



**M**ORGAN ALDRICH, olive-eyed and sleek, dropped his feet from his desk in the sub-treasury and stared blankly at the figure of his chief weigher, who had burst through the doorway in the manner of a man getting out of the way of liquid-fire.

Roscoe, the chief weigher, brought up with a jerk before the severe rebuke in his boss's eyes, raised his hands and passed them across his forehead, then blurted: "We've been robbed!"

Morgan Aldrich replaced his patent-leather shoes upon the edge of his desk, drew forth a special perfecto, lighted it with a safety-match, then smiled up into the face of his chief weigher. The smile was one of utter confidence. It was the perfect composure of a man sure of himself. He removed the perfecto from between his lips, glanced at its end, then said slowly:

"Roscoe, this is a very hot day. You better punch the clock and drop down to Coney Island. Take an Iron Steamboat and cool off."

The chief weigher mopped his brow with his shirt-sleeve. Tiny wrinkles of doubt spread from the corners of his eyes.

"I know," he said brokenly, "that

you'll think me crazy, but we've been robbed! The gold in the third vault is fifty-three pounds, six ounces, light. I've weighed it all on the big scales, sir."

Morgan Aldrich lowered his feet, tossed the perfecto out the wide-open window, and rose to his full height of five feet eleven.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "Absolutely impossible! There's something the matter with the scales. There's a sack short—or something."

"The scales are all right, sir. I tried two, with the same result to a pennyweight. The sacks check. We've verified them three times with the record of the vault."

Morgan Aldrich paced back and forth across the floor. He avoided Roscoe, who shrunk into one corner and waited. The care and management of the sixty-odd employees of the sub-treasury was no light task for any man. Aldrich always held the fear that one of the many would "go wrong" or abscond. He did not believe that it was possible to rob the sub-treasury from the outside. The great vaults, of which there were eight, were protected by concrete and steel. The building was guarded day and night by two shifts of special detectives. Each man was bonded by a reliable company.

He paused in his stride across the room. "Roscoe," he said after a shrewd glance at the doorway— "Roscoe, go back to the vault, check up once more, then bring me one of the sacks. Also, Roscoe—" The chief weigher had turned to go. "Roscoe, say nothing of this to anybody. Bring a sack here, leaving a receipt with the vault-keeper, and also bring a scales—the kind that automatically weigh gold pieces. There's one in the assay room."

Aldrich fished a second perfecto from his vest-pocket, lighted it, and stepped to the window. He breathed deeply of the outer air. The bustle of the street, the shouts of the newsboys with their war-extras, the shuffling of passing feet, all seemed a reality of the new world. Roscoe had thrown him into a doubt which all but passed as he waited and dragged upon the cigar.

"The worst that can be the matter," he concluded. "is that the sacks are short in count, or that there ain't five hundred double-eagles in each sack. We've never lost a cent. I'll bet a box of cigars it's this heat that's affected old Roscoe and his count!"

The chief weigher appeared as Aldrich was finishing the cigar. Aldrich sat down in his swivel-chair as Roscoe deposited a sealed sack and a coin-scales upon the extension of the desk.

"What did you find?" asked Aldrich with a good-natured twinkle in his olive eyes.

"The same," husked Roscoe, wiping his forehead where beads of moisture had sprung from clear skin. "It's the same—each time. There's one thousand sacks in the vault. They should weigh fifty-three pounds, six ounces more than they do."

"Eh-m!" Aldrich glanced at the sack. He lifted it, held it out, ran his eyes over its surface, then dropped it upon the desk. "It looks all right," he mused. "Looks as if it had never been tampered with. Did you weigh it?"

"Yes, sir. It's about seven ounces short—they are all about that much short."

"All?"

"Yes. I weighed thirty of them from different parts of the vault. Something's the matter—somewhere. I don't understand it at all."

Aldrich drew out his gold knife that was attached to a watch-chain. He opened it, slit under the cords that bound the neck of the sack, and pried the red seal loose.

"We'll count them first," he said as he spread the sack open and dumped the double-eagles upon the desk.

Roscoe watched as Aldrich stacked the coins into piles, of twenties. He leveled them off, stooped and ran his eye over the piles, then said: "They're all there—five hundred. Twenty-five piles."

Roscoe mopped his forehead. The heat seemed to have risen in the room.

"Now," said Aldrich seriously, "we'll weigh one."

Roscoe set the scales upon the center of the desk. Aldrich picked up a coin from off a pile, felt of it, balanced it in his hand, then allowed it to settle in the groove marked "double-eagle."

They both leaned. The scales lifted the coin with a quick snap—the weight went down. Both men glanced at the coin. "I'll try another," said Aldrich in perplexity.

The second twenty-dollar gold piece weighed light, as had the first. Aldrich's hand trembled as he reached for more. He tried a dozen with nervous fingers. The result was the same.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, reaching for his handkerchief and wiping his face. "What can be the matter? They're new coins minted this year at Washington. They look right. They haven't been in circulation. Roscoe, bring me another sack. Take it from the back of the vault."

Aldrich gathered up the gold pieces and dropped them into the sack. He opened a drawer and laid the sack among some papers. His hand trembled as he turned the key in the Yale lock. He sat down, then tapped upon the edge of the desk. Now and then he turned and glanced out the doorway. Roscoe seemed long in coming.

