

The War-Makers

by *Nick Carter* (John L. Chabliiss)

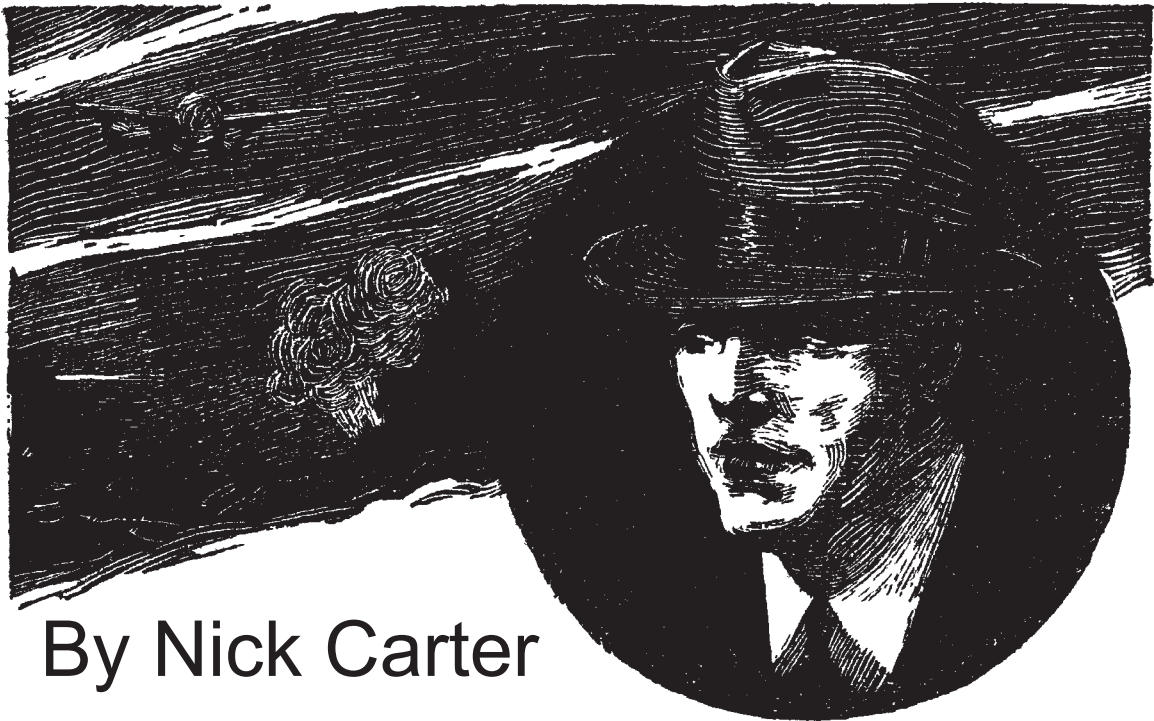


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A
Complete
Book-Length
Novel

***A man had his price~and because of it the
United States was plunged to the brink of war!
But another man couldn't be bought~and it was
Nick Carter who saved the nation!***



By Nick Carter

THE WAR-MAKERS

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD.

IT had rained in torrents all the way down from Schenectady, so when Jack Duane glimpsed the lights of what looked to be a big house through the trees, he braked his battered, convertible sedan to a stop at the side of the road.

Mud lay along the fenders and running boards; mud and water had spumed up and freckled Duane's face and hat. He pulled off the latter—it was soggy—and slapped it on the seat beside him, leaning out and squinting through the darkness and falling water.

He was on the last lap of a two weeks' journey from San Francisco, his objective being New York City. There he hoped to wangle a job as foreign correspondent from an old crony, J. J. Molloy, now editor of the *New York Globe*. Adventurer, journalist, globetrotter, Duane was of the type that is always on the move.

"It's a place, anyway, Moses," he said to the large black man beside him, his servitor and bodyguard, who had accompanied him everywhere for the past three years. "Somebody lives there; they ought to have some gas."

"Yasah," said Moses, staring past Duane's shoulder, "it's a funny-looking place, suh."

Duane agreed. Considering that they were seventy miles from New York, in the foothills of the Catskills, with woods all around them and the rain pouring down, the thing they saw through the trees, some three hundred yards from the country road, was indeed peculiar. It looked more like a couple of Pullman cars coupled together and lighted, than like a farmer's dwelling.

"Fenced in, too," said Duane, pointing to the high steel fence that bordered the road, separating them from the object of their vision. "And look there—"

A fitful flash of lightning in the east, illuminating the distant treetops, showed up the towering steel and network of a high-voltage electric line's tower.

The roving journalist muttered something to express his puzzlement, and got out of the car. Moses followed him. "Well," said Duane presently, when they had stared a moment longer, "whatever it is, I'm barging in. We've got to have some gas or we'll never make New York tonight."

MOSES agreed. The two men started across the road—the big Negro hatless and wearing a slicker—the reporter in a belted trench coat, his brown felt hat pulled out of shape on his head.

"It's a big thing," Duane said as he and Moses halted at the fence and peered through. Distantly, he could see now that the mysterious structure in the woods was at least a hundred yards long, flat-topped and black as coal except from narrow shafts of light that came from its windows. "And look at the light coming out of the roof."

That was, indeed, the most peculiar feature of this place they had discovered. From a section of the roof near the center, as though through a skylight, a great white light came out, illuminating the slanting rain and the bending trees.

"Damnedest-looking thing I ever saw," Duane confided briskly to his servant. "Give me a boost up."

Though his eyes were getting larger by the second, Moses obediently cupped his hands. Duane inserted a muddy shoe, and the next moment was perched precariously on the top of the fence. An instant he clung there, studying the ground below; then he leaped, landed, and the fence separated him from Moses.

"I'm going in," he told his man. "I don't see how it can be a farmer's place or anything like that, but maybe they've got some gas anyway. You wait here."

Moses's reply was drowned in the lash of the rain as it came down harder, and Duane turned and headed through the trees. Though getting gasoline was still his main interest, his curiosity was aroused by this thing ahead. What he had first supposed to be a native's dwelling was now a mystery, and his reporter's nose for news bade him unravel it.

Breaking through the trees, he walked across soggy ground to the long building, noticing that it was made of sheet-metal, that off to one side was a separate structure—a cottage, from which no lights showed. He also made out a dirt road that wound in from farther down and realized that, had he and Moses proceeded a little farther, they would have found a gate.

There was a big door at the nearer end, and Duane knocked on it as loudly as he could. Desisting, he heard a steady humming from inside, like that of a motor. Again he knocked and shouted, "Hello! Anybody there?"

The echoes of his voice died. Whoever or whatever was inside could not hear him, because of the rain and the hum of the motor, or whatever it was. Duane walked to the nearest of the narrow windows and tried to peer in; but it was painted on the inside. It was then that his gaze lighted on a wooden ladder that lay beside the building—a ladder long enough to reach the roof.

The flat top of the building was tar-papered except for a twelve-by-twelve skylight near the middle. Duane

crawled across its wetness until he was at the edge of the glass, his idea being to attract attention from above.

He peered down, and then squatted motionless in surprise.

IN the huge shed-like structure there below him, whose interior was a blaze of light from several Kleig lamps affixed to the walls, a man and a young woman were performing some sort of experiment.

That they were oblivious to the rain on the roof, to the isolation of their quarters and its fantastic setting off here in the woods, was quite evident to Duane from their attitudes of concentration. Each wore cape-like affairs that reminded the journalist from San Francisco of a surgeon's gown, such a thing as he, himself, had worn at one time in medical school. Only these outfits looked very heavy and thick, as though composed of a rubbery material.

What they were doing he could not make out at first, so engrossed was he with the enormous array of machines and devices, the like of which he had never seen before, and with his amazement at coming upon such a scene under such conditions.

The man whose face Duane could just make out above the cape and hood of dark rubber, was well along in years. Nose glasses perched on an aquiline nose, and the sharp, intellectual face beneath was that of a man of science.

The young woman he could not make out, nor did he try, for he was now beginning to get an inkling of what they were doing; it gripped his entire attention.

Standing at the end of the table and facing down the long shed, the man held in both hands a long, black cylinder, at whose front was a thick, blue glass lens. It looked for all the world like an immense flashlight, except that from the rear end a heavy wire came out. Duane could see that the same line weaved across the floor, connecting with some part of the humming motor.

The black cylinder was pointed at something at the far end, which Duane could not see. Hastily shifting his position, he pressed his face closer to the skylight, and now could make out a tier of small cages, each of which held a guinea pig. They were some fifty feet from the tall scientist.

