hour. If his unknown correspondent was punctual his plans would have succeeded to a nicety. The Journalist stood, counting the strokes on the bell. As the last tone sounded a motor car swung rapidly round the corner and pulled up at the foot of the stops.

"Mr. Hardy! Quick!" It was a girl's voice, low and exceedingly pleasant. Wondering greatly the journalist stepped into the hack of the car, tripping over a pile of rugs. Immediately the car moved forward. The rugs gave Hardy a hint. They had yet to pierce the cordon of police Frost had drawn in a wide circle around the stops. It might be possible for him to bluff the car through, but he did not know what instructions the inspector had given to his men. Sitting down on the floor of the car, the newspaper man covered himself with the rugs, making the heap look as natural as possible. He had hardly concealed himself before the car pulled up abruptly, and he heard a man talking to the girl driver. A few moments and the car moved forward.

Hardy crawled out from under the rugs, and, opening the near door, stepped on to the running board, and slipped into the seat by the driver. The girl had opened out the car, and, dodging through some side streets, crossed in front of the Rushcutter's Bay Stadium, and then, by side streets, into Oxford Street. Turning citywards she swung into Victoria Street and down to Potts Point. Outside the

gates of some large gardens, surrounding a fine house, she brought the car to a stop.

"Will you open the gates, please, Mr. Hardy?" she said, quietly. Hardy swung open the gates, and, when the girl had driven through, closed them again and walked up to the car. The girl was standing on the path awaiting him.

"I did not expect the place to be surrounded by police." There was more than a hint of reproach in the clear voice.

"Inspector Frost is particularly thick-headed at times," said the journalist. "Unfortunately, he was in my office when I received your letter. Nothing would satisfy him but that he must also attend the interview you so kindly offered me. I tried hard, but he would not understand that three people always formed a particularly large crowd. Getting rid of him was very arduous work."

The girl laughed, and Hardy decided that she had a particularly pretty laugh. He wished that she would move out of the shadows so that he could judge if her features matched her laughter.

"I suppose I shall have to introduce myself, after this most informal meeting," she observed. "My name is Doris Blayde. This is my father's house."

"You already know my name," replied the journalist. "But to comply with social demands, I should I say that Robert Hardy of the Mirror has the honour to await your commands."

"How did you get rid of your friend Inspector Frost?" inquired the girl.

"I left him on the steps." Hardy laughed slightly at the picture of the bewildered Inspector searching for him. "The last I heard of him was a muttered statement about *being snatched up into the blooming clouds*."

"I was surprised to find the district being watched by the police. Still, it didn't matter, as you managed to give them the slip," remarked Doris. "I had been visiting in the Gardens and I did tell the constable my right name and address. So it doesn't matter, does it?"

"Not one bit." assured Hardy.

"I suppose you are wondering why I sent that note to you," Doris appeared to be at a loss how to guide the conversation.

"I gathered from your short note that you had some information for me," suggested the newspaper man, "Still, if it was only your intention to take me for a motor ride around the beauties of your neighbourhood, I must offer you my hearty thanks."

"It was more than that, Mr. Hardy." The girl spoke earnestly. "Father and I have been wondering over certain matters that have come to our knowledge, and I suggested that you should be told of them. Father objected, so I took this course of sending for you."

"But if your father objects—" commenced Hardy.

"He won't, now I have caught you," laughed the girl. "I think he is in the library. Will you help me to put this machine away and we will join him."

The garage doors were open and Doris steered the big machine skilfully into its place. Then she led the way through a side door of the house into a corridor.

"Father's in here," she whispered, stopping before a door. "He's not very terrible, even when I do things he says I mustn't."

## Chapter IX

SHE opened a door and led the way into a large comfortably furnished room, crowded with books. Although principally a library, it bore unmistakable evidence of being a favourite living room of the family. A bright fire was burning on the hearth, and seated before it was a tall, fair man, with a mass of light grey, curly hair surrounding his head. As he turned his head at the opening of the door, Hardy saw that he was clean shaven and his eyes bright blue, particularly open.

"Dad. I have brought Mr. Robert Hardy, of the *Mirror*, home with me."

Mr. Blayde came forward to greet the journalist. His hand, extended in greeting, was long and slender, and the slightly bowed shoulders spoke eloquently of the man of books and not of affairs.

"I did protest at my daughter mixing herself up in this affair of the dead man found in Darlington Road," said Blayde, speaking in a low soft voice. "Yet I am most pleased to welcome you to my home, Mr. Hardy. I think you will be comfortable here and—what will you have to drink? We make a practice of helping ourselves in this house. Ah, I see. Doris is before me."

"I am afraid this is an unconventional hour for a call, Mr. Blayde," laughed Hardy, sinking luxuriously into the depths of a lounge chair. He was weary after his long day's work and the excitement of the evening. Doris seated herself on the arm of her father's chair. With her hat off, Hardy had an opportunity of unobtrusively scrutinising her. She was of medium height, with a slight boyish figure, fair, almost the same tone as her father. He decided that she was quite as pretty as her voice by this time. He had quite made up his mind she had the prettiest voice he had ever heard.

"My daughter and I have followed the story of the Mystery Man of Darlington in your newspaper, very closely," commenced Blayde. "I am by way of being an amateur criminologist, and my daughter is an earnest devourer of detective fiction."

"All this is to lead up to the fact that we believe that we have discovered something that will help you, Mr. Hardy," interjected Doris.

"That remains for Mr. Hardy to judge," corrected Blayde. "Certainly we have noticed some queer happenings in this neighbourhood."

"Have you any reason to believe that they are connected in any way with the Mystery Man?" asked Hardy.

"I think I know the man whose body was found in Darlington Road." Doris was jumping with impatience, contrasting quaintly with her father's more judicial attitude.

"You know the Mystery Man?" Hardy sat upright.

"I told father I had seen him, when I saw the portrait in the *Mirror*, but he would not believe me. You see, Mr. Hardy, your newspaper does not—"

"—go in for art portraiture," completed Hardy with a laugh. "Do you think, you would recognise him from a proper portrait?"

"I am certain I should," exclaimed Doris.

Hardy hesitated a moment. Then he drew a photograph from his breast pocket. "I'm afraid it may shock you, Miss Blayde," he said, hesitatingly, and holding the photograph face downwards. "You see, it was taken after death and—well, although he was not outwardly injured, death photographs are not very pleasant."

Doris hold out her hand without hesitation, although she shuddered slightly when she first saw the face of the dead man.

"Yes," Doris exclaimed, passing the photograph of the mystery man to her father. "I am sure it is the same man. You only saw him once or twice, dad, but perhaps you will recognise him."

"I think you are right, Doris." Mr. Blayde spoke after he had carefully examined the photograph.

"Who is he?" asked Hardy, with difficulty restraining his impatience.

"I believe this to be the photograph of a man who lived for a time in the house next to this. He was. I believe, chauffeur to Mr. Francis Westerton."

"Francis Westerton?" Hardy was puzzled. "If this man was his chauffeur, I wonder why Mr. Westerton has not come forward to identify the body. Who is this Mr. Westerton?"

"I know little of him," explained Blayde. "He bought the house next I door some two years ago. We have seen little of him. He appears to go out very little, and then only in a closed car. Doris came in touch with his chauffeur while our man was away on his holidays, and her car broke down. She telephoned to Mr. Westerton and asked him to allow his man to come in and give the machine a look over. The man came and fixed up the car. I saw him for a few minutes when I rewarded him for his trouble. On the other hand Doris was in and out of the garage all the time."

"You know nothing of Mr. Westerton, socially?" asked Hardy.

"He is absolutely unsociable," protested the girl. "I tried to get him to come to a dance we gave here, and he hadn't the decency to refuse my invitation."

"Then he must be hopeless." Hardy thought he would not require much pressing to attend a dance with Miss Doris Blayde.

"Now that we have succeeded in identifying the mystery man," remarked Blayde, "I will leave it to Doris to tell you the remainder of the story. All I will say is that I can personally vouch for the truth of the many incidents. I did not see the first part of the affair, but Doris fetched me in time to witness the climax."

"Is your story connected with Mr. Westerton, Miss Blayde?" asked Hardy with interest.

"The events happened in Mr. Westerton's grounds," replied the girl. "First, I should explain to you how I came to witness the affair, or you will think I am in the habit of prying into my neighbour's affairs."

"Before you commence, Miss Blayde," interrupted Hardy, "will you tell me if you have any occasion to believe that Mr. Westerton had anything to do with the murder of his chauffeur?"

"The murder of his chauffeur?" repeated the girl in surprise.

"So far as we have penetrated into the mystery, there is every reason to believe that the man who was found unconscious in Darlington Road was murdered by a man named Dr. Night."

"Then Mr. Westerton is Dr. Night," announced Doris positively, ignoring the protesting hand her father raised.

Hardy sprang to his feet, in excitement. This man, Westerton, to be the mysterious, self-confessed murderer, Dr. Night! For a minute he remained standing, trying to steady and coordinate his facts.

"What grounds have you for that statement, Miss Blayde," he said, at length, seating himself again.

"Do let me tell my story and then you can judge," said Doris, quietly. She left the arm of her father's chair and drew a low stool against his knee. Sitting there, in the soft glow of the fire light, she made so fair a picture that Hardy could not take his eyes from her.

"I have read everything you have published about the mystery man." The girl spoke after a long pause and in a low voice. "First, I was attracted by the awful bad print of the man in the *Mirror*. Then your story of the mysterious Dr. Night was most thrilling. It was like a romance out of a book. If you will come to the top of this house you will find that I have a cosy nook up there, for, although we are near the water, we can only see it from the roof. One evening—it was the day before the mystery man was found—I remained up in my nook very late. Dad had been detained in town and I would not go down to dinner. I told my maid, Annie, to bring me up a light meal, on a tray. Presently, I got tired of leading, and picked up the powerful glasses dad keeps up there, to examine the ships that go up and down the Harbour. There was a big ship coming in and I turned the glasses on her. I could see her decks plainly and followed her with the glasses until she went out of sight behind the trees."

## Chapter X

DORIS hesitated a moment and then continued "I was just going to put the glasses down when I saw something moving in the garden next door. I had looked a' the house lost before I took up the glasses to examine the ship, and the place appeared deserted. There was not a light in the house, and I thought that Mr. Westerton had retired for the night, or else had gone on one of the long motor trips he is so fond of. Perhaps I should not have done so—dad says that I was wrong—but I turned the glasses on the grounds, and what I saw there was so strange that I could not resist continuing to look. Two men were standing under the trees, near our wall. They appeared to be engaged in a furious argument. One was a big man, the other much shorter and thinner."

Hardy wanted to ask a question, but refrained. There would be plenty of time to question the girl when she had finished her story.

"Presently the big man turned and strode towards the house. The shorter man followed, continuing to argue the point in dispute. He was quite excited over it, and at length stood right in the path of his companion. The big man pushed him on one side and went into the house. I thought the other man would follow him, but he did not, and as he seemed to expect the big man to return, I continued to watch. The big man came back after a short interval. This time he had another man with him, and they carried something long, and wrapped in a rug, between

them. Do you know, Mr. Hardy, I believe they were carrying the mystery man of Darlington Road."

Doris appeared to be somewhat overcome by the recital of the scene she had witnessed on the evening before the mystery man was found by the police. Her father took her hand and held it, patting it sympathetically.

"Don't go on, if it upsets you, Miss Blayde," urged Hardy. "Now you have given us so good a tip, we can no doubt get to the bottom of the business without troubling you further."

"No; I will tell you all that I saw," decided Doris, looking up proudly. "They carried the—the thing to a place under the trees where I had first seen the two men standing. Again they had another argument. I thought that they were never going to come to a conclusion, but at last the big man appeared to give way to the arguments of his companion. The man who had, apparently, done all the talking—the thinner, shorter man—then went away, and, after a time, I saw the car backing to the place. The men lifted the 'thing' into the car and then got in themselves. The car drove away, and I heard it go out of the grounds on to the road. I went downstairs and met dad in the hall. He had just come home, and I told him all that I had seen. He would not believe me at first, but I made him come upstairs with me, and there I explained everything all over again. Just as dad was getting impatient and saying that I had been dreaming, we heard the car returning. In a few minutes it came in view along the drive. It stopped at the front door, and the two men got out. Then the car drove off to the garage. The two men came across to the trees, and I saw them pick up some tools. They were talking excitedly, and once I thought they were going to fight. At length, they went away, and although dad and I remained on the roof for some time, nothing more happened." Doris concluded her story, breathlessly.

For a time the journalist sat silent, conning the many points the girl had set out. "You believe that the long package they carried out of the house to be the mystery man?" he asked at length.

"It was just the shape of a body, and they were away in the car just long enough to go to Darlington Road, get rid of him and return," replied Blayde. "I did not credit Doris' story at first, but the actions of the men were so strange, and the facts in the newspapers appeared to fit into them so well, that at last I had to believe."

"Did you recognise any of the men?" asked Hardy. "I am positive the two men I first saw were Mr. Westerton and his valet," answered the girl.

"It was too dark to be certain," corrected Blayde. "The forms appeared to be those of the persons Doris mentioned."

"What is Mr. Westerton like?" Hardy asked the question eagerly. On the answer might rest the solution of part of the problem before him.

"Oh, he is a big man—a big, burly man, very red in the face, and with a thick neck, and he wears the smallest of collars possible." Doris' words were illustrated with eager gestures. "He has small green eyes and quite a little rosebud mouth, and he has such a funny voice. Just like a child's."

"Then I am afraid Mr. Westerton is not Dr. Night," said the journalist disappointedly. "We have a description of Dr. Night as a short, slight man, very grey, and speaking in a precise, even tone."



Doris looked disappointed.

"You have given me a wonderful help," stated Hardy earnestly, as he rose to take his departure. "Half past twelve! You will never forgive me for detaining, you to this hour, Mr. Blayde. Good night, and thank you very much for your help."

## Chapter XI

DORIS escorted the journalist to the door. As he took her hand in parting, asked:

"Why did you send me that note, and write to me in that mysterious way?"

"Because I have the idea that my father and I are being watched."

Doris made the startling reply in a very matter of fact voice. "I am certain there is something evil next door, although you do not think that Mr. Westerton is your Dr. Night. Those people next door are doing illegal things, and they are afraid we are watching them."

Then, as Hardy stood on the doorstep, Doris placed her hand on his coat-sleeve. "You will come and see us again. Mr. Hardy, will you not? Dad and I are so interested in this mystery—and your work."

It was only the street door, that by some mysterious means interposed at the critical moment, that prevented the journalist making an abject fool of himself.

Inspector Frost was awaiting Hardy when he arrived at the *Mirror* Office the next morning. The detective greeted the newspaper man without any sign of animosity at the trick played on him the previous evening. In fact, except for a few words of somewhat heavy sarcasm, he ignored the incident of the Roslyn Gardens steps and concentrated on the story told to the newspaper man by Doris Blayde.

The one outstanding feature of the story was the identification of the mystery man of Darlington Road, and the Inspector sharply cross-questioned the journalist on this.

Why had not Westerton come forward to identify the dead man as his chauffeur? True, the newspaper reproductions of the photograph of the dead man were poor and rendered positive identification difficult; but against that could be set the fact that the chauffeur must have been missed from the household, and inquiry as to his whereabouts would be natural.

Again, Doris Blayde and her father had seen sufficient resemblance between the prints and the chauffeur to induce them to communicate with the *Mirror's* representative.

The inspector did not attach much importance to the story of the men and the mysterious package beneath the trees. There might be a dozen plausible explanations of the incident. Further, while the chauffeur might have been murdered at the house, it was almost impossible to believe that any person should consider burying an unconscious man, even though he was certain to die in time.

Shortly after mid-day. Thomas came down to the newspaper office and on learning that the Inspector and Hardy were in consultation on the premises, sent a message asking them to join him in his room.

There, Hardy had to go again over the story told him by the Blaydes. The managing editor supported the theory of the detective and advised an immediate interview with Mr. Westerton.

To the Inspector's surprise, Hardy refused to accompany him on the visit to Westerton's house. He gave as his reason for his refusal that he had determined to make "Holmhurst," Mr. Blayde's residence, his headquarters for watching Westerton's house, and that his accompanying Frost on the inquiry might draw unwelcome attention to the Blaydes, and his presence there.

After some discussion Thomas supported the argument of the journalist, and it was decided that the Inspector should take with him the Darlinghurst constable who had seen the man supposed to be Dr. Night in Oxford Street.

Frost chose the early afternoon for his visit to "Forest Home." A telephone to Darlinghurst Police Station warned the constable to meet him at King's Cross, and the two men walked down to Pott's Point shortly after 2 o'clock.

The big iron gates of "Forest Home" were wide open when the Inspector and his companion arrived. A couple of gardeners were engaged on some flower beds near the entrance. As Frost walked up the gravel drive he looked around him with some curiosity. The long, low cement-faced house, surrounded by wide verandahs, did not look like the lair of a gang of desperate criminals. It was just the house that would normally be occupied by a wealthy Sydney merchant. The place was in excellent repair, and the grounds remarkably well kept. Far away to the left stood a belt of trees, bordering the dividing wall between "Forest Home" and "Holmhurst," the trees beneath which Doris Blayde had seen the strange incident of the long bundle.

As Frost and the constable approached the main entrance, a tall, stout man, with a very florid complexion, rose from a lounge on the verandah, and came to meet them. From the description of the journalist Frost decided that this was Westerton, the owner of the house.

"Mr. Westerton?" queried the Inspector. "My name is Frost—inspector Frost, of the Criminal Investigation Department of the New South Wales Police. Will you give me a few minutes of your time?"

"Delighted!" The absurd rosebud mouth pursed into a baby smile that made the Inspector almost laugh. The voice was that of a young child, ridiculous in the extreme from such a large man. He turned and led the way to where he had been seated and drew up some chairs.

"Constable Chalmers, of the Darlinghurst District," introduced the Inspector. "From certain in—"

"Please." The big man held up a fat white hand. "I am sure, after the walk from the tram stop, you must be thirsty. May I offer you a drink?"

Frost accepted the preferred hospitality. He was in no hurry to leave "Forest Home." The longer he could linger about the place, the greater the opportunity to examine the house and its inmates.

"I am investigating the death of the man found unconscious in Darlinghurst Road, a week ago, Mr. Westerton," commenced Frost officially. "So far we have not been able to establish identity."

"A most sad case," chirruped Westerton. "I am afraid I do not see how I shall be able to help you, Inspector."

"You read the daily papers. Mr. Westerton?" asked Frost. "The *Mirror* for instance?"

"A most interesting newspaper; Certainly I take it."

"You saw the photograph of the murdered man in that newspaper?"

The fat man laughed heartily. "It was a portrait? It might have been someone. You, for example, Mr Frost."

"It did not remind you of anyone?" The Inspector was watching Westerton, keenly. The man appeared to be thoroughly at ease.

"No! why should it?"

Frost took a photograph from his pocket and passed it to Westerton. Immediately the latter caught sight of the pictured face he jumped to his feet excitedly.

"Good gracious! This is Smithson," he shrilled. "Where did you get this? What is the matter with him? He looks—"

"He is dead." interrupted the Inspector. "Who was Smithson?"

"My chauffeur. At least he was until I dismissed him."

"Has he been missing?"

"Missing? No, I discharged him. He was so insolent. I paid him his wages and he went away."

"Did you see him again?"

Frost was puzzled. Here, where he expected to solve the mystery of the dead man of Darlington Road, he was met by a name only.

"He came back the following day. He was intoxicated and demanded money. My people turned him out of the grounds."

"Will you give me the date on which you discharged this man, Smithson?" Frost produced a pocket book.

Westerton touched a bell.

"What date did Smithson leave my employ?" The big man asked the question of the maid who answered the bell.

"A fortnight ago tomorrow, sir," replied the girl.

"When did you see him last?" Frost asked the question of the girl, sharply. Before replying, the maid looked at her employer, who nodded.

"He came here the day after he was dismissed. He was very drunk and abusive." The answer was given hesitatingly.

"Did you see him after that?"

"He was continually about the gates." The girl showed signs of distress. "He frightened us and we were afraid to go outside the grounds."

"Why?"

"Well, sir. He thought we should side with him against Mr. Westerton. He swore to us, and called us names. We were glad when he was discharged, for he wasn't a pleasant companion in the house. He was always drinking, and foolin' about."

"Do you read the newspapers?" asked the Inspector.

"Sometimes, sir."

The girl looked puzzled.

"Anything in the newspapers of late that interested you?" asked Frost, carelessly.

"You mean the murder," said the girl slowly, after a pause.

"Yes. Did you see the portrait of the murdered man, published in the 'papers?'"

"Y-e-s." The girl did not appear to understand the drift of the question, at first. Then realisation came. "You—you don't mean that it was he?"

Frost picked up the photograph Westerton had placed on the wicker table and handed it to the maid. "Do you recognise that?" he asked.

"Yes. That is him. You say—he is dead?" The girl looked at the inspector, questioningly.

"That is the photograph of the man the police found unconscious In Darlington Road. Do you identify him as Smithson, the chauffeur lately employed here?"

The girl nodded, agitatedly. Then turned and ran into the house.

"Upset her a bit," commented Frost, placing the photograph on the table again.

"Women always get upset at death," said Westerton. "I suppose you will require me to give evidence at the inquest?"

"Certainly. I shall want that girl, also, and others of your servants. Smithson was murdered and it is possible that one of your household may be able to provide a clue to the murderer."

Handing the photograph to the constable, Chalmers, the Inspector instructed him to interview the servants and obtain the necessary statements from them.

Chalmers was the only person who had seen the supposed Dr. Night. He wanted to get him into the house, among the servants. It was possible the man might pick up some clue to the mysterious person and also to the other happenings—matters he did not at the present time propose to question Westerton on.

When the constable had left, Frost dropped his official attitude and lounged back in his chair, talking on general subjects. In the half-hour of the constable's absence he gained much information on Westerton's history, entirely unsuspected by that man.

At length Chalmers returned, and the Inspector rose from his chair. To his surprise, the fat man rose also and proposed to accompany them to the entrance gates. This suited Frost. He turned into the drive running near the "Holmhurst" boundary wall.

"Fine trees," Frost observed, carelessly pointing to the belt of trees hiding the Blayde's house from view. "Pity there's that gap. It will take a long time for a new tree to fill that space."

"I shall put a big tree there," replied Westerton. "Already the place is being prepared, and in a few days it will be planted. It is one from the other side I shall move."

Frost stepped from the drive and crossed the grass to the trees. Westerton made an involuntary move, as if to stop him! Frost did not appear to notice the action. Reluctantly, the fat man followed the detective, and the constable dropped to the rear. At the foot of the trees the Inspector stopped and looked about him.

Close at hand it was plain to see that the gap had been filled by a very large tree. Glancing around him, the Inspector determined that Doris Blayde could well have seen anyone standing beneath the trees, and also sufficient of the lawn to observe anyone going towards the front door. Walking around carelessly, he soon found the marks of tyres on the soft turf.

Directly before the detective, stood "Holmhurst," Mr. Blayde's handsome home. A compact dark-red building, very English in appearance. On the flat roof rose a quaint little structure—evidently the "cosy nook" Doris Blayde had referred to in her story. Until the new tree was planted the cosy nook would be an ideal spot from which to keep watch on the inhabitants of "Forest Home," and Frost had already determined that household was well worth watching.

"Fine place, that." The Inspector nodded towards 'Holmhurst.' "S'pose you know who lives there. Of course you would. You've lived here long enough to know your neighbours."

"Strange to say, I do not know my neighbours," Westerton laughed slightly. "It happens that I am somewhat of an invalid. Heart, you know. Not much, but I have to rest a lot. I must have no fatigue, and neighbours are always fatiguing, you know."

"Sorry." Frost spoke emphatically. "Perhaps you had better not come down to the gates. Chalmers and I can find our way out."

The fat man looked uncertain, then held out his hand. "If you will excuse me, then. I shall always be pleased to see you, Mr.—Look out!" Westerton had clutched Frost's arm and dragged him forward. The detective laughed.

"By Jove! I was nearly in that hole. Funny thing, I never noticed it. Looks like a grave."

"A grave?" Westerton's face became ashen. Then, with an effort, he recovered his poise and joined in the Inspector's laugh. "You are not a cheerful companion, Mr. Frost. First, you tell me that my late chauffeur has been murdered. Then you say the hole I am having dug to plant my new tree in is a grave. You are too morbid."

With his hand pressed to his side, Westerton turned and walked to the house. Frost stood for some moments watching him, his lips twisted into a wry smile. Then, motioning to the constable, he turned and strode to the gates.

"Funny thing, sir," observed the constable, falling in step alongside his superior officer. "That hole did look like a grave."

Robert Hardy had not missed an early opportunity of calling on Doris Blayde and her father. He had two attractions to "Holmhurst." First, there was the girl, and secondly he had decided that the Blaydes' house would be an ideal place from which to watch the household at "Forest Home."

Both Mr. Blayde and his daughter were keenly interested in the mystery man of Darlington Road and eager to help in every possible way to bring the murderer to justice.

Within a week, Hardy had been accepted as an intimate friend of the family. Evening after evening was spent in the "cosy nook" on the roof of "Holmhurst," watching for any move on the part of the "Forest Home" household, and in idle conversation.

Gradually these quiet evenings came to mean much to the journalist. An orphan, he had for years missed the intimate beauty of home life. The Blaydes had taken him into their circle, and the long, quiet evenings on the roof had come to mean much to two of the three gathered there.

The inquest on Charles Richard Smithson, one-time chauffeur to Francis Westerton, was duly held, and a verdict of wilful murder against a person or persons unknown recorded. Inspector Frost had not tried to prove anything more

than identification, and that the man had been poisoned by some unknown person.

On the latter point there was some diversity of opinion amongst the medical witnesses. Heart disease was mentioned, and the Crown representative had some difficulty in getting from the witnesses an admission that the man might have been poisoned. The medical men were unanimous in stating that, if the dead man had been poisoned, the poison was unknown to modern science.

Francis Westerton proved a competent witness under examination. His evidence was given tersely and well. The deceased had been his chauffeur. He had discharged him for drunkenness and insolence. The next day Smithson had called at "Forest Home" in a state of intoxication and had insisted on an interview with him. At that interview he had uttered vague threats and had demanded money. He had been promptly expelled the house and grounds. Witness had seen the deceased on the day previous to him being discovered in an unconscious condition in Darlinghurst Road.

The next witness was the maid Frost had questioned on his call at "Forest Home."

She gave her name as Mary Gannett, and under searching examination admitted that she had seen the deceased, Smithson, on the evening before he had been found unconscious.

After his dismissal Smithson had hung about the gates at "Forest Home." The witness had seen him several times.

At first, he was intoxicated and abusive of Mr. Westerton. Later, he was quieter, the witness thought, because he had spent all his money. She had spoken to him several times, advising him to leave the neighbourhood and to get work.

The evening before he had been found unconscious he had beckoned her to come down to the gates. He had told her that he had had nothing to eat that day. She had left him to obtain some food from the cook for a "poor man at the gates." She had given him money on his promising not to spend it in drink. He had continued to utter threats against Mr. Westerton. Just before he had left her that evening he said that she was a good girl and that he would reward her now that he had the old bird, Westerton, under his thumb.