The chief weigher staggered in finally. He had brought two sacks. These Aldrich opened, as he had opened the first sack. The coins checked—five hundred to a sack. The weight of each gold piece was light. Aldrich tried a score. He sat down then, stared blankly at the open sky through the window, then turned toward the perspiring Roscoe.

“Check the number of sacks in the vault,” he ordered. “Then after you have checked them seal the vault—and do not let any one take any sacks from it. I shall keep these three sacks of short-weight coins.” Aldrich glanced at the drawer where he had placed the first sack.

“Shall I try the other vaults?” asked the chief weigher.

“The coins are in boxes there—but you might open one and bring me a few. We’ll try them with the scales. We’ve had no complaints from the banks, have we?”

“None that I have heard—but the banks have never had any of the gold out of the third vault since the last shipment from Washington.”

“This entire shipment was checked as to weight?”

“Yes—and found correct. I’ll swear that the weights in vault one, two, three, and four, which are in the old building, are correct with Washington’s figures. That is, they were checked in correct.”

“And vault three is short now!” Aldrich’s voice was final. “That’s the situation,” he added. “Well—try the others in the old building and report your findings. This

matter is serious, and but for our receipts to Washington I’d think the trouble was at the mint. You may go now.”

Aldrich picked up one of the gold pieces as Roscoe softly closed the door. It appeared to his trained touch a trifle light. He dropped it in the slot of the scales, then leaned and eyed its milling. Finding this sharp and perfect, he compared it with a gold twenty he drew out from his pocket. There seemed no difference. He weighed the pocket-piece. The scales balanced to a hair.

“They’re all about a quarter of a pennyweight light,” he concluded, glancing at the coins on the desk. “That much is settled. Now, how did they come to be that light? The mint did not make a mistake—they never make mistakes. The weight was correct when the vault was closed. Each coin is a fraction light when the vault is opened. I don’t know whether it’s a case for a detective or an assayer. I’ll try both.”

Aldrich pressed a button on the side of his desk. He turned then and lifted the telephone-receiver.

“Give me Hudson 3-9-0-4!” he said.

“That you, Frank? Say, Frank, get the chief on the wire—yes, this is Aldrich. This you chief? Say, chief, I want you to send a smart man down here right away. No—not Bull. No, Grace won’t do—somebody they don’t know here. Some Washington man, if you’ve got one. I want an operative with something besides bone in his head! Have you got one?”

Aldrich listened, then smiled. “All right,” he said, “send him along. I’ll be in my office—tell him to come right up. Good-by!”

Aldrich hung up the receiver and turned toward the door. He listened a moment, then wheeled in the chair. He was leaning back with a perfect in his mouth when a light tap sounded on the panel. “Come in,” said Aldrich. The door opened, admitting the chief

assayer, who had worked for the government twenty years.

“A job for you!” exclaimed Aldrich, picking up three of the gold-pieces and toying with them. “I want you to rush an assay of these right away. You’ll find them light. I want to know what makes them light. There may be too much alloy—there may be something else the matter with them.”

The assayer weighed one in the hollow of his palm. “Seems a shade light,” he said. “Perhaps they’ve been sweated by an acid. They look a little different.”

“Test them out and bring the result. I’m not prepared to say what is the matter—except that something is wrong. The thing is serious. Be careful and keep your findings to yourself.”

The chief assayer went out. Aldrich waited, debating the problem over and over in his mind. Now and then he turned toward the pile of gold-pieces on his desk and fingered them reflectively.

A knock sounded then. “Come in!” said Aldrich. The door opened. The figure that stepped in caused Aldrich to stiffen in his chair with suspicion. He ran his eyes over a perfect specimen of an old-clothes peddler. A brown derby was hung on the back of a long, shrewd head. The eyes that fixed upon his own were cunning and sharp. The peddler’s outfit savored of Grand Street or the East Side. A rolled-up newspaper was under one arm.

“Well,” said Aldrich, half rising from his chair—“well, who let you in?”

“I’m from th’ chief,” explained the peddler with a light laugh. “Chief said ‘you wanted a man without a bone-head’—so I came over!”

“Good!” exclaimed Aldrich. “I’m glad there’s one in the world. Here’s the situation. What’s your name?”

“Drew — ‘Triggy’ Drew. ‘Triggy’

Comes from a bad habit with my trigger-finger.”

Aldrich smiled. “Sit down,” he said. “Now look one of these over while I talk.” Aldrich passed over a twenty-dollar gold-piece taken from one of the two sacks.

It was ten minutes later when Drew rose, coughed, and went to the window. He thrust his hands in his pockets as he glanced up and down the street. He turned and said:

“You’re short over ten thousand, then. My opinion is that the trouble lies at the mint.”

Aldrich frowned as he glanced at the detective. He drew out a perfecto, bit off its end, then struck a match on his shoe. “I thought of that,” he said coolly. “That was the first thought. I’ve been here ten years, and I never knew of the mint to send out a light coin let alone thousands of them. They have automatic machines which weigh, count, and sack the gold pieces. Besides, their weight was correct with ours when the coins were received.”

“I’m to start with the supposition, then,” blurted Drew, “that a thief went into the vault and nicked about a quarter’s worth of gold from every double-eagle.”