WATCHING, Duane saw the man press a button at the top of the cylinder, while the girl, behind him, looked on intently. There was no observable result, except that Duane thought he detected a faint diminution in the hum of the motor.

Then he realized that the result was there, but that

he had not seen it. One of the guinea pigs was no longer standing up, munching leaves, but lay stiffly on its side in the cage.

Before Duane's mind could act on that phenomena, he saw the scientist wave the cylinder back and forth, a beam of light coming from it like a flashlight, leveled at the cages fifty feet away. Duane then saw half a dozen other guinea pigs in a tier of the same level follow the example of the first one, toppling over as though life had been pushed out of them in the twinkling of an eye.

As the scientist turned off the cylinder's light and laid it on the table behind him, Duane whistled noiselessly in amazement.

He had seen nothing whatever pass between that cylinder and the tier of guinea pigs. He had heard no sound. But something had emanated from that strange "flashlight" in the hands of the scientist, which, directed on the pigs, killed them quickly, much better than a bullet, more swiftly than gas or poison.

"—seems to be no flaw." The man down there was speaking to the girl, nodding his head with satisfaction. Duane heard the words faintly, for the motor had been cut off. "It is as deadly as the one I devised a year ago, and the cost of the operation is about one per cent. All that remains is to increase the range—a matter only of size and power."

The girl, who had thrown back her hood and slipped out of the protective cape, revealing herself as a most attractive young woman of twenty-two or three, impulsively threw her arms about the older man, crying out in delight: "Oh, dad, it's a triumph! What the war department doesn't owe to my father—Doctor Fraile!"

Jack Duane could not hear what more she said, and in any case he had heard enough. Doctor Fraile! Irving Fraile! The wizard of the United States war department.

IT was then that Duane began to realize what a thing he had stumbled on by sheer accident, and he forgot completely his desire to borrow some gasoline, to continue his trip to New York. His best move now was to make himself scarce as quickly as possible.

Of Irving Fraile he had heard more than a little in the past year. He was the inventor who was known to be working secretly for the war department on some unannounced instrument of warfare, and the fact that Duane, purely by accident, had discovered his secret laboratory, was not something to be noised about.

Still rather stunned and amazed at the outcome of his midnight foray, Duane started for the edge of the roof and the ladder. Before he could reach it, he heard

a sound that froze him where he was. An automobile was coming up the road that led in to Fraile's secret workshop.

Its headlights dimmed, it swung into view through the trees, and the journalist from San Francisco wondered if Fraile's final test of his invention had been anticipated. Perhaps this car contained men who were officials of the war department, come secretly to pass on it.

Duane's mind leaped immediately to Moses, who waited outside the fence, wondering if he had been discovered. But the probability that the visitors had come from the south, from New York, allayed that worry.

He squatted lower, peering over the edge of the roof, and saw the machine—a long, official-looking sedan—draw to a stop at the far end of the building, saw half a dozen men get out quietly. They conferred together a moment before they passed along the back of the laboratory, to reach the door at which Duane had knocked. The rain had lessened in the past few minutes, and with the motor turned off, their own knocking was plainly audible to the reporter, as it must have been to those inside.

Duane looked toward the roof's edge. He could escape now without being observed. But now, despite his awe, curiosity was coming to the fore again. It would do no harm to delay a moment and hear the first words of the forthcoming conference; moreover, it would be safer to wait until all were inside.

Voices came from below, the sound of footfalls, a called question. It must have been answered satisfactorily by those outside, for Duane heard the squeaking of a heavy lock. Then voices again, and he guessed that the visitors were inside. He crawled cautiously back to the skylight and peered down.

At first he didn't understand. The six visitors, grouped not far from the door, were ringed about Fraile and the girl and the younger man, much as they might have had they been war department officials come to inspect and congratulate.

But their faces were hardly the sort he would have expected. Their attitudes were tense.

And then—with a thudding heart—Duane realized that these were no officials, either of the war department or of anything else. They had no business here, these six men.

ACRY from the girl came suddenly, punctuating Duane's last thought. Fraile backed off and gripped the table's edge, pointing to the door and shouting

fiercely, "Get out of here! You have no business to be—"

The sentence was unfinished as two of the men sprang toward him, grabbed him and held him helpless. At the same instant, two others pounced on the girl, tore her dress as she whirled to flee, leaped after her and caught her, then held her in a viselike grip.

The sixth man, the leader, had an automatic pistol in his hand, was brandishing it. Even now, Jack Duane did not understand what this was all about, what was really happening below, in the glare of the Kleig lights.

He caught a square view of the leader's countenance—a round, dark visage, marred by some skin disease. The man was a Chinaman.

Even that meant nothing to Duane, and he continued gasping for another minute. A mad burst of struggling came from Irving Fraile, his thin face gone white with fear and rage and frustration. The girl screamed and fought, was struck, and fell to the floor.

The leader pointed to the long, black cylinder on the table, shouted something which was unintelligible to the reporter. And then Duane saw that whatever this was there was something very phony about it, that it was time he took a hand. Both Fraile and the girl were in obvious danger.

He made for the ladder quickly. More cries reached his ears from below. Duane cast ahead to determine how he should fight, weaponless as he was.

The ladder slipped as he hurried over the edge and started down it, and he snatched at the roof to steady it. His hand slipped. A foot lost its rung and plunged through.

Duane swore and grabbed wildly for support as the ladder pitched over backward, carrying him to the earth. Even then he could not have escaped and rushed to the aid of Fraile, for it was not much of a fall. But there had been a stone just at the spot where his head had been when he came down.

With a last, grunted oath for his own clumsiness, Duane saw the night changing to dazzling day, then back to darkness again; and he lay where he had fallen.

CHAPTER II. A SECRET CONFERENCE.

IN an office on the twenty-second floor of a New York skyscraper the following morning about ten o'clock, a conference was in progress.

The United States secretary of war occupied the head of the mahogany table, and facing him from three sides were Caspar Tait, president of the Tait Munitions

and Powder Company; Oscar Lomas, head of the House of Lomas, bankers, and Martin Nye, owner and czar of the Nye chain of newspapers.

They sat in a room overlooking America's greatest city, a room known to scarcely half a dozen people beside themselves. They had assembled to confer, as they had done before, on the state of the nation with relation to a certain foreign power.

"Well, gentlemen," said the secretary of war, Mr. Knox Reeder, "things are about the same, as you know. Only, a little worse."

The others nodded.

"The state department still seems to have hopes of untangling the situation by some diplomatic legerdemain, but the president and I and most of us in Washington can see only one end to the present situation. Emporia is apparently determined on war, despite everything we may do to try and stop it."

The secretary paused. His eyes went around the table.

Caspar Tait, smallish, dapper, with the dark hair and trim mustache of a foreign count, drew his lips together, stared thoughtfully at his manicured hands. Lomas, the banker, whose stolid, square-cut, mid-Victorian figure was legendary in the world's financial marts, cleared his throat, and waited. The hawk-faced Martin Nye sat forward, gray eyes fixed on the war secretary.

"However," resumed Knox Reeder in a brisker, harder voice, "we aren't meeting to weigh the possibilities. The purpose of this council, as you all know, is such that it *assumes* that war is coming, and coming in a comparatively short time. You would probably like to hear the latest from Washington, as far as the diplomatic situation goes."

He touched his finger tips together. "The Jackson incident"—he referred to an American army officer who, touring for pleasure in Emporia, had been arrested as a spy a month before—"has taken a turn for the worse. The State department hasn't made it public yet, but Emporia is going to execute him!"

The others took this in.

OUR intelligence service has now definitely established that the recent border clashes with Mexican rebels were instigated, financed, and in one or two cases led by Emporist agents. The implications of that are manifest."

Nye nodded grimly, his eyes narrowing. Caspar Tait looked pained.

"Other things are about the same. The matter of the *Alaska*—an American cruiser inexplicably dynamited

two weeks earlier while in Emporia waters—is still the focal point of the trouble, and the sore spot that will eventually have our citizens clamoring for war, unless something very conciliatory is done.

“There is no evidence that they intend to do anything of the sort. The preposterous claim now of their foreign department is that the *Alaska* was about to be scrapped, and was blown up by *its own crew, under orders from Washington*, in order to provide the United States with a *casus belli!*”

“Haw!” exclaimed Nye.

Sardonically, the secretary nodded.

“It’s all deplorable. Of course, with things as they have been in Europe, we of the war department have never taken quite the air of confidence that most Americans entertain—that the United States is slated for peace and will not be drawn again into conflict, despite whatever happens across the Atlantic.