He was quite sober then, Francis Westerton recalled, said that he could not imagine what the deceased had meant by stating that he had him, the witness, under his thumb. Smithson had no hold over him. His life was an open book. He had no secrets.

"It may be an open book to him," grumbled Frost, when going over the evidence with Thomas and Hardy at the *Mirror* Office. "It's Greek to me."

"Greek may be an open book, Frost." Hardy laughed. "The one trouble in reading it is to know the language. You have had Westerton looked up?"

"Two and a half years in Sydney. Came from England. Appears to have plenty of money. Invested heavily in Government stocks. Does not speculate, drinks moderately, does not play golf or any other game, so far as I know. Doesn't attend races or any sports meetings. Hasn't any business or profession. Doesn't attend church, theatres, pictures, shows or concerts. Has a powerful wireless, but only uses it on occasions. Has only two daily newspapers delivered at the house. Doesn't buy books, periodicals or magazines. Smokes a lot in spite of his bad heart

he talks about, and is not under the advice of a doctor. Has an enormous post, mainly from abroad. I have had it examined and it appears to be mainly from personal friends. Very few commercial letters."

"A very negative person," laughed Thomas. "You don't seem to have struck on his hobbies or pursuits, Frost."

"He has one hobby," remarked Hardy, quietly. "He has a partiality for midnight motor-rides."

"What's that?" exclaimed Frost.

"Westerton has the habit of leaving home about 10.30 at night and driving out towards South Head. These journeys are not regular—except that he invariably starts at 10.30 and travels in the same direction."

"Where does he go?" demanded Frost. "Have you followed him?"

"I followed him one night," replied the journalist. "The trip appeared aimless and harmless. Something in the nature of a joy-ride."

"Who drives the car?"

"Westerton, himself."

"Does he stop anywhere? Speak to anyone along the road?"

"Stops a good deal: seems to enjoy the view across the harbour. Once or twice he has offered persons on foot a lift. Sometimes he will stop the car, and sit yarning with some chance-met acquaintance, or stranger."

"On what days are these journeys taken?" asked Frost, after a lengthy pause.

"Absolutely irregular," Hardy replied. "Mr. Blayde first informed me of this habit of Westerton's and then I watched. I saw Westerton leave 'Forest Home' twice on these trips. Appears to take a run when he feels so inclined."

For a long time the detective remained silent, a heavy frown on his face. At length he appeared to have made up his mind to a course of action.

"What line are you working on, Hardy?" he asked.

## Chapter XII

THE journalist's face flushed. Lately the pursuit of the mysterious Dr. Night had given place to a more interesting occupation. The watching from the cosy nook on the roof of "Holmhurst," seated beside Doris Blayde, had come to be much more interesting than criminology.

"Only night watching," Hardy replied, hastily. Then added; "That and trying to get a line on Westerton's movements during the day."

"You think these mid-night motorcar trips have a definite end?"

"If Westerton drove out regular intervals. I should say *yes*," replied the journalist, slowly. "At present I can only see the aimless fad of a wealthy man in them. Yet, somehow, they seem too aimless."

"I agree with you," interjected the detective, sharply. "They are too aimless to be honest. What do you think of Westerton, Bob?"

"I don't like him."

"Spoken to him?"

"Three or four times. I made it my business to get on speaking terms with him."

"He says he is English born, but has lived a long time in America."

"English-born," repeated Frost, quietly.

"Why, the man's a German," exploded Hardy. "Speaks good English, I admit, but sometimes he frames his sentences as if he were translating from his native tongue."

"I wondered if you had noticed that," Frost laughed shortly. "I noticed the same thing when I first interviewed him. He's not English, I'll swear to that."

"Looks as if the mystery of the dead man of Darlinghurst Road is to go on the slate as another unsolved New South Wales murder," mused Thomas. He was watching the detective closely from beneath his half-closed eyelids. "There's quite a number of them, now."

Journalist and detective swung angrily towards the managing editor of the *Mirror*.

"There's no chalking this up, Mr. Thomas," exclaimed the detective angrily. "If I have to resign from the department, I camp on this trail to the end."

"The same thing goes with me, Mr. Thomas." Hardy's face was flushed. "I'll get to the bottom of this business."

"Then make a note of these joyrides. When you have half a dozen of them recorded, find out what happened on land or sea, corresponding to them."

"What 'do you know, sir?" asked the journalist, eagerly.

"I know that I have to get the *Mirror* out for to-morrow, and that you and Frost are blocking my work."

Then as the two men rose to leave the room, Thomas added; "I have a hunch as you call it, Bob, that the Harbour may be a strong point in the solution of the Westerton joy-rides. Good-night to both of you."

The journalist was particularly silent when he and the detective reached his room in the *Mirror* building. For some time he wandered about the room, picking up things and looking at them in a vacant way.

At length he swung round on Frost, who was seated in a lounge chair, idly scanning some proof matter.

"Will you get someone to follow Westerton on his next Joy-ride, Frost?" he exclaimed suddenly, halting in his walk before the seated Inspector.

"Sure. What's the game, Bob?"

"I'm going to explore 'Forest Home,'" replied the journalist. "Next time Westerton goes out, I'm going to get into that house, somehow. Get your man to make a map of the route Westerton takes. Time him at all points where he stops—how long he remains at each place."

"What about the persons he speaks to?" asked Frost curiously.

"Immaterial, so far as I see for the time being. The Chief had a hunch when he gave us that tip about the Harbour. I'm going to follow it and will give the house and the grounds a close-up at the same time."

"Well, good luck, Bob, I've some other matters to look into. Seems the dope trade is looking up in Sydney and the Commissioner is yelling blue murder."

"Huh!" Hardy swung round to face the Inspector. "What's that you're saying?"

"Only that the dope trade is looking up again." Frost laughed at Hardy's sudden interest, yet he was suddenly alert. "There's always a fair dope trade through this



city we don't seem to be able to hobble. Lately it has grown, considerably, in spite of the large number of runners our men have picked up of late. The Chief has asked me to take a hand in the matter."

"Look here, Frost," exclaimed the journalist, excitedly. "Have you forgotten young Bill Matthews? What about getting the police of Melbourne to look him up? Get a line on his cobbers and amusements?"

"Still following the story? All right. Bob. I'll have a word sent down to them. Don't get in trouble over your explorings. If you're caught—" The Inspector made an expressive gesture.

"I'll take my medicine," laughed Hardy as he parted from the detective and made his way to the *Mirror* record rooms.

Half an hour later he left the building with a large roll of newspapers under his arm and caught the Darlinghurst tram at Queen's Square.

The long night watches from the roof of "Holmhurst" had not resulted in any important discovery making towards the solution of the mystery of the solution of the dead man of Darlinghurst Road. Twice, since he had taken up the watch, had Hardy seen Westerton start on his mysterious night rides. Aimless, they appeared to be; the whim of a rich man to whom night and day were indifferent.

Yet one fact appeared significant—these journeys always commenced exactly at half past ten at night. On the second occasion on which the journalist had seen the man next door start on a journey, Westerton had left the "Forest Home" garage a few minutes early. He had appeared to realise this by the time he had reached the road and had stopped the car and sat in it idly until the church clock had chimed the half hour. Then he had driven on.

Impatient at the long inaction, Hardy had determined to search the grounds of "Forest Home" the next time Westerton left on one of his mysterious car-rides. For some days he had searched the grounds of "Forest Home" through powerful field-glasses from the roof of "Holmhurst," but the view was too restricted. With Westerton away, he did not fear to be discovered by the servants.

Doris Blayde vigorously opposed the proposed expedition, declaring it was risky, and that if the journalist was discovered, it was liable to arouse suspicion that "Forest Home" was under police observation; but Hardy was certain that no regular watch was kept by the household of "Forest Home," and that with the master away the servants would not trouble even if they had a suspicion that someone was prowling about the grounds. Further, he had decided on a late hour of the night for his proposed expedition.

Two nights after Hardy had determined to search the grounds of the house next door, Westerton started on one of his mysterious car rides. About twenty minutes past ten, the journalist noticed one of the servants walk down to the gates and swing them open. Five minutes later he heard the sound of the car being driven out of the garage on to the drive. Then, exactly at the chiming of the half-hour from the church clock, Westerton drove the car out on the road and went in the direction of Rushcutter's Bay. The servant closed the gates and returned to the house.

Hardy waited a quarter of an hour and then slipped from "Holmhurst" by the side door and crept down to the boundary wall between the two houses. Earlier in the evening, Hardy had drawn a small iron table under the boundary wall,

opposite the spot where the gap occurred in the belt of trees. Mounting on the table, Hardy peered over the wall. A light was still burning on the ground floor.

Hardy waited, and ten minutes later the light was extinguished. A few minutes and lights began to appear in the upper story of the house. Hardy calculated that he would have a little over half an hour before Westerton would return from his ride. In that time he proposed to thoroughly explore the grounds of the house, but to leave any attempt to penetrate the house itself to a later date.

A quick spring and the journalist was over the wall and crouching in the shadows. From there he carefully examined his surroundings. Then, satisfied that no one was watching, he skirmished along the boundary wall until he reached the big gates. Crossing the open patch of ground rapidly he continued along the iron railings fronting the road, dodging from bush to bush.

At the far side he found a short wall from the iron gates leading down to the water's edge. The wall was considerably shorter than the dividing wall between "Holmhurst" and "Forest Home." It took him but a few minutes to traverse its full length. Then he returned to the road, and, taking every precaution to prevent being seen by any passer-by, returned to the gap in the trees, close by where he had entered the grounds.

He now had a fair knowledge of the geography of the grounds. "Forest Home" was situated on the edge of the Harbour. The piece of ground comprised about four acres, the house being situated on the edge of a small cliff that overlooked the water. Along each boundary wall stood a belt of fine trees, and between them lay well kept lawns set out with flower beds. A heart-shaped drive surrounded the centre lawns, and between the drive and the tree belts were long stretches of narrow lawns and flower and shrub beds.

On the water side of the house the belts of trees had been trained towards the wings of the house, and hid the edge of the cliff and the water view from persons on the road and drive. On the "Holmhurst" side this belt of trees came within ten feet of the walls of the house, and some of the branches overhung the wide verandahs and reached almost to the windows.

Keeping well within the shadow of the trees, Hardy walked towards the eastern wing of the house. Passing through the trees there he came out on the edge of the cliff. It was about fifty feet high, and from the house paths had been cut in the solid rock down to a patch of lawn and shrubbery at the edge of the water. The belt of trees narrowed until they were only sufficiently thick to hide the boundary wall. It was along this waterfront that Hardy had determined he would make any discoveries leading to a solution of the mysteries that appeared to surround "Forest Home" and its owner.

The rear of the house appeared to be quiet. None of the windows showed light, and the narrow terrace on the edge of the cliff lay silent and deserted in the dim light of the moon. Dodging back amid the shelter of the trees, the journalist found the boundary wall again and, with some damage to his clothing and person, climbed down the cliff until he stood on the piece of ground bordering the water front, and in the shelter of the trees. From there he could see the rock-steps leading down to the lower level from the house. The lower lawns, were laid out in a tennis court, bounded by a large expanse of grass. A high netting surrounded the tennis court, and beneath the small cliff and just outside the netting stood a

summer-house of rustic work. At one side, near the boundary wall of "Holmhurst," was a large boat-house. A space of seven or eight feet between the boat house and the boundary wall was apparently filled by high bushes.

For some time Hardy stood in the shade of the trees, examining his surroundings. So far as he could discover, he was alone in the grounds. Yet someone might be seated in the rustic house, and any untoward movement on his part would lead to his detection. It was necessary that he should discover, immediately, if anyone was in the summer-house.

The boat-house and the patch of bush between it and the boundary wall intrigued him. It was necessary to satisfy himself that the summer-house was vacant. Yet, to approach it, was to leave himself open to observation from the boat-house and the queer bit of land beside it.

The journalist was facing a dilemma. Both courses of action were dangerous. At that moment a dark cloud slid over the face of the moon. For a time the grounds of "Forest Home" were drenched in gloom. Acting on Instinct, Hardy ran silently towards the boat-house. When the moonlight again flooded the scene, he was standing in the shadows of the building.

Slowly and with the greatest caution the journalist crept towards the patch of ground beside the party wall. At the corner of the house he peered round, and swiftly caught his breath. From where he stood the sheltering bushes had been trimmed away. The patch of ground was not filled with flowering bushes as he had supposed, when examining it from a distance. A space had been cleared in the centre and in that space stood a small iron table and a couple of chairs. It was a hidden observation post, from whence a watch could be kept on the Harbour.

The waterfront was guarded by low, thick bushes, overhanging the water, yet so trimmed that a person seated in the hidden nook would have a fairly free outlook over the Harbour, while securely sheltered from observation. On the land side the sheltering bushes just overlapped the corner of the boat-shed foliage.

The outlook had been used very recently. On the table stood bottles and glasses, still containing liquor. A box of cigars was on the table, half opened, and the ashtrays were well filled. A biscuit box had the lid propped against its side, and beside it an open book lay face down. It was not a place anyone would choose to pass an idle hour. It was an observation post only. Anyone too confined, and on a hot day would be uncomfortably oppressive. It was concealed there one could keep a watch on the shipping of the harbour and receive, if not send, signals to the shipping passing or at anchor.

The place was vacant. The journalist entered it boldly and seated himself in one of the chairs. As he had reasoned, the chair commanded a wonderful view of the Harbour. Hardy looked around himself. At his right hand, almost within reach, was a low door, shut, but the padlock fastening it was loose. Hardy picked up one of the clean glasses and helped himself to a liberal allowance of whisky. A soda syphon stood handy and he filled the glass with the effervescent water. He was badly in need of a drink and looked longingly at the open box of cigars. He could do with a smoke, but that was too dangerous.

Why should Westerton have a concealed outlook over the Harbour? Why had he had a door out in the wall of the boathouse in such a position that anyone

watching in the nook could quickly escape into the boathouse if some skiff on the water came too close, or felt inquisitive regarding the clump of bushes?

Hardy was irritated. The mystery of this house and its owner was growing, instead of becoming solved. Francis Westerton was not Dr. Night. He was convinced of that; yet the owner of "Forest Home" was fast becoming as Mysterious as the little "gray man" who had commanded, him not to proceed with his investigations into the death of the mystery man of Darlinghurst road. Westerton had called himself an Englishman, yet he used idioms that would only be used by a person of Teutonic extraction.

Mysteries had solutions; yet this house, and the grounds surrounding it, teemed with small inconsequences that border on the realms of unsolved mystery. There was nothing tangible. Westerton might be one of those innocent foreigners who prefer to live under an alien flag to the petty inconveniences of life in their native lands. The house and grounds might be entirely innocent of harbouring criminal activities. There was nothing definite, yet a hundred unexplainable trifles surrounded the place; little trivialities that pointed definitely, yet inconsequently, towards the dead man of Darlinghurst Road, and his identity.

Westerton had driven away and would not return for the better part of an hour. For that time the journalist could continue his search—if Westerton was acting entirely on his own. But Hardy was coming to the belief that the big man was but one of a gang inhabiting "Forest Home." If that was so, then he was in a dangerous position.

Discretion urged a quick retreat, even if retreat meant long hours spent crouching beneath the trees and shrubs, waiting for Westerton and his confederates to reveal themselves and the mystery of their actions.

## **Chapter XIII**

THE door leading into the boathouse intrigued the journalist. Quickly he placed a hand on it and pulled. The door was fast, in spite of the dangling padlock. A stronger pull, and the door remained firm. Hardy drew a pencil flash from his pocket and threw a thin beam of light on the door. Just above the padlock was a small latch. Pressing this, the door swung silently open.

Hardy entered and drew the door closed behind him. The boat house was a long, somewhat narrow structure, part of it overhanging the water. There were no boats in it, and from what he could see there had not been boats sheltered in it for a long time.

He was standing on a wooden floor about the size of an ordinary room. Out towards the harbour he could see the glint of water behind the closed water-gates. Above his head hung three powerful electric globes with strong reflectors.

Here was more mystery. A boathouse that did not contain a boat and had not harboured boats for some considerable time. The journalist pressed the button of his torch again and swept the light slowly round the room. In the centre of the room stood a long bench, covered with various packages and a litter of apparatus.

Around the walls had been built shelving, and these were filled with apparatus and packages.

Hardy walked slowly around the room, letting his light play on the various articles. Westerton had evidently a catholic taste in chemistry, for most of the apparatus related to chemical research.

Close by the water edge stood three huge packing cases. Two of them were empty and the third was open, but still retained part of its contents. The packing straw and paper were still scattered around the cases. Hardy groped down in the case. It appeared to be filled with small round, smooth objects. With some trouble he prised one from its place, and stood upright. The object was wrapped in paper.

The journalist started to uncover it.

Something hit him hard over the head, and he felt himself falling—down down—Faster and faster he slipped down a long, long slide—and then oblivion.

The long, slow slide downwards ceased and oblivion came as a period of gentle rest. Then painfully, and with a queer, underlying agony, succeeded the upward lift to consciousness. The tug upwards became stronger and swifter, and Hardy felt a long smooth rocking of his body. He was lying on something soft; something that yielded to every motion of his body; and part of it felt loose. It was as if, by some means, part of his skull had fallen away leaving the delicate, sensitive nerves exposed.

The long, lazy, swinging motion continued. Hardy felt that he could lie there and sleep for hours. Something splashed on his face, and he was too uninterested to lift his hand to wipe it away. It was water. All too slowly, he came to realise that he was in the water. The swaying he had felt was the long roll of the tide.

Something was holding him tight around the neck. His collar was choking him. He put up a hand and found a small cold hand twisted into the limp dampness of his collar. A voice, dimly familiar, was calling to him.

"Bob! Bob!" The voice called desperately. "Oh, do wake up, Bob! Do wake up!"

Now he remembered. It was Doris' voice. What was she doing here? She had no business here! He couldn't quite remember where they were, but it was not right for her to be there; he was certain of that. It was night and quite late, and the water was so soothing and restful. He wanted to sleep.

Now Doris was pouring water over him. Some of it splashed into his mouth, and it was quite salt. Besides, she was making him wet. Something bumped his head. He became angry for it had hit the place where it seemed that his brain lay exposed. One of his hands caught the edge of a boat. He opened his eyes.

Yes! it was the edge of a boat. What was it doing there and why was he in the water and not in the boat? The hand let go of his collar and he could breathe more freely. Then the small hands grasped his hands and tugged hard.

"Bob! Bob! Help yourself! Creep into the boat while I balance it. Oh, Bob—" Doris was calling to him.

He looked up, into her eyes. She was looking down at him from over the side of a small skiff. With a big effort he threw off the inertia that was holding him. Doris was calling to him for help! With a big effort he raised his other hand to catch the edge of the skiff.

Something was in it. He dropped the object into the bottom of the boat; and then caught hold of the edge.

Doris had disappeared; but he could still hear her calling to him to get into the boat.

Exerting every remaining ounce of his strength, he lifted himself from the water and rolled over into the bottom of the skiff.

"Quick, Bob!" Doris was shaking him roughly. "Quick, or they will catch us!"

The girl's low voice was a call to action. Hardy struggled to clear his senses. Mistily, his head in a whirl, he sat up in the bottom of the boat. Doris was struggling with an oar over his head. Reaching up a shaky hand, he guided it into the rowlock. Then his fingers met hers, and held.

"Oh, Bob!" It was all the girl could say. A long, lingering clasp and she withdrew her fingers. Drawing himself up on the seat by the thwarts of the boat, Hardy caught at the oars. For a minute the boat, and the surrounding waters, danced an insane jig before his eyes.

Gradually things steadied, and, feebly at first, but stronger after a few strokes, he started to paddle towards the "Holmhurst" boatshed.

"Quick, Bob," whispered the girl. "He is getting a boat out."

"Not a boat there, old thing." Hardy laughed almost wildly, as he bent to the oars. "Did you see anything?"

"Only a man with a tail," replied Doris shakily.

"A what?" Hardy stopped rowing, to gaze at the girl, in amazement. "It's been too much for you, dear. I'll have to get you home at once. You're—"

"I'm all right, Bob." The girl laughed, slightly hysterically "I really did see a man with a tail."

"You mean a man with a pig-tail," corrected Hardy, after a moment's thought. "I've never seen a *Chink* at 'Forest Home,' though."

"There isn't one," declared Doris, positively. "And the thing I saw carried its tail in the usual place; not at the top of his neck."

"Wonder if there's anything of an ape-kind about the place?" mused Hardy.

"But it was a man," insisted Doris, "It was a man with a tail. A real man, I mean."

Then the girl burst out laughing, wildly. Hardy looked anxiously at her. The strain of the past few hours had been too much for her. He was terribly afraid of feminine hysteria.

"It sounds absurd. 'A man with a tail.'" Doris laughed. "But, Bob, I did see him, and at the time I was not looking for anything out of the way."

"What were you doing out in the boat?" asked the journalist, anxious to change the subject.

"Watching you," retorted the girl, promptly. "When you climbed over the wall I wanted to follow, but I knew that you would send me back. So I went up to the cosy nook and tried to follow you through the night glasses. But, I could see nothing. Then I remembered that the boat was afloat. So I ran down to the boat-house and found the oars, hoping to be able to keep a watch on you from the water. For a long time I watched and saw nothing. Then the lights went up in the boathouse and I saw the man with the tail. He was bending over something lying on the ground. After a time he picked it up and carried it to the water and threw it in. I rowed down to see what it was that he had thrown into the Harbour, and—"

and found you, Bob, and—and you—you wouldn't answer me when I called you Bob."

Hardy was silent for some minutes. Doris had saved his life, and she had seen something that he had not seen. The man with the tail puzzled him, but he did not doubt her now. She had seen what she had described. It had not been hysteria, for she had seen the man with the tail before she had realised that the "something" thrown into the Harbour was his unconscious body. Swinging the head of the boat round, Hardy let the tide drift it down the Harbour, past "Forest Home" grounds. The house and the boatshed were in darkness. The man with the tail, if he existed outside Doris' imagination, had disappeared, but now the journalist was certain that the freak existed.

Urging the boat round against the tide, Hardy passed the point and then let it drift down again past the "Forest Home" boatshed. A few strokes and he came again to the observation post. He shipped the oars and caught at one of the overhanging branches. "Hold this, Doris," he whispered, as he passed the bough to the girl. Then he stepped out of the boat and waded to the shore. From where he had landed, he could peer between the branches into the observation post, beside the boatshed.

As he had expected, it was deserted. The door into the boathouse was shut and the padlock fastened. Whoever had discovered him in the boathouse and struck him down, had been satisfied he had disposed of him for good, and had not waited.

A low whistle from the girl in the boat, recalled Hardy. Time was passing fast and Doris was anxious to get back to her father before he noticed her absence and became worried.

Hardy stepped into the boat again, and pulled up to the "Holmhurst" boatshed. There he made the boat fast, and, carrying the oars into the shed, looked them up. Then Doris and he walked up the tiny path to the house. At one of the angles of the steps they had a fine view of the waterside of "Forest Home," between the trees.

"A house of mystery," observed Hardy, meditatively. "I wonder if we shall ever untangle the skein?" Doris pressed his hand in silent sympathy.

While they stood there the sound of a motor horn was heard from the front of the house. Then followed the soft grind of tyres on loose gravel.

"Mr. Westerton," whispered Doris. "We got back just in time." Listening intently they could almost follow the actions of the motorist. They heard the car backed into the garage and then the big doors rolled into place. As they went to move on, they glanced up at the windows of the house next door.

"Look!" Doris clasped her hand over her mouth. She was pointing Hardy's hand towards the windows of "Forest Home."

One of them had been suddenly illuminated, As they watched, a man's shadow was thrown on the blind. He was standing facing the window. A thin narrow man with sloping shoulders. Even in the position in which he was standing it was possible to see that his shoulders were bent. It was the outline of a man who had spent many years in study. In no one particular did it resemble the burly outline of the master of "Forest Home."

The shadow grew smaller and the outline more distinct. Then, slowly, the shadow turned. They saw the bend of the bowed shoulders and the poise of the

scholarly head. The figure was shrouded in a long loose cloak from its throat. Slowly the garment slipped from the figure's shoulders to the ground. As it did, Doris gave a little gasping shriek.

## Chapter XIV

SHE had not been mistaken. At "Forest Home" lives a man with a tail. Hardy could see it plainly. It curved out from the figure, gradually arching up to the tip. The girl's fingers bit into the journalist's arm. Then she began to sob, hiding her face on Hardy's sleeve.

The figure moved away from the window, towards the centre of the room. As it moved it increased in size until it appeared almost gigantic. Then it appeared to lift something from the table, with both hands. For a few seconds it stood motionless, then it raised the object high in the air with both hands, and lowered it on its head. In some way the thing looked like an inverted flowerpot, made of some pliant material. Again the figure approached the window, only to vanish as if blotted out by some magic power, leaving the window illuminated only by the unbroken glow of the light.

Placing his arm around the girl's waist, Hardy supported her to the house. On the doorstep they lingered awhile, Doris trying to compose her nerves, in case she met her father on her way to her room.

When he left her, the journalist walked towards the entrance gates. He had not proceeded far when he was recalled by a low whistle. Doris met him on the drive.

"Bob," whispered the girl. "You threw this into the boat to-night, when I found you." She pressed a small, hard object into his hand, and then, with a hurried word of farewell, ran into the house.

Hardy stepped into a patch of moonlight and looked at the object the girl had given him. In his hand lay a small bottle of glass about two inches long and half an inch in diameter. For a moment he looked at it in amazement. Then he remembered. It was similar to the bottle he had found on the table of his sitting room, some days before; it was the fellow of the bottle Dr. Streatham had shown him at the Sydney Hospital.

Hardy opened the bottle and smelt the interior. It was empty and had apparently not been used. In that particular alone, it differed from the bottle Dr. Streatham had shown him, and one mysteriously sent to him. Both those bottles held cocaine. This bottle, empty now, would certainly have been used by the drug fiends inhabiting "Forest Home" at some time to hold the illicit drug they were smuggling into Australia.

His luck had held. Accident following accident had led him to the goal he sought. At "Forest Home" he had found the bottle, and at "Forest Home" he would, sooner or later, find the solution to the various mysteries that had followed the discovery of the body of the man, Smithson, in Darlinghurst Road.

The apparition of "The Man with the Tail" in the upper room of "Forest Home" greatly perplexed Robert Hardy. The investigations he had carried out in the



grounds and the boatshed had proved to him that the place was being used by a gang of illicit drug smugglers. He had in his possession sufficient evidence to persuade the police to raid the place. Once inside the house, without warning, he was convinced that evidence would be forthcoming to secure convictions for all found on the premises.

The knowledge that "Forest Home" was the head quarters of a gang of crooks was satisfactory in so far as it justified the suspicions that the journalist had held of the house and its owner, Francis Westerton.

But Hardy realised that he had not advanced one inch in the solution of the death of Smithson in Darlinghurst Road; and the identity of the mysterious Dr. Night had still to be discovered. Westerton was not Dr. Night, and since the evening when that master criminal had telephoned the *Mirror* Offices and made virtual confession of his complicity in the death of Smithson, he had vanished into thin air.

The journalist was working on the theory that the pursuit of Francis Westerton and his activities would lead to the lair of the master criminal, Dr. Night.