“That’s the way it looks.”

“How—” started Drew when the door opened and the assayer stepped in.

“Well?” asked Aldrich, glancing up.

“The coins are seven pennyweights light. The ratio of gold to base metal is correct—nine to one. They were not drilled or sweated or clipped. I looked them over very carefully.”

Aldrich glanced at Drew. “That’s the assayer’s report,” he said. “Sweet, isn’t it? I’ve given the government a receipt for full weight—I’m responsible unless we can find the reason.”

Drew laid down his roll of newspaper and his hat. “Let’s go take a look at the vault,”

he suggested.

Aldrich nodded. He rose, gathered up the coins on his desk, then turned swiftly.

The door swung open, the chief weigher staggered in, white-faced and wild-eyed. "We're robbed more!" he stuttered. "We're hit hard! Some of the kegs and the boxes—the ones I weighed—are way short. They're sealed and all that, but they're short. It's in all four vaults. Everything is wrong with our figures — everything!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Aldrich.

The chief weigher glanced at Drew. "He's all right," husked Aldrich. "He's on the case."

Drew started toward the door. Aldrich tossed the bags of gold into a lower drawer, locked it, then led the way down through the hallway to a stairs that descended into a dark-vaulted basement, out of which the government had partitioned strong boxes for the storage of gold and silver.

The chief weigher led the way to the old wing where they paused before the iron door of vault No. 3. It was locked and sealed. A watchman hurried up as Aldrich called. He unlocked the outer door. The chief weigher drew it open, stooped and inserted a flat key into the lock of the inner door. It came open with a rusty wheeze of the hinges. Aldrich reached and snapped on a light. The sacks of gold were arranged about the vault in orderly rows save in the place where the three had been removed by the chief weigher.

Drew sat down on a sack of gold, crossed his legs, and shot a shrewd eye about the vault. He surveyed the ceiling, then the floor. He rose with a languid air and went over the side plates. "I don't know why we're here," he laughed good-naturedly. "If each vault has been tapped it's a job for a lot of thinking. I wouldn't say offhand that it's going to be something we can see close up. This place would disgrace a country bank. It's

old and falling apart. The rivets seem loose."

Aldrich ran his finger along the damp sides of the vault. "I never thought they were as loose as all that," he mused thoughtfully. "Why, you can almost pull them out!"

"Rust," suggested the chief weigher.

"That's what seemed to happen to the gold—rust! I never heard of gold rusting, though," said Aldrich.

Drew furrowed his brows. "There's an idea there," he said. "I've heard of gold growing in mines—why not rusting away in a damp vault?"

Aldrich stepped to the door of the vault. "We might as well leave this," he suggested. "The walls are ten feet thick, sheathed with the plates you see. The floor is concrete on railroad iron. There's no tunnel or anything like that. If there was we'd lost the gold in a bunch. The stuff simply melted away—or all our scales are wrong."

"A good checking up—a new count all round wouldn't hurt," said Drew. "The first thing to do is to find out how much you are short. If five or six hundred pounds of gold have gone in the thin air they must have gone somewhere. If it isn't natural causes it's unnatural. If it's that, there's a thread we can pick up somewhere some time."

Aldrich led the way to the other vaults. These were examined in turn. In each the same careful scrutiny was made by Drew. The one point of interest to him seemed to be the loose rivets of the iron-sheathing—the decrepit condition of the government strong-boxes wherein was stored bullion that reached into many millions of money. He scratched his head in perplexity.

"The protection of these places," he said cuttingly, "lies in the watchmen—not in the construction of the vaults. They are impossible. I wouldn't expect a pawnbroker to keep plated stuff in this type of vault. Perhaps, though, that's our very reason to conclude that

the gold has never been tampered with in here by human hands—the simpler a thing the more difficult—sometimes. This layout reminds me of English vaults where the total protection is in the hands of watchmen. I suppose for a base we can assume that yours are like Caesar's spouse—above suspicion!"

Aldrich held up his hands. His olive eyes flashed. "If I were to tell you the precautions we take here in the matter of guarding these vaults you would not believe me. I don't believe that there is any spot in all the world more closely guarded."

Drew nodded and stepped out into the hallway. He counted six watchmen in various corners of the long, dark hallway. "Looks like it," he snapped, glancing at his watch. "Well, let's go up to your office. I think this is a matter of finding out just how much gold is gone—also of getting Washington on the wire. I can start the investigation there. We'll have an operative go over the government shipments to you and check the weights. There's always a chance of a slip somewhere."

Aldrich led the way up-stairs. He sank into his swivel-chair as Drew telephoned to his chief, then to Washington.

The detective hung up the receiver. "That '11 start them," he said. "Now let's check up. You've given orders to weigh and count all the gold in the four vaults, I presume?"

"I have," said Aldrich.

"You'll have this report soon?"

"Yes."

Drew leaned upon the window-sill and glanced up and down the street. "The richest and most talked-of in the world," he mused aloud. "We're in the very hub of the financial world. Its spokes extend to the four corners of the world and the rim of the universe. If a crook were to pick out a spot for a gigantic operation this would be the spot. Since the

war I have heard there is more gold gathered in this building than was ever in one place before. Is that correct?"

"There's over a billion and a half."