“The trouble with that is that it takes no account of the other fellow, You may resolve not to fight, but when the time comes you may find there is nothing else to do!”

“Absolutely!” said Nye.

“That’s the trouble,” said Tait.

SO that’s the situation,” said the secretary, straightening briskly in his chair, “and I don’t have to tell you why the president asked you to act with me in planning for the emergency.

“We have already made a start. The war department has done more in the past two months than in the five years previous.”

The others knew. Hidden antiaircraft defenses around all major cities had been manned to wartime strength; coast defenses had been doubled; the navy was in position, and a steady, though inconspicuous movement of troops from the interior, had been taking place for some time.

Railroads were even now refurnishing their rolling stock that had long stood idle; munitions dumps were being established in key locations; great quantities of food, clothes, metals and raw materials were being accumulated by the government.

“We are ready,” said Mr. Reeder, “or almost ready, at any rate. Doctor Fraile has just perfected the death-ray gun, on which he has been working for over a year.”

Tait sat up. “He’s perfected it?”

“I had a telephone call yesterday,” Knox Reeder nodded. “It is finished, and the cost of operation is not much more than that of a machine gun, for one that size.”

Martin Nye pursed his lips. Lomas wore a look of grim satisfaction.

“In another week, we can start turning them out,” the secretary was saying. “Fraile has assured me that the range is a matter of power and focus, and that up to five thousand yards hardly a change will be needed.

“Just what the gun is, I can’t tell you, because I don’t know myself. It is based on some abstruse theory of electric waves, is painless, utterly lethal, and withal is the deadliest war machine ever invented by a human.”

Nye tapped the table and murmured, “So I guess we need have no fear of an invasion.”

“Hardly,” smiled the secretary. He then went on to say that there had been for some time in America an organized espionage ring, in the pay of the enemy.

This ring, known to the government, had only begun to be taken seriously in the past few months. The capture of one of its members—a member who had carried a partial list of spy numbers—had given the American intelligence service an inkling of its magnitude.

In New York City alone there were believed to be over two hundred spies, all operating under one head.

“That head, and their headquarters, is important. We have reason for thinking that the head of this spy ring, here in New York, is some one of considerable prominence—some one who has means of learning government secrets.”

Tait—Nye—Lomas—all sat up a little straighter. Knox Reeder wore a hard, worried look. “We know only that he is called ‘Mr. B’ by his agents, this master spy. I want to warn you to guard yourselves, even more particularly than in the past. Reveal this council and our decisions to no one, not even to your best friends!”

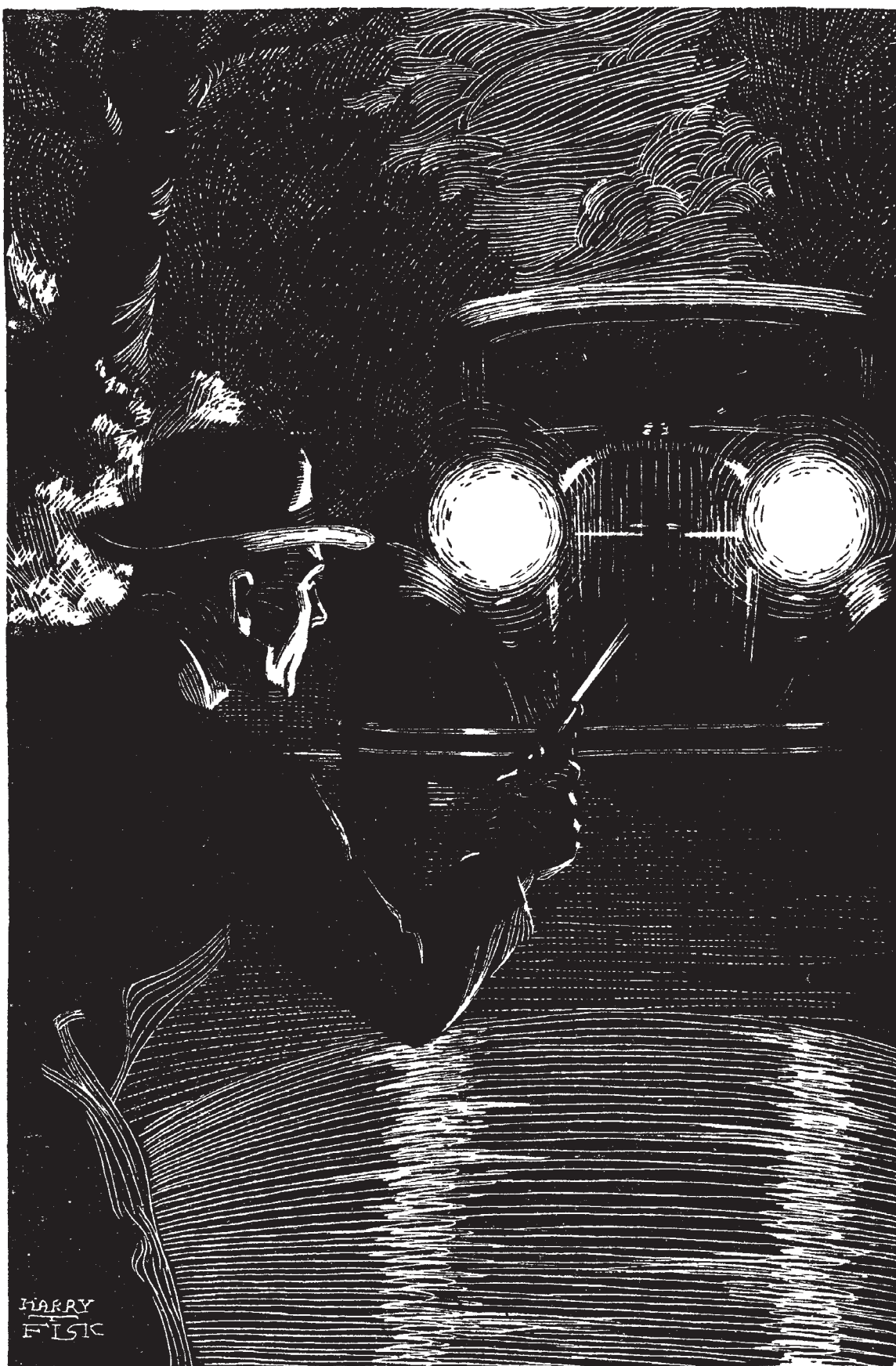
There were murmurs of positive concurrence. The secretary of war arose from his chair.

“That’s all. Our greatest danger today, I believe, lies in this Mr. B, and his spies. The nation will be ready when the time comes, as apparently it is coming. But if our plans should leak out—the Fraile invention, for example—it would change the situation.”

He looked around at the three faces, adding that, in addition to the intelligence service agents, men were working night and day to destroy the ring, find its headquarters, and uncover its head; he had hired an investigator on his own, so convinced was he that the spy ring was their greatest menace.

“Be more careful than ever, gentlemen.”

WITH those last words, the United States secretary of war turned to depart, when suddenly a



He had ordered them to halt, had shot the driver, but they escaped....

telephone rang near by. Every one of the four swung to stare at it, where it stood half concealed in a niche in the wall. Like the office, that telephone was known to hardly four people in the country, and each man wondered who could be using it.

The secretary strode to it, lifted the receiver, waited. A man's curt voice reached his ears, and he nodded, spoke. Then, for a minute or two, he listened, and the others saw the blood rush from his face.

Slowly, he replaced the receiver and turned. "The very worst has happened," he said. "I cannot understand it. That was my investigator, whom I hired to find Mr. B. He reports that enemy spies last night kidnapped Doctor Fraile and his daughter from their laboratory upstate, stole the death-ray invention, then disappeared! How they learned of it, or where Fraile was working, is a mystery. I must leave at once!"

The others were on their feet, thunderstruck. The secretary turned and hurried out without another word. Tait and Nye and Lomas stared at each other.

CHAPTER III. THE SPY RING

ON the north side of Forty-seventh Street in New York City, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, stands a large white, stone building, five stories in height, which was originally built to serve as the art museum of an ambitious millionaire. Abandoned a year or so before—when the wealthy man went into bankruptcy—it now bore no clue to its occupancy beyond the metal plate that said:

EASTERN RELATIONS LEAGUE

Had any one asked what that meant, say, the policeman who passed it daily, passed its marble portals, he would probably have shrugged his shoulders in ignorance. Nobody knew and nobody cared about it. Whoever rented the building paid a fancy sum, and that was sufficient.

Behind the brass door, brass-studded, heavy, which led into the edifice, around eleven o'clock that April morning, a number of men and women were sitting about in a large, ornate back chamber.