Inspector Frost's report of the interviews on the verandah and in the grounds of "Forest Home," had induced the suspicion that Westerton was not the master mind of the gang inhabiting the house. Hardy held a suspicion that behind the scenes lurked Dr. Night either living in seclusion at "Forest Home" or visiting there at frequent intervals.

The night rides indulged in by Westerton gave colour to that theory. Dr. Night well might be brought to the house, and taken therefrom, concealed in the car. The regularity of the time of leaving "Forest Home" could be explained by the fact that the car was met at an appointed spot by another car, for the transference of the passenger. Such a procedure would certainly prevent the two places frequented by Dr. Night being connected.

Following this line of reasoning, Hardy asked himself: "Is Dr. Night the Man with the Tail" Doris and he had seen shadowed on the blind of the upper room at "Forest Home?" It was possible; and from the seclusion Dr. Night had apparently adopted, very probable.

Then, who was Dr. Night? Was he a freak of nature; a deformed intelligence; seeking to work ill on humanity, as revenge for Nature's endowment of abnormality? Such an explanation fitted into the puzzle—but it was only a theory. By hook or crook the journalist determined to gain admission to "Forest Home" and to prove his theory right or wrong.

To visit the house would serve him little. He would not be allowed to wander about at his will. The only course was to obtain admission unknown to Francis Westerton and his household. To do that he would have to place himself outside the law. Detection would mean imprisonment, and although he stood on intimate terms with the Police Department, he could not look for any relaxation of the laws. That would be impossible, for Westerton would certainly press for his punishment; and neither his newspaper nor the police could refuse, or plead complicity without raising a storm of public indignation against the invasion of the privacy of a citizen's home.

Hardy found the Inspector waiting for him in his room at the Mirror Offices when he arrived the following morning. Frost met him with the news that William Matthews had been arrested at Fitzroy, a Melbourne suburb, the previous day.

"How is that going to help us?" asked the journalist.

"We've taken him on a charge of consorting with persons of doubtful character, and being without visible means of support," replied the Inspector shortly. "After appearing before the Victorian magistrate, he will be remanded to Sydney on a warrant I have caused to be issued. When he gets here we will persuade him to explain a lot of things."

"Particularly?" queried Hardy.

"I want to know if he was connected with Smithson."

"Matthews will have a lot more than that to explain when he comes to Sydney," observed the journalist thoughtfully. "I want the inner story of the shooting up of his mother's flat; and that means the story of his connections with the snow-runners of this city."

"Sure."

The Inspector hesitated, then continued: "Truth is, Bob, the story's got me bluffed. The Chief asked me this morning who Dr. Night is, and I had to confess that I hadn't the ghost of an idea, beyond the fact that he had a lot to do with the death of Smithson."

"Dr. Night is the head of the Illicit drug traffic of Sydney," replied Hardy quickly. "Who, and what, he is, I cannot even guess. He is covered too well, but I'm just beginning to understand how he is operating."

Frost was immediately interested.

The journalist then recounted in detail his adventures in the grounds of "Forest Home," the previous night, finishing his story with the vision of "The Man With the Tail," seen by Doris and on the blind of the room at "Forest Home."

"How you can hope to work out from that the line of operation of these crooks is more than I can understand," remarked the detective, when Hardy had concluded. "All I can gather is that someone was trying to play the goat with you."

"The case of bottles in the boatshed is sufficient on which to base the theory that 'Forest Home' is the headquarters of the illicit drug smugglers of Sydney," retorted Hardy. "You remember, a similar bottle was placed in my room for some purpose. Both Chaffers, the chemist, and Dr. Streatham, of the Sydney Hospital, are positive that the drug runners are selling the dope in those bottles."

"By the bye, Bob," interjected the Inspector, "I think you should bring that bottle down to headquarters. There might be something about it that would give us a clue."

Hardy thought for a moment. He had a strange reluctance to bring the bottle into the business at that stage.

"No," he said positively. "That bottle is too innocent, Frost. It's locked up in my rooms, and I'm opposed to anyone touching it until we know more about it than we do now. Besides, we have no knowledge whatever that it is connected with either Dr. Night, or Smithson. It may be a practical joke that someone is trying to put over me. Anyhow, that bottle stays where it is until we know more. Now, do you remember Mr. Thomas tipping me to compare Westerton's mysterious journeys with happenings on 'land and sea'?"

"Well?"

"I obtained from Mr. Blayde a list of the dates on which Westerton had taken night motor-rides. A search through the files of the *Mirror* resulted in the fact that the motor rides coincide with the arrivals of ships from Asia."

"That's a point," exclaimed the Inspector with great satisfaction. "I'm going to have that car searched next time he goes out."

Hardy did not think any good would result from any such search. While there might be a connection between the arrival of eastern shipping and the mysterious motor-rides of Francis Westerton, it would be improbable that the gang would attempt to convey the drugs from the ship to "Forest Home" by such methods, it was too open for suspicion.

The boatshed offered the better route for the smuggling of the drugs. On dark nights the conveyance of the smuggled drugs by water would be almost absolutely safe from detection. Men disguised as fishermen could, without suspicion, visit the vessels at the wharves and then drop casually down the shores to the boathouse. The water police would be entirely unsuspecting, and the presence of a fair haul of fish in the boat, an excellent cover.

Yet the journalist did not attempt to dissuade the detective from his proposed search of Westerton's car. He did not believe it would result in any tangible evidence, but it would give him a free hand to conduct the examination of "Forest Home." He had already made up his mind that he must take all risks and force an entrance to the house of mystery.

It was late that night before Hardy made his way to the gates of "Forest Home." He had not called at the Blayde's house, as he was certain that if Doris knew of his proposed adventure she would bitterly oppose him taking the risk, or else demand some share in the adventure. That was impossible.

## Chapter XV

THE grounds of "Forest Home" lay silent and deserted in the waning light of the moon when he arrived at the gates. The road was deserted, and after a swift look round, the journalist scaled the wall and dropped into the shadows of the trees. Cautiously, he skirted the boundary wall down to the boathouse. On both sides the house was in darkness.

Was Westerton at home, or had he gone for one of his mysterious motor drives? More than probably the gangster was at home. At no time had he taken his motor trips on two consecutive nights.

Hardy had determined to risk this. From what the Inspector had told him, there seemed to be quite a number of servants in the house. The presence of Westerton would add but little to the risk he was running.

The outlook between the boundary wall and the boathouse was deserted. A survey of the boatshed indicated that it was vacant. It was from there, Hardy had decided, that he had been watched on the previous evening. This time he would not leave his rear unexplored.

Waiting until a cloud passed over the face of the moon, Hardy ran silently to the blank wall of the summer-house. Here he was in the shadows again. For a time he listened intently, his ear against the woodwork. There was no sound and no light issuing from the building.

Creeping to the front, the journalist boldly entered the summer-house and flashed his torch around. As he had suspected, it was empty. He was now satisfied that this portion of the grounds did not contain watchers. There remained the house, and every window of the building was in darkness. That, in itself, was no guarantee that the inmates were in bed and asleep. Before proceeding further, he must satisfy himself that the darkened rooms did not contain watchers.

Presuming that the gang had posted sentinels—and such a course would be probable after his adventure of the previous night—Hardy had but two courses he could pursue. He could go to the house, trusting to his luck to make them discover their presence before getting dangerously close to them, or he could make them come to him. Both methods were risky, and one false step might wreck all hopes of ever getting into, the house, unobserved.

Watching his opportunity, Hardy returned to the shelter of the boat-shed. There he retired into the concealed nook and lighted a cigarette. He could smoke here without endangering his mission. He wanted a smoke and time to think and plan.

The cigarette finished, he climbed out on the runway from the boathouse, extending over the water. From there he threw the light of his torch across the bushes on the waterfront. For several minutes he played the light up and down, intermittently. Then he crept into the nook and lay beneath the sheltering bushes, watching the house. It remained silent and dark. Satisfied now that the inmates were asleep, Hardy made his way to the edge of the verandah. Crouched down, the journalist scanned the verandah and the windows. Suddenly he tensed.

A window was open and through it, swaying in the gentle breeze, floated a curtain. What did it mean? For some moments Hardy remained undecided. Was it a trap; or—had the window been left open by a careless servant? Both were possibilities, impossible to prove.

Then he swung himself on the verandah and silently approached the open window. There was no sound from within the room. Catching hold of the curtain as it, drifted towards him, the journalist peered into the darkened room. All he could see was the dim outlines of a few pieces of furniture that stood near the window. The remainder of the room was in darkness.

To suspect a man of dealing in smuggled drugs and to invade his house in the dead of night, are different things. Hardy held no illusion on the subject. He was taking a big risk. He knew that even Frost, with the power of the Detective Department behind him, would have no power to save him if he was detected and caught. He would have to take his medicine. The *Mirror* would disown him. He would be treated as a common thief.

Only if he failed. Success, and the proving of his theories, would justify his actions. The thought spurred him on. With a quick, backwards glance over the grounds, he pulled back the flapping curtain and stepped into the room.

For a full minute Hardy stood, just inside the room, listening intently. There was not a sound to be heard. He pressed the button of his torch and swept the light slowly around the room.

As the light pierced the darkness, the windows behind him swung together. At the same time came the sharp *click* of a switch and the room was flooded with light.

Standing on the hearth rug was a thin grey man of medium height, his shoulders slightly bent forward in a scholarly stoop. On his head he wore a black silk skull cap from beneath which scanty grey hairs straggled across his forehead and temples.

"Good evening, Mr. Hardy." The man's lips had not appeared to move yet the voice came clear as a bell with a slight tinge of foreign accent. The man stood, absolutely still, only his piercing grey eyes showing signs of life.

"I have waited a long time for you, Mr. Hardy," the clear voice continued. "You could not keep away neither did I will you to do so."

"Dr. Night!" breathed Hardy.

"At your service. Dr. Night!" The thin lips twitched into a faint smile. "The name will serve. You would not take the warning I gave you; yet that warning was given at some considerable risk to myself."

Hardy swung round, suddenly, towards the window. He had it in mind to make a swift break for liberty.

"I warn you." Dr. Night raised a thin hand. "My servants are without and have orders not to allow you to pass. They obey me or—But we will not talk of unpleasant things."

He had been trapped. Hardy now realised that the quietness of the house, the open window, the unmatched grounds had all been decoys to draw him into this room. He had been watched silently, unobtrusively, from the moment he had entered the grounds of "Forest Home." The way had been made smooth for him that he might deliver himself helpless, into the hands of the master criminal.

A wave of relief swept over him that he had concealed his intentions from Doris. It would have been inconceivable for her to have fallen into the hands of this ominous grey man.

"What are you going to do with me?" Hardy asked the question, involuntarily.

"You are my guest." Dr. Night's eyes had not lost their glint of amusement—the amusement of a cat playing with a tortured mouse. "It is the better way. You have become inconvenient. For that I congratulate you, Mr. Hardy. Few people inconvenience me; your friend the big policeman, not at all. As my guest you will not inconvenience me."

"I should imagine otherwise," answered Hardy with a short laugh. "You realise that questions will be asked by my newspaper and the police, if I disappear without explanations."

"By your friend, the big policeman." Dr. Night waved the suggestion aside. "Yet you had no trouble in avoiding his espionage when you determined to meet my fair neighbour alone at the foot of Roslyn Gardens steps."

Dr. Night smiled again at the journalist's bewilderment. "You are surprised, my guest. You have not realised that you have been watched for a long time. That I made one mistake is not a guarantee that I shall make others. The good man, Smithson, was a mistake. I shall not err again."

"You made a mistake when you telephoned me," corrected Hardy. Something in the air of his captor gave him confidence.

"I grieve to differ from my guest." Dr. Night's smile had disappeared. "It was written that you came to me. Therefore I took means that you should find me. I placed in your hands the slender thread that would lead you to this house, and to this room. You have followed it, my servants watching your every step. You have come here a—now you are my guest."

"The word *guest* seems somewhat of a misnomer," remarked the Journalist, drily.

"I think not. But I am remiss. Will you please be seated. I desire not that my guest should stand."

Pocketing the torch he had continued to hold, Hardy walked carelessly into the room and seated himself in a deep lounge chair.

"That is well." The master criminal relaxed the air of tension he had worn since revealing himself to the journalist. He dropped wearily into a chair. "We will now talk of the future."

"The one matter that interests me at the present moment is, how long you intend to hold me a prisoner," retorted Hardy.

"Who can read the book that lies in the lap of the gods?" Dr. Night turned his piercing glance on the journalist. "We mortals live from day to day and walk the path ordained for us. Again I fear I am remiss. It is well that I administer to the requirements of my guest."

The master criminal clapped his hands, thrice. Immediately the door opened and a Chinese servant entered, pushing a wheeled table before him, on which was set out an elaborate tea-service. Halting in the doorway the man bowed low, three times. He pushed the waiter to the side of his master and folded his hands in his sleeves.

"I offer you the drink of my country." Dr. Night waved a thin hand towards the tea equipage. "It is to your liking? That is well. It is for you to order in this house and for my servants to obey. If they obey not you shall inform me and they shall be asked not little, my guest. The wise man takes that which is freely offered, even to the uttermost."

"I warn you, Dr. Night, that I shall take my freedom," laughed the journalist, sipping the delicious China tea from a cup of exquisite delicacy. Already he had recovered his nerve and was planning his escape.

In spite of the involuntary awe the master criminal had first infected him with, the journalist realised now that it was a battle of wits. Dr. Night had shown that he did not intend to murder him, or to hand him over to the authorities as a thief. There must be some way he could work to freedom, and even if he failed. Inspector Frost would search for him. "Forest Home" would immediately fall under suspicion and a search of the premises would result in his release.

"Shall I read your thoughts?" The cool voice of the master criminal broke on his meditation. "You are thinking that your friend, the big policeman, will quickly come for you. True, he will come, but he will not find you. You will not want him to find you."

"I beg your pardon?" Hardy was startled.

"I say, you will not want your friend the big policeman to find you." Dr. Night's voice was full of assurance, "It will be your desire to remain here as my guest."

"Should you leave me I shall have to invite your lady friend to take your place. You understand. I am referring to the young lady who pulled you out of the water last night. And she will not refuse. No, I shall take her for—my guest."

## Chapter XVI

THE grey eyes of the man became full of weird lights. The lean body tensed with energy and as he leaned towards the Journalist his voice became low and menacing.

"You will be my guest here, or the lady of your friendship shall take, your place. She, I will send to my country, and there she will not be my guest. There are men in my country who desire greatly women who are white. Do you understand?"

Slowly, Hardy nodded his head. Only too well he understood the veiled threat.

Dr. Night confined Hardy in a suite of rooms on the upper storey of "Forest Home," overlooking the Harbour. Except that the door of the suite was kept locked and the windows were heavily barred, there was but little restraint put on him. The master criminal appeared to think that the journalist was 'overawed' by his threats against Doris' liberty.

Hardy was willing that the Doctor should deceive himself in that manner. From the moment the threat against Doris had been uttered the journalist had determined to play a part. He would remain a voluntary prisoner in the quarters assigned to him, obedient to the orders of his gaoler, and trust to the sequence of events to give him his liberty at the opportune moment. One of the chief reasons which held Hardy a complacent prisoner in "Forest Home" was the fact that, in those circumstances he would have opportunities to study the master-criminal at close quarters; and that chance might put him in the way of the clues to solve the mysteries surrounding the place and the gang. To attain these objects, Hardy was content to ignore the immediate question of his liberty. Once he had to break up this nest of criminals he would find means to walk out of this house and take measures for Doris' protection. Further, every day brought the Inspector nearer to his prison place. Sooner or later, he and the police would get into communication and then the arrest of Dr. Night and his confederates would quickly follow.

Dr. Night appeared to take a great interest in his prisoner. Two or three times a day he would visit Hardy's room and, though his visits were short, at first, he gradually lengthened them. Nearly every evening he would send a message to the journalist requesting him to visit him in his study; and the short journeys through the house showed Hardy that the master criminal had at his disposal a large staff of servile Asiatics.

Dr. Night's nationality puzzled the journalist. There was an evident desire on the part of the Doctor that his prisoner should regard him as a Chinese of high rank; but for some indefinable reason, that Hardy could not have logically defended, he was convinced that the master-criminal was attempting to mislead him in that direction. At the same time the journalist noticed that the Chinese servants

regarded their master as purely Chinese and of royal rank, and served him accordingly.

Hardy saw no one but the master criminal and the Chinese servants. So far as he could discover there were no white people in the house. Yet Frost had declared that the household was composed only of Europeans. The journalist could not conclude that the house contained two separate households, and that the Asiatic household was carefully concealed from any chance visitors to the house.

Openly, and for public information, Francis Westerton occupied the house. Behind this blind lived Dr. Night, served by Asiatic servants, in royal seclusion.

The apparent inaction of the journalist induced a spirit of boastfulness in the master criminal. At the first intervals between Hardy and his gaoler the latter had confined himself to general subjects and had proved himself a wonderfully well-informed man. Later, he had become more personal, and entertained the journalist with accounts of his adventures as a modern Robin Hood, in constant warfare with recognised authority, always succouring the poor and needy. It was the story of a life that led from the heart of China, and through the various countries of the world, to the new nation in Australia.

A week passed and in spite of Hardy's ceaseless watchfulness, he had learned but little, his immediate ambition was to gain a certain freedom in the house. For the time he was indifferent as to how closely the master-criminal guarded him from the grounds and freedom. He wanted liberty to explore the house and that, it was evident, was to be denied him.

When Dr. Night visited him, the door of his prison rooms stood apparently unguarded, but outside in the corridor stood on guard half-a-dozen stalwart Chinese. Peculiarly, when he was served with his meals in his sitting-room, the man who waited on him appeared to be unattended, by guards.

The inaction fretted the journalist. He wondered that Inspector Frost was doing. Surely his disappearance would have caused inquiries to be made at "Forest Home." The detective knew that he had been watching the place. Fairly contented at first, the journalist grew restless and spent much of his time standing at his window, staring out over the Harbour.

One day his attention was attracted by the vigorous signalling of a sailor on a destroyer steaming down the Harbour. The journalist could decipher the letters as they were spelt out. Idly, he repeated the message to himself. An idea struck him. It would be possible to flash a message across the Harbour. The electric light in his room would be the means.

Would the sudden lighting and darkening of his room be sufficient? He doubted it. He must intensify the light and throw it out over the Harbour. He looked around the room. A radiator stood in the corner, attached to the wall plug by a long length of flexible wire.

Disengaging the wall plug, he had at his disposal a long length of wire sufficient to extend the light to his window. Mounting the table he carefully scraped bare the wires immediately above the lamp holder, keeping them apart with a plug of wood. From one of the rooms of the suite he obtained a globe-holder and fitted it on to the end of the cord. Around this he formed a cone of newspaper to confine and intensify the light. He was now ready to get in touch with the outer world.



Three nights in succession the journalist, at frequent intervals, attempted to get into communication with some boat on the Harbour, but without success.

On the fourth night he noticed a lantern being waved vigorously from a small boat. After watching it for some time, Hardy came to the conclusion that the persons in the boat were trying to get in communication with him.

"*Tell Inspector Frost, police, come waterfront, to-morrow,*" carefully spelt out the journalist, in hesitating Morse.

There was a brief wait and then Hardy repeated the message. From the boat someone winked out the message:

"Yes."

Hardy was now in communication with the outer world.

Pulling down his apparatus and concealing the evidence of his work, he sat down to think out his course of action. Frost would certainly come to the waterfront the following night, and by that time he must have planned his future actions. If he decided to leave "Forest Home" at once, Frost would certainly arrange for the house to be raided immediately. In fact, Hardy feared that once the Inspector received his message, he would arrange a raid without waiting to hear from Hardy on the following evening.

Strange to say, the journalist was not in a hurry to leave "Forest Home." The house intrigued him. If only he could pass the door of his room, unwatched.

The following evening Dr. Night came early to his room and sat talking. Hardy was restless, and when the hours passed and the master-criminal showed no signs of leaving he became suspicious that the doctor's spies had discovered his attempt to communicate with the outer world. At length, the journalist commenced to yawn, ostentatiously.

"You are tired, my friend," Dr. Night said "Yet you have no work to draw on your strength. As for me, night I have to labour long. I will, therefore, bid you pleasant sleep and a good awakening."

"It will be pleasant if it leads to the day of my freedom," observed Hardy barely stifling another yawn.

"That is a matter it is forbidden to discuss." Dr. Night bowed as he moved towards the door. "The day may come. In the meantime, remember, the wise man is patient in all things."

Immediately the Doctor had left the room, Hardy sprang to the door and pressed his ear against the woodwork. He heard the slow, stately step walk along the corridor and then start to descend the stairs.

When he was certain that the Doctor would not return the journalist mounted the table and quickly fixed his apparatus. For about an hour he flashed signals across the Harbour, without result. Then he received an answering signal from the deck of a ship lying out towards Neutral Bay.

Three times the message was repeated before the journalist could decipher it.

Finally, he pieced together sufficient of the words to guess the meaning of the whole.

"*Frost in boat, waterfront. Is it safe, signal from there?*"

Depressing the mouth of his cone, Hardy winked out the word: "*Frost.*"

From a clump of bushes on the waterfront a torch winked quickly. Opening the window the journalist flung out on the lawn his cigarette case, containing a letter he had written during the day.

Then he morsed: "*Letter on lawn. To-morrow after midnight. Good night.*"

It was very dangerous to continue signalling.

Hardy waited impatiently for the following night. It wanted some twenty minutes to the hour when he took up his station at the window, fearing every minute that something would happen to prevent the detective getting in touch with him. Just on the stroke of the hour a torch winked on the water edge.

Hardy opened his window, and waited. A few minutes later a soft article struck the bars of the window and fell, almost silently on to the iron of the verandah roof. The journalist thrust his arm out of the window, curved to cover as many bars as possible, and waited. Again the soft thing bumped the bars and fell to the roof; this time the string to which it was attached fell over his arm. Stretching out his other hand he caught the string and hauled it in.

A somewhat large package came over the edge of the verandah and slid along the roof. It was fairly bulky and he had some difficulty in dragging it between the bars. Then he pulled down his flashing apparatus. With nervous hands he opened the package and switched on the room lights. He discovered a miscellaneous collection of files, saws, skeleton keys and other burglar tools, including a knotted rope.

## Chapter XVII

A LETTER lay among the tools. Hardy was about to open it when he thought he heard a sound in the corridor. Bundling the tools into the cloth in which they had been wrapped he took them into his bedroom, and hid them under the mattress of his bed. Then he returned to his sitting room and opened the letter.

*Here are the tools you asked for. We have been greatly worried over your disappearance and Thomas raised hell with the D.B. He was much relieved when I telephoned him today that we had got in touch with you and told him that you were occupying a position in the enemy's camp. When will you be ready to escape? Shouldn't take you more than a night to file through those bars. What did you want the keys for? Do you intend to get through the house? Should say window the best. Bill Matthews was brought from Melbourne this morning. Going to give him a 'once-over' tomorrow evening at office. Should like you to be there as you may have gathered sufficient to induce him to open out. One of our boats with a couple of men will be under the bushes on the waterfront each night, until you escape, to be of any assistance to you. If you are not free within forty-eight hours after you get this, I shall raid the house.*

*Jim Frost.*

*P.S.—Will wait for your O.K.*

Hardy seized a piece of paper and was about to write a note acknowledging the detective's letter when he heard voices in the garden. Switching off the light, he went to the window and peered out into the night. He could see little but moving shadows. The shrill voices of the Chinese servants came up to him and he could distinguish the calm, level deeper tones of the master-criminal.

Then a torch winked on the waterfront. The chatter of the Chinese servants increased in volume. Someone on land fired a couple of shots, responded to from the waterfront by a derisive laugh.

The light in the study below switched on and Hardy could distinguish on the lawn the slender form of Dr. Night, standing by the bulkier form of a white man.

"Sure I hit one of 'em," exulted Dr. Night's companion. "Couldn't miss 'em. What were they after?"

"Robert Hardy," replied the Doctor. "It is most evident that the big policeman suspects that he is here."

"D'yer think that newspaper chap got in touch with him?" queried the man.

"We may soon learn if that is so."

Dr. Night turned and led the way back to the house. Hardy stripped off his coat and collar and picked up a book. When the master-criminal and his companion entered the room he was seated, apparently half-asleep, in a chair.

"Hullo!" The journalist gave an excellent imitation of a man rudely awakened from a doze. "By Jove! I must have fallen asleep over my book. Anything wrong, Doctor?"

"Did not my guest hear the shots fired on the lawn?" Dr. Night looked searchingly into the journalist's face as he asked the question.

"What was the trouble?" asked Hardy innocently.

"I was unable to discover," replied Dr. Night suavely. "My guest would do well to retire. It is not good to read too late at night."

"I'd stop 'is readin' an' 'is breathin' too," muttered the gunman, slipping his hand into the pocket of his jacket. "Just say t'word, Doctor."

"I do not approve of violence." The master-criminal motioned his companion towards the door. "Mr. Hardy understands the consequence of disobedience to my wishes."

For an hour Hardy lay down on his bed, intent on keeping awake. He had determined that, when the household had quieted down, after the excitement occasioned by the shooting on the lawn, he would explore the house. Time was short, for Inspector Frost had written that he had Matthews in custody, in Sydney, and intended to question him the following night. The journalist had determined that he would be present at that inquisition. Matthews could link up many points in the chain of evidence he was weaving around the household at "Forest Home," if he would speak, and Hardy was of opinion that he had information that would induce the young criminal to talk freely.

The master-criminal had indicated earlier in the evening that he had work that would occupy him a greater part of the night. Hardy realised that to attempt to explore the house with Dr. Night awake was terribly hazardous, but he could not wait, it had to be that night, whatever the cost. With the information that he might

gain, the work of the police in routing out this nest of criminals would be made easy and exact.

The frequent conversations he had had with the master-criminal had given him an insight into the character of the man. Clever, the Doctor undoubtedly was, but it was a cleverness that held many pitfalls. Secure in his own ability, the master-criminal held the powers of his opponent's cheap. He ignored the undoubted ability of the Police Department, treating them as if of no account. He had concealed to some extent his opinion of the journalist, but had let it be seen that while he gave the newspaper man credit for certain shrewdness, he discounted any opposition from him as negligible.

Unwittingly Dr. Night had given Hardy a fairly clear understanding of the working of the gang he headed. The journalist had, before he entered the home of Dr. Night as a prisoner, formed the theory that "Forest Home" was the headquarters of a gang of illicit drug smugglers under the leadership of Francis Westerton and Dr. Night. He had suspected that the activities of the gang were confined to New South Wales.

His interviews with the master criminal had sufficed to show him that he had vastly underrated the abilities and extent of the gang. Dr. Night was the sole head of the organisation. Westerton and the other white men under him, and their ramifications, spread all over Australia. Under the master criminal, Sydney had become the centre and the port for the secret importations of cocaine and opium in vast quantities.

But there was another side of the activities of the gang that Hardy had not yet uncovered. Sufficient he had learned to induce him to believe that through "Forest Home" Chinese and other Asiatics were being imported into Australia in vast quantities. These men, practically slaves, were immediately passed into the city and out into the country, to be forwarded by underground railways into the vast north, there to work in mines and on the fields owned by Chinese who had been in Australia for years.