"Some swag! I don't wonder that the attempt was made. I don't wonder that it was successful so far. I'm acting on the assumption that Washington sent you the correct count and weight. Your figures show that this was the case. The shortage is here. If there was no other lead to follow I would suggest that we start from a more careful guarding of the vaults and a secret watch being set. It is idle to say that the thing could not be done. It has already been done. You are short over ten thousand—perhaps a million when the full count is in.

"This leads to the deduction that if there is a million missing there is a million of gold, in the world that somebody somewhere will try to convert into other security. It's a criminal trait to convert spoils. The natural means to convert gold bullion is to get bank-notes for it. Do you follow me?"

"It's about as clear as mud," blurted Aldrich with asperity. "How did a crook take seven grains of gold from each gold piece? Answer that and I can follow you."

"I don't know how," laughed Drew. "But the thing was done, as you yourself admit. You say it happened. All right, then—I'm working from the known fact. I'm supposing that all of your watchmen and guards are honest. I'm supposing that you are honest. I'm going over all this and arriving at one conclusion: Gold was stolen or, at least, has disappeared from your vaults. It went away from under your eyes as if it had wings. If it was taken away it must still be in existence. If it's in existence then the holder of it will naturally try to change it into something else—perhaps into gold pieces or gold certificates. Where in the world would he find a better place than right here? I suggest

you look over your receipts and we will run down every purchase of magnitude. If we find some seller who can't explain where he received his gold, then that's the man, Aldrich."

"Suppose you were right regarding the disappearance of the gold. Suppose it is in some crook's possession—he might hold it and not try to change it. Mind you, I'm only supposing—the thing is beyond me, right now. I haven't an idea or a clue in the world—everything seems to be beyond my brain."

"It's a material world — almost," said Drew. "It's an age of inventions and applied mechanics. There is an eternal balance of things that leads me to believe that we owe it to ourselves to conclude that the human mind will err under certain conditions. The mind that worked out a plan for nicking your gold pieces of seven grains each might err in disposing of these seven grains. That's my theory of going about this case—it's a chance, at any rate."

"And a mighty slim one."

"What else have we to work from?" The detective thrust out his hands, palms upward.

Aldrich chewed savagely at the butt of his perfecto. He crossed his legs, then uncrossed them. His fingers drummed upon the edge of the desk. He leaned then and inserted a key in the lower drawer. He drew out one of the three sacks and poured the gold pieces upon the desk.

"Nice," he muttered. "Nice, and they look right—but they ain't. They'd pass till they reached some careful bank. We've had all kinds of things tried on us—sweating by means of an acid—shaking up in a bag till some of the gold is worn off-drilling and a copper wire plugging the drillhole. We've even found platinum wire in the old days before platinum was dearer than it is now. We've found everything, but this beats me!

Seven grains gone and they're not even worn! Ump!"

Drew paced back and forth across the room. "We'll start with Washington's report," he said. "We'll check up with the total amount missing as soon as you receive it—we'll act on th'—"

Aldrich turned to the door as it was opened. The chief weigher stepped in, closed it, then glanced at a paper he held in his hand as he approached Aldrich.

"You remember me saying that there was a shortage of fifty-three pounds, eight ounces in the third vault?" he blurted to Aldrich.

"I do," said Aldrich.

"Well, counting the three sacks you have, the shortage has now increased to fifty-nine pounds, four and a quarter ounces. Every time I weigh the sacks they get lighter!"

Triggy Drew bit his lower lip. His eyes swung from the white, drawn face of the chief weigher to Aldrich.

"Lighter!" snapped Aldrich.

"Yes, sir, lighter." The chief weigher glanced from the paper in his hand to the gold pieces on the desk. They seemed to fascinate him. "I can't make head nor tail of my own weights," he said blankly. "I don't seem to get the same result twice—which is unusual. I've had every sack weighed in the third vault. Their total, added to the weight of the three sacks you have, shows a considerable shortage over the weight I had this morning."

"We might weigh these," suggested Drew, pointing to the gold pieces on the desk. Aldrich gathered them up, counted them, then dropped the gold double-eagles into the sacks. "Get scales," he said over-shoulder to the chief weigher. "Get another sack, too—one that you have already weighed."

The chief weigher returned with small gold scales such as assayers use. Into the pan of this he laid the sack from the vault. Its

weight was just under 507 grains of gold per coin, deducting the weight of the sack. This made the coins nine grains short from 516 grains, their standard weight. Drew, who figured the weight, turned then and laid one of the sacks from Aldrich's desk upon the pan of the scales. This weighed 509 grains per coin. He glanced at his scrawled figures on the back of an envelope, then he passed the result over to Aldrich.

"We're getting nowhere," he exclaimed — "unless — yes, unless the longer the gold remains in the vault the lighter it gets. That seems to be one answer. One would think we were talking of ice—or snow. If the gold of the world starts melting it's time for us to throw up the case. If, however, it melts or rusts or just disappears in one spot, it's time we were getting into the game."

Aldrich fished another perfecto from his vest pocket. "I'd say," he said between puffs of smoke. "that we were getting closer. Suppose we go over the records of gold received from private assay offices and the like. Also, suppose, we make a careful search throughout the city of any buyer or seller of gold in quantity. In the mean time I'll have a check on our weights, and just how much we've lost by 'melting' or whatever it is. It 'll take days to get a full report of every pawn-shop and assay office. I'll have the weight by evening— that is the weight of the gold in the four vaults. The others are all right." Aldrich turned toward the chief weigher.