They were of varying aspects and nationalities, Americans, Frenchmen, Germans, Japanese, a Russian or two, and a single Chinaman. In all, there were eighteen, smoking, talking in low, tense voices, casting occasional glances toward a door at the back.

The room's furnishings contrasted oddly with its

decorations, the latter having the air of a Greek temple, the former wearing that of the lounge room of a political club. Small tables held cigarettes and siphons—objects which an occupant occasionally sampled. In one corner a chess game was in progress; somewhere else two people bent over a map.

All this was screened from outsiders by heavy shades that were drawn to the bottom on all the windows, front and back. The light came from glass chandeliers that were suspended from the high, painted ceiling, making a blue haze of the cigarette and cigar smoke.

In this scene of guarded activity, two men and a woman sat on a lounge in a far corner, conversing seriously.

The woman, seated between her companions, was a tall blonde creature in her middle thirties, voluptuous of eye, with the round sensuality and childlike complexion of a Norse maiden. Looking at her innocent eyes, one would have been excused for not guessing that she was known in five nations as the shrewdest female spy since the World War.

The man at her right, small, black-haired, insignificant-looking and of no ascertainable age, was equally innocent of aspect, was equally to be feared by any government.

The other man—a large, bestial, olive-skinned person whose face was made unsightly by a skin disease—happened to be the assembly's lone Chinaman, though there were other bloods in his veins. Lacking the reputation of his conferees, he made up for it in the fearsomeness of his appearance.

THE trio was in the midst of a rapid discussion in which the words "cylinder," "airplane," "fast steamer," reoccurred, when the door at the back, which all had been watching, opened suddenly. A man of medium height, clad in a dark suit, whose face was covered by a black mask, stepped into the room.

At once there was sounds of "*Pssst!*" all over the room, and conversation died abruptly. Some one whispered to a neighbor who had failed to observe the entrance: "Quiet! It's him!" and the neighbor snapped shut his mouth precipitately.

The new arrival, having closed the door quietly behind him, advanced to the center of the room.

"Greetings," he said in a soft voice.

Murmurs of greeting and much throat-clearing came from all sides.

"Mr. B" turned this way and that, scanning the faces of those present through the eye slits in his mask. He

seemed to be checking them off with each movement of his head.

"All here, I see," he said in that same mild intonation; "that is, all that I expected for our little demonstration." A note of satisfaction entered his tones. "You slept well last night, I hope," he said, addressing them as though they were children.

"You had reason to. We have succeeded! Are the prisoners safe?" The last in a snapped aside to the big Chinese.

The bestial man nodded. "I came from looking at them but a moment ago."

Mr. B nodded. "It would take more science than Fraile commands to escape from that cellar. We will have them here in a minute, and then will do what we did not do last night. It was no time then, you understand—at two in the morning—to risk attracting the curiosity of some passer-by by letting him show how the thing operates. It is different now, with the street crowded with traffic."

He paused. The eighteen or twenty spies waited for what was to follow.

"Toya!"

The big Chinaman started briefly, came forward.

"What happened to Shakoff last night?"

Toya licked his lips. Before he could speak, Mr. B went on: "You left here with five men—six of you, all told—for Fraile's laboratory. Shakoff was not with you when you returned. I noticed it—even though you brought Fraile and his daughter and the death-ray cylinder—even though you succeeded. Shakoff was missing. What happened to him?"

The big Chinese opened his ugly mouth. "He was—he was killed."

"Killed?"

Every person in that room started as though struck, except the four who had been Toya's other companions last night. They looked guiltily at the floor.

"Killed?" repeated the spy leader, advancing. "By whom? You mean by Fraile—resisting?"

Toya shook his head. "No. No. Something happened we didn't anticipate. Let me explain."

The leader waited.

"We were attacked as we were starting back," said Toya. "There must have been a leak somewhere"—he glared about him—"something went wrong with the plans. When we had captured Fraile and the girl and gotten the cylinder and were in the car half a mile away on our way back here, a car coming toward us suddenly blocked the road. A man—an American, an agent he must have been—leaped out and called on us to surrender."

MR. B listened to this without moving a muscle. For an instant the drop of a pin could be heard in the room, until Toya continued:

"Shakoff was driving and when we refused, he started to shoot. This agent shot him down at the first blast. I threw him out of the car, in order to get behind the wheel. The man was plainly afraid to shoot too much, because of Fraile. We left him behind."

Mr. B drew a deep breath. "Alive?"

"I think we wounded him, but he was not dead."

A snort of rage from the spy leader sounded in the room. "You *think* you wounded him?" he cried. "What does that mean? Describe the man. What did he look like?"

"He was a tall person," said Toya. "He wore a gray suit and had the hard face of a detective or agent. His car was a coupe with New York license plates."

Mr. B, listening, could be seen to set his jaw beneath the mask. For a moment he stood there, fear visible in his very carriage. Then his voice cracked out at Toya: "He was an agent, a detective! He must have been retained by some one to work with the intelligence department in finding us. He must have gotten wind of our plans about Fraile and hurried there alone to stop us, arriving too late. *Somebody here talked!*"

Nobody stirred. Suddenly the blonde, voluptuous woman rose up from the couch and drifted across the room to where Mr. B stood. Beside him, she whispered in his ear, turned and went back to her seat.

The spy leader swung slowly, until his eyes were resting on a white-faced man of middle age, an American, who sat not far away, opening and closing his hands at his sides.

"Walker. Stand up!"

The man stood up. He might have been a bookkeeper or even a stockbroker in ordinary life.

"The orders yesterday were that our plans for last night were not to be spoken of outside this room under *any* conditions! You, with Shakoff, were seen last evening in Leon's Restaurant on Broadway, talking very secretly together. Your lips were read. You were discussing the forthcoming capture of Fraile."

Walker's teeth began to chatter faintly.

"A man was watching you at the time, according to my informant. There is now no question that he was the detective who attacked the party with Fraile, that he learned of the plans through the disobedience of you and Shakoff."

Walker, his hands shaking, could not find his tongue. Mr. B drew from his coat a blue-black automatic revolver, to which a silencer was attached, and pointing it at the terror-stricken agent, clicked off the safety.

“You jeopardized the success of our biggest coup, and have endangered the safety of all of us. That detective is still alive, and aware of Fraile’s abduction, and a tempest will begin any moment, whereas we had hoped—because of Fraile’s secrecy—that his disappearance would go unnoted until we had gotten the ray out of the country.”

The gun steadied. “Shakoff has already paid for his foolishness,” said Mr. B, then pulled the trigger, just as Walker let out a choked scream.

WHEN the powder smoke had cleared away and Walker lay on his face on the floor, the leader made a gesture to Toya and replaced the gun in his pocket. The big Chinese proceeded to drag the dead spy by the heels from the room.

Mr. B sat down and looked around. The execution had been witnessed by stony faces, mostly approving. “The price of disobedience,” said the leader coldly. “Our position is not nearly as good as we had hoped. That agent, or rather detective, has undoubtedly reported by this time to whoever retained him. We will have to work fast.”

There was one more detail to be settled, however. He turned to Toya who had returned, was at his elbow. “Barsino has reported to me that he suspects there was *another* individual at Fraile’s last night, at the time of your raid. Were you aware of that?”

Toya looked incredulous. Mr. B turned to the dark Barsino and bade him tell his story. The latter broke into speech, reciting how he had looked back along the rainy country road as they sped away just before being attacked by the agent, and could have sworn that he saw a large black man standing beside a car some distance behind. Taking him for a native of the country, he had said nothing until later.

As Barsino finished, Mr. B asked Toya what he thought of that. The big aid was still baffled, but finally reckoned it had nothing to do with their capture of Fraile, which the black man could scarcely have witnessed.

Mr. B appeared satisfied. “Enough,” he said. “And now bring in Fraile and his daughter.”

When Doctor Fraile and his daughter, Jocelyn, were pushed into the big room a few minutes later, the chairs of the eighteen enemy spies had been pushed together to form a semicircle.

The black-masked leader, Mr. B, sat in the center, his hands folded quietly in his lap.

The war department’s key scientist halted in the center of the room. His hands were tied behind his back;

in addition he was gagged with adhesive tape. He knew what he was facing.

A silence followed their appearance. The prisoners could not have spoken had they wished to do so. Now Mr. B broke the hush, enunciating his words in a careful, deliberate manner.

“You have, no doubt, guessed the situation by this time, Doctor Fraile, and know exactly who we are. For that reason, I won’t waste time in telling you. Also, of course, you know why we captured you, why you are here, with your daughter. It was not enough to acquire your invention; we must also be quite certain as to how it is used.”