From sentences the doctor had let fall, the journalist was coming to believe that white men, calling themselves Australians, were not innocent of this bartering in human flesh and blood as cheap labour. Piecing together the various bits of information he had obtained during his confinement in the house, the time passed quickly for the journalist.

At two o'clock in the morning, Hardy swung his feet to the ground and went quietly to the door. Not a sound could be heard from the corridor. Taking a bunch of the skeleton keys Frost had given him, Hardy tried a likely-looking one in the door. It turned easily and silently. Very cautiously, he pulled the door slightly open and peered out. The electric light was still burning in the corridor. For a moment the journalist stood at the open door carefully examining the corridor from end to end. It lay silent and deserted.

Hardy had in his mind a careful plan of the house, gathered from the few times he had passed from his prison room to the Doctor's study. Turning towards the head of the stairs and walking with the utmost caution, he passed along the corridor. At the head of the stairs he halted and listened intently. The house seemed deserted. As far as he could judge he was the only person awake within

those walls. Yet, unless the Doctor had deliberately deceived him, he knew that this was not so.

Somewhere in the house the master-criminal was awake and at his nefarious business. It was for Hardy to avoid him at all costs. Face to face with the Doctor, he would have to surrender and go back to a more vigorous confinement, or fight his way to freedom against overwhelming odds. If his luck held—Hardy proved that it would—tomorrow he would be free, and with the information to put the master-criminal and his gang behind the bars for a long term of years.

The next hour would decide.

Carefully creeping down the stairs. Hardy arrived at the ground floor. Before him were the great doors of the entrance hall. On either side the hall branched off into passages. Doors seemed everywhere. Turning to the right, Hardy cautiously tried the door. It gave and he thrust it open and peered in. The blind was up and the journalist could see that it was one of the big reception rooms, unoccupied. The door on the left of the front doors led into a similar room.

The journalist hesitated a moment and then closed the door. It was not in these rooms he would find the information he required. Through the darkness of the house the newspaper investigator moved silently, from room to room. Soon he located the room where Westerton lay asleep. In another room he found the maids, also asleep. Yet another room was given over to the men-servants, but nowhere did he find any trace of the Chinese servants. It was evident that they slept in some quarters at the rear of the house.

At length he came to the door of the room he knew to be the master-criminal's study. Here he paused a long time, listening with his ear pressed against the panel. It was silent within the room, but Hardy feared to turn the latch. He well remembered the wonderful silence the man had preserved on the night he had been captured.

Was Dr. Night within, like a spider in his lair, awaiting the journalist-fly to walk into the trap?

The minutes passed while Hardy stood with his hand on the door-knob trying to pluck up courage to put his doubts to rest. Then, walking back to the front door, he carefully examined the fastenings, making certain that the door was not bolted and could be opened on the latch alone. Satisfied he returned to the study door and, listening a moment, turned the handle and slipped inside.

A light was burning on the desk under one of the long windows. The red shade cast a glow over the room, leaving the corners in mysterious shadows. Hardy drew his pocket torch and swept the room with a beam of white light. He was alone. A number of papers were littered on the blotting pad. Quickly he passed them under review. They were innocent business letters, most of them relating, to the household expenditure. Among these papers were a few, obviously letters, written in Chinese characters. The newspaper man hesitated, with them in his hand. He would have liked to have appropriated them. They might contain information relating to the foreign correspondence of the gang.

It was dangerous, however. Dr. Night might miss them and in his rooms he had no hiding place where they would be safe from a thorough search. Systematically, Hardy quartered the room, patiently searching for evidence of the gang's criminal

activities. A comfortable, handsomely furnished room, it held nothing that could be considered of value to a prosecution.

Wearied with his search, Hardy seated himself in one of the lounge chairs and looked around him. His attention was caught by a handsome pianola standing against the wall at the far end of the room. Close by stood a cabinet, choked full of piano rolls. On the instrument and on top of the cabinet, and piled on the floor around were heaps of rolls.

Hardy could not remember hearing the pianola being played since he became a prisoner in the house. From the number of rolls scattered around Dr. Night should be considered a "pianola fan." Yet he did not use the instrument.

Crossing the room, Hardy picked up one of the boxes. It opened easily in his hand and contained the usual music roll. Lifting it out the journalist opened the roll. It was the usual perforated paper article. Hardy tried box after box, only to meet the same result.

He was not satisfied. Why should the master-criminal accumulate this large pile of rolls and never play the instrument? They looked innocent, but—Hardy slipped one of the boxes into his pocket. It would not be missed and in his rooms he could examine it at leisure.

The silence of the room made Hardy incautious. He was standing by the pianola, puzzling over the mystery of the musical instrument that was never played when he heard a sound—a slight *click*, like the release of a latch. Quickly, he slipped behind the pianola.

There was a long silence. He peered around the instrument. Someone was standing by the big desk, searching for something. Drawer after drawer was opened and examined.

At length the man stood up, muttering to himself. He walked across the room to the handsome fireplace and pressed one of the bosses of the ornamentation. A section of the wainscoting moved silently to one side, revealing a passage. The man bent down—and gave a low whistle. A few seconds and he whistled again. Almost immediately Dr. Night passed through the opening into the room.

"The things are not here," exclaimed the man, irritably. Dr. Night went to the desk and pulled out one of the drawers completely. He thrust his arm into the cavity. There was a little *click* and part of the heavy moulding at the top of the desk fell down, revealing a shallow drawer.

"Here are the papers, my friend," said the Doctor, suavely. "You know where the stuff is hidden."

"Sure," said the stranger. "It's one of the cutest tricks I've come across this side of the Pacific."

"It is a pleasure to have the commendation of so great an authority as Carl Humberson." Dr. Night spoke with slight sarcasm.

"That's more than I can say for the birds I have to work with," retorted Humberson, crossly. "Of all the mugs I've come across, the wiseheads of Sydney beat it. How in Hades did you come to let Jinks Smithson get in the hands of the *demons*?"

"That is a matter we have discussed at some length before," answered Dr. Night, with a slight anger in his tone. "Had you not been foolish enough it would not have

been necessary for me to write to you. I am not responsible; my servant thought the letter would give him power over you and I—opened it."

"Yet you killed him?"

"It was necessary. The man indulged in excessive drinking of spirits. He was a talker and—well, he talked."

"Good lor'!" Humberson turned on his heel with a shudder and made his way to the secret door. "Comin' down?"

"I follow you, my friend." The master-criminal closed the secret cavity and replaced the desk drawer he had pulled out. Then he passed from the room through the door by the fire-place, and the secret door swung shut behind him.

Robert Hardy had much to occupy him on the day following his adventure in Dr. Night's study. For the first time he was beginning to accurately realise the strength of his opponents. Dr. Night had murdered Smithson, the man found unconscious in Darlington Road. He had heard the master-criminal admit the fact in a callous, cold-blooded manner, defending his action on the ground of policy.

A new factor in the problem confronting the journalist was the secret sliding panel in the Doctor's study. Where did it lead to and what lay behind it? For the moment he believed that it led to the boathouse, but further reflection made him decide against this theory.

Before starting on his tour of the house he had carefully watched the gardens. Had any person been working in the boatshed, and under the powerful electric light system established there, he could not have failed to have caught some glimpse of the light. No, the secret door led to some underground workshop where the activities of the gang were conducted without risk of interruption.

On returning to his room from the master-criminal's study, Hardy had set himself to solve the problem of his escape. He had decided that the following night would see him free. Frost had warned him that it was the intention of the police, on that night, to question William Matthews as to the death of the man found in Darlington Road, and also as to the reasons behind the attack on Mrs. Matthews' house.

The journalist would not have missed that examination on any account. Matthews answers to the questions the police would ask him, coupled with the information he had collected in the house of the mystery, would certainly make a connected story sufficient to enable Inspector Frost to apply to a magistrate for a search warrant on "Forest Home"; and warrants for the arrest of Dr. Night and the members of his gang.

At first glance the barrel windows of his prison appeared to be the best avenue of escape. During the day Hardy was left to his own devices. Dr. Night had provided him with a small but very complete library, and the daily papers were brought to him with regularity, within a short time of the publishing of each edition.

The journalist had rather wondered at this. Frost's investigations had shown that only one morning and one evening newspaper were delivered at "Forest Home." These newspapers were slight but additional proof of the fact that the two households were conducted on entirely separate lines.

## Chapter XVIII

TESTING the bars of the windows, the journalist decided that to cut through them would mean several days work, with the tenor of discovery hanging over him. To work in the day-time would subject him to espionage from the gardens; to work at night would be to risk someone in the house hearing the grate of the excellent saws the police had provided him with.

On his adventure through the house. Hardy had been able to reach the front doors unobserved. It was possible he might be able to do so again. The fastenings of the doors were not difficult and it should not be impossible or even difficult to pass out of the house through the front door unobserved and unheard. Against this stood the fact that most large houses were protected by some form of burglar alarm. To open the door and walk out might set in operation some mechanism that would alarm the household.

The journalist had no doubt that he could easily outdistance any of the Chinese servants in a sprint to Darlington and the populous streets. Dr Night was not to be considered in a test of running speed. Francis Westerton was not built for running, even if his story of a weak heart was false.

There remained only the gunman. Hardy set him down as the one great danger. The man was lean and fit and had, in addition, the menace of the guns he would undoubtedly use on the slightest provocation.

There was an additional factor to be counted. Dr. Night had threatened Doris with a fate of unspeakable horror. The journalist was convinced that once his escape was known, every endeavour of the master-criminal would be directed to revenge, and that revenge would be against the girl at "Holmhurst."

Hardy might, on escaping, go for police protection. In the meantime, he and Mr. Blayde might attempt the defence of the house. But the master-criminal could, undoubtedly bring to the attack a very large force of Asians. It was almost certain the defenders of "Holmhurst" would be overwhelmed, Hardy and Mr. Blayde killed or seriously injured, and Doris in the hands of the unscrupulous criminals, before Frost could bring any force to their relief.

The sole remaining avenue of escape must be through one of the windows on the upper floor. The windows of his suite of rooms were barred, but it was improbable that all the windows on that floor were in the same condition.

From signs Hardy had some days previously come to the conclusion that the rooms he occupied were, at one time, used for a nursery. Thus the reason for the bars, obviously of some years' standing.

The hours of the day passed rapidly in the weighing of evidence on plans of escape. Darkness came about half-past seven. At six o'clock the Chinese servant detailed to attend on him had served an elaborate dinner and, after clearing the table, had locked the door. Dr. Night was evidently busy for the usual hour of his visit passed without him making an appearance.

At eight o'clock the journalist started to put into action the plans he had formed. For a time he knelt beside the door with his ear pressed against the pane



listening for any sound in the corridor. No one passed, and at length Hardy decided that the time for action had arrived.

With the master key provided by the inspector, Hardy cautiously unlocked the door and, opening it a small crack peered out. As he had expected, the corridor was deserted, although brilliantly lit. To the left lay the head of the stairs.

Three doors lay between Hardy's prison room and the stairs. Hardy disregarded them. Escape from the windows or doors of the lower rooms would leave him to run the gauntlet of espionage from the house, while attempting to reach the police boat concealed under the bushes near the boundary wall between "Forest Home" and "Holmhurst."

With his scanty knowledge of the house to work on, the journalist decided that the far end of the long corridor to the room of his suite of rooms, gave him the best hope of escaping unobserved and attaining the shelter of the trees.

For a time Hardy stood in the corridor, carefully conning possibilities; at the same time alert for the slightest sign of movement in the house. Without moving, his eyes scanned the doors of the various rooms bordering the corridor to the right. Some of these rooms were certainly occupied. His investigations of the previous evening had shown that Francis Westerton and his household lived and slept in the front of the house and on the ground floor. It was, therefore, possible that the Chinese servants occupied the rooms at the rear of the house. He had not succeeded in discovering their sleeping apartments. Possibly they occupied the rooms around the prison.

At the end of the corridor was a door. There was no balcony to the upper storey of the house, therefore the door led into some room. Was that room occupied? If not, did the room contain an unbarred window, through which could be his road to freedom?

Creeping carefully down the thickly carpeted corridor, the journalist arrived at the door he had marked as his best means of escape. The master key turned easily and silently. Hardy opened the door a crack. The room was in darkness. For a couple of seconds he hesitated. If anyone slept in that room, the sudden light from the corridor would certainly awaken them.

Hardy had an impulse to search for the switch and shut off the corridor lights. Immediately he abandoned the project. The darkening of the corridor would attract the attention of any watchers within or without the house. If anyone occupied the room, his success depended entirely on his quickness of action.

Swinging open the doors, Hardy pressed the button of his electric torch and flooded the room with light. It was a large room almost entirely filled with boxes and the junk pertaining to an occupied house. A quick glance round and he switched off the torch and closed the door behind him. He had taken the risk of attracting attention in suddenly lighting the room. It had been an inevitable risk, but he had acted so quickly that he trusted any watchers in the grounds had not observed the lighting of the room; or if they had, had placed it to the credit of some servant. Turning, he locked the door and then went to the window.

As he had expected, the window was unbarred and looked out towards "Holmhurst." The trees came up to within a few yards of the edge of the verandah and one large branch far overhung the verandah roof, coming near the window of

the box-room. Once out of that window, in a few seconds he would be within the shelter of the belt of trees. The risk of his escape being observed was small.

Listening for a few moments at the door leading to the corridor, Hardy unlocked it and, shutting it behind him, stole back to his prison rooms. Here he collected the tools Frost had provided for his escape. With the bundle of tools under his arm he returned to the box-room. There he found a hiding place for them.

## Chapter XIX

A FEW minutes later he opened the window and stepped silently on to the verandah roof. Without sound, he crept to the verandah edge and dropped to the ground. Two seconds later and he stood, once more free, within the shelter of the trees.

His first impulse was to go straight to "Holmhurst" and let Doris know that he was safe and free. A moment's thought and he stole softly down to the water's edge and whistled lowly. Immediately came an answering whistle, and a boat edged down from the boundary wall.

Ten o'clock was striking when the journalist walked into the main entrance of Police Headquarters. Inspector Frost was loitering in the main hall and welcomed him warmly.

"Good boy," exclaimed the detective. "I guessed you would not miss tonight's show. Did you have any difficulty in escaping? But keep your story. The Chief will want to hear it."

Frost led down the corridor to the Superintendent of Detectives' office. As the couple entered, Dixon looked up with a broad smile of welcome.

"Still on the inside running of the story, Bob?" he laughed. "Frost looted our museum of housebreaking tools for you. In all my twenty years in the force I never had the luck to be accepted as a guest by the gang of criminals I was chasing."

"Perhaps it's the lack of grey-matter in the cranium of a journalist that makes the difference," retorted Hardy. "From what I can see, it appears impossible to have grey matter and luck. It's one or the other."

Before Dixon could reply the door opened and Alfonso Thomas, the managing editor of the *Morning Mirror* entered. Seeing Hardy with Superintendent Dixon he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Hardy! You've escaped! Good work boy. For a few days we thought Dr. Night had made away with you."

"I think we are ready for our interesting young friend," remarked Dixon, at that moment. The Inspector left the room. Hardy and Thomas found seats under the window, to the right of the Superintendent's desk. There was an air of tenseness in the room, concealed by the three men under an air of assumed indifference. Yet, each one of the three realised that the work they were engaged in had come to a climax.

The silence was becoming almost oppressive when the door opened and admitted William Matthews and a detective sergeant. The latter took up a position

by the door, whilst Frost beckoned the snow-runner to a seat facing the Superintendent, across the desk. When Matthews was seated there was a short silence.

Hardy and Thomas looked with open curiosity at the prisoner. Matthews was a typical product of the city. Hollow-chested, sallow-faced, short of stature, he bore every sign of the moderate degenerate. Seating himself carelessly, the snow-runner first deliberately tried to outstare the Superintendent. Failing in this object, he coolly turned in his chair and surveyed the other occupants of the room with tin air of detached insolence. Finally he turned to the Inspector.

"Say," he drawled, wearily. "Is this a beauty show, or what, and do I get first prize. Those boobs don't run natural with your mob."

"Keep a civil tongue in your mouth," replied the Inspector roughly.

"Next time you'll tell me to keep a silent tongue—and you brought me here for a pow-wow. You demons are as full of wise sayings as the Harbour's full of water."

"Captain Kettle sends his regards, Matthews," observed Dixon, carelessly.

Matthews swung round on his chair, his mouth agape. The shot had struck right home; the more that it had been entirely unexpected.

"Come down to book tales, now," Matthews tried to jeer away his error. "Well, it'll do some of you guys good to take a tumble to Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, an' that lot. Might earn your beans then. Suppose that's what this writin' bloke's here for."

"Look here, Matthews," exclaimed Dixon sternly. "I've had you brought here to give you a chance to get out of a mess. Let me have any of your lip and you go up—and take your medicine."

"Ain't they good, these Sydney *demons*?" Matthews turned a sudden glance on Thomas. "Allus tryin' to help a bloke. Never hits 'em down—not them. They're all for a poor chap's good. They don't want to know nuffing, 'course not! They're clever enough to find out all they wants to know."

"Clever enough to track down your friend, Dr. Night," said Hardy carelessly. "Come now, Matthews. Mr. Thomas and I are on the level, if you don't trust the police. Come across with what we want to know and we'll see that you get a square deal and perhaps more."

"Kind of yer!" The snow-runner appeared to fancy his heavy sarcasm. Then a thought appeared to strike him and he added: "Say, are you the *Mirror* bloke?"

"What of that?" Dixon broke in abruptly.

"If he's the *Mirror* bloke, perhaps he wrote the stuff about the man who was found dead in Darlinghurst Road."

"What if he did?"

"Well, he knows what comes to them as talks too much."

"So that's what you're frightened about." Frost tried to fill his voice with scorn. Matthews did not answer. He sat staring ahead at Superintendent Dixon. The watchers began to realise that the terror Dr. Night had instilled into his followers was real.

"Look here, Billy." Hardy drew a chair close to the prisoner's and lowered his voice. "Let's get together at the beginning. I had a story last year that might Interest you. It concerned an American of the name of Zimmerman."

"You've got nothing on me over that," Matthews sat upright in his chair for the first time, and glanced towards the door.

"Let's hear your tale of the deal?" interrupted Dixon.

"It was straight, boss. I bought the goods from the bagman. You can't hold me for that."

"As you won't tell the tale, I suppose I must," said the journalist carelessly. "About eighteen months ago, a commercial traveller came from New York to Sydney. He had with him a lot of samples. One case contained some gross of imitation gold pencil cases. The man took to drink and got rid of a lot of valuable stuff from his sample cases. The imitation gold pencil cases were a drug on the market and he failed to dispose of any of them at any old price. You, Matthews, came along and offered to get rid of the lot, at a price. You carried out your promise, but Zimmermann claimed he never saw the price."

"Th' old souse!" The snow-runner's voice was full of indignation. "He offered me a straight fifty-fifty on the deal then wanted to cry off—when the deal had gone through."

"That's the tale you tell." Dixon struck his desk heavily with his open hand. "Zimmerman states you collared the whole of the money you got for the pencils. Matthews, you stole that money."

"I—"

"You stole that money." Dixon's voice was more imperative on the repetition.

"Zimmerman 'ad 'arf."

"You stole that money." The Superintendent's voice had dropped to a dead monotone but had lost nothing of its imperativeness. The prisoner looked up into the Superintendent's boring eyes, and then looked down, hastily. The denial died on his lips. "Ave it yer own way." The snow-runner's pallid cheeks were ashen white.

"You stole that money."

Matthews sat fidgeting restlessly in his chair. Again the Superintendent reiterated the statement, in the same monotonous monotone.

"Yes." The criminal's eyes, now fixed on the Superintendent, were filled with a depth of despair. "I stole that money."

## Chapter XX

"GOOD." Dixon's tone changed abruptly. "Have you the warrant Warren?"

"Yes, sir." The detective sergeant, seated at the door, stood up. "Shall I execute it sir?"

"Not yet." The Superintendent motioned the man to resume his seat. "How did you come to know Captain Kettle, Matthews?"

"He bought some of the pencils."

"Knowing them to be stolen property?"

"S'pose so."

"Who is Captain Kettle?"

"Friend o' the doctor's."

"In what way?"

"He 'ands out the stuff."

"What stuff?"

"The snow an' the other things."

"What other things?"

Matthews made a gesture of disgust. "You know. The mud, an' all that."

"Look here, Matthews," broke in Thomas, impatiently. "This sort of question and answer business doesn't suit me. The *Morning Mirror* has offered a large reward for the capture and conviction of Dr. Night and his gang, and the destruction of the illicit drug trade in this State. I will see that you get your share of the reward, if you help me to round up those criminals."

"An' who might you be?" Matthews began to regain some of the confidence Dixon's third degree methods had dissipated.

"My name is Thomas, and I'm managing editor of the *Mirror*."

"You've givin' me that straight?"

Alfonso Thomas' large moustache appeared to bristle at the idea that the owner would break his word.

"You have my word for it."

Bill Matthews stood up and stretched himself with an air of utter weariness. Frost made as if to force him back on his seat, but Hardy, who had been closely watching the criminal's face, made a warning gesture.

"Then this 'ere bloke's Bob Hardy. I thought so."

Matthews turned to face the star reporter. "The' boys says as you're straight. Will you back 'is word."

"Yes."

"How close 'ave you got to the doctor?" The criminal turned to Dixon.

"We shall arrest him any day now."

"Aw!" Matthews spat in disgust. "Why can't you 'dicks' talk straight. Give chap some proof. You're all kid stakes."

"Robert Hardy has been until tonight a prisoner in Dr. Night's house. Ho escaped this evening."

Dixon made the reply with studied simplicity.

"You've been a prisoner of the doctor's?" Matthews looked incredulous. "How did'ja come t'escape?"

"Got out of the window. Quite easy," laughed the journalist. "Believe I could get in again in the same way. That is if I wanted to."

"A lie." The young criminal exclaimed passionately. "I'm in an' you knows it,' but yer can't help lyin' time. It ain't fair."

"Last night I watched Dr. Night and Humberson come through the sliding panel by the fireplace in the Doctor's study," replied Hardy.

A look of awe came into the criminal's face. Going close to Hardy he peered right down into his eyes, "Give me yer 'davy' yer speakin' the truth an' I'll believe yer."

Matthews continued to stare intently into Hardy's eyes. "Lor', if you can put one over the Doctor you're the only man in Australia as 'as done it. I'll take yer word."

Hardy held out his hand. "There's my hand; I'm speaking the truth," said the journalist, earnestly. "I'm out to get the scalp of Dr. Night and wear it."

"I believe yer." The young criminal grasped the proffered hand for a moment. Then he swung towards the detective-sergeant.

"Where's that warrant, mate. Hurry up!"

At a nod from the Superintendent, the detective produced the warrant and gravely and formally arrested Matthews for the theft of certain imitation gold pencil cases from an American commercial traveller named Zimmermann.

"Now I'll talk," said Matthews, easily, taking his seat opposite the Superintendent. "When I'm through you'll send me down to Long Bay. It's the only place I knows ov as where the Doctor can't get me."

"Yer nearly caught me when yer sed as Captain' Kettle 'ad sent me 'is regards." Matthews spoke to Superintendent Dixon. "I thought for th' moment you'd collared 'im. D'yer know where 'e is?"

"There's a record of a man of that name being in gaol in New Zealand," answered the Superintendent grimly.

"So I 'eard in Melbourne," Matthews smiled broadly. "But, from wot a Sydney bloke told me it seems as 'ow 'e's somewhere in this city, at the moment."

"What do you mean?" asked Frost sharply.

"You've had a lot ov snow run ov late, ain't yer. Well, Captain Kettle's the best snow-runner as Dr. Night 'as. You've caught me out on the question, by Zimmerman and 'is dud pencils. Well, it was those pencils as brought me in touch with Captain Kettle," continued the young criminal, after a somewhat lengthy pause. "I 'ad the tip t' go t' him with the' goods. I did, an' 'e put me wise as to where to get rid ov 'em."

## Chapter XXI

"I SUPPOSE he then made you an offer to join up with him in the snow running?" asked the journalist casually.

"Kerreck. That's jest wot 'e did. He 'ad a place in William Street where 'e 'ad a small printin' plant."

"That's news," observed Dixon. "What was the object of the plant. Snide notes?"

"Nothing so risky, guv'nor. Y'know th' straight trade in them drugs—th' snow an' th' mud—is in th' hands of a big American company. Well, t'get th' dud stuff as Dr. Night brings t' Sydney, on th' market without givin' the game away. It 'as ter 'ave a name on th' label. You'd be surprised to know th' stuff they sells t' the dinkum chemists. Straight stuff, I mean. Good as wot's sol' under the dinkum label. Why, mor'n 'arf th' chemists in Australia buys th' stuff from Dr. Night's chaps an' thinks they're gettin' th' dinkum goods with th' white mark on 'em."

"Then this Captain Kettle uses his printing press only for the purpose of forging labels for illicit drugs," commented Dixon.

"An' good enough at that," answered the snow-runner. "There's a sight more of the stuff comin' into the country as you demons think of. Why, Capt'n Kettle 'ad two men allus at work at th' plant. That 'e did!"

"Well, get along with your story," snapped Frost aggressively. It hurt the pride of the police officer to learn that so extensive a drug trade was being carried on under the eyes of the Department.

"All right! Give a bloke a chance. Y'see—"

"Where did he get the glass tubes for the stuff, Matthews?" interjected Hardy.

"Lor'! There's plenty of glass blowers in Australia who'd supply all th' Capt'n wanted. 'E 'ad a office somewhere in th' city and they fairly pestered 'is life out for orders."

"Surely they knew that bottles were being used for illegal purposes," questioned Thomas sharply.

"Who'd worry?" The rogue grinned broadly. "There's plenty as puts on th' dog of a dinkum life as don't worry as where th' dough comes from. Orders is orders, they ses, as so long as they don't get th' straight tip as th' stuff is on th' side they ain't going ter ask questions. I'm a-tellin' yer, the Cap and Dr. Night could get all th' bottles an' stuff they wanted—and no questions asked."

"Get on from where this Captain Kettle brought you into the game," ordered Dixon.

"Right-o. When th' Capt'n found out th' lay I was on, 'e knows as how 'e could trust me. So 'e put it up ter me straight an' shows me as 'ow I could make a sight more 'oof with Jim in' danglin' soaks for their goods. Seein' as 'ow it's a safe lay so long as a bloke keeps 'is head, I was on."

"What did you get out of it?" asked the journalist.

"Them bottles used to 'old somethin' like an ounce of th' stuff, an' I made 'alf-a-note outer every one got rid of. Why, one week I shot out a 'undred of em and walked about with a roll as big as a bookmaker. It was risky pressin' it too hard, but in' an' out I 'made a level twenty quildlets a week, all round."

"How did you get out of it, Bill?" asked the superintendent curiously.

"Got greedy, that's how. Y'see, it happened as sometimes the doctor'd run short. Not as that 'appened often, but when it did I thought as 'ow I saw me way clear to make a bit on th' side. Struck on a mixture as looked so like the dinkum stuff as you 'ad to taste it to know wha's wot."

"You tried to make a bit on the side," suggested the Inspector.