"Yes, they check correctly," he said. "It's all in the vaults of the old building. Perhaps we better transfer the gold, sir."

"I don't think that would be a bad idea."

"It might," said Drew. "In fact I'm pretty sure that it would. But one thing— if the gold is 'melting' by an outside agency, we better leave it there another day.

At any rate, I'm going to spend the night in vault three and wait for further developments."

"But why take chances of losing more?" asked Aldrich, in dismay.

"If," started Drew, "if—now I'm only supposing—if there is an agency at work destroying or copping your gold, and this agency is human, they would take alarm at the removal of the bullion or the gold pieces from the vault. You see my point—any power whatsoever that is subtle enough to penetrate through all your defenses, in the way of concrete and plating, would also be subtle enough to detect the fact that the gold had been removed. Therefore we must let things be natural—for another day—at any rate."

"This is all weird to me!" exclaimed Aldrich. "We seem to be in another age or in the fourth dimension, or something queer."

"There's always an answer," said Drew. "The answer to this riddle may be simple—I doubt it though."

Aldrich chewed upon the butt of his perfecto. "You may go finish the weighing," he said to the chief weigher. "Leave the four sacks here, and the scales. Bring me your figures of the old vaults as soon as you finish. We'll get to the bottom of this thing, or I'll resign."

"I've known," said the detective, as the door closed behind the form of the chief weigher. "I've known of vaults being robbed by blasting the doors with nitroglycerin—I've heard of them being opened with oxy-acetylene blow-pipes—I've read somewhere of allowing an acid to drip on the gold and collecting the acid at the drain pipe of the vault. I've all these things to refer to, but I never dreamed of the thing we're up against—taking gold out without disturbing the walls or the door. It's a new twist to larceny."

"Or a natural cause!" exclaimed Aldrich. "And I think that we'll find it a

natural cause. There isn't a particle of evidence of anything else. I ought to go round pulling my hair and crying the news to every detective and official in the service—but I'm so sure we'll work it out ourselves I've kept my nerve. I'm responsible for this gold down to the last grain, but I don't believe in the supernatural."

"It's mostly bosh!" snapped Drew. "Natural causes in a natural world — I agree with you. Just the same we must remember the age we are living in. There's a lot of things coming up with seven-league boots—wireless, and radium, and the theory of atoms. Suppose that some master mind hit upon an adaptation of new-found energy?"

"I'd have to be shown!" exclaimed Aldrich.

The detective picked up his hat and roll of newspapers. "I'm going over to Central Office," he said, turning at the door. "I'm going to have the city operatives scout me up all the information they have on file concerning the purchase of gold by any of the thousands of pawn-shops, assay-offices, and refiners. They have this record in case of theft. It might lead to something, Aldrich."

"Hardly with the pawn-shop records—perhaps with the refiners or assay offices. If you don't find anything you had better try the other cities — Washington, Boston, and Philadelphia."

"We'll try them all before we're through, unless I run across something. I'll be back by five. You better make arrangements for me to spend the night in vault three. You ought to have your chief weigher's report by then."

Aldrich nodded as Drew passed through the doorway. He feared this chief weigher's report as some condemned felon would fear the drop. Its coming hung over him like a sword of Damocles. The shortage was already sufficient to cause consternation at

Washington. It promised to make a national sensation. He thought of German spies, of master minds, of treachery somewhere within the massive walls of the Sub-Treasury.

The chief weigher crept into the room at four o'clock. His face was as long as his lists of triple-checked weights. "We're ruined and robbed," he muttered, with slight control of his voice. "Vault one shows a shortage of sixty-seven, odd, pounds — vault two is eighty-four pounds short — vault three is sixty-two and a quarter pounds short, and vault four, where the bullion is stored, checks fully four hundred! and ninety pounds of gold under what we put in it."

"What!" exclaimed Aldrich.

"Yes, sir. I've the figures here—there's no mistake. We're roughly speaking, seven hundred pounds of gold, short!"

Aldrich mopped his brow with his shirt sleeve. He glared at the cringing figure of the chief weigher as if he would spring on him and throttle his neck. He tried to speak and found his throat parched.

"Good God!" he managed to gasp. "It can't be!"

The chief weigher shook his head. "I checked three times," he whispered. "I've had twenty-five men working over the gold. I've put it all back and sealed the vaults."

"Have you tried the other vaults?"

"They're all right—the shortage is in the old building. The kegs and boxes I tried in the new, check to a grain. There's nothing missing there."

"Leave your report," said Aldrich, mopping his brow for the tenth time. "Leave it. I'll warn you, or any one who assisted you in the weighing, to keep silent as a graveyard about the matter. We can't allow the newspapers to get hold of it. If they do we're never going to get the gold back."

"Get it back?" queried the chief weigher.

"Sure—it's gone somewhere."

"So has the winter. Do you know what the men say who were helping me?"

Aldrich frowned as he glanced upward.

"They say, Mr. Aldrich, that the mint's bought some new imitation gold that goes into vapor like phosphorus or radium. They say that somebody's discovered how to make a near-gold that isn't stable. Do you think that can be?"