Toya crossed the floor and ripped the tape from the doctor’s lips. Fraile, not moving, drew in a long, deep breath.

Barsino arose and left the room, returning presently with the death-ray flashlight, the long, dark cylinder with a cord attached to its end. Mr. B took it in his hands, looking at Fraile.

“The value of this we know, and its general idea. What we require is a detailed statement of the principle involved and every operation that went into the making of it—plus a demonstration.”

Fraile made no reply. After some moments of waiting, Mr. B asked if the scientist was attached to his daughter. Still Fraile did not answer, and the next instant, Toya and two other men were standing behind the white-faced girl, prepared to do the bidding of their leader.

THEN Doctor Fraile spoke. “You have the cylinder. I take it that you are going to smuggle it out as soon as possible. Your scientists will need no demonstration or detailed explanation, once that is in their hands. It will tell its own story.”

“But we want you to tell it,” insisted Mr. B.

Fraile drew another breath, advanced and took the cylinder from the leader of the spies. Then, so suddenly that there was no doubting its sincerity, he pointed and exclaimed: “You have lost the outer lens! This thing is worthless without it! I can demonstrate nothing!”

Slowly and ominously, Mr. B turned his eyes that were just visible through the slits of his mask, on Toya. “Well?” he snapped. “You had charge of carrying it? Were you so careless that you lost a part?”

Toya, the brunt of all errors it seemed, came forward, scowling fiercely, and looked at the cylinder. That it meant nothing to him was obvious. He turned a black look on Fraile, as though wishing to claim him a liar. “He’s——” he began in a loud, harsh voice, but

the spy leader cut him off.

"If he lies, we can settle it later! I don't think he lies. Therefore, you lost a part, either while bringing the thing here, or at the laboratory! Go and search the limousine!"

Toya rushed out. Nobody spoke or moved for five minutes.

"There is nothing there," announced Toya in a thick voice, returning. "If we lost something, it must have been at the——"

"Enough!" Mr. B stood up, anger and frustration in his voice. "Take them out," he gestured at the prisoners. Four men swarmed forward and hustled the Frailes from the room before they could say a word. The rest of the company waited for the leader's next words.

He turned and raked Toya with a stream of scornful vituperation, ending, "Get out! Leave!"

Toya departed hastily, by a rear door.

Mr. B looked around, stood unspeaking for a moment or two, brooding, then said, "A fine triumph! There is nothing to do now but go back to the place in the Catskills and hunt for the missing lens. And if Fraile's absence has been reported—as it certainly has—we may have plenty of trouble before we get it."

Angrily, he swung and strode to the back door. "You will all wait here. I must find out what is being done before we make another move. Keep all under strictest guard."

The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER IV. THE SHAKOFF CLUE.

AFTER leaving the skyscraper in midtown New York City that held the office of the secret war council, Mr. Knox Reeder, United States secretary of war, entered a taxi-cab and told the driver to take him to the Battery. As he sank back against the cushions, a gray-haired, thoughtful man whom not one American in a hundred would have recognized, his face was very grave.

To say that he was stunned by the news of the abduction of Doctor Fraile and his daughter and the theft of his invention—news that came like a bombshell, just when he was thinking that matters generally were moving expeditiously—to say that would be a great understatement. But to add that he was bereft of thought would be putting it too strongly.

Badly shaken though he was, the secretary was already thinking ahead on what was to be done, how

this thing could be kept secret until every force had been put into motion for finding the spies and rescuing the Frailes; and who was to be notified first.

As for the latter, he would have to advise the president the moment he reached Washington. As for the former—that of locating the spies—he was on his way now to learn the exact details of what had happened from his personal investigator, and find out what could be done.

He had, therefore, requested his cab driver to make all the speed possible; and it was not many minutes before his machine pulled into a parking place at the Battery, not far from the slips whence ferries left for Staten Island.

The secretary did not get out immediately. After saying something for the driver's benefit, he leaned forward and glanced at the line of cars parked near by.

In one of them—a streamlined, high-powered, plain black coupe with New York plates—two men were sitting. Almost at once the taller and older of these two men got out of the car, came over and stepped into the back of Mr. Reeder's cab, closing the door before he spoke. As he sat back beside the war secretary, he said, quietly, almost casually:

"You might call me Smith," and then: "Shall I start right in?"

"Yes—Mr. Smith. Start right in. The whole story. First of all"—Mr. Reeder was looking at the profile of his investigator he had seen only once or twice before—a clean-cut, chiseled visage, brown, hard, expressionless, mature—"first of all; how did you know that Fraile was abducted last night? You didn't say over the phone."

"I was there," was the immediate response. "I tried to halt it and failed because I arrived too late. Give a minute," went on the agent who preferred to be called "Smith," "and you'll understand.

"At five yesterday afternoon I was in a Broadway restaurant, whose name doesn't matter, watching two men who I was convinced belonged to the spy ring. You recall that in my last report, two days ago, I told you that I thought I had located a cafe that was a regular meeting place for some of the spies."

The secretary nodded. He was impatient.

The other was continuing in an emotionless voice: "I was right about the cafe, as I became certain last night, and was observing these men, hoping they would lead me to the main headquarters. They were talking, and I listened. I heard them discuss a plan to capture Fraile and his daughter, then steal the death ray, last night."

Smith went on, touching only lightly on his surprise at what he had heard—a surprise due to the fact that he had thought Fraile's work and present whereabouts were known only to the general staff and the secret war council. It was too late to summon help, even his assistants, for if he were going to thwart the spies he would have to leave immediately.

He hurried out to the Catskills in his fastest car—but encountered trouble on the way. A drunken driver had crashed into him, delaying him for twenty minutes, and by the time he approached Fraile's place, the spies were already departing with their prize.

He had ordered them to halt, had shot the driver, but they had escaped, after wounding him slightly.

THE secretary of war was nodding, rapidly, with a tense, harried look on his face. "And you could tell nothing from their faces, or the car? Did you see Fraile?"

"I saw Fraile. They used him as a shield when I threatened to shoot, and also the daughter—No, the faces meant nothing to me, except that I recognized the two men from the cafe. The car, either. It had no license plates."

Reeder drew a breath. "It's a terrible business," he said. "I have taken you into my confidence, Mr. Car—Smith, and you know what Fraile's invention means. You know the situation diplomatically. I have just come from a meeting with the secret war council—as, of course, you know, because you phoned me there—a meeting that is just one other phase of the general, secret mobilization. But this—this audacious kidnapping of Fraile and the stealing of his invention—"

Smith cleared his throat, spoke quietly.

"I have something of a clue," he said. "The man I shot last night—the driver of the car—was one of the men I watched in the restaurant."

Mr. Reeder turned.

"They tossed him out of the car," the other explained. "I fetched the body back to my house."

The secretary of war began to understand. "You hope, through him, to learn where the rest of the ring—"

"Not too fast," cautioned Smith. "I hope to—yes. But so far I haven't even learned the name of this corpse. There was nothing on him to identify him immediately or tell where he lived, and the only chance—a specially manufactured money belt—is being looked into now by one of my men. From that we may learn who he was—and after that it will be a gamble. But it's a chance, and I thought I'd mention it."

Knox Reeder nodded slowly. "I'm glad there's something at any rate," he said. He made a movement. "It's time I left. I'll leave this in your hands for the present. Doubtlessly, the president and the general staff will want a corps of intelligence men concentrated on New York immediately. But until there——"

"A moment, sir."

The secretary paused.

"I've got to ask you something. How do you suppose Fraile's work and his whereabouts leaked out to the espionage ring, to Mr. B?"

The Washington official looked for a long minute into the gray eyes that met his levelly. Finally he said, "That is the greatest mystery; in some respects the most horrible aspect of the whole business. I cannot comprehend it. Fraile's work and the location of his secret laboratory were known only to myself, the president, the army general staff in Washington, the members of the secret war council, and yourself."

After a hesitation, the agent said, "They might have learned of his location by accident, of course. But on the other hand——"

"Yes," said the secretary after a pause that threatened to last some time; "on the other hand, they might have been told."

He said no more. With a sudden, nervous movement he clambered from the taxi and tendered a bill to the driver. The tall, wide-shouldered investigator followed him out, stood a moment eyeing him; then, with a brief nod he swung on his heel and went back to his car.

AS the launch bearing Secretary Knox Reeder swung out from its dock and headed across the harbor for Governor's Island, the secretary's personal investigator gave rapid instructions to the other detective who sat beside him.