"Right again. An' I got caught. It was like this. There's a bloke as lives in Darlinghurst. I ain't goin' ter give him away, so you needn't ask no questions about 'im.' 'E mada fine thing outer th' snow. The Capt'n used t'hand it to him direct before I came into th' game. Then 'e let 'im 'ave it through me. It 'appened as once he came to me an' wanted a lot of the dope an' the' doctor 'adn't it. The Capt'n 'ad gone to New Zealand an' I was gettin' the' stuff direct, from th' Doctor. I tried to show 'im as 'ow 'e 'adn't to supply this bird, but 'e's a bit offish an' wouldn't listen t'me. So I thought I'd make a bit on me own an' keep th' bloke quiet at the same time. I 'ad a lot of the labels an' the' bottles an' all that, as the Capt'n 'ad let me 'ave afore he went away."

"So you made up a dud lot and gave it to him?" suggested Dixon.

"D'yer take me for a mug?" The snow-runner's face was a study in disgust as he digested the Superintendent's question. "Why, that bloke's as fly as they make 'em. 'E'd have spotted th' fake at once. No, I 'ad a better game than that. I 'ad a lot of th' straight stuff as th' Doctor 'ad given me to hand to a bloke as was comin'

from the country. It was at my digs awaitin' for 'im. I give that to Di—— th' Darlington bloke an' then started, an' filled a lot ov bottles with the faked stuff. Y'see, I 'appened I know the joint where 'e an' 'is pal 'ung out. It wasn't difficult to 'ang around until 'e and 'is 'pal was out, an' then t' change th' straight stuff for the fake. I'd have given a couple of notes t'see 'is face when he found out whal'd happened."

"Go on, Bill," said Hardy encouragingly. "You're getting distinctly interesting."

"Glad it amuses you," Matthews answered drily. "I wasn't. Y'see, 'e 'appened to spot as it was me as rung the changes an' 'e came after me wi' a gun. It got so 'ot as I thought I'd fade away for a time. So I went ter Melbourne."

"And left your mother, sister and brother to be terrorised and a beaten up by thugs," exclaimed the Superintendent disgustedly.

"I ain't as bad as that," protested the young criminal aggressively. "I never thought 'e'd play that game. I didn't know of it until one ov th' Melbourne papers printed somethin' as was in the *Mirror*. I was comin' back to 'ave a friendly talk wi' D—wiv 'im an' 'is crowd—when the *demons* nabbed me."

"A talk with a gun in each hand," suggested the journalist. "Good thing for you the police found you in Melbourne. Possibly saved your neck."

"What were you doing in Melbourne?" asked Dixon.

## Chapter XXII

MATHEWS hesitated a moment before answering. Then he burst out laughing. "There was a bit in the *Mirror* about a committee being formed in Melbourne to fight th' drug traffic wasn't there?"

The snow runner turned to Hardy, who nodded assent.

"Well, I was workin' for that committee. 'Lor', it was just great."

"What do you mean?" asked Dixon angrily. "I want the truth and none of your lies. That committee was straight. Why, some of the best people in Melbourne were on it."

"Keep yer 'air on," retorted. Matthews easily. "I'm givin' yer the straight goods, ain't I? It was one of th' doctor's jokes, an' 'e's a rare hand at 'em.' Of course, they thought as they were straight. They wouldn't be anythin' else but they couldn't 'ave been of any use to us If they 'adn't been straight. All th' same, th' doctor 'ad some 'igh-toned pals down there an' 'e put up one of 'em to start th' business, 'e was straight an' 'e didn't know but what the doctor wasn't straight, too. Th' doctor put 'em up ter it an' got 'em to get hold ov me, t' show 'em th' ropes. I was to be a chap as had run the goods an' 'ad got th' 'allelujah bug. They simply ate it."

"The idea being that while you were pretending to help the committee you were creating avenues for the disposal of illicit drugs provided by Dr. Night?"

"Gee-hos-ho-phat!" The young scoundrel, looked at the *Mirror's* managing editor with well-feigned admiration. "Why ain't yer pickin' winners at th' trots, mister? You're a wonder. 'Course you've 'it it. It was a good plan, but somehow it went



wrong. Any'ow, th' committee didn't cover me and I was taken for bein' in bad company or some such rot an' brought me 'ere. Of course, I've tumbled to it now."

"Where is Captain Kettle now? What is his real name?" asked the Superintendent sharply.

"Where is Capt'n Kettle?" repeated Matthews slowly. "Well, I guess you won't find 'im far from th' doctor, 'e ain't no fool where th' dibs are concerned. Who is 'e? Ask me another. 'E's th' flyest bloke as ever walked Australia. What is Ms name? 'e's 'ad a dozen as I knows of, an' if you went after any of them you'd think them as straight as a bishop. 'E's a wonder, that's wot 'e is!"

Dixon pressed the point and the snow-runner gave a list of names under which Captain Kettle had conducted businesses in Sydney. None of the names had come under the suspicion of the police, and in the case of two of the names Frost declared the names were those of well-known integrity.

"What is Captain Kettle's real name?" asked Hardy.

"I've told you I don't know, I'd tell yer it I did. I've known 'im to 'ave twenty and I'd bet that not one' of 'em was wished on t'im before 'e could yell."

"What is he like?"

"Like? Why, 'e's th' picture of th' bloke on the cover ov th' book ov the same name. I bought it 'cos I thought it was about 'im. Like as two peas, they is."

"That say, Captain Kettle is about middle height, slender built, brown hair and beard cut to a point."

"That's 'im."

"What is Dr. Night like?" continued Hardy.

"Oh, 'e's as grey as a 'orse, y'know. Grey all over."

"Middle height, grey hair, no beard or moustache," repeated Hardy.

"Yes."

"Just the same as Captain Kettle except for the hair on his face, his colouring—and his clothes."

"What do you mean?" Frost sprang to his feet.

"That Dr. Night and Captain Kettle were, and are, one and the same person."

"By jingo!" exclaimed the snow-runner excitedly. "I believe this writing chap 'as it! Allus thought I knew, th' doctor when I first saw him. Seemed familiar like."

"A somewhat wide conclusion," remarked Thomas with a smile. "Yet it may be correct."

"Who killed Smithson, Billy?" asked Frost, bending forward and looking intently into Matthews' eyes.

"Dr. Night," came the straight answer.

"How?"

Matthews turned deliberately in his chair and looked at the Journalist before replying.

"There was, somethin' in the paper about you findin' a bottle ov 'snow' in your doss one evenin', 'Mr. 'Hardy?" he asked, after some considerable pause.

"Yes."

"You didn't touch it?"

"Only while I had gloves on. Why, Bill?"

"Thought, so. Of course, I knows nuffin', but I guess that if Smithson 'ad been' as wise as you 'e'd been alive to-day. You found a bit ov glass in his trousers.

Per'aps it fell there when th' boozy fool felt the stuff th' doctor painted the bottle with."

Hardy was about to question further when the telephone bell rang. Dixon lifted the receiver and listened for a minute. Then he pushed the instrument towards Hardy.

"Someone wants to speak to you, Bob. Wouldn't give a name."

"Hardy speaking. Who's there?"

Unaccountably the journalist had a feeling of impending disaster.

"Dr. Night is speaking," came the well-known, precise voice. "As you have left my house without my permission, I have persuaded Miss Blayde to become my guest."

"That fiend has captured Doris!" Hardy looked round on the five men, his face ashen grey. "I—I—"

"Steady, boy!" Inspector Frost sprang to his side and snatched the receiver from his hand. The instrument was dead, and his inquiries at the switchboard went to show that the master-criminal had hung up immediately he had delivered his ominous message.

"Chief, order out a car for us, I am going with Bob to Potts Point to see what truth there is in this message."

The journalist was standing by the desk, his eyes gazing into space. Twice Frost touched him on the arm, and the newspaperman took no notice. Then the detective placed his arm across Hardy's shoulders and led him from the room.

A car was drawing up before the main entrance. Frost shoved the newspaper man in and, after a muttered word to the driver, closed the door. The car immediately started off at a good pace.

Hardy lay back in a comer, his eyes closed, trying to steady his thoughts.

"Nothing to worry about." The words uttered by Frost struck dully on the journalist's brain. "Dixon will have given orders to have the place surrounded by now. The old scoundrel may have abducted Miss Blayde, but he can't get away with it. He's in that, house with his prisoner and gang, and there we'll find them."

"Where are we going?" asked Hardy at length.

"Holmhurst, first." Frost spoke crisply. "See what Mr. Blayde knows. For all we know, Dr. Night might be drawing a red herring across the trail."

"Oh, it's true enough." The journalist had abandoned his attitude of despair and spoke with a return of his normal energy. "He's got her, that's certain. Don't talk, Frost. I want to think."

The car sped on through-the darkness of the late night. Here and there the faint light of some shop or street lamp dimly illuminated the interior of the speeding car for a brief moment, casting grotesque shadows on the forms of the two men. Then, with a sudden jerk, the car swung round to the left and ran up the gravelled path leading to Mr. Blayde's house.

"This way," called Hardy, impatiently, as he jumped from the car. He ran down to the side door and turned the latch. As he had suspected, the door was unfastened. At the library door, he hesitated a moment, and then' entered quietly, followed by the detective.

"Where is Doris?" Hardy demanded In a low tone, as Mr. Blayde rose from his chair.

"Doris?" queried Mr. Blayde, noting the journalist's pale face and agitated manner.

"What's the matter, Bob?"

"Never mind me," answered Hardy, savagely. "Is Doris at home."

"She went to Coogee this afternoon to visit a friend." Mr. Blayde looked at his watch. "She is late, I don't like her driving through the streets so late at night."

"She won't come home," Hardy laughed wildly. "That half-caste devil has got her."

"Sit down." Frost took the journalist, by the shoulders and forced him into a chair. Then he turned to Mr. Blayde and in a few words recounted the telephone message from the master criminal.

"Bob seems to think that the position is serious, but the house is surrounded and at the worst Miss Blayde will only suffer a few hours temporary inconvenience."

The Inspector's quiet authoritative manner immediately quieted the alarm the master of "Holmhurst" had felt. With the usual Anglo-Saxon firm faith in the ability of the police he was willing to believe Frost and discount the journalist's dejection. In fact, so impressive was the Inspector that Hardy had begun to recover his poise.

Frost crossed to the sideboard and mixed three stiff glasses of whisky and soda. "Drink this, Bob," he said firmly. "We know where the girl is. Dr. Night made his first, mistake in giving you that information. We have the place surrounded and not even the cat will be able to get in and out without our knowledge. Now, if that man had any brains he could have taken her to half a hundred places in Sydney where we might have searched in vain for days, to find her. When you're ready we'll go over and see what our men have done. When our posts, are secure and the place surrounded we have only to walk in and rescue Miss Blayde and round up the gang. Why, it's sweet!"

"No. You don't know that devil like I do, Frost." The journalist spoke firmly. "Your method might serve with the ordinary kidnapper but Dr. Night is too clever. A police raid on the house would only result in the complete disappearance of Doris. He threatened to send her to China to become—" Hardy shuddered at the recollection of the master criminal's threat, but he did not lose his nerve again. For some moments he stood, lost in thought.

Then he turned to the two men.

"I'm going back," he declared quietly. "It is the better way. Perhaps, then. Dr. Night will let Doris go free."

"Going back?"

Frost stared at the journalist in astonishment. "You're mad, Bob. Why, he'll eat you!"

## Chapter XXIII

"I DON'T think so. Doris is only a pawn in the game. For some reason the Doctor wants to control me. Over and over again he indicated as much to me during the days I lived at that house."

"For what reason?" The detective was frankly puzzled.

"There you beat me." Hardy turned to Mr. Blayde. "Don't you agree with me. Even if I am wrong I shall be in the house and possibly able to assist Doris, if not able to free her immediately."

"It's a risk. Bob." The master of "Holmhurst" spoke slowly. "As the Inspector says, he may hold the two of you and thus double his ability to arrange a compromise with the authorities."

"There's no question of compromise," exclaimed Frost sharply. "You appear to forget that Dr. Night is a murderer and that a warrant is in existence for his arrest on the charge of the death of the man Smithson. The Government cannot deal with Dr. Night except in one way."

"I'll take the risk." Hardy spoke impatiently. "I got out of the place in a manner it is unlikely the gang have discovered. I can get in the same way, with a little luck. Until Dr. Night solved that puzzle I shall have a certain advantage over him, and I think I know how to make the best of it."

Blayde showed a disposition to agree with the journalist and the Inspector was quick to recognise this. More, he had some experience of the futility of trying to control Hardy. Quickly he changed his line of argument.

"Very well." He reached for the telephone. "I'll get a few extra men and we'll all go in the same way."

Hardy covered the mouthpiece of the instrument with his hand. "Nothing doing, Frost," he said, firmly. "It takes time to organise a successful raid. Give me twenty four hours' start and then come on and do your damndest. I'll be ready for you then."

"I agree with Bob." Blayde spoke, suddenly. "If he can get back the way he came out and without Dr. Night discovering his methods he will hold a great advantage.. The man will be stalemated for the time and uncertain how to act.—Bob will possibly have a certain freedom of movement, and if during the next twenty-four hours he can locate Doris he can warn her of your attack and take means to safeguard her from any eleventh hour vengeance from the gang. Besides, with Bob inside the house, your attack will be free from many difficulties."

"I'm going, Frost," added the journalist quietly. "And you cannot stop me. Come with me and I will show you how I escaped and how you will get in tomorrow. I shall be expecting you immediately after dark."

The Inspector made a gesture of resignation. With Blayde definitely on the side of the journalist it was impossible for him to hold out. A few words advised Hardy of the line of attack he proposed. Then he picked up his hat and followed the journalist from the room. At the side door Hardy held out his hand to Blayde.

"I'll bring her back, Mr. Blayde," he said earnestly. "Or I shan't come back at all. You can rely on that. Come on, Frost." Carelessly he walked down to the boundary wall and climbed over, followed by the Inspector.

Once in the grounds of "Forest Home" he proceeded with greater caution. He had expected the grounds to be patrolled by Chinese guards, but to his surprise

they appeared to be deserted. For some time he hung about the fringe of the trees, keeping well in the shadows.

"Queer, he muttered. Then, with a caution to the Inspector to remain hidden, he commenced to circle the house. Both house and grounds were deserted, so far as he could, discover.

Arriving at the gap in the trees beside the boundary wall he sat down on the turf and for some minutes was lost in thought.

"Where are your watchers?" He whispered quietly to the Inspector.

"Don't know." Frost was evidently worried. "Dixon would act quickly, I'm certain of that. Yet there's no one about. I'm going to see." Rising to his feet the Inspector stole down to the big entrance gates, followed by the journalist. Outside he whistled softly. A man materialised from the shadows and came forward.

"What's the game?" asked the Inspector sharply. "I thought this house was closely guarded."

"Orders are to ring the place but not to go inside the grounds of 'Holmhurst' or 'Forest Home,'" replied the man quietly. "The Superintendent said that you would take charge sometime tonight and would make your own dispositions."

"Good! Carry on for the time. I'll see you later."

Frost turned to Hardy much relieved.

"Now, Bob. If you're going on with your fool stunt, get to it. Seems the place is deserted or Dr. Night is confident he can repel any attack on the house. We'll see how that works out, later. I'll be here until I'm certain you're back in your prison safely. Then, tomorrow night I'll raid this place at nine o'clock. But if there's any trouble any old time, I'm coming in one the run. Get me."

"Right." Hardy led the way back, to the side of the house opposite "Holmhurst."

"Now watch and see how I get in. It will be your line of attack tomorrow night, and if I can work it you will meet with no opposition."

Opposite the window by which he had escaped from "Forest Home" the journalist halted. A quick glance round, and he crossed the patch of grass until he stood close up against the verandah. Frost crouched in the shadows watching him. A frail-looking lattice made a precarious route to the roof of the verandah.

Once there the journalist tested the window. It was not locked. Raising it cautiously the newspaper-man crept into the box room and partly shut the window. He flashed his torchlight on the lumber. His kit of burglar tools were as he had left them. Picking up the skeleton key he turned and waved a farewell to the hidden police officer, before completely shutting the window.

The key turned easily in the door leading to the corridor. Opening the door a crack he peered out. The corridor was lit, but apparently deserted. Slipping off his boots, the journalist tip-toed swiftly to the door of his rooms and slid the master-key in the lock.

Once more he was back, a prisoner of Dr. Night.

Hardy examined the rooms. They were just as he had left them a few hours before; even the book he had been reading up to the minute of his escape lay on the table beside the tray of glasses and the spirits tantalus. With a sudden impulse the journalist opened the door again and carefully examined the lock.

Why had Dr. Night left the prison unaltered? Had he forecasted that the journalist would return to his prison house, when he heard that the gang of

criminals had captured Doris Blayde? It seemed possible; yet, so far as he knew, no watchers had been posted to discover how he had left and re-entered the house.

He had the key to the door of his prison. So long as he retained that and the master criminal did not load the door with fresh fastenings, the way was open to him. But, first he had to find and release Doris; and after that, to make smooth, so far as lay in his power, the path of Inspector Frost and the raiding party.

"Never thought to be back here again," muttered the journalist. Then he looked round the room again, seeking a hiding place for the master-key that had now become of supreme importance. A few minutes' thought, and he crossed to the window and stretched his arm between the bars. He could just reach the roof of the verandah. It would prove a good hiding place for the key during the few hours he proposed to remain at "Forest Home."

Then he went into his bedroom and undressed.

"Wonder what time the old doctor will call me in the morning, and what sort of beastly temper he will be in?" were his last two waking thoughts!

A heavy hand pressed firmly on his shoulder awakened Hardy. Dazedly opening his eyes, he found the daylight streaming in at the window. Rolling over, he looked into the sombre grey eyes of Dr. Night.

"My guest sleeps far into the day," observed the Doctor, suavely.

"Nothing much else to do here," replied Hardy with a yawn that was only half feigned.

"So? I had formed the opinion that my guest had found sufficient to amuse him." There was cold menace in Dr. Night's voice.

The journalist did not answer.

In spite of a nerve that had pulled him through many a crisis in his career, he could not suppress a certain awe of this mysterious personality. "My guest does not appear willing to confide in me," continued the master criminal in the same curious monotone.

"The positions of the prisoner and gaoler do not usually lead to confidences," observed Hardy sarcastically. "I duly received your telephone message—and came back."

"You were comfortable here? My servants attended to your wants? There was nothing possible for your comfort that was left unaccomplished?"

"Only the matter of an open door," commented Hardy. He was determined that the Doctor should broach the subject of the capture of Doris.

"It is possible that I may be able to offer that privilege in the near future."

## **Chapter XXIV**

"THEN you realise that your plans have failed?" asked the newspaper man, quickly.

"By no means," Dr. Night spoke with more animation than he had formerly exhibited. "My plans are complete and now only await your agreement to what I have to propose to you, to put them into immediate operation."

"I am afraid you will have to wait a long time for my help in your criminal activities," observed Hardy, grimly.

"Not at all. Your recent actions have placed me in a position to make certain demands on you, demands you dare not refuse to comply with."

"You mean?"

"You have not chosen to confide in me your recent actions and the reasons for them." Dr. Night had reverted to his usual smooth monotone. "I must therefore ask you certain questions."

"I shall not consider myself bound to answer." A thrill of excitement crept into the newspaper man's voice. The crisis had come sooner than he had expected, but he had no fear.

"I require to know my guest's movements since he left my house last night. I require to know how my guest left my house and the manner of his return."

"Why ask me?" The journalist was fencing to know how much the master criminal and his spies had discovered. "You spoke to me on the telephone at Police Headquarters, last night, or rather early this morning."

"I require to know how my guest left and returned to this house."

"I shall not answer."

"I require to know for what reason my guest visited the police last evening."

The Doctor did not seem to be perturbed at Hardy's refusal to answer.

"I shall not answer those questions."

"My guest is aware that I have gained possession of the person of Miss Doris Blayde?"

"You devil!" Hardy could restrain himself no longer. "What manner of man are you to war on women?"

The fathomless, expressive eyes of the master-criminal met Hardy's, and the journalist felt the anger die in his breast. The eyes fascinated him; grey as the depths of a wind-beaten sea; fathomless as the ocean; they held a quality he could not understand but which beat his will to almost submission. Dully, he sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I have kept my promise. The girl is here because you failed to comply with the conditions I laid down for your conduct. Dress yourself, Robert Hardy. It is my will that you see her."

The Doctor seated himself on a chair some distance from the bed and watched Hardy dress. The journalist spun the business out into almost a ceremony, yet the master-criminal showed no signs of impatience. At length, Hardy signified that he was ready.

Without a word Dr. Night led the way to the door.

He was about to see Doris, yet Hardy had no plan formed to obtain her freedom. Dr. Night had acted too suddenly. Hardy had gone to bed determined to awaken with the first beams of daylight and to formulate some plans for the girl's release. Now he was following the master-criminal to the place where she was confined—helpless and planless.

Out in the corridor the journalist expected to find a guard of Chinese ready to overcome any signs of resistance on his part. Instead he found the place apparently deserted.

Dr. Night turned to the right and led the way down the corridor in the direction of the box room. At a door half-way between Hardy's room and the end of the corridor, the master-criminal stopped. A key was in the door lock. He turned it and stood to one side, motioning the journalist to enter.

The girl was seated in an arm-chair by the window, looking out over the harbour. At the sound of the opening of the door she turned her head and then sprang to her feet "Bob!"

"Doris!"

"I knew that you would come soon." The girl spoke bravely; then suddenly burst into tears and fell, into the journalist's arms.

"Don't cry, dear." Hardy stroked her hair gently. "I'll get you out of this, somehow. Don't cry, dear."

"Miss Blayde should understand that she was brought here as hostage for you," said the master-criminal with a ghost of a smile.

"Well, I've returned. What more do you want?" Hardy choked back the hot words that rose to his lips. That this man should dare to treat Doris so. "There is no reason for detaining Miss Blayde, now."

"Miss Blayde must remain here." Dr. Night spoke with finality.

"I'm damned if she will!"

"That is a matter we will discuss later."

The master-criminal shrugged.

"Look here." Hardy put the girl from him gently and strode over until he towered above the slim form of the crime master. "We are here alone. I noted that you had none of your gang in the corridor. I could choke you insensible and then walk out of the place, as I did last night. And, by Jove, I'll do it if you don't obey orders. Right, about turn and quick march.' D'you hear?"

Dr. Night stood with his hands folded before him, his eyes downcast. At Hardy's approach, he stepped quickly aside. As the journalist caught hold of the door-handle he spoke; a cruel smile twisting his lips.

"I would advise caution."

For answer, Hardy swung open the door. In the corridor, and facing him stood a couple of hefty-looking Chinese, armed with automatic pistols.

"These men answer with their lives for your escape." Again the master-criminal spoke in the slow, suave tones. For a few minutes the journalist stood staring from the guards to their master. Then, with a gesture of impotent anger, he flung the door shut.

"My guest has, I observe, some discretion. I should have been sorry to see the hands of my base-born servants pollute his honourable person. We will talk."

Dr. Night seated himself, and motioned to Doris and Hardy to be seated. After a moment's hesitation the girl went to a seat on a lounge.

"What do you want?" Hardy strode forward until he again stood over the master-criminal.

"There are many things I desire." Dr. Night smiled softly. "First it is my desire that my guest be seated."



The journalist was about to reply impatiently when he caught Doris' eyes. The girl beckoned him and, after a moment's hesitation, he went and seated himself beside her. "Well?"

"Good! Now we will talk. A man who suffers under defeat is a plaything for the gods. My guest is of those who smile on adversity and promise that the future shall pay to them of its treasures."

"What is all this leading to?" Hardy asked the question angrily. "Do you think that you can keep Miss Blayde and I prisoners indefinitely, and get away with it. Inspector Frost knows that we are here. Unless Miss Blayde is released immediately, he will raid the place. I can promise you that he will not go away empty-handed."

"He shall find you if he comes here." There was deep menace in the voice of the master-criminal. "Yes, he shall find you—but he shall not find her."

Hardy was silent for some minutes. He could not disregard the menace in the Doctor's voice. It was a direct threat of murder to him; and something, incredibly worse for the girl.

"Look here. Dr. Night." Hardy forced himself to plead with this murderer. "This farce is about played out. Miss Blayde comes of a well known and influential family. Any injury to her will cause you to be hounded throughout the world. As for me, well—I'll stay here, if you're so keen on it; but you must let her go. You know, it just isn't done."

"I have spoken."

"Oh, that's all nonsense." The Journalist forced a smile. "There's such a thing as law, you know."

"I am above all laws." The statement, absurd as it sounded, froze the dawning smile on Hardy's lips. There was a note in Dr. Night's voice that carried the conviction that the Doctor believed that he was supreme among men. The journalist looked at the slight figure seated before him, and wondered. He knew this man to hold absolute power over a large band of criminals, mainly foreigners. He had, at his command, a body of men who could withstand the forces of law and order in a city of a million souls. It was impossible!

"That's all right, Doctor." The journalist tried to continue the negotiations he had commenced. "You may think so. You might have reason to believe so in China, but you're in a white man's country here and we're strong for law and order. Every man's equal and that sort of thing. Now take my own case. When you locked me up for the night I just sat down and thought out how to get in touch with my friends. I did it, you know, though I'm not boasting about it. It's the same now. I'll confess I haven't a ghost of a plan, but I'll find—"

"You are my guest. Miss Blayde is my prisoner." Dr. Night slowly raised his eyes and looked at the journalist. "It is my will that you remain here. Should you attempt to escape, you know the penalty."

"The absurd threat against Miss Blayde?" Hardy attempted to laugh.

"That threat I have, in part, carried out. Miss Blayde is here, a prisoner in my house. It is for you to decide if she is to pass from my keeping to those who greatly desire her."

"With the whole of Sydney in an uproar over her abduction?" Hardy threw all the scorn he could muster into his voice. "I tell you again, unless Miss Blayde is immediately freed the police will come in search of her."

"The police will not act until tonight." There was decision in the voice of the master-criminal. "By that time she will be free—or on her way to China—to disappear for ever."

"You mean—"

"Her destination is for you to decide."

"In what manner?"

"You would not remain here as my guest. Now you must remain here as partner in my work."

"I refuse."

Dr. Night shrugged. He rose from his seat and clapped his hands. The door opened and the Chinese guards entered. The master-criminal spoke to them in guttural tones. Then he turned to Hardy.

"Miss Blayde will be taken from here to-night for a destination I will not name." He spoke in his low, monotonous voice. "You, Mr. Hardy, will return to your rooms. You will have until the time set for her departure for meditation. I shall require your answer, then. I think you will reflect deeply."

## Chapter XXV

AT the ominous words of the master-criminal, Doris cried out sharply and clung to Hardy. It was some time before the journalist could pacify her. Then with a whispered reassurance that help would be forthcoming before any harm could come to her, he left the room and joined the master-criminal in the corridor. Immediately the door of Doris's room was shut and locked.

The Doctor turned and walked down the corridor to Hardy's room. As one of the guards swung open the door, a man hurried along the corridor and caught Dr. Night by the arm.

"The *demons* have got Matthews" he cried breathlessly.

"I had the news of the capture by the police of William Matthews in Melbourne, some days ago," replied, the Doctor, quietly.