"Say," said Aldrich. "Say, Roscoe, if you or anybody else were to walk in here and tell me that pink monkeys were chasing brass parrots about the assay-rooms, I'd believe them."

Roscoe edged toward the doorway.

"Yes—I'd believe them! It ain't a bit more unlikely than gold melting or violet rays to kill at twenty miles or powder so powerful that a pinch would destroy the city, It's a great age—this age of war and invention. They're melting my gold away right under my eyes, and I can't see it go. I'd sooner have the pink monkey about, than what is really happening."

"So would I."

Aldrich, who was looking for sympathy, frowned as the chief weigher edged out through the doorway, and closed the door softly behind him.

"You're hard luck!" he snapped as he swivelled in his chair. "You're about as cheerful as a picture of No-Man's Land."

Aldrich tired finally of accusing himself. He tapped the desk, found a half-smoked perfecto in one of the pigeonholes, lighted this, and leaned back with his feet cocked upon the extension slide. "I'll wait," he decided, more cheerfully. "I'll wait for that 'old-cash-clothes' detective to return. I'll lock him in the vault overnight, and then I'll make my report out to the treasurer. It '11 take me two hours to tell him what I don't know about the missing gold."

Triggy Drew stepped into the Sub-Treasury as the clock in Trinity Tower was striking five. He tapped on Aldrich's door, then entered at a low voiced, "Come in!"

Aldrich was tossing a gold piece in the air, then catching it on the fly. "I've got an idea!" he blurted, glancing round.

"Same here," said Drew. "Let's hear yours."

"I've been over the receipts of gold from outside sources." Aldrich reached and picked up a report submitted to him by the chief clerk of the receiving department. "There's just three prospects in it—the rest are too well known to question. One smelter of gold is Levi of Houston Street. He deposited with us all of \$20,000 during the last week. Another is Simpkins of the Bowery. He brought in 883,000 gold and a lot of bullion-bricks which are not yet refined. The third is Grossman and Monneson of Wall Street. They sent over yesterday and to-day about \$100,000 in gold ingots. These ingots run well to lead and other base metals."

"Their place isn't far from here—is it?" asked Drew interested.

"Half a block."

"Ump!"

"Close, eh? So close that I looked them up. Grossman is dead. Monneson runs the business which is considerable, judging from the records of our office. Queer they should jump their transactions with us just when the shortage was discovered?"

"Were they paid for the gold they left?"

"Yes—in large, gold certificates."

Drew glanced at a paper he drew from his coat pocket.

"Great minds," he began, then paused.

"Do you know that I had that firm marked from the police sheets. It's locality, so close to the Sub-Treasury, set me thinking. Their report given to the police this morning

was practically nil—a few thousand dollars' worth of bullion and watch-cases bought from Maiden Lane jewelers. The day before that it was less. From the sheet I wouldn't believe they did enough business to pay for the lights."

"A hundred thousand in a day is no trifle."

Drew thrust his hands in his pockets and strode across the floor of the manager's office. He brought up with a sharp turn. "I'll put the Center Street runners on Monneson's trail!" he snapped, as he reached for the telephone. "We might as well find out all we can of Monneson. They can trail him to-night, and report in the morning."

Aldrich leaned back as Drew spoke rapidly into the phone. He hung the receiver up, then stretched his arms.

"He'll be put to bed, and then some, by that bunch," said the detective. "They'll have his whole history, the story of his life, the kind of beer or wine he favors and his general character, when we need it. It's only a suspicion, anyway. Queer, though, we both thought of him? I suppose it's because he's the nearest."

"We might take a stroll down there," suggested Aldrich, rising. "What do you say to a walk round the block? It might freshen us as to locality. It might give us an idea. The street's dead from now on. I don't believe there's a thing stirring save a few watchmen and private detectives."

Drew led the way down the steps of the Sub-Treasury Building. They both struck toward Broadway as if by intuition. They turned at an up-town corner, walked rapidly eastward, and passed the Sub-Treasury upon its blank side.

"That's the old building where the four vaults are," said Aldrich, pinching Drew's arm. The detective turned and said, pointing:

"The next is a bank—the next a bond

house—the next is a back extension to Grossman and Monneson's nice little assay-office and smelter. Doors and windows covered with sheet iron in regulation security. No lights that I can see. Looks all right but then looks, like twenty-dollar gold pieces, may be counterfeited."

Aldrich turned back and drew the detective across the street. "We've seen all there is to see," he said, glancing at his watch. "We'd better go to the Sub-Treasury and think this over. Monneson is up-town, perhaps, and the Central Office is taking care of him."

Drew paused at the corner. His glance at the barred windows of the smelter and refiner was long and shrewd. Then he went on with Aldrich.

An hour later he was securely locked in vault three. Aldrich had assured him that there would be plenty of air, as a small ventilator was in one of the corners of the vault. Drew found this and tested it with cigar smoke. It was in working order. He sat down then, moved the catch on his flash-light, and leaned back against the sacks of gold. He was in total darkness — a darkness so profound he was not aware when his eyes were open or closed.

The dull booming of Trinity's bells was a faint sound to mark the passage of the hours. The rumble of passing trucks came to him as slight tremors. His hearing became so acute that he detected the passage of the subway-trains that ran under Broadway.