The end of them was: "You on Tait, G on Lomas, and R on Nye. Get out now. I want the car. I want to see what G got on that money belt." And he went into gear.

The other man slipped out, vanished quickly on the sidewalk, and the dark coupe backed off, turned and sped up lower Broadway. A siren wailing inside it cleared a path; it made no stops for traffic lights, reached Union Square in a few minutes and cut west.

Shortly after that it pulled in before a brownstone house on lower Fifth Avenue, and the investigator jumped out and ran up the steps.

Inside, he confronted a younger man, blue of eye and alert, who said immediately, "I got it. Man's name was Shakoff, and here's the address."

The elder detective took the paper. "Good," was all he said as he stuffed it into his pocket. "Chick," he added, "has instructions. He's calling in a minute. Get them and relay to Roxy." He turned and was gone.

His dark coupe went north again, then east, and again crossed Union Square. After a while it was crawling along a narrow, dirty street on the East Side, while the man inside peered out and up, scanning numbers. Presently he stopped, got out the paper.

It showed the name of the spy whom he had killed last night, plus an address that should be right along here.

The coupe moved on. After another hundred yards it veered in to the curb and parked. The man got out, locked the car, dropped keys into his pocket and walked up a flight of sandstone steps to a dirty door, above which a sign said:

HOTEL ACME
ROOMS BY DAY AND WEEK

The hotel was built at a triangular intersection and extended through to the next street. The investigator knew that, though Shakoff had lived here, this was certainly not the headquarters of the espionage ring, where Fraile was being held. He, therefore, entered boldly and approached a desk behind which sat a slant-eyed clerk reading a magazine.

"Shakoff," said Smith and showed a bronze badge.

The clerk bounced up. "Yes, sir," he said quickly, fawningly. "It's room twelve, captain, but he ain't in now."

"I know it," said the other, and with hardly a pause kept on to the narrow stairs that led upward. At the top he faced down a long hall, at whose other end was another flight of stairs. Moving that way, he looked at the room numbers. He saw that twelve was above and went up another flight, walked until he came to twelve. His reason for not troubling to ask for a key was apparent as he pulled a ring from his pocket, fitted one into the keyhole and readily turned the lock.

Before opening the door, however, he stepped back, drew a .45 revolver from beneath his coat, cocked it and stood to one side. The door burst inward as he booted it, but the room beyond was empty.

Smith stepped in, still holding his gun, cast about until he saw the closet door, jerked open sidewise. It, too, was void of life, and the gun went back under his coat.

AFTER that, the private investigator for the secretary of war spent a good thirty minutes

combing every article in the room, clothes, personal effects, what few letters there were, books and magazines. This, right here, was the "gamble" of which he had spoken to Knox Reeder.

Would there be anything in this room pointing to Shakoff's connection with the espionage ring headed by Mr. B? Anything to show where the headquarters of the spy ring were, who some of the other members were?

He learned that Abraham Shakoff, born thirty years before in southern Europe, a draftsman who had studied at a local university, had been working until yesterday for the Department of Public Works of New York City. His bankbook showed large deposits, though his salary could not have been much.

The spy angle was confirmed, but nothing was here to directly connect Shakoff with the ring that had kidnapped Fraile last night, with whom he had been shot, though there were maps and blue prints that might well have their meaning.

Smith sat down finally. His gray eyes were coldly calculating. So far the trail was clear, perfect, but so far was not enough. How could he leap from this room and Shakoff who had been of the spy ring—to the place where Shakoff's five companions had returned last night—bringing Fraile, his daughter and the death ray?

The man's eyes drifted to the door. He pondered. Abruptly he rose, went downstairs and told the clerk that if any one came to visit Shakoff's room they were to be allowed to go up; and further, if they asked whether any one else had preceded them, the clerk was to say no and make it stick.

Nodding vehemently, the clerk promised, and the investigator returned upstairs, closed the door with the night latch on, then seated himself on the bed. A gun was deposited beside him.

Perhaps, he was thinking, the other spies would not be certain that Shakoff's room had been clueless. Perhaps Mr. B, wary lest his dead informer have left something to give him away, would send men here this morning to make sure.

CHAPTER V.

"MR. NICK CARTER IS BUSY."

AT that moment, however, the man known as Mr. AB, who half an hour before had left his spies at their headquarters in Forty-seventh Street, was not thinking of Shakoff, as he came out of a subway station at Canal Street and hurried toward a large white office building. Needless to say, he no longer wore his mask.

The problem that occupied the spy leader's mind was of sending men as quickly as possible out to Fraile's laboratory in the Catskills and retrieving the lost lens before the storm broke.

Even now it might be breaking; even now government agents might be guarding the secret laboratory in the woods, and Mr. B's one thought was to find out about that as soon as possible; then, if the coast was clear, to dispatch a mob.

How he intended to learn what the government knew at this juncture was something that only Mr. B could have answered; he who was suspected of being "a person of prominence in New York," who had access to government secrets.

He strode hastily through the portals of the office building, nodding curtly as a newsboy spoke to him with respect. As he passed the directory on his way to the elevators, his mind concentrated on what lay ahead, the tail of his eye remarking two men who stood there.

One was a strapping fellow of twenty-seven or so, blond of hair and tanned; the other was a huge Negro. They were talking swiftly, the while the white man scanned the directory board, and Mr. B caught the words, "got to tell Molloy about that business last night upstate—"

Mr. B narrowed his eyes a little, kept on to the elevators. Presently he was out of sight.

In the lobby, Jack Duane had turned and sent a curious look after the retreating back, frowning a little. Then he swung back to Moses and said, "O. K. Wait here. I'll go up and see J. J. Molloy."

IN the office of the city editor of the *Globe*, Jack Duane from San Francisco stretched his long legs, lighted a cigarette and leveled a finger at the face of his old friend. Greetings were over, and Duane, his mind still full of what he had witnessed last night in the foothills of the Catskills, was eager to get it off his chest.

After the fall from the roof of Fraile's laboratory and his subsequent awakening to find the scientist and his daughter gone, Duane had hurried back to his car with the idea of chasing the six men. But there he had heard news from Moses that, surprising him, changed the complexion of things, and after some thought he had decided to make New York as quickly as possible and get advice on what was to be done.

He did not know, of course, the real status of the men who had captured the scientist, though, with the night to reflect in, an inkling of the truth had come to him. Least of all did he realize the imminence of Fraile's

work and what it meant to the nation at this moment. To Duane, Fraile was still merely a scientist working for the war department, developing something that might never be used.

"I've got an earful to give you, J. J.," he said. "Listen close."

J. J. Molloy, still showing his gladness at the sight of his pal, nodded once and waited. A medium-sized man with a mild face, he contrasted sharply with the brown good looks of Duane.

"I guess you got my wire from Pittsburgh," Duane said, "and knew I was on my way here with Moses to try to get a job. Well, I'm here and I still need a job, but I ran into something last night up in the Catskills that's knocked everything else out of my head."

He recited then how he and Moses, their car needing gasoline, had seen the light.

He told the whole story, from the first sight of the lights through the trees to the discovery that the scientist below with the death cylinder was the famous Irving Fraile, and then to the arrival of the six men, his own subsequent fall. He had awakened to find Fraile and the others gone, as well as the death cylinder.

J. J. Molloy, a medium-sized, mild, little man, listened with rising interest and excitement, and when Duane was through he got up and closed the office door, even turning the key. Duane divined that Molloy saw even more in this business than he himself had.

"Man," said Molloy in a soft voice, "this *is* a story!"

Duane waited.

Molloy pointed, lowering his voice, even though it was impossible that any one outside could have heard him. "You don't realize the present diplomatic situation, do you?"