"He's in Sydney."

For the first time Dr. Night showed some uneasiness. He flashed a quick look at the journalist.

"How did you learn this, Humberson?"

"Matthews was brought to Sydney the day before yesterday and taken to police headquarters," replied the gunman. "This morning he was taken into the Central Police Court and charged with the Zimmerman matter. He was committed for trial and taken immediately to Long Bay."

"Your visit to the Police Department, my friend," observed Dr. Night! turning to the journalist. Then he faced the gunman. "He knows the fate of those who talk of our work?"

"Matthews has split," declared the gunman, emphatically, "You'd have thought he was precious, the care they took of him. Johns all over the place and a squad of them to bring him to court and to take him to jug. He looked as happy as if he was on a holiday."

For some moments Dr. Night stood at the door of Hardy's prison rooms, in deep meditation. The news that William Matthews had been committed to Long Bay prison to await trial evidently disturbed him. At length he aroused himself and turned to the journalist, motioning to him to enter the room. It was impossible for Hardy to disobey, although he would willingly have lingered in the company of the rogues, to learn further details.

When the door closed on him, he knelt down and pressed his ear against the woodwork in an endeavour to catch some fragments of the conversation. All he could hear were the sounds of the footsteps of the master-criminal and his companions retreating towards the head of the stairs. Thrusting his hands in his pockets, the journalist wandered across the room to the window. He had a big problem to face and with but a few hours to come to a decision. Sometime that night, Dr. Night would come to him and demand his decision on the offer he had made him to join on the gang's criminal activities. His answer might consign Doris to a fate unspeakable. To avoid that answer, he would have to discover some means of escape for the girl, and, at the moment, he had not a glimmer of an idea how it was to be accomplished.

Opening the window, Hardy retrieved the master-key and tried it in the door. The door swung open to his touch. He gave a sign of relief. One step of the way was open to him. The next problem was how to get Doris out of the house safely. It was impossible to think of waiting until night before acting. At any moment Dr. Night might return for his decision, and Hardy was confident that the master criminal would not be content to take his mere word of adherence to his gang.

Some act, definitely criminal, and committing him body and soul to their cause, would be demanded; and he could not refuse while the girl he loved was at their mercy. There was a way; there must be a way.

For over an hour. Hardy stood at the window looking vacantly over the waters of the harbour, intent on the problem. Plan after plan arose in his mind; but in every one lay a big element of risk to Doris; and he wanted the one plan in which lay certainty and security. It seemed impossible. Almost he decided to await the advent of the master-criminal for his answer and then, by some subterfuge, gain access to Doris's prison. With his aims around her he would defy Dr. Night.

He was disturbed by the opening of his door. Half fearfully, he looked around, expecting to face the master criminal, awaiting his answer. But it was only his Chinese servant, carrying the midday meal tray. The man set his burden on the side-board, then deftly proceeded to lay the table. Hardy watched the man's proceedings in silence. A glimmer of a plan was forming in his brain. He spoke sharply to the man and was answered only by a low bow. On previous days the journalist had attempted to enter into conversation with the attendant, but the man had refused to utter a word. He had abandoned all attempts to draw him into a talk. The man did not understand Australian or had been forbidden to speak to him. The Chinese completed his task and drew out a chair, waiting for Hardy. The

journalist moved slowly from the window and seated himself at the table. He had found a chance. Could he develop that chance into activity.

Hardy ate slowly. Gradually the plan was taking shape. It held but one kink. Before he could act with any certainty of success he must be alone for a few minutes. Given that and Doris would be free and the stage set to raid the house and capture the gang. But he must have those few precious moments away from the eyes of his servitor. The meal dragged on, the Oriental carrying out the ritual of service in minute manner. Dr. Night provided, well for his "guest" and the meal was both lengthy and rich.

"The chutney, please." Hardy spoke with additional emphasis, yet striving to keep his voice on an impersonal note. He had found the chance that he had been looking for.

The man bowed low and backed to, wards the door. Immediately he had left the room, turning the key in the lock, Hardy darted into his bed-room and dragged from the ceiling-rose the flexible cord of the electric light. Then seizing a sheet from the bed he carried them to the sitting room and concealed them under the table.

Then followed a game of patience. Hardy watched the servant intently, waiting for a moment when the man would be off his guard. Methodically the man proceeded on his duties, clearing the table and replacing the cloth with the tantalus of spirits and glasses.

With a low bow he stood before the journalist, silently requesting permission to withdraw. As the Chinese straightened from the bow, Hardy flung a quantity of pepper in his face. With a strangled cry the man clasped his hands over his eyes. The journalist flung himself on the blinded man, bearing him to the floor and choking from his lips the warning cry. The attack was so sudden that the man made practically no resistance.

In a couple of minutes Hardy had him bound and gagged. Then he carried him into his bedroom.

Ten minutes later a Chinese servant walked out of the bed-room into the sitting-room, and stood irresolute. So far Hardy had succeeded in his plan. Dressed in the clothes of the servant he would be able to pass through the house with impunity so long as he avoided other Chinese. In his hand he held the keys of her prison, taken from the Oriental, then laying bound hand and foot on his bed.

The master-key opened the door into the corridor. Hardy stepped out without hesitation. There was no one in it. Walking stealthily to the head of the stairs, he descended a few steps until he could see into the hall below. So far as he could discover the household had not been disturbed by the sounds of the brief struggle in his room. As he watched, Westerton passed across the hall, in conversation with the gunman, Humberston.

Retreating to the corridor he went to the door of his rooms and locked it. He then walked quietly along the corridor and after a couple of attempts found the key that unlocked Doris' door.

The girl was seated by the window, looking out over the harbour.

She turned at the sound of the opening door and gave a little cry when she saw the Chinese entering. Closing and locking the door, Hardy walked towards her, his finger on his lips.

"Bob?"

"Quiet, dear."

"How did you escape, Bob?"

"I haven't yet," Hardy replied grimly. "Listen, dear, I think I see a way to get you out of this. Will you try, sweetheart?"

"I shan't be afraid if you are with me, Bob." Doris looked up fearlessly at her lover.

"That's the rub'," answered the journalist, ruefully. "I can't let Frost down, so you must go alone."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to remain in this horrid place?" protested the girl. "Why, Bob, that man will murder you when he learns, that you have freed me."

"Look here, girly," Hardy rubbed his chin, perplexedly. "I've got a scheme that will free you and make Dr. Night think you escaped on your own. It will puzzle him, no end."

"Can't you come, too," protested the girl, somewhat fearfully.

"I wouldn't if I could," Hardy answered truthfully. "I'm going to be in at the end of this mystery and by remaining, here I can help old Frost, no end. If I get you free, I want you to get in touch with him and tell him what happened. He will understand. Are you on?"

"I'll try." The girl pursed up her lips determinedly.

"Good!" Hardy opened the door. "I'll back in a moment."

Within a couple of minutes the journalist returned to Doris' room carrying the bound Chinese. Bidding Doris remain in the sitting-room he carried his burden into her bedroom and laid him on the bed. Then he stripped from himself the Chinese clothing. Carrying the Chinese garments he returned to the sitting room.

"I want you to put these on, dear. Over your own clothes will be best. It will make you look bigger. Knock at the door when you are ready."

## Chapter XXVI

RETURNING to the bedroom he replaced the flexible cord binding the Chinese with one he tore from the electric light fittings. Then he made a bundle of the sheet and the cord he had wrapped round the captive and placed them on a chair, ready to carry to his own rooms.

He had barely completed this task when Doris knocked at the door. Entering the sitting-room he was faced by a very presentable Chinese boy.

"What next?" asked the girl, saucily.

"This." Hardy caught the girl in his arms kissed her passionately. "You're the best and pluckiest girl in the whole world. Come on!"

He led the way to the box room and retrieved the knotted cord that he had hidden amid the boxes. Then he opened the window and got out on the verandah roof. A careful examination of the grounds on that side of the house showed no signs of watchers. Turning back to the window, he assisted the girl on to the roof.

"I'm going to lower you to the ground," he explained hurriedly. "When you find your feet, get across to the belt of trees. There's a gap in the brickwork a little way down towards the water. You can get across it quite easily.

"I understand." Her face was pale but determined. She realised that not only her own safety but the safety of her lover lay in her success.

"What am I to tell Inspector Frost?"

"Say that you're at home and say that he's to send men to guard your home. Frost will understand. He will be here tonight and we'll make a big clean up."

Hardy slipped the rope under the girl's arms and without hesitation she climbed over the edge of the roofing and swung to the ground. Immediately she had freed herself from the rope she sped towards the belt of trees.

Turning there, she wafted a kiss to her lover, and disappeared. Hardy waited a moment, then, hearing no alarm, gave a sigh of relief and re-entered the window.

"She's safe," he muttered, when once again in the corridor. "Now for the Chink and to set the stage for the Doctor."

In Doris' late prison rooms he set to work to give the place the appearance of a terrific struggle. Then, with a final glance at the bonds of the Asian lying on the bed, he picked up the bundle he had prepared and left the room, locking the corridor door and leaving the keys in the lock.

"It won't be much to that poor Chink's credit when the doctor finds him," Hardy chuckled as he made his way swiftly to his own rooms. "From appearances it will look as if the Chink had paid a visit to the girl, and had been bound and overpowered by her. Captured and bound by a girl. Won't he roar?"

In his own room, Hardy remade the bed and repaired the electric light fitting. Then he tidied the sitting-room and placed the tray of crockery in the corridor outside the door. Finally, he locked the door of his room and restored the master-key to its hiding place on the verandah roof.

"There's only one flaw in the whole act," the journalist murmured, as he seated himself in his favourite chair by the window and lit a cigarette. "The Chink will tell his tale, incriminating me. Will the doctor believe that, or the evidence I have prepared for him; the evidence that Doris fought and overpowered the Joss, and escaped? One thing in my favour is that the doctor will believe the Chink to be lying to get out of the disgrace of being conquered by a girl. Well, it won't be long before we know."

The cigarette well alight, Hardy picked up his book and commenced to read. In a while the book fell to the floor and the journalist lay back in his chair, meditating.

"She's some peach, sure!" he murmured. Then, after a long pause, in a soft undertone. "My girl!"

The afternoon drifted by in a long, seemingly interminable, waiting for the inevitable trouble. Again and again Hardy crossed to the door of the suite and stood with his ear pressed against the woodwork, listening intently for the discovery of Doris Blayde's escape. More than once he had to restrain himself from recovering the master key and opening the door to see if the table utensils he had placed in the corridor were still there.

Late in the afternoon the door of his room opened abruptly and Dr. Night entered. For some moments the master criminal stood in the centre of the room, looking intently at his prisoner. Then he started a casual conversation, asking

seemingly inconsequent questions. While he was talking, Dr. Night moved continually about the room, his eyes searching every nook and corner.

Satisfied as to the sitting room the crime-master muttered an excuse and visited the bedroom and the adjoining bathroom. Returning to the sitting room he abruptly asked his prisoner if he required anything. Hardy replied that the soda in his syphon had turned flat and requested that a fresh syphon be sent to his room.

Dr. Night nodded response and left the room. Some little while after a strange Chinese servant brought a fresh syphon of soda water. The journalist was satisfied. He had learned that the man he had bound and gagged and left in the room occupied by Doris, had been relieved of his attendance on the prisoner. It was presumptive evidence that the tale told the master criminal was not wholly believed.

Just before dusk there was a commotion in the corridor. It seemed as if a dozen Chinese were engaged in a talking competition. At length the cool level tones of Dr. Night mingled with the Oriental clatter, and there came a lull of sound. The voice of the master criminal could be heard distinctly, but he could not distinguish the words, especially as the doctor appeared to be giving orders in some dialect of his native land.

After some time the door of Hardy's room was suddenly thrust open, and Dr. Night entered, followed by three Chinese, the centre one of the three being the man Hardy had bound and gagged and carried to Doris' prison chamber. At the sight of the Journalist seated by the window the man broke into voluble speech. The master criminal listened for a few moments, then struck the man violently across the mouth, silencing him.

"My servant states that you assaulted him, bound him, and took him to the room occupied by the girl, Doris Blayde, and there left him," said Dr. Night with ominous calm. "What have you to answer, Robert Hardy?"

"Is that what all the language was about?" asked the Journalist in apparent surprise, "I thought he was abusing me because the soda water had turned bad."

"I ask you to reply to the accusation my servant has brought against you, Robert Hardy." The voice of the master criminal was cold and hard. "The tone you adopt is not one with which so grave a charge should be met."

"Who is your servant that I should condescend to reply to any charge he may lay against me?" Hardy assumed an air of indignation.

"It is true that he is of the base born; that his ancestors are of the things that crawl on the earth," Dr. Night considered gravely, as he replied slowly, to the journalist. "Yet I would ask my guest to bear with this slave and from his supreme wisdom answer the base-born, confounding him."

"It is your wish?" Hardy asked the question.

"The greatness of my guest would honour my unworthiness in his reply." The master criminal appeared to forget the veneer of modernity that he had previously carried before the journalist.

"I reply with a question to the base born." For some occult reason Hardy found himself copying the phraseology of the Chinese despot before him.

"To go to the room occupied by Miss Blayde, I must pass through that door, pass along the corridor, open the door of the suite where you have confined Miss Blayde. I suppose you keep the door of her suite locked as you keep mine?"

"My guest has not answered the accusation my slave has laid against his supremeness," repeated the doctor, looking intently at the journalist.

"First, then you must tell me the accusation," countered Hardy. "I have not the privilege of understanding the lingo your slave seem so fluent in."

"The base-born accused you of assaulting him; carrying him to the rooms where the girl was confined; taking the girl from that place; and of taking from him his garments."

"Then Doris is free?" asked Hardy, simulating joy.

"You are a good actor. Robert Hardy," said Dr. Night, after a long pause. "Almost I believe you that you speak truly."

"I cannot see you taking any other course, doctor; unless you are prepared to explain how I can pass through locked doors, abduct prisoners, and generally walk about freely about your house. When you have explained all that, I should like to know why, with the possession of such occult powers, I am sitting here, a prisoner, when I have only to walk to freedom?"

"You left my house last night and returned voluntarily," warned the doctor. "You refused to explain to me the manner in which you accomplished that feat."

"I returned because of the threats you held out against Miss Blayde," countered the journalist quickly.

"Threats which I carried into execution."

"Yet you now tell me Miss Blayde has escaped—and accuse me of having been the means of her escape. Have you forgotten you unlocked that door to enter this room?"

"I shall obtain possession of the person of that girl again," Dr. Night said with perfect assurance.

Hardy did not choose to reply. He for the next few hours held his life in his hands. Only a short time, and Frost would be at the house, with a force strong enough to overawe and capture the crowd of Oriental criminals occupying "Forest Home."

"You left my house and returned to it again," repeated Dr. Night. "You cannot answer the charge. I believe my slave has spoken the truth."

"I wonder what would happen to him if you choose to believe that he had lied to you?" asked Hardy, nonchalantly. A slight smile passed over the grey face of the mystery man. A cruel look came in his eyes and his lips drew back, exposing teeth that looked like fangs.

"He would be better dead."

The words came in a sibilant hiss that bore a menace almost indescribable in its ferocity.

"So you have asked me to prove that man a liar so that you may have the privilege of torturing him?" Hardy spoke angrily. "Well, I am going to do nothing of the kind. I shall refuse to answer any further questions."

"To pass from this room and to enter the girl's room you must be in possession of a key," suggested Dr. Night speculatively. "Where is it?"

Hardy closed his lips firmly.

"The keys that my servant possessed were found in the lock of the door of the room from which the girl escaped. Yet the door of your room was locked. Therefore you must be in possession of a key that will lock the door of this room."



Dr. Night stood for some moments waiting for the Journalist to reply to the indirect accusation he had brought against him.

Hardy shrugged his shoulders, looking over the master criminal's head.

"I must have you searched."

The words fell slowly and distinctly from Dr. Night's lips. He was looking directly at Hardy, and at the words the journalist flinched.

To be handled by these uncouth strangers, alien in race and thought, was a degradation, yet he bragged himself to suffer it. Even though Doris was safe under police protection in her own home, it would wreck Inspector Frost's schemes to reveal to this gangster the means he had employed, to outwit he and his servants.

At a sign from the doctor the Chinese seized Hardy, and subjected him to a thorough, though not scientific searching. The small bunch of keys he had in his pocket at the time of his capture and had been allowed to retain were tossed on the table, but not a key would fit the lock of the door of that room.

Dr. Night then gave orders for the suite to be thoroughly searched. Hardy watched them with a quiet smile curling his lips. The master key lay on the roof of the verandah, close against the wall of the house. With the bars on the window it was impossible for it to be seen.

## Chapter XXVII

"MY servant has lied." The doctor spoke when the men had completed their task. "That is if—"

"If what, my worthy host?" laughed Hardy, almost reckless with relief.

"If—you are not an exceedingly clever man," completed the master criminal. The journalist bowed his acknowledgements.

"Perhaps your servant has a partiality for your whisky, doctor," he retorted, with a light laugh. "I confess I favour it. May I suggest a refresher, after the strenuous events we have lately passed through. I have a fresh syphon here."

"I thank you. I have no time at present." Dr. Night had returned his old suave manner. He spoke rapidly in Chinese to his servants. "When I have dealt with this man according to his deserts, I shall be honoured to partake of your hospitality."

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Hardy sharply.

"He is mine, body and soul." Dr. Night spoke grimly. "He will never lie to me—or you—again."

"Stop!"

Dr. Night turned slowly to face the journalist, his hand on the door-knob.

"You mean to torture that man?"

"He is my slave."

"There are no slaves in this country."

"Your laws do not apply to me. I have had occasion to remind you of that before, Mr. Hardy. This house is Chinese territory."

"Are you going to tell me that you have the territorial immunity of an ambassador?" Hardy laughed, ironically. "You, a criminal the police are hunting

and will capture within a very short time. Look here, Dr. Night, if that is your name. I am not going to stand idly by and see that man done to death."

"What can you do?"

"I can stop you leaving this room." As he spoke the journalist sprang suddenly to the door, thrusting the Asian to one side. Then, with his back to the door he glared around the room evidently awaiting and expecting attack.

Dr. Night had reeled back from the sudden attack by the journalist. For a few moments he remained with his eyes downcast. Then, instead of ordering his slaves to attack the journalist, he slowly raised his eyes and fixed them on some point about a foot above the journalist's head.

"Look here, Doctor." Hardy had cooled somewhat, repenting of the impulse that had driven him forward a direct attack on the master-criminal. "Let the man go. You haven't any evidence, one way or the other. Just because you can't get me to speak, you jump at conclusions. Conclusions are not evidence. No one convicts on them. If you like, I'll say that I was responsible for Miss Blayde's escape."

Dr. Night did not reply. He continued to stare at the point over Hardy's head. The silence was irritating. The journalist wanted to turn and discover what the Dr. was staring at.

"You needn't try to hypnotise me," laughed Hardy somewhat nervously. "I've had others try to do it, and not one of them can. Now—I'm talking to a reasonable man. Don't act hastily. Take time to think. I've told you the man is innocent, so you can't torture him. Come, now! Be a good fellow. Let the poor devil go. Come and sit down and act like the sport you are. Have a glass of your own whisky. It's bonzer stuff, I tell you. I can do with one myself."

Still the Asian stood silent, his eyes fixed on the spot over the journalist's head. But now small twinkling pointy of light flecked the pupils of his eyes. The lights danced and whirled in mad phantasy, growing larger and larger until the whole of both eyeballs seemed to be masses of moving, seething flames.

Hardy wrenched his eyes from the spectacle. He had felt his' senses waver under the influence of the dancing lights.

"Of course, you can order those chaps to put me from the door, and I don't doubt but that they'll have a go for it."

Hardy was now talking to relieve the strain on his nerves. "Still, they'd be in for a dinkum fight. I'm no chicken and I guess I can give them a good go. They're a hefty crowd but they don't look as if they are much of boxers, and I'm certain I'd make a mess of that chap's nose first hit. Couldn't miss it if I tried and I shan't try. What do you say? Box on, or whisky? I vote for the whisky, eh?"

The word "tomorrow" appeared to be drumming itself in Hardy's brain. He was trying to think of fresh arguments to use, but the irritating word persisted. Whenever he got hold of a new idea the word "tomorrow" came and hunted it away.

Then to his utter amazement he found himself walking across the room to his seat at the window. The Doctor had not hypnotised him. He was certain of that, but there was a force driving him that he could not withstand. He could think clearly. He was not acting under the Doctor's will. He had just walked across the Doctor's room under impulse. Chaps did that sort of thing, sometimes, y'know.

He glanced across his shoulder at Dr. Night. He was still standing, facing the door, in the same pose, his eyes still fixed on the point Hardy had wanted to examine. The three Chinese still stood in the centre of the room, the centre one kneeling on the floor.

"Tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow!"

The words had not been spoken by anyone in the room, yet they seemed to echo through space, obliterating all other sounds.

"Did you say *tomorrow*?" asked Hardy, sinking into his chair by the window. "I'm willing if you promise not to do anything to that chap until after then. Yes? All right! It's a bargain."

Slowly Hardy became conscious of a presence in the room, it was something intangible, unseen, yet it seemed to grow, filling the room. The air became oppressive and hot, his throat parched, then became contracted, as if under the pressure of some supernatural power. He could only sit back in his chair, his eyes fastened, watchfully on the slight form that dominated the room.

Almost when Hardy thought he must shriek, Dr. Night raised his hand and pointed to the door. The Chinese moved slowly forward and, as they advanced the door seemed to recede before them.

No. It did not open. Hardy was prepared to swear to that. The door did not swing on its hinges. He was certain that it went back squarely and bodily, leaving a space of the corridor visible and—on to that space stepped the two hefty Chinese and the prisoner. They walked towards the head of the stairs and passed behind the solid wall. Hardy heard their footsteps growing fainter as they passed into the distance.

## Chapter XXVIII

FOR the interval there was silence in the house—a silence that was more oppressive than the drumming that had been paramount in his head when he faced the Doctor at the door.

Then, slowly and calmly, the still figure in the centre of the room moved. With hardly visible motion he glided forward into the corridor, against the opposite wall of which the door of that room grotesquely stood. Then he turned, staring again over the crest of Hardy's head.

Now the feeling of irritation passed from Hardy's mind; to be succeeded by a great calm. The strange oppression in the room faded and in its place came a cool, sweet breeze. The whirling, dancing flames in the mystery's man's eyes, dwindled and slowed. For a moment they stilled and on the air came the slow, precise voice the journalist would recognise and remember all his life.

"Tomorrow. Until tomorrow. Then I—then shall you explain."

Suddenly, the door sprang into place, shutting from the journalist's sight the spare, thin figure of the Asian.

Hardy drew a long breath, loosening his collar with his finger. The door opened again—to admit one of the Chinese servants who methodically set about preparing the table for the evening meal.

For some time after Dr. Night had left the room Hardy sat conning over the events of the day. He was back in his prison room at "Forest Home" and, so far as he could gather, the master-criminal was in ignorance of the means he had employed to enter and leave the house. Then, he had freed Doris from the clutches of the gang. Her disappearance from her room had been in keeping with the mystery with which he had surrounded his own actions. So far as he could guess he had the master-criminal and his gang completely puzzled.

The threats to torture the poor devil of a Chinese were entirely discounted by the journalist. He had persuaded Dr. Night not to take any action against the man until the next day, and by that time Inspector Frost and his police would be in control of the house. Dr. Night and his gang would be behind prison bars.

The journalist was frankly puzzled by the apparently superhuman powers of the mystery man. It had been his frequent boast that he was immune to mesmerists and other like fraternities. Yet, without any apparatus or flummery, so far as he could judge, Dr. Night had created around him an atmosphere that had dulled his senses, and left him plastic in the master-criminal's hands.

The evening meal had been accompanied by certain signs that Dr. Night was taking precautions against further actions by the journalist. The man who brought the meal to the room and served it was attended to the door by an armed Chinese guard. The door was left open and the table was shifted to a position where the guard could have a full view of the journalist while he ate. Just before the man left the room he moved the table back to its old position. Immediately the door closed Hardy sprang across the room and pressed the panel of the door to listen, but he could not see whether the guard remained in the corridor, or accompanied the serving man to the lower floor.

With a shrug of anger, he returned to his seat at the window. Inaction irked the journalist. Every few minutes he looked at his watch. He had never thought the minutes could travel so slowly. His plans were set—and he could rely on Frost to keep his time, to the minute. Only one factor remained to be decided. Had Doctor Night set a watch in the corridor?

Hardy longed to repossess the master-key and open the door. Yet, if he acted at once, he might betray himself and his only means of gaining the freedom of the house would be taken from him.

In any event, Inspector Frost would act. The absence of the journalist from the box-room would not stop the raid. It would only force the police to act with greater caution—and take from them a knowledge of the house and its inmates. Hardy had intended to fully inform the Inspector of the lay-out of the house and the probable movements of the inmates, at nights, when he was at Police Headquarters; but the sudden news of the capture of Doris had driven all else from his thoughts.

Darkness had fallen. A long session with his ear at the door had failed to reveal any movements in the corridor Hardy was almost persuaded that Dr. Night had failed to set a watch. At any minute, now Inspector Frost and Ills men would be

under the shelter of the trees watching from some sign from-the box-room window—and he dared not act.

In one of the chests in the box-room lay the housebreaking tools the Inspector had sent him. Hardy swore softly. If he had been able to bring them with him to his room! If he had them he would have an extra chance of success in the game he was playing—but would they have survived the very careful search of his rooms Dr. Night had supervised?

He could not hope to hide so material a bundle on the verandah roof. In his pocket he had a small penknife. It was the only tool or weapon he possessed, besides the master key. As a tool it was inefficient, as a weapon ineffective. For some moments he balanced the little instrument in his hand.

One of the blades was long, narrow and almost round. Carelessly he placed his left hand over the handle and rolled the knife between his palms.

An idea occurred to him. Going to the door he found a place on the panel, about breast high, that he thought would serve his purpose. Taking the handle of the penknife between his palms he applied the soft point of the blade to his chosen spot and spun the knife, with but soft pressure on the point.

Quickly, the blade bit into the wood and a thin trickle of sawdust fell to the floor.

## Chapter XXIX

VERY cautiously and carefully the journalist continued to spin the knife between his palms. Bit by bit the blade worked into the panel until suddenly it stopped, with a slight jar, indicating that the point of the blade had penetrated into the corridor.

Now he had to act with the greatest caution. He had to enlarge the minute hole so that he could see through it, but if he used the penknife the lights in the corridor might flash on the polished blade, and attract the attention of any guard Dr. Night had stationed there. A quick search of his pockets brought to light only a pencil, a few coins and some papers. He looked at the collection ruefully. He could see no hope there.

He looked around the room. Nothing in sight promised assistance. Tentatively he placed the pencil in hole. It was too big. A few seconds work with his penknife made the pencil fit in the hole somewhat loosely. A little pressure, and he turned it. There came a slight grating sound, and the pencil moved forward a fraction of an inch. Withdrawing the pencil he applied his eye to the hole. He could see through. Opposite his door and seated on a chair was one of the Chinese servants. He was looking down the corridor towards the head of the stairs. After a moment he turned his eyes and stared straight at the door of Hardy's room.