Nothing else disturbed his vigil. He went over the entire matter of the disappearance of the gold—the gradual melting of the coins which savored of the supernatural. He had believed that he would detect the presence of vapor or fume which might prove the answer to the problem. He sniffed the air now and then without any result. It was pure and sweet. He flashed the light about the corners of the vault.

Nothing was there save the white-canvas sacks and the rusty walls of the place.

Aldrich let him out in the morning. "Anything?" he asked as he led the detective to his office.

"Not even a mouse. Have the gold, checked, just the same."

Aldrich pressed the button on the end of his desk, for the chief assayer. To him he repeated Drew's request. As the door closed, the detective picked up the receiver of the telephone and called up Central Office. His face grew hard as he listened to the report. He turned finally and stepped to the window. Out of this he thrust his head and glanced up and down the street. The market was not yet open but the great financial district teemed with clerks and stenographers who were hurrying to their positions.

"We'll wait for the chief weigher's report," said Drew, drawing in his head. "After we get this report, we'll act one way or the other. The matter has cleared considerable overnight. Monneson has two places of business—one is the assay and refining office down the street from this building. The other is in the Financial Savings Building. By a strange coincidence both his offices are in the basements of the buildings. This fact is suggestive—very suggestive!"

"The Financial Savings?" exclaimed Aldrich. "Why — why that's right over there." Aldrich pointed toward Broadway,

"Sure," grinned the detective.

Aldrich paced the floor. He was on the point of speaking, when the chief weigher knocked on the door and then came in.

"Well?" asked Aldrich.

The chief weigher glanced at his figures, upon a scrap of paper.

"I've checked up the gold in vault three," he said slowly. "Checked it up and we are now short one hundred and nine pounds, eight—"

Drew's exclamation caused the chief weigher to pause.

Aldrich turned. Drew was at the telephone. His voice, as he got the connection, was terse, eager.

"Twenty men," he said. "Yes—twenty! Get them here right away. Send them down, two at a time. We'll start from here! Yes—from the Sub-Treasury. Have a wagon or two handy. We're going to raid both offices, Charlie."

Drew hung up and turned.

"What's this mean?" asked Aldrich.

"Quick action! If we don't have quick action you won't have any gold worth mentioning. Thirty or forty pounds of the yellow metal melted while I was sitting on it. Let's see—what time it took." Drew glanced at his watch. He shook it and listened. He wound it with a puzzled expression on his face. "Funny," he said. "Funny—it won't run. I thought for a minute that it had run down. Wonder what's the matter with it?"

Drew opened the back of the case and peered inside. He thrust in his finger and fished out the hair spring which had broken. This he held up to the light like a strand of human hair. "Nice," he muttered below his breath. "Nice thing. Look at it, Aldrich. It's lost its spring and temper—it's half eaten away!"

Aldrich took the spring. He felt of it, then moved to the window. His face wore a puzzled twist as he crushed it between his fingers. "Like lead," he said slowly. "It's been eaten by some acid."

Drew grinned. "You're close." he said positively. "You're closer than you think—but it's not acid or vapor or anything you could put your fingers on and say you had something. No. it isn't as crude as that. One thing, though, the same thing happened to that watch spring that happened to the rivets and the walls of your vaults. In another week

they'd all be gone."

Aldrich stared at the detective, blankly. "I don't see yet—" he began.

"Nor I!" snapped Drew. "I know this, however. There's a force at work that attacks all metals at a distance. It not only attacks but it also takes away. This force can be governed and directed. I'm no scientist, but it is not a far step from what has already been done and what is known. Somebody—Monneson perhaps—has jumped the age a decade or more, and, being a crook, he's used it against the greatest collection of gold in the history of the world. If we don't stop him he'll have it all. We'll stop him. I'll take the chance of a raid. If I'm wrong, then it's flowers and another job for me."

"But can't we go slower?" asked Aldrich. "Don't you think we'd better investigate his smelter and his office before we raid?"

"No I don't!" Drew's voice was positive. "I've seen too many birds fly, to wait for an empty nest. Now's the golden moment."

"It's golden, all right," said Aldrich. "Well, here's the 'C. O.' detectives, so let's get on the job."

Drew marshaled the twenty detectives who arrived within minutes of each other.

"Surround Monneson's smelter place down the block," he told twelve of them. "Surround it—don't let anybody in or out. Four of you go through the whole plant — hold everybody—then report to me. The rest of us will be at the office in the basement of the Financial Savings Building. There's enough to take care of everything."

Aldrich followed Drew who led the way down the steps and then along the street. The detective split. Drew posted two men at the entrance of the building where Monneson had an office and a small exchange-room below the level of the sidewalk.

"Now," said the detective, "we'll spring what the French call, 'A fly trap.'"

Drew rapidly turned the corner, grasped Aldrich's arm, and paused as he reached the basement steps that led to Monneson's exchange-room.

"A quick rush, boys!" he exclaimed. "Draw your guns and round up everybody you find below. Come on Aldrich!"