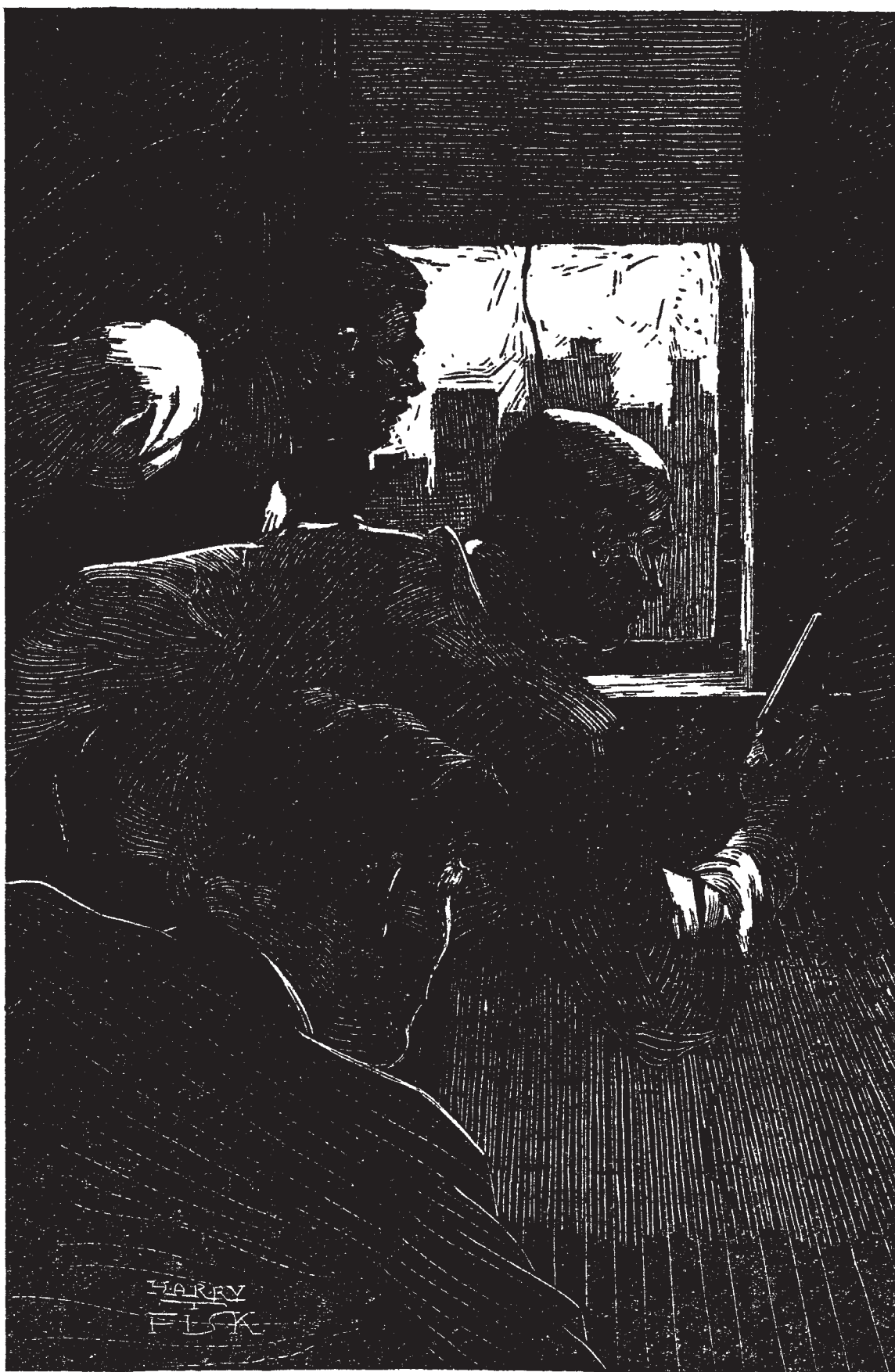
Duane blinked his eyes. He had followed the newspapers more or less, but the real truth of the situation was beyond him.

"Because," went on Molloy, and he spoke for several minutes.

Duane listened, and listened further to the real import of Irving Fraile and his death-ray invention.

"You mean," he cut in, suddenly, while Molloy was still speaking, "that war is a certainty, and that these spies stole Fraile's invention not just to be stealing, but to use against *us* within the next year?" He was halfway out of his chair.

The *Globe* man said that was exactly what he meant. He jumped to his feet. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed; "this is terrific! If the war department doesn't know of this, they ought to be notified immediately! For all we know, Fraile's absence hasn't



The automatic went spinning just as the reporter from San Francisco saw



four men springing forward from three sides of the square, furnished room.

even been discovered yet, that these spies have him locked up somewhere, with the death ray!"

Duane looked at him. Suddenly he said, "Wait a minute! There's something else I wanted to tell you that may answer that question." He said that, after awakening and finding his way to the car, and telling Moses of what he had seen, he had learned from his man that the car containing the enemy spies and their three prisoners had been attacked a little farther down the road by a man who ordered them to surrender, then shot at them.

"Moses didn't see any more than that," Duane ended, "but do you suppose it could have been a guard or government agent, either sent there to guard Fraile or tipped off to what was to happen?"

Molloy pondered, lips parted as he breathed. Finally he said, "It seems likely. If that's so, then the government must know by this time and probably has a thousand men looking for Fraile right now." He stood up, came around and laid a hand on Duane's shoulder.

"I'll tell what I would do. Go and tell this story to a man I'm going to recommend and leave it up to him. He has government connections; he'd know just what to do."

"Who's that?"

"A private detective. I'm surprised that he hasn't been called in already. I've known him for a long time, and I came into contact with him some months ago when he solved the murder of Harrison Ballard, the chairman of the president's utility commission.* You probably remember. I figured in that case, myself, in a small way."

Duane sat up. "You mean Nick Carter?"

Molloy nodded. "He's the very man."

JACK DUANE sat silent, pondering. Molloy's advice was sound, particularly in view of the fact that Fraile's abduction was so much more important than Duane had realized.

And although the reporter from the west coast was desirous of working on this business himself, it would certainly be wiser to take a man like Carter into his confidence and let him handle the official end of it. Duane could not deny that, even after hearing Molloy's news, he was as much concerned with rescuing Fraile's enormously attractive daughter, whose face had stuck in his mind, as in saving the inventor and his cylinder.

He, therefore, agreed to follow Molloy's counsel. A few moments later, he took his departure. Downstairs, he picked up Moses, and in a taxi they headed at once

for Nick Carter's address on lower Fifth Avenue, which the reporter had gotten from the editor. They arrived there as the clocks of Manhattan were striking noon.

Duane ran up the steps and rang the bell.

The door was opened after only a short delay by a small dark man, plainly a servant and, Duane guessed, a Filipino. The journalist went to the point immediately.

"My name is Duane and I want to see Mr. Nick Carter on extremely important business. You can tell him I was sent by his friend, J. J. Molloy of the *Globe*."

Without a trace of expression and almost before Duane finished speaking, the servant was shaking his head. "Mr. Carter—he not here. He very busy on important case. He cannot take on any other business right now."

Duane got out a five-dollar bill. He did not know Nick Carter's servant. "Listen," he said, somberly, "this business I'm talking about is ten times more important than anything he could be working on now, I don't care what he's doing."

The Filipino did not even see the banknote. The door began to close. "I have said," he intoned curtly.

"Wait a minute!" Duane cried, and shoved a foot against the door. "I tell you this thing I'm talking about is important to the whole country! It's—it's——" he broke off, not wanting to say too much. "I'm not trying to bribe you. If Carter's not here, how about one of his assistants? Has he got any?"

"They not home either," answered Carter's Filipino servant, who all too often in the past had heard such monumental pleas and had learned to discount them. "Very sorry. You have to enlist aid of some one else." And he closed the door.

Duane raised his hand to hammer the panel, let it fall. There was no use insisting further, himself. Molloy, notified of this unexpected obstacle, might be able to reach Nick Carter and convince him of the importance of Duane's visit. Meanwhile—

The San Francisco reporter turned and hustled back down to his cab, intent on getting to a phone and advising Molloy of the situation. But, on the point of giving an order to the hackie, he paused and bethought himself.

Why not go ahead on his own? If Carter was off on some "most important case in a long time," as his servant had phrased it, why yap at his heels for aid? Couldn't he, himself, take on alone the job of finding where Fraile and his daughter were held prisoner?

JACK DUANE'S blue eyes glinted grimly. He had money enough for a few weeks; he was footloose, he knew New York City—and already he had an idea

* Note: See "Whispers of Death"—Vol. V, No. 5

for possibly trailing the six men who had kidnapped the scientist.

"Moses!"

Moses sat up like a shot, in the back of the cab. "Yasah!"

Duane jumped in beside him, slamming the door. He snapped an address to the driver—that of the hotel where he had put up early that morning after coming in from the north—and then sat back and assailed his black servant's ears with rapid speech.

"We're going to have some action, big boy. We're going to the hotel, get some guns, pick up the car, then head for—Chinatown."

Moses gaped. "Chinatown, Mistah Duane?"

"Chinatown," Duane nodded grimly, and slapped his servant's elephantine knee. "We're calling on every doctor down there who treats skin diseases."

That Moses's mind was as dark as his skin was quite evident from the vacant way he snowed his teeth. "Yasah?" he said, dumbly.