The journalist feared that he would notice the small hole on the edge of the panel, but the man made no sign. With the Asiatic seated opposite his room door and on guard, it was impossible for the journalist to use the master key. Long before the door could be opened and Hardy able to attack, the man would have

raised the alarm—and have obtained assistance. In some manner the man must be removed. Almost despairingly, Hardy looked round the room again. A gust of wind came in at the half-opened window and swung the shaded electric light.

Hardy stood looking at it with a puzzled expression on his face. Suddenly, he turned and walked into his bedroom. On the bedside table lay a pocket torch. Placing it in his pocket he returned to the sitting-room. There he retrieved the master-key and fitted it silently into the lock. Again in his bedroom, Hardy switched off the electric light and then removed the globe from the socket.

Placing a three penny-piece across the contacts, he fitted the globe into the sockets again. At the switch, he pressed sharply. In the globe came a sudden light, accompanied by a cracking noise and then darkness. The dim light in the room, from the sitting-room globe, suddenly failed! Hardy raced through the rooms to his spy hole. The corridor was in darkness, and he could hear the Asiatic pattering to the head of the stairs, calling to his comrades in shrill tones.

The master-key turned silently. Plucking it from the lock, Hardy shut the door and locked it. Then, as silently as he could move, quickly he raced down the corridor to the box room. A moment, and he had the door shut behind him. So far he had succeeded.

Throwing a beam of light around the room the journalist located the light switch. A globe hung in the middle of the room. Pressing down the switch. Hardy waited for the house fuse to be mended. Now he had only one danger, and that he had no power to guard against. Should Dr. Night, with the fresh scare of the failing lights, take it into his head to search Hardy's prison rooms, then his escape would be discovered, immediately—and he greatly desired that the household should remain unalarmed until Frost was ready to act.

Crossing to the window, Hardy flashed his torch, then flung up the sash. An answering glimmer came from under the belt of trees.

Taking the knotted rope from its hiding place, he tied it firmly to the handle of a large trunk standing under the window, then throwing the rope over the verandah roof-edge. Then he seated himself on the trunk—and waited.

Suddenly the globe in the centre of the room came to life; the household had mended the broken fuse. The journalist jumped to the light-switch and plunged the room into darkness. As he regained the trunk and again seated himself, one end rose from the floor, as if bucking. Hardy flung all his weight on the trunk.

A few moments later, and a dark form filled the window.

"Bob?" It was the voice of Inspector frost.

"Here. Get on this trunk. You Johns are too well fed for my weight," answered the journalist. "How many are you?"

"Three." Almost as the journalist spoke another man slid gently into the room; to be followed by a third.

"Why the darkness, Bob?"

"I broke the safety fuse," answered Hardy. "There was a Chink seated In the corridor, facing my room. We can have a light now you're here." Feeling his way across the room Hardy switched on the light. Then he went to his cache of tools. As he expected, a small boring tool was in the kit. Taking this, the journalist went to the door, and commenced to bore a hole in one of the panels.

"What's the idea, Bob?" the Inspector asked curiously.

"I want to know if that Chink is still in the corridor," replied Hardy, working strenuously. "The only thing that I am afraid of is that Dr. Night has taken it into his head to search my room."

A minute later, and the tool bit through the wood. Through the hole Hardy looked down the corridor. The Asiatic was seated in his old place, facing Hardy's late prison door.

"All serene," exclaimed the journalist, turning to his companions. "They appear to have reckoned the light failure was an accident. But we've got to get rid of that fellow. He'll raise the house if we walk out of here on to him."

"Why not?" The light of battle lit in the dark eyes of the Inspector. "Let 'em have first shot, and then we can take a hand in the game. I'd love to have a pot at some of those chaps."

Hardy shook his head. He thought for a moment, then turned to his cache of tools. "Seat yourselves, gentlemen," he said laughingly. "Before we adopt our bloodthirsty friend's suggestion, I have a little demonstration to make." The three men looked curious when he brought from his cache a pianola roll.

"Had any luck in tracing out how the gang gets the 'snow' into the country, Frost?" he asked, when he had arranged matters to his satisfaction.

"You heard what Matthews split," replied the Inspector. "I've been working on that. Seems we've woke up a hornets' nest, Bob. This Dr. Night and his gang appears to have been everywhere."

"What do you mean?"

"If I said everything I should not be far off the mark. And it isn't cocaine, alone, by any means."

"Get on with it, Frost. You cackle like an old hen."

"If I do, the brood's coming home to roost." The detective smiled grimly. "I've followed up the clues Bill Matthews gave me last night, and at an interview I had with him this morning, and the lines led to some unexpected quarters."

"How's Matthews?"

## Chapter XXX

"AS chirpy as a wagtail, appears to enjoy Long Bay so much that we won't be able to shift him, ever. The one thing I can't get out of him is how the bulk of the stuff gets into the country. Most of the ways he appears to know can only be sidelines. No chance of large importations through those channels."

"Any line on a music shop, in your investigations?" asked the journalist, after a moment's thought.

"What the devil!" The Inspector stared at the journalist in sheer amazement. "I thought you had been locked up in this den of thieves, all day. Why, I only got on to that this morning."

"Well?"

"Matthews told me that Captain Kettle had an interest in a music agency—a wholesale place. So far as I could see the business is too large for any crook work."

Why, they have the sole agency for one of the most popular makes of German pianolas."

Hardy lifted the pianola roll he had taken from his cache. "I found that in Dr. Night's study, you tell me why he wants a huge number of pianola, rolls when there's not a sound of music in the house from one week's end to the other? And, Frost, they're German."

The Inspector opened the box and took out the roll. He examined it carefully, even unwinding the paper for some distance. Finally, he rewound the roll and handed it to Hardy.

"I'll buy it, Bob," he said, with a short laugh.

The journalist opened the record until he had only the bare wooden roller in his hand. For a few minutes he tried to remove the knobs from the ends. Failing in this he took a small saw from the kit of tools and commenced to saw the roller in half. In a few moments he realised that the roller was a hollow cylinder.

He caught the half-sawn roller in his hands and wrenched it apart. From the interior streamed out a large quantity of white powder.

The Inspector picked up a pinch of the stuff and sniffed at it.

"You've solved the problem, Bob! Congrats! This is cocaine."

Frost picked up the roller and examined it. "I'd like to know how they work this knob."

"Plenty of time to experiment when our work's finished," laughed the journalist. "There's hundreds of rollers like these, downstairs."

"I understand a lot now," mused the Inspector. "When Matthews spoke of Captain Kettle's interest in the music shop, I made some inquiries. Didn't get a line on him, direct, but ran up against a lot of suspicion that pointed towards a certain music warehouse. That firm's importing a huge number of pianola rolls and seems to be able to sell at a price that has created a practical monopoly. Couldn't understand it until now."

"That mystery's solved," laughed the Journalist. "Now we have to find out how they got rid of the huge quantity them imported."

"Breeding drug fiends," answered the journalist shortly. "Man, Australia's full of the trade. The awful modern craving for excitement, and then more excitement, is just the ground these fiends want to prey on. People are trying to burn the candle at both ends. They demand excitement for twenty out of twenty-four hours of the day. To keep up the strain they frequent the chemists' shops for pick-me-ups. Later, they meet some *friend* who states he or she has *just the thing you want*. That's the end; and the beginning of the tale of hundreds of cases. They get used to the beastly stuff and hand it round to their friends and neighbours. Take a typical case. A man has a series of late nights. He goes down to his office in the condition best described as a *wet rag*. More than probable, there's a drug addict on the premises. *Take a bit of this, old man, It'll pull you together*. It does. Another series of jamborees, and the man applies for more of the stuff. Later, he asks where he can buy it for himself. Dr. Night and his confederates have made another customer and another victim. Almost every issue of a newspaper in Australia contains news of some tragedy attributable, directly or indirectly, to this horrible trade. And it's growing man, growing like a pestilent weed."



"We'll put a stop to it, now," growled the Inspector, and a heavy murmur of assent from his followers.

"With a consequent long list of suicides for the coroner to handle," added the journalist thoughtfully. "The poor devils cannot exist if their supplies are cut off."

"You don't suggest the Police Department should peddle the stuff to them?" Frost asked the question in blank amazement.

"I don't know what to suggest." Hardy moved restlessly around the room. "One thing, the stuff must not be destroyed. After tonight, the hospitals will need huge supplies of the cocaine."

"I don't follow you, Bob." The police inspector drummed with his fingers on the box he was seated upon.

"Look at the facts, man. It is evident from what we know of the Captain Kettle episodes that nearly every chemist in Australia is getting his supplies from Dr. Night. Every snow runner gets his goods through this loophole in the country's customs defence. The legitimate agents and makers are circumscribed to a limit that renders their stocks small and ineligible for medical purposes; much less as a source of supplies for addicts, when we smash up this house of sin. Dr. Night is the Snow King of Australia."

"Was," stated the Inspector emphatically. "After tonight, Dr. Night's a has-been."

Hardy paced the narrow room thoughtfully for some minutes. Then he returned to his seat beside the Inspector.

"I doubt if, even now, Frost, you realise the extent of this affair," he said. "There is something more than smuggling in this affair of Dr. Night."

"Look at the profits," urged the Inspector.

"They must be enormous," agreed the journalist. "But there are other lines of thought we should not neglect. I have been in contact with Dr. Night for some time. He does not appear to me to be a man who would enter this trade solely for the profits. You were in the War, Frost?"

"Yes."

"You know something of the enormous losses in lives and treasure, occasioned by the avarice of a few men?"

"I'm not a socialist," argued the Inspector. "It's good enough for me that Germany started the row and got a father of a good hiding."

"I worry about facts, not titles," answered Hardy. "You can call me a socialist if you like. Most writers are. But you can't conceal from yourself, whether you'd admit it or not, that greed of money, greed of power, and greed of revenge, are the three factors that set the world aflame."

"What then?"

"The Great War was fought with shot, bayonet and gas. What if some ambitious person, inflamed by one of the *greeds* started to conquer humanity—what we call civilisation—by more more subtle means."

For a moment the detective stared at his companion, horror dawning in his eyes. For a long moment he waited, then:

"You mean a war of—of drugs?"

"It is possible." Suddenly Hardy sprang to his feet. "Come on Frost. Zero's struck. We've got work to do—not theories to argue."

Hardy went to the door and bent down to peer through the little spy hole. As he had expected, the Asiatic was again seated on the chair, facing the door of his late prison. The situation was awkward. So long as the man remained in that seat, and awake, it was Impossible for the raiding party to leave the box-room.

Outside the house were a large number of men, awaiting the opening of some door to pour into the house and overwhelm the inmates.

When the journalist straightened himself, the Inspector took his place at the spy hole, and carefully examined the corridor. It was a nasty problem. The man was a good sixty or seventy feet from the door of the box-room; far too distant for any chance for a rush attack.

Frost swore softly under his breath as he turned to face the journalist.

"Will the beggar ever sleep," he asked in a low whisper. "Looks as if we shall have to wait until he dozes off, or else charge out and gain the head of the stairs before he can be re-by his friends below."

"Dr. Night's servants don't sleep," replied Hardy, his lips twisted to a grim smile.

The Inspector had not witnessed the abject terror of the man he had fought and tied for Doris' freedom.

"Then it's a charge, boys." Frost turned to his men. "I'm afraid there's going to be a considerable amount of bloodshed in this affair. Remember, we've got to give them the first shot. The law only allows us to defend our selves. Of course you can make it as slippery as you please. Seconds count with bullets, and who's to swear you fired a fifth of a second before the other fellow. S'long as his pistol contains a fired cartridge, there's not going to be any outcry. And remember, we're all one in this work. If any blighter shoots at Bill, and Tom gets him before he gets Bill, that counts one to Tom, and no questions asked. Get me?"

The Inspector had his hand on the master-key when Hardy stopped him. The Inspector looked round impatiently.

"Walt a moment, Frost," exclaimed, the journalist, in a low tone. "Remember the trick I played on that chap to get here. Well, it's worth trying again. Can only alarm the fellows downstairs, at the most. They won't understand it. And even if they guess some trick is being played on them, they will have to guess quite a lot to find out how it is being worked."

The Inspector looked dubious. He had keyed himself for some nasty work and wanted to get it over as soon as possible. Frost was slightly dogmatic. He hated to change his plans. In this case he had decided that trickery was out of the question and the journalist's hesitation irritated. He was about to speak sharply, and go on with his plan, when Hardy took the master-key out of his hand and put it in his pocket.

"No good getting your paddy up, Frost," Hardy laughed at the expression on the detective's face. "It's fifty-fifty in this game and I want my share. At the worst, I can't block your plans for direct action, and I might manage to get through without causing a riot on this floor."

"Whose rooms are those along the corridor?" asked the Inspector, gruffly.

"Vacant, I think." Hardy put his hand in his pocket. "By Jove! I left all my silver on the table in my room. Got a tray-bit. Frost?"

"Yep" The Inspector handed over the coin. "What's the joke, Bob?"

Hardy threw the room into darkness and then lit his torch. Handing it to one of the men to hold, and bidding him focus the light on the electric bulb he unscrewed the globe from its and balanced the coin over the contacts.

The men watched him he replaced the globe in the holder.

## Chapter XXXI

"READY, Frost? Now listen, I'm going to unlock the door. Then I shall press the switch; that will fuse the light in the house. While it is dark I shall creep down to the chair where the man is seated. I think he will act as he did previously, and go to the top of the stairs. If he does I shall await his return; then I shall collar him. With luck I may be able to prevent him yelling out and alarming the household. At any rate we shall await his return; then I shall think about downstairs, and by the time they realise there is an alarm on this floor we shall be streaming down the stairs."

Interested, in spite of himself, the Inspector nodded a reluctant assent. Hardy unlocked the door and held it slightly ajar. One of the men pressed the switch and immediately the lights in the corridor went out.

Hardy slipped silently through the door and made his way to where the man had been seated. As he had expected, the man had retreated to the head of the stairs. The journalist could hear him there, talking excitedly to his friends below. Minutes passed, the journalist crouching beside the empty chair. The wait seemed almost interminable, and unbearable. Then, just as Hardy felt that he could stand the darkness and waiting no longer, the lights came to light again.

Now was the crucial time. The man would face in Hardy's direction when he returned to his watchman's chair. Hardy was only concealed by the slight outline of the chair, standing almost directly under one of the large bucket lights. The man could not help but see him. Everything depended on whether he was close enough for a successful attack, and whether he thought himself strong enough to recapture the journalist without help.

The Asiatic turned from the head of the stairs on the resurrection of the lights. He came padding down the corridor, leisurely, his eyes fixed on the ground. A few steps before the chair, he raised, his eyes and looked straight at the journalist. Hardy remained quiet.

The man stopped and half opened his mouth. Then, a cruel smile spread over his yellow countenance and he advanced, half crouching. The journalist met the beast-like spring half way, and the two men fell to the ground grappling. The journalist had found an early grip on the throat of his opponent and clung for a few minutes and Frost would come to his assistance.

Grimly he held on his head whirling from the continuous shower of blows rained by his antagonist. The lights were dancing before his eyes and his head throbbed terribly. He had buried his face on the breast of the Asian, and the queer overpowering smell of the Easterner's body made him feel faint. Frost was a long time coming.

His fingers bit deep into the man's throat and his ears sensed the labouring lungs. The blows on his head became less frequent and to come from only one side. Then he felt a hand slipped between his face and the man's chest. The hand crept higher, in spite of the pressure he was applying against it. The fingers curved round to his face and he could feel the long-nailed tips searching for his eyes; He shifted quickly, but the groping fingers followed. The man was staggering—dying on his feet, but still those groping fingers continued their search for his eyes.

Hardy felt he would have to let go. He could not hold out many seconds longer. Why did Frost not come to his assistance? What had happened to hamper the completion of the plan? Suddenly the man shivered and collapsed on to him. Hardy tried to release his fingers but the muscles did not relax. Someone caught at his wrists and forced his hands from the man's throat.

"Steady, Bob." It was the Inspector's voice. "Let's up, or you'll choke the yellow beggar."

Hardy opened his eyes and looked around. Frost was kneeling beside him holding his wrists. A few feet away the Asiatic lay on the floor, the two detectives busily engaged in binding and gagging him.

"Any alarm?" asked Hardy weakly.

"Not a sound from below," assured the Inspector. "Your attack was so sudden and with both of you in bare feet, you hardly made a sound. Looks as if you'd got away with it again, Bob."

"I'm all right now." Hardy rose to his feet and shook himself carefully.

"What next, Frost, it's your show, now."

For answer, the Inspector led the way to the stairs, followed by Hardy and the detectives. The Chinese was left in the corridor, helpless. They could collect him when the round-up was completed. At the head of the stairs the Inspector paused and looked over the banisters. The hall was brilliantly lit but no one was in sight.

Frost descended the stairs, followed by his small party of raiders. Arriving at the front door he paused and in a whisper bade the others await his return. Then he opened the door and walked out into the night. A minute later the detective returned, followed by half a dozen plain-clothes constables. The door carefully closed, the Inspector started to make his preparations for the cleanup of the household.

Four men were detailed to follow the Inspector and Hardy on their investigations of the rooms. The others were stationed about the hall, on guard, and to protect the investigators from surprise. Frost walked to a door and, with his hand on the knob, turned to the Journalist.

"What's here?"

"Front part of the house occupied by Westerton and his servants," replied Hardy promptly. "They're a blind. The real gang lives somewhere at the back of the house."

"Good. We'll clean them up and sort them out afterwards."

The third room visited proved to be a bedroom. Westerton was found deep in blissful sleep. The muzzle of an automatic thrust in his midriff despite Hardy's laughings of heart disease, effectually aroused him.

"Raise an alarm and I'll shoot," warned Frost, grimly. "Now you lazy, good-for-nothing invalid where's your household?"

"Next room."

"Oh! How many?"

"Four girls."

"That's all?"

"Yep. They're only for show. The Chinks do all the work."

"Where do the Chinese camp?"

"Next to the kitchen," Westerton replied, and found the barrel of the automatic thrust between his teeth.

"Not on your left," commanded Frost. "I'm just aching to shoot; so just be careful."

The Inspector jerked the fat man off the bed on to his feet. As the German looked round the room he caught sight of the journalist standing in the doorway.

"Ach! You? I told him you were better dead."

"Told whom," asked Frost.

The man would not answer.

"Where's Dr. Night?" asked the Inspector.

The man remained silent.

"Where's Captain Kettle?" continued Frost.

"In prison, in New Zealand," snarled Westerton. "I don't mind telling you that."

"Thanks. Any more information to offer?" The man turned sullenly towards the door.

"Well, as you don't feel conversational, I'll see that you don't talk at all."

Before the man could move, Frost had seized him from behind and forced a gag in his mouth.

"Now for your maids."

The girls were aroused without any alarm and still in their night attire, but swathed in blankets, ushered into Westerton's room. Frost wished to gag the girls but Hardy intervened and persuaded him that, with the detectives on guard, they would not be so foolish as to call out and receive retributive punishment.

"Keep quiet and you'll get just what's coming to you," was Frost's final and cryptic parting advice. "Start any nonsense and it's your funeral. There's a hundred men in and around this house. Take your choice."

Detailing a couple of men to guard the prisoners, Frost led the way from the room to continue the search the house. Room after room was systematically searched, without the arrest of any more suspects.

It looked as if Westerton had told the truth, when he said that his household consisted of only four maids.

"Looks fishy," whispered Frost to the journalist, as they stood before a door at the rear of the house. "Where the devil are Humbertson, Night and Kettle? Can't make it out at all. They don't sleep with the stinking Chinks, do they?"

Hardy smiled, but answered nothing. He was beginning to form a theory of the whereabouts of the master criminal and his associates. He had not forgotten the incident of the sliding panel in the master criminal's study.

"Where's this lead to?" asked Frost abruptly.

"Dr. Night's study," answered the journalist in a low tone. "Now there's likely to be trouble."

"Dr. Night's study," muttered Frost softly. "Humph."

A quick turn of the wrist, and he flung open the door and strode into the room. Hardy followed close on the heels of detective, and the men crowded the doorway.

The room was unoccupied. A shaded light stood on the desk before the window. In the fireplace a large radiator threw a warm glow over the surroundings, bringing into relief a small table holding a couple of decanters and some glasses. The little circle looked as if it had only recently been vacated. Frost strode across the room and lifted both glasses to his nose, one after the other.

"Seems they did hear us, Bob," he whispered. "They heard us and got for their lives. Funny we haven't heard any thing from outside. They can't get away. I'll swear to that."

The journalist shook his head in the negative. Whatever the heads of the gang were, they were not cowards. Humberston, a gunman by training and instinct, would certainly fight. Captain Kettle was an unknown problem, and while the arch-criminal, Dr. Night, was not built for a fighting man, Hardy could not but think that he would go to any lengths to prevent capture and the downfall of his complicated plans.

Frost stood looking around the room with a puzzled expression on his face. Then, apparently, having made up his mind, he strode resolutely towards the door.

"Come along," he said quietly. "The birds have apparently flown. We'll have time to loot this place when we've rounded up the servants."

The Chinese servants of Dr. Night were found in their quarters peacefully asleep. The police skilfully rounded them up, and marched them to the room where Westerton and his maids were prisoners. Then, strengthening the guard over the prisoners, Frost led the way back to Dr. Night's study.

At the door of the study Frost found the plain-clothes man he had posted on guard. In the reply to the query in the Inspector's eyes, the man shook his head.

"Not a sound, sir," he whispered hoarsely. "I don't think they're back."

Without replying, Frost opened the door and strode into the room. For a moment the detective was undecided what action to take. Hardy watched him for some moments.

"Up against it, Frost?" The journalist grinned wickedly at the Inspector's predicament. "Let me take a hand in the matter. It may be that I know more of the secrets of this house than you."

"If you can get to the root of this business, get to it," retorted Frost crossly. "I can't believe that these scoundrels levanted without putting up something resembling a fight. But where the devil have they got to. I'd be prepared to swear they're not in this house."

"They're hot far away, it I guess right," laughed the journalist. "There's a secret door opening into this room. Where it leads to, I don't know. I saw Humberston use it one night. We'll have a try for it later, but first I want you to have a look at these pianola rolls."

But the spirit of the man-hunter was dominant in the breast of the Inspector. He gave but a cursory glance at the hundreds of pianola rolls, scattered about the room. For the moment he hardly seemed to realise that under his hand lay thousands of pounds worth of cocaine—that here lay the secret of the huge Importations of illicit drugs the department had failed for months to discover.

The desk appeared to attract his attention. He strode over to it and tried the drawers.

"I'd like to smash that thing up at once," he growled. "We might find a clue or two there, but to break it open would occupy too much time and make too much noise, and I want those men first. You say you know of a secret door, Bob. Where is it?"

Hardy crossed the room to the fireplace and ran his fingers along the moulding. One of the bosses appeared to give slightly under his fingers. A tentative pressure, and he had found the secret. The panel slid aside silently.

"Crikes!" exclaimed the Inspector; "Where does It lead to, Bob?"

"That is more than I can say," Hardy peered into the cavity over the Inspector's shoulder. "I told you, the night I explored the house I hid in this room and watched Humberston and Dr. Night enter and leave the room by this door. It appears to lead down below the house."

"We'll soon see. I'll lead here. Can't afford to have you shot up."

One of the police officer's rare smiles lit his face as he glanced back over his shoulder at the journalist. He stepped forward to enter the door. Hardy suddenly caught him by the shoulder and pulled him back. At the same time he touched the spring controlling the door, and the panel slipped back into place.

"What's up?" exclaimed Frost angrily. "Open that door, again, Bob."

"Hush!" The journalist's hand closed on the Inspector's lips. "There's someone coming up from below."

"Well, I was going to fetch him."

"The strategy of war is to divide the enemy's forces and destroy them in detail." Hardy muttered the platitude without a smile. "Get behind that screen, Frost. Hide yourselves, men. We'll take this fellow in a trap."

Switching off the lights, except the shaded lamp on the desk, Hardy watched the Inspector and his men take cover. Then he flattened himself against the wall, besides the secret panel. The seconds that passed appeared as minutes, and the journalist began to think that his ears had deceived him. Then, just as he was about to move, a slight *click* sounded beside his ear and the panel slid aside. A man's form passed into the room and made for the desk. Hardy stretched out his hand and touched the boss controlling the panel. At the click of the shutting door the man swung round, with an exclamation. Then he strode to the switches and flooded the room with light.

"By heck! Who switched out the lights."

"Good evening, Mr. Humberston," said the journalist quietly.

The man's hand swung to his hip as he turned on his heel.

"The writer feller, by jingo! Why didn't the doctor put you to sleep for good. I wanted him to."

"That seems to be a common idea of my welfare, Mr. Humberston," laughed the journalist. "I have heard that wish expressed before, this evening. It appears that I am not to be consulted in the matter."

"What are you doing here?"

"A little exploration." Hardy laughed again. "In fact, I am interested in pianola rolls; Do you know anything about them?"

"So you know that?" A look of murderous hate came in the gunman's eyes. His voice fell to a sibilant hiss, and his hand again crept towards his hip-pocket. "You know too much, my Australian friend."

"Cut it out," exclaimed the journalist sharply. "You're covered."

"Am I? Well, I'll take a chance."

The man's hand moved so rapidly that Hardy could hardly follow it. He sprang aside and tripped. A stream of bullets poured from the automatic in the gunman's hand and peppered the wall against which the journalist had been standing.

Then, following the sudden silence from the gunman's pistol, came one solitary shot. A look of intense surprise came on the man's face. With an effort he turned slowly and faced the screen beside which the Inspector was now standing, a revolver in his hand. For a full minute the gunman looked at the police officer, his features braced for effort. Slowly his hand and arm tensed, and the muzzle of his pistol came up. The Inspector raised his arm again. Then, with a sigh, the man pitched forward on his face.

## Chapter XXXII

"LUCK!" exclaimed the detective, striding forward and bending over the fallen man. "I didn't want to have to fire again, but it looked as if I should have to. Say, boy, you'll never escape like that a second time. I've never seen a man so quick on the draw. Who is he?"

"Humberston, the man the note found on Smithson was addressed to," replied Hardy shortly. He was just beginning to realise the narrowness of his escape.

"So!" Frost stooped and rolled the man on to his back. He peered down on the white face. "Humberston, you say? Well, he's better known as Carl Petersen, the manager of the Petersen Pianola Music Company—the firm that's attempting to corner the pianola music industry in Sydney."

"Petersen! Humberston! But he's not Captain Kettle?" objected Hardy incredulously.

"Seems not," retorted the detective. "I'm beginning to believe that your Dr. Night and Captain Kettle are one and the same person."

"Number one," observed Inspector Frost, as he rose to his feet from beside the wounded gunman, Humberston. "If they're all as ready with their gats as he, there'll be a devil of a shooting—"

He was interrupted by the bursting in of the French windows and the abrupt entry of a number of police, attracted by the shooting.

"Huh! I forgot you chaps would roll up at the sound of the shots. Just as well you came. Looks as if we'll have quite a job, raking out this hell-hole. Now then, Bob, what about the door?"

Hardy crossed to the fireplace and pressed the concealed spring. The panel slid aside, noiselessly. Beyond lay the passage, silent, cool and grim beneath the glow of an electric globe just within the door.