The detective sprang down the stairs, thrust open the door and dashed in. "Take those two!" he shouted over shoulder, as he pointed toward the clerks behind a netting. "Come on, Aldrich!" he repeated as he twisted a knob, then sprang in through a second doorway. Aldrich followed at his heels. The room was bare, save for a litter of strong boxes, kegs, and papers. Drew stood in the center of the floor, allowed his eyes to wander over the walls, then stepped to a closed closet door. It was locked. The detective squared his jaw as he swung his leg, lifted his foot, and brought his heel crashing against the panel near the lock. He repeated the blow. The panel splintered. Drew reached inside, fingered the catch, then smiled grimly as the door came open.

Aldrich leaned over the detective's shoulder. The closet was about eight feet square. Against the wall on the side furthest from the door hung a black covering such as photographers use. Drew reached out and brushed this aside. Behind it in an alcove that ran under the sidewalk, stood an arrangement of wires and plates, with one insulated conductor extending to a small wash-basin. Drew stepped to this, wrapped his hand with a handkerchief, and disconnected the wire from the water pipe.

"A ground!" he exclaimed. "The plate you see there with the collectors in front of it was grounded to the water-main. Take a look at the plate. There's no danger now."

"It's gold!" declared Aldrich. "It's

gold on the street side. It's so heavy I can't lift it."

"What's the other metal? What's the plate made of?"

"Looks like lead," said Aldrich.

"All right—leave it. This is the receiving end of the game. This is where all your gold has come. Now for the other end—the sending end. Monneson ought to be there!"

Drew gave instructions to the detectives as he passed through the outer office. He climbed the stairs to the street, two steps at a time. "Come on!" he snapped to Aldrich. "Come on, quick! The quarry is at the other place—I thought this would be the generating end."

Aldrich followed after the detective, his head in a whirl. They mounted the four steps to the entrance of Grossman and Monneson's. Drew paused and whispered to the detective on guard. The man pointed over his shoulder. "They're trying to break in a basement room," he said. "It's some job. They sent for axes and crowbars."

"Good!" exclaimed Drew. "Stay right here and don't let anybody out except our own men."

Heavy and ringing blows confirmed the detective's statement. Drew hurried through the outer room, turned at a landing, and listened. The blows were repeated. Aldrich clutched his arm.

"It's all right," said Drew. "Come on!"

The stairway was dark and dusty. It seemed to lead to a blank wall just beyond the bottom step. Drew flashed his light and discovered a small opening, through which he crawled on hands and knees. Aldrich followed him. They straightened in a cellar filled with old kegs and boxes bound with iron. The detectives were at the furthest end where a great, sheathed door had barred their progress.

This door was tottering on its hinges as Drew sprang forward and seized an ax. His third blow sent it inward where it crashed upon a stone floor. Drawing a revolver Drew charged through the gloom. His light flashed as he stood in the center of a dark vault and searched each corner.

"All right, boys," he called. "Come in the whole game is here."

Lights were lit by the detectives who had found the snap-switches. Aldrich stepped over the fallen door and reached Drew's side. The vault presented the appearance of a cyclone-cellar struck by a cyclone. Wreckage was everywhere. A large rotary-generator, driven by a motor, had been overturned and smashed with a hammer. From this, wires led to a huge, lead disk that was supported by glass insulators of the petticoat pattern. In front of this plate lay the remains of a glass tube which had once been all of six feet in diameter. Beyond this tube was a tangled mass of white-metal wires arranged in a cage-pattern. These wires flared as a funnel where they reached the stone walls of the vault. It was as if the lead plate, the tube and the outer screen had formed the petal of some giant flower. This flower pointed toward the Sub-Treasury.

Drew stooped and picked up fragments of the tube. The thin glass cut his finger. "A transformer of some kind," he said. "It's smashed now beyond putting together. I've an idea it's the first like this that was ever made."

The detective stepped back and eyed the entire apparatus.

"Clever," he said, half to himself. "It's clever and ten-years new. The current from that rotary generator was transformed in some manner by this tube. Rays were directed from the reflection of the lead plate. They were guided by this funnel—coil of wire. In other words this whole plant was a gigantic cathode or electric projector from which rays were

projected to the other plate, or anode, in the basement of the Financial Savings Building.” These rays, whatever they were, had the property of disintegrating gold and other metals and carrying their ions or atoms until they reached a lead disk. On this disk the gold was deposited somewhat in the manner of electroplating. The vaults in the old portion of the Sub-Treasury were in line with these rays, consequently the gold was ‘melting,’ as we called it.”

Aldrich passed his hand across his head.

“Yes,” said Drew, “that is what happened. Good thing we got it in time. Monneson would have ‘melted’ all of your gold by the discharge of electricity through matter. He probably took his clue from electroplating and from the action of radioactivity in a Crookes’s tube. This plant of

his is nothing less than the transmission of electric waves through air or stone without the use of wires. The transmission of electric power ‘via wireless’ has long been expected.”

Drew paused as a detective shouted at the far end of the vault. Lights were flashed there. The detective, who had been stooping over a dark form, rose and came into the light.

“There’s a dead man over there,” he said grimly. “It’s Monneson, I guess, from description. He’s all twisted. He’s taken poison or been electrocuted.” The detective glanced at the overturned transformer.

“Anything else over there?” asked Drew.

“Yes, there is. There’s a chest crammed full of big yellow bills.”

Drew turned to Aldrich.

“That closes the case,” he said.