He turned and faced the room, lit by the soft glow from the shaded lamps. A slight breeze was blowing in from the open window, stirring the curtains and gently swinging the globes. Almost in centre of the room lay the American, one of the detectives bending over him, administering first aid.

The journalist shuddered and quickly looked away. He had a sudden distaste for the coming adventure. This hounding of men, even though they might be criminals, held a primitive excitement that carried with it a revulsion of the more delicate sensibilities.

"What's the matter, Bob?" The Inspector's voice appeared to come from a distance, although the police officer was standing at his shoulder. "If we don't make a move soon we'll lose all the advantages of surprise. Humberston will be missed and Dr. Night, or this Captain Kettle, will be up here to find him."

Roused from his reverie, Hardy made a step through the secret door. The heavy hand of the Inspector held him back.

"You come second, lad. I lead."

A few steps through the door, and the passage bent quickly to the right. The raiders were standing at the head of a flight of stairs, leading apparently into the bowels of the earth. Here the light of the electric light just within the secret door showed very faintly. Frost led the way down steps, and the journalist followed him, counting twenty-eight steps.

At the bottom of the stairs a short passage led onwards, shrouded in gloom. Frost snapped on the light of his torch and threw the beam before them. Hardy added the strength of his torch to the glow and, under the combined light, the little army moved forward. The passage proved to be about twenty feet in length, and ended in a wall of natural rock. Calling lowly for more light, Frost explored for a door with practised hand.

"What's behind this, Bob?" asked the detective.

"Boatshed above, water in front," the journalist answered promptly and confidently.

"Should say you're right. There should be a door here, but I can't find one. Look to the roof."

The glow of half-a-dozen torches swept the roof, to reveal only the solid stone. The detective was frankly puzzled. Why had the passage been made, and in this direction. Whence had the gunman come, to meet his wounding and capture in the study of "Forest Home?"

With a muttered exclamation Frost swung round, his torch describing ft half-circle in the darkness.

"Look, Bob." Frost's light had settled on a passage that led back at an acute angle to the one they had come along. "Here's the answer."

A concentration of light showed only a long passage, sheltered at the far end in darkness their torches could not penetrate. Frost made a step along it, and then turned towards the wall behind them.

"Don't like to leave that behind me," he muttered. "Still, we can pick it up when we've routed out the gang. Hang it! Come along, you fellows. If it does lead to the boathouse Dr. Night is not likely to be there. Our men in the grounds would have routed him out, long before this. Masters, stand along that passage and keep, a

watch on that wall. Shoot it you have to, or if you see anything like a door opening—and shoot straight. Whew, I'm getting nervy in this rat-hole."

With eager steps the detective led down the new corridor, followed by Hardy and his men. As he walked along he threw the light of his torch in every direction. Hardy, at the Inspector's elbow, kept his light focussed ahead. The men followed closely, their torches dark, yet every man's finger rested on the switch, ready to flood the corridor in light at the first signs of necessity.

The passage appeared to have been cut with considerable skill through Sydney sandstone. Most of the corridor was dry, but in places the water oozed through cracks in the rock and formed little pools on the floor. In the faint light of the police officer's torch the journalist noted that the roof of the tunnel held an electric light cable.

"Must have cost a lot of money to cut this rat-hole," commented Frost, waving his torch-light around.

"That is one of the problems I cannot quite understand," answered Hardy. "Snow running may be a profitable business, but this gang are running things on a scale that I can't even guess at. How do they manage to balance the sheet and leave a profit?"

"I'll worry about that when I get to the end of this job," retorted Frost grimly. "This passage appears to have had considerable use. Look at the floor. It's quite smooth, as if padded by generations of feet. Where does it lead to and what is it for? Darn it! There's not a door in sight."

"You notice the electric cable along the roof?" asked Hardy.

The Inspector flashed his light aloft. "So there is. Smith, run back to the room and see if any of the switches there work these lights. Anderson and Brown, space out after him and report both ways. And—I say, you fellows, just keep a watch on the walls as you go along; you may find a switch on the way back. Off with your light, Bob. We'll have to finish this job in the dark. It's too risky with our torches shining. Why, the doctor and that Captain Kettle could pot us off, one after the other, and we not get a shot back."

In silence and darkness, the little group waited for the return of the messengers. The minutes passed slowly, and alter what seemed to Hardy a wait of hours the lights of the plain-clothes men's torches returning from above, showed sharply in the tunnel.

"Nothing along the passages, and the lights in the room control only house light," repeated Frost angrily. "Then, where the deuce do these lights come from? Well, it can't be helped. We'll have to feel our way along, Bob. You take the left-hand wall and I'll take the right. If you want light, hold your torch well away from your body. You chaps, follow along the wall on either side."

Slowly the little procession moved forward in the thick darkness. Another fifty feet and Frost called a halt. "Anything to report, Bob?"

"Blank wall my side, Inspector."

"Same my side. Where do you think we are now?"

"Somewhere under the bluff between 'Forest Home' and 'Holmhurst.'"

"Thought so. Well, we can't do anything but go forward. Ready? No, wait a moment. Smith, go back to the house and get that bluff surrounded by land and

water. Remember orders. No one to pass the lines except by my personal permission. Got ahead, Bob."

One hand sweeping the wall, the other holding his torch, Hardy moved slowly forward.

This slow crawl through the darkness was wearing on his nerves. He began to see things—to imagine the darkness before him held shapes and figures uncouth and grotesque. Dark, leering faces, yellow fanged, and with exaggerated Chinese eyes, watched him from the darkness. Almost instinctively, his right hand sought his pocket and dropped his torch, to pick up his automatic. He had it half-way out of his pocket when the wall on his left suddenly fell away from his hand. He gave a sudden, half-strangled exclamation and wrenched the weapon from his pocket.

"What's the matter, Bob?"

The Inspector's whisper came weirdly out of the darkness.

## **Chapter XXXIII**

"LIGHTS!" Hardy transferred the automatic to his left hand and felt for his torch. As he pressed the button a beam of light from across the passage struck the wall well ahead of the journalist, and travelled slowly back, it rested on a small, low doorway, sunk deep into a recess into which Hardy had wandered. Frost gave the signal for lights and then crossed over and carefully examined the door. It was fastened, apparently on the Inside, for there appeared to be no bolts or bars side facing that passage. Frost scratched his head with the peak of his hat.

"I'd like to see what's behind you," he muttered addressing the door. "Wonder if you'd be hard to force? No. There's time for you when I come to the end of this warren. Come on, Bob. Jones, stand against the wall opposite that door and keep your flash on it. Shoot if it moves. That'll bring us back on the run."

Again the small party moved forward through the darkness, to be brought to a halt by a whisper from the Inspector. Almost at the same moment, Hardy spoke:

"Ran against a wall, Inspector?"

"Wall's given way here," retorted the Inspector. "Let's have some light. Looks as if the passage bends here."

The light of Hardy's torch illuminated a wall closing the end of the passage. Slowly the light travelled over the wall and fell into a passage, turning to the right. It was but a short one, a bare ten feet in length and was closed at the end by a heavy door.

Frost pressed the button of his torch and added the light to Hardy's. In a few strides he covered the distance. The door was of iron and heavily guarded by massive bolts and bars.

"Looks as if it was never intended to be opened," shouted Frost, tugging at the fastenings. "Lor', it must have been constructed to stand a siege."

"An outlet on the harbour," guessed the journalist. "This place must have taken some building."

"Too right!" Frost lifted with a grunt a heavy bar of iron and stood it against the wall. "And, our people never suspected this. What do they want it for? They get all their stuff in through the music rolls."

"Perhaps they go in for larger contraband."

"What do you mean?" The Inspector's voice was heavy with suspicion of the more prosaic police officer. "Guess away, if you think it will do us any good." Frost attempted, heavy sarcasm. "Huh! That's the lot. Now, what's behind all this?"

The door swung open with a slight squeak. Frost stepped out into the open night, and Hardy followed close upon his heels. They were standing on a narrow ledge of rock at the foot of the high bluff, on the edge of the harbour. The cool winds of the night were just fling the waters into sparkling wavelets, under the light of the moon. A Manly boat was passing, some little distance from the shore. On board a merry party were filling the air with laughter and snatches of song. The lights of the ferry lit up the waters, turning the crests of the wavelets into a sparkle of brilliant gems.

"A natural wharf," commented Frost. "Who'd have suspected this? Look at that cliff, Bob."

The door had swung back while they had been gazing at the beautiful harbour scene. All the journalist could see was a high expanse of rock, rugged and broken, but showing no signs of the door through which they had passed on to the ledge of rock. Their long and weary crawl through the passages beneath "Forest Home" might have been but a phantasy of a dream.

The Inspector started towards the face of the rock. For some time he tested the cliff with the butt of his revolver, but everywhere he was met with the sharp *click* of steel on rock. The door had completely disappeared.

"Damn it—" The Inspector's temper was rising. "What do those chaps think they are doing? Why don't they open the door?"

With a laugh, Hardy pointed to the face of the rock some distance away from where the Inspector was testing, vainly, the cliff. The door that had shut so silently had re-opened. A couple of plain clothes men standing just outside it, their torches shining wanly in the moonlight.

"Faced with solid rock, inches thick." Frost was carefully examining the door, "Shut off those lights, chaps. Do you want to get a bullet in you?"

Re-entering the passage, Frost had the door carefully rebarred and stationed a man before it. Then he led the way back to where the plain-clothes man stood on guard before the mysterious door.

As they advanced the light of his torch, playing on the door, cut weirdly through the darkness.

"Anything to report?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then we'll deal with this mysterious door and what lies behind it. Let's hope we'll get to something definite here. Lights, while I see how it's to be opened."

Impatiently, the Inspector put his shoulder to the iron of the door. It swung inward, easily.

"Jones!" The Inspector exclaimed, angrily.

"Sir?"

"You told me that no one had come out of here."

"No one has come out of that door, sir. It hasn't moved all the time you've been away."

"It was locked when I tried it before. Now it is open."

"Yes, sir."

The Inspector flashed his light on the man's face. Jones appeared to be as bewildered as his superior officer.

"Humph!" The Inspector turned to the door and pushed it open. The room beyond was in darkness. "What's in here, I wonder?"

As he spoke the lights through the passage and within the room sprang to life, flooding the place with a brilliancy that bewildered and dazed the little group of raiders.

Hardy gave a sigh of relief when the electric globes in the underground warren beneath "Forest Home" lit. At last they were to come face to face with Dr. Night!

The sudden flooding with light of the chamber in which they stood showed that the master criminal was well aware of their presence in the warren and had chosen his time in which to receive them. His imprisonment in the house had shown Hardy that the mysterious person who headed the gang of criminals had at his command powers which he was unable to understand. Much as he desired to come to grips with the man and free the country from the menace overshadowing it, he feared for his companions and himself. Dr. Night would never allow himself to fall into the hands of the police.

The incident of Humberston in the doctor's study but a short hour before had shown him that the gang were desperate and willing to take any means to defeat their enemies. Would Dr. Night put up the same kind of fight?

Hardy did not believe that he would. The two men were of different calibre. The master criminal was of a cold calculating nature, entirely unsuited for physical violence. He was the more dangerous in that he possessed an intelligence of the highest power trained in the subtle unknown arts of mysterious Asia. From him could be expected some awful manifestation of powers of nature unknown to the civilisation of the white man.

In that underground citadel he had with him the man known as Captain Kettle. From what the journalist had learned about the man it was possible that he, like Humberston, would choose to fight it out, automatic in hand. But Humberston had been alone with his enemies when he went down to Frost's bullet. Would the doctor permit his one remaining white companion to follow the same road? Hardy doubted.

Inspector Frost stood in the centre of the underground chamber and looked around. The room had been cut from the sandstone that underlies most of the hills in and around Sydney. It was bare of furniture except for a small table and chair, placed against the wall at the far side. Close to the chair, and within arm's reach, was a door that opened into the room. The floor was uncarpeted, and Hardy was reminded instinctively of the ante-chamber of some lodge-room, where initiates were prepared for the ceremony.

For some moments the little band of police stood as if waiting a summons. Then, suddenly, the Inspector strode forward, towards the door.

As he approach the door swung slowly open, as if of its own volition. Beyond lay a short wide passage leading to another door, before which stood two gigantic Chinese, armed with large curved swords and dressed in semi-uniform.

At the sight of the advancing police they lowered their weapons, as it in salute and stood aside from the door. Hardy pressed forward until he had regained his old position at the Inspector's shoulder.

Frost hesitated a moment when he stood before the guards. Hardy could read his thoughts and touched his arm in warning. Frost would naturally want to arrest anyone found in that warren, but the journalist recognised the folly of commencing a fight with the servants and allowing the masters time to perfect their escape or means of resistance. The Inspector nodded shortly.

The impulse had passed, and with but a cursory glance at the Impassive Orientals, he passed through the door to come face to face with the arch-criminal, Dr. Night.

## Chapter XXXIV

A LONG room, almost a hall, lit by concealed lights that threw a coloured glow over the lower part of the room and, leaving the roof in deep gloom, gave the impression of great height. This effect was enhanced by the decoration of the ceiling. It represented the heavens, and the artist, aided by wonderful lighting, had given the impression of vast spaces. The walls were painted to represent the forests of an Oriental country. Here again was the effect of distances, unattained by modern European artists.

To the journalist it seemed as if he stood on the edge of a clearing looking over far-flung wildernesses towards a distant circle of hills. In the centre of the room stood a half circle of queer stools. Stools they really were, yet each stool had a high semi-circular back that partially enveloped the occupant. Facing the semi-circle was a raised platform on which was placed a highly-ornamented throne, supported on each side by two huge peacocks, their tails spread and quivering the slight breeze that floated through the opened door. Throne and stools were occupied by Chinese, evidently of high mandarin rank, and each man wore a head-dress of white silk that came down nearly to his lap. Before the throne and covered by a long piece of silk stood a long low table.

Hardy shuddered at the sight of it. The thing bore a sinister resemblance to a bier. For a space, the two groups of men remained motionless. The figures seated on the throne had not turned or moved at the entry of the police. They sat as if carved in stone, their faces turned towards, their master. Inspector Frost advanced a couple of paces; then stopped, as if undecided as to what action to take.

"Whom seek ye?" The ancient question rang through the room, as if penetrating the vast illusionary distances of the paintings on the walls. The gaily plumaged birds, flanking the throne, stretched higher their vivid, quivering feathers.

"Whom seek ye? Again I ask."

"I seek the man known as Dr. Night." Frost stepped forward, his head erect. Hardy felt a wave of fear sweep over him at the spectacle of his friend confronting, fearlessly the unknown menace of the east.

"I am he!" The figure on the throne stood up slowly and removed the veil that hung before his face. It was Dr. Night, but changed. No longer the slight grey figure that Hardy had traced from the telephone box in Oxford Street to the house at Potts Point. No longer the scientist, "snow" importer, criminal; but a monarch on his throne, conscious of his glory and power.

The slight grey figure had disappeared. The flowing robes of a silk rarely seen by alien eyes, gave him a majesty supreme. On his head rested a circlet of beaten gold, arching quaintly to the head and neck of a peacock. The metal of the crown was almost hidden by the glory of the gems with which it was studded—gems fitted to grace the diadem of any monarch; but shadowed to insignificance by the supreme glory of the jewel the gold bird held within its beak—a pearl the size of a wren's egg and of a glorious green, mirroring the tumbling iridescent waters of tropical seas.

Silently the veiled figure on the stool in the centre of the semi-circle, facing the throne, rose and drew his chair to one side, leaving an avenue from the door to the foot of the dais. As if he had awaited the unspoken invitation, he strode forward until he stood facing the throne, and beside the shrouded bier.

"What seek ye?" Dr. Night asked the question passionlessly.

"I hold a warrant for the arrest of the man known as Dr. Night." Frost was not speaking in his usual firm tones. He seemed to be struggling with some inexplicable emotion. "I am the man known in the city by the name of Dr. Night. Ye seek me?"

"I hold a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder. Do you surrender?"

The lips of the master criminal curved slightly. With a slight motion his hand he indicated the bier before him. The veiled man who had given passage to the Inspector came forward and stood beside the bier.

"I also hold warrants for the arrest of two men—Carl Humberston and Peter Jackson, alias Captain Kettle. I shall also hold every person here assembled under arrest, pending investigation."

Frost spoke unemotionally, yet with obvious effort. "It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

"Carl Humberston lies above, wounded by your revolver." Dr. Night spoke impassively, yet with an authority that perplexed Hardy. He did not act as if all avenues of escape were closed against him, and that before him stood the shame of the dock and the hangman's noose.

"For Peter Jackson, my servant, who is known to you as Captain Kettle—look!"

With a swift gesture the shrouded figure beside the dais withdrew the overshadowing, silk. On the bier lay a man, bearing on his chest what looked to be a coil of rope. Hardy had stepped silently forward and now stood beside the Inspector. A quick glance showed him that the man lying before them had been strangled. The features were twisted and pain stricken, yet from the description he had of the man, the journalist could not doubt but that Captain Kettle, lay before him—dead.

"My servant dared to disobey my commands. I have punished him. He is beyond your power."

The low tones of the master criminal rang through the chamber as the decree of fate. The silent figures on the stools bowed their heads, as if acknowledging the justice of the punishment.

"Murder!" Frost spoke in a rasping voice. "Seems to me that you've got a double murder to answer for, Dr. Night. Strangled, and by this queer rope." The Inspector was bending over the corpse. With an inquisitive finger he flicked the coiled rope on the man's chest. The thing seemed to writhe at his touch. Frost gazed at it with astonishment. After a moment he caught it by an end and held it up.

"Jove!" The exclamation burst from Hardy involuntarily. "The monkey's tail." His memory flew back to the night when he had been thrown into the and had been rescued by Doris. On their way home they had stood and watched on the blinded window of "Forest Home" this "tail" attached to some person. Its strange shape and lithe animal nature could not be mistaken.

Frost stood before the throne on which Night had again seated himself, the strange tail in his hand. As he held it up the thing quivered and shook as it animated with life. Frost laughed suddenly. The thing was swaying in his hands, its oscillations becoming more and more strong. With a sudden effort it swung up and caught on to his arm. Quickly it established its hold, twisting round and round the arm of the dazed man. Then, with a sudden jerk it wrenched its end from the police officer's grip and commenced to work its way up his arm, towards his body.

"The devil!" Frost uttered the exclamation in low, puzzled manner. He made no attempt to free himself from the grip of the thing. His eyes were on the writhing, moving rope.

"Quick, Frost." Hardy sprang to the police officer's side. "Throw the Thing away! Quick, or it will kill you!" The journalist seized the rope and sought to wrench it from the detective's arm. It held on strongly. Hardy turned to the silent seated figure, standing before the throne.

"Dr. Night! Would you kill him?"

The dark fathomless eyes of the master criminal turned for one instant from the steady look into the eyes of the police officer. At that moment Hardy felt a relaxation in the resistance of the Thing. Putting his strength he wrenched it from the Inspector's arm, taking with it the whole of the man's jacket. As he turned and threw the Thing at the feet standing before the throne, the journalist caught a glimpse from the master criminal's eyes. They were flaming with hate and baffled fury. Then gradually the expression became again calm and serene.

"So that's your game."

Frost shook himself, as a dog coming out of water. Bracing himself he advanced a couple of steps. As he placed his foot on the dais, a look of puzzled wonder came in his eyes. His muscles tensed as if he was forcing his way forward against some great unseen power. For minutes he swayed as if seeking, from side to side, some form or resistance. Then, suddenly, he collapsed a huddled heap on the steps; his head almost touching the feet of Dr. Night.

Hardy gazed at the fallen figure of his comrade in wild amazement. But a couple of minutes before, Frost had stood virile and clothed with the might of the law,



before the throne of the mysterious criminal, Dr. Night. Now he was lying, a poor broken tangle of flesh and bones, across the foot of the dais—and no tangible thing had wrought the change.

A sudden anger surged up in the heart of the journalist. He took a step forward and half raised his revolver. To his amazement his arm was powerless—some power was holding it down. For a few minutes he strove to fight against it, but, as a few hours earlier in his prison room, he found it irresistible. Gradually it grew stronger and stronger, enveloping and guarding the silent figure on the throne. It pressed him back, yet held him from retreating. It surrounded him and he felt that it was even penetrating his body and working outwards in a mighty expansion. His lungs swelled and felt as if about to burst. His eyes bulged and he could see but indistinctly. His brain was whirling and, as a last resource, he turned painfully to the small group of police crowded in the doorway.

## Chapter XXXV

"SHOOT! Shoot!" he exclaimed in a hoarse, anguished whisper that seemed to tear the tissues of his throat. "Shoot—and kill this devil!"

One of the men sprang forward, revolver in hand. Within the semi-circle of chairs he hesitated, and raised his weapon. Hardy turned to watch the master-criminal. Dr. Night, in all the majesty of his, royal robes, sat on his throne, silent and unafraid, a slight smile curving his thin, cruel lips.

Yet the shot did not come.

Hardy painfully turned. The man was swaying on his feet, a look of blank terror on his face. Presently he braced himself land, raised the revolver to the level of his face. For a full minute he stood thus, motionless. Then his fingers contracted and the sound of the shot re-echoed through the silences of the hall. Again and again: the echoes of the shot whirled around the room, growing; in intensity, until they jolted like peals of thunder. The lights dimmed and waned, until the place was filled with the gloom of a tropical storm. This air became black and charged the intensity of lightning. The veiled figures on the stools bowed forward, until their white masks swept the ground. Amid the roars of thunders came the whistling whip of driving winds followed by the hiss of torrential rains. Yet none fell.

The room grew dark, until the journalist could barely distinguish the majestic silent figure seated on the high throne above him. A queer soft light crept around the walls of the room, lighting the painted landscape to a fearful reality. The roof had disappeared and in its place had come a dark drear sky across which swept heavy banks of black clouds, charged with electricity.

The distant hills lightened, as if by the reflection of a setting sun. Their peaks grew bolder and more vivid. From them came a rushing blinding wind that circled the room and swept Hardy off his feet. He felt himself borne upwards and onwards; whither he could not guess. The hills grew larger and larger and at lying amid a nest of low foothills, he saw a white-walled city.

High in the air he was borne and over the battlements to the centre of the painted city. There the winds gradually failed and set him gently in a tiled square. Before him was a throne, set high on tiers of marble steps; and on that throne sat Dr. Night. Hardy looked around him. He was in the midst of a deserted city. Yet the houses were firm and open. The shops were hung with various goods. Carts stood in the streets; yet no living thing save, the silent figure on the throne could be seen.

"Fool! Thrice accursed fool!" The voice of the master-criminal came softly to his ears. Calm and emotionless, it seemed as the voice of a god. "Fool, who challenged the powers of my fathers handed to me through long generations; listen and learn.

"For the wrongs your race did to my people in the days that have passed, I brought to their lands the curse of the snow-white powder. This is the message I give to you, the only white man who has seen the city of the ancestors of the sons of heaven."

"Long years ago the white man came to the coasts of the land my fathers ruled. They asked to trade and we did not bid them go.

"My people had their laws and their customs. Those laws and those customs had served and had made them great in the days when the white man was not. The white man brought with him the juice of the poppy. The white man gave it to the people of my fathers. The white man debased the people of my fathers—and would not be denied. They brought soldiers who fought the soldiers of my fathers until they were forced to submit to the will of the foreigners.

"My fathers were helpless. Their hearts full of grief, they left the lands they had ruled so long and came to the city that had cradled their race. They set an impenetrable barrier between their city and the world and lived, awaiting the day when the white men would be swept from the face of the earth. For such was the decree of the gods, spoken by the mouths of the priests, their servants. Years passed, and the wail of my people came to my ears. The white men had increased in power and in strength. He had brought to the land of my people other things. He had taught to them the illusion that lives in fermented drinks. My people were slaves, seeking the gold and silver and precious ores the divine gods had placed in the land, for the greatness of their white conquerors.

"In my compassion I left the city of my waiting and came among the white men. I learned their mysteries and added them to the mysteries that my fathers had taught me. I fought the white people with the snow-white powder they themselves had found and given to the world.

"What of your people now, oh Robert Hardy? White men and women have enslaved themselves to this drug; a drug more powerful and terrible than the poppy juice your people brought to my country. Now the white people cannot do without the snow-white powder—and they must go to my people for it. For that reason have I placed the people of my land among the people of the white race.

"I have conquered. But a little time and the white people will be but a nation under my feet. Already white women sell their bodies for the fateful drug; white men give their gold for its possession.

"I come again. I come when the I snow-white powder has accomplished its work. Australia belongs to the East, Your people have taken it; to my people must it be

returned. Until the days of recompense be accomplished there is war between my people and your people, Robert Hardy.

"And in the day of restoration there will be no will but my will, no thoughts but my thoughts; and the land from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun shall be my land; and my people shall rule all people."

"Farewell, Robert Hardy. I come again."

The majestic figure on the throne grew dimmer and dimmer. The city became enveloped in darkness that no eye could penetrate.

Hardy felt himself lifted high into the skies, yet all around him floated the thick darkness. Higher and higher he mounted until the air grew thin and rare; his breath became shorter and more difficult.

With a mighty effort he flung his arms apart, rending the darkness around him. Suddenly he dropped, down, down, through an immensity of space. He saw the earth rising up to him, swiftly and menacingly; and closed his eyes, waiting for the crash that never came.

Hardy opened his eyes. He was lying in bed in a large simply furnished room. He looked around uncomprehendingly. It was a strange room. Where was he? What had happened?

He tried to think, but his head ached. Restlessly, he turned on the soft, yielding pillows.

A girl rose from a chair beside the window and came across to the bed. It was Doris.

He looked up at her gratefully.

"Bob! Do you remember?"

"Remember? Remember, what?"

"Dr. Night and—and the—"

The girl broke down, and lying her head on the pillow beside him, sobbed softly.

Dr. Night! Swift as a picture on the screen, the scene came back to him. Again he passed through the torture of the bare hour in the underground warren beneath "Forest Home." Again he saw Frost go down before a power he could not see or understand. His hand came up and tenderly stroked the girl's hair.

"Frost?" he whispered, questioningly.

"We don't know, dear."

"The police?" The girl shook her head slowly.

Were they all gone, the gallant little band of gentlemen who had thought life little to free the country from the menace of the East. Was he alone—the onlooker—the sole survivor? No, he could not believe that!

"Where?" Hardy asked painfully.

"Where did we find you?" The girl turned so that her cheek lay beside her lover's. "On the rock ledge, dear. There was an explosion. The bluff is a mass of broken rock. The police have taken charge. They will not tell anyone—anything."

"Then—there is—hope. Frost?" The journalist muttered faintly.

"We—hope—yes."

The girl's voice was very low. "There—there is always hope."

"And—Dr. Night?"

"You are the only one we know to be found, dear. They—they are all in there."

Again into Hardy's brain come the last words of the mystery man: "Farewell! I come again—"

Would he come again, this man with the strange mysterious powers of forgotten ages?

Yes, he would come again. Hardy was sure of that—and when he came—God help the people.

Painfully, Hardy turned so that his arm lay over Doris's slender shoulders. Out of evil had come good; out of the degradation and turmoil of human passions he alone of the lost band had come back to the happiness and home of a love.