Duane said, "Yeah. The point is that I only know one thing about any of those fellows, and that is that the leader had a certain skin disease that required X ray treatment. I knew that as soon as I looked at him. I worked in a hospital once, you know."

Moses knew, only too well. It was in a hospital, three years before, that Jack Duane had saved the life of the huge Negro, brought in after a street brawl and given up as lost by the other doctors.

"Now do you get it?" said Duane. "That leader was a Chinaman. The chances are he's going to a Chinese doctor for his X ray treatment. So I'm going to visit every Chink doctor in New York until I find the one who's treating him, and then I'll run down the leader and rescue Fraile and the girl."

The cab was at their hotel, and Duane jumped out, followed by his servant. They hustled inside, took an elevator to the second floor where Duane's room was, strode down to the door. The reporter was fumbling for his key, still thinking rapidly ahead of how he hoped to trace the spies, when a room maid appeared beside him, key in hand.

She was about to make up his room, would open the door.

Duane nodded, stepped back, and the woman unlocked the door and pushed it open. She was in the act of stepping aside, to allow the journalist to precede her, and was directly between Jack Duane and the room, when a burst of gunfire that shook the walls came from inside. The maid shrieked once, stumbled and collapsed to the floor—and Duane saw three men leap from various hiding places in his room and dash to an open

window.

His own forehead had been creased by a bullet; blackness was hitting his eyes. Stunned, unbelieving, he tried to get into the room.

Unconsciousness struck him suddenly like a mallet; he went down.

CHAPTER VI. UNDER SUSPICION.

DOWNTOWN, uptown, and mid-town, meanwhile, went Caspar Tait and Oscar Lomas and Martin Nye.

The three other members of the council had left its office precipitately, immediately after the departure of Knox Reeder.

Nye to his office, Lomas to his bank, Caspar Tait to his home. But all were having the same thoughts.

In his shiny, resplendent limousine, Tait had hurried uptown to his twelve-room Park Avenue apartment, and there he was now, smoking his fourth cigar of the day, pacing up and down.

The portent of Fraile's abduction was clear to him.

He knew—this small, dapper munitions king—that the only way the enemy could have learned of Fraile's invention and whereabouts was through some one close to the government—either some one on the general staff in Washington or one of the four men on the secret war council.

Mr. Tait ruled out the general staff; he didn't even consider the secretary of war—all of which left him realizing that either he, Oscar Lomas or Martin Nye was a traitor to the nation.

His state of mind was not eased by something he had noticed a moment before. There had been a young man down on the street—six stories below—a quietly dressed and grim young man who, at the moment of Mr. Tait's looking out the window, had been observing the munitions king's window.

Was it possible that he was being watched? Caspar Tait walked to the window again, cautiously drew aside its heavy portiere. The young man was still down there.

That decided Mr. Tait. Perhaps they suspected that he was the mysterious Mr. B himself? He turned suddenly and rang a bell. When his valet appeared, he ordered his topcoat and hat, said to have the car brought to the door.

CASPAR TAIT rode south on Park Avenue in his limousine, and behind him, at a discreet distance, an unostentatious roadster followed the same trail. The

munitions king, after one glance backward, had not looked again.

His car kept on for some twenty minutes, turning finally from lower Broadway into Wall Street's smoky canyon. Presently Mr. Tait alighted and entered the huge block of masonry that was the House of Lomas. A private elevator lifted him to the third floor, where in an outer office of heroic dimensions he handed his card to a girl behind a desk.

She told him with great respect that Mr. Oscar Lomas would see him immediately, that he was to go right in. Mr. Tait passed through another outer office, was admitted to the private sanctum of the city's greatest banker. He and Lomas, who had parted a few hours before at the secret office of the war council, stared at each other across the financier's inlaid walnut desk.

"Have a chair." That was all Lomas said. He seemed to divine at once the motive for this call, as his gray eyes penetrated the other's face. Mr. Tait got the impression, indeed, that Lomas had been expecting him to turn up any minute.

"You may go, Westcott." Lomas's stolid, old-fashioned figure made a gesture toward an assistant who was turning the pages of a financial report. "Close the door. I'm to see no one."

The young man nodded and withdrew. Oscar Lomas sat down, shoved over cigars which were refused, closed the box and leaned back, drew his thin lips closely together, as though he were sucking a piece of invisible candy. There was silence for almost two minutes.

"Well?" said Lomas.

"I'm being watched, Lomas. Already!"

The banker raised an eyebrow ever so slightly. "Then I suppose so am I," he said. He added: "There was a young, blue-eyed fellow in here a moment ago doing something to the telephone. He said he was from the company."

Tait leaned forward. "It's terrible, man! Don't you realize what it means? After what Reeder said just before he got that telephone call? That one of us three—either you or I or Martin Nye—"

Lomas interrupted in his dry, emotionless voice: "I realize, Tait." Presently: "It's terrible, as you say. I've been thinking the same thing ever since I got back here. Terrible, not only as far as we are concerned, but because of the thing itself. You know what Reeder said about this invention of Fraile's.

"If it's really stolen and continues to stay stolen—"

He did not finish, but his narrowed, gray eyes

seemed to linger on the wainscoting in his big office, seeing through it to the great money building around him, the creation of his family.

"But what are we to do?" Tait demanded. "It's obvious now that Reeder thinks that one of us three"—he lowered his voice with an involuntary glance toward the door—"is the source of the leak."

"Do?" echoed the banker. "There's nothing to do. It's in the hands of agents by now, I suppose." Abruptly he said, "What about Nye?"

Tait swallowed. "What do you mean?"

Lomas pressed his finger tips together, paused for a long moment as though weighing what he was about to say, then launched into a speech.

His remarks lasted some four minutes, a long speech for Mr. Lomas. What they came to was this: neither of them knew anything much about Martin Nye.

His appointment to the secret war council, along with the munitions manufacturer and the banker, had surprised them both a little. They had put it down to his staunch backing of the Administration, plus the undoubted influence of his fifty-odd newspapers.

But he was not "one of them." His beginnings had been humble, obscure. In the early days, his papers had gone in for sensations, war-scares, murders and divorce scandals. His own private life was not above suspicion. And his motives—

"Well, he's always worshiped circulation above everything else; and circulation means the dollar," said the billion-dollar banker.

Tait had listened in silence. Now he nodded. "Money," he said, "is Nye's god. But even so. Lomas, what possible sum could he have been promised to do a thing like this? He's fabulously rich already!"

Lomas got up and walked to the window, looked out. Turning, he said, "I don't know. Perhaps I've talked too much. Let us leave it at that. I wonder, though, what Nye is thinking about right now?"

AS for that, a casual onlooker would have said that Martin Nye was having much the same thoughts at that moment as the other two men who constituted the secret war council. The subject of Lomas's suspicions, seated before his desk on the fourth floor of the *Globe* building near Canal Street, drummed restlessly with his long fingers and stared glassily at the opposite wall.

From the council's conference in the skyscraper office in midtown, he had gone to several places before coming back here, to his private office in the building that housed his greatest newspaper, the *Globe*. And for

the past half hour he had sat thus at his desk, his lean, hawkish face twitching now and then with some inward thought, a large hand coming up occasionally to rub his cheek.

From time to time he arose to pace his office. It was a huge affair with desks for several secretaries, a battery of telephones, a news ticker and other paraphernalia. But the famous publisher was alone in it now, having dismissed his secretary on arrival.

Apparently, he could not drive from his mind the memory of Knox Reeder's last, shocked announcement in the secret office of the war council two or three hours before: that Doctor Irving Fraile, whose invention he had mentioned with satisfaction but a moment before, had been kidnapped by the very enemy spies he had also spoken of.

Martin Nye, owner and controller of fifty-four newspapers all over the United States, in every one of which he took a voracious and dictatorial interest, licked his lips and moved his head from side to side.

A knock sounded on the door, and the czar of journalism called an impatient, "Come in."

His secretary advanced a tentative head. "Mr. Nye, I know you said not to be disturbed, but Mr. Molloy says he's got to see you about something very important."

Nye wanted to know what the editor of the *Globe* had on his mind. The secretary said she didn't know. "All right, send him in," said the great man impatiently, and J. J. Molloy entered the office quickly a moment later.

Jack Duane's friend, flushed and excited of aspect, burst into low, confidential speech as soon as the door was closed. "I've been trying to find out where you were, Mr. Nye, for the past two hours. I've learned something that you ought to know immediately!"

Nye looked up at his New York editor. "Well," he said, "what is it, J.J.?"

Molloy pulled up a chair. "A man I used to know in the west came in to see me about eleven this morning—a fellow named Jack Duane who's here looking for a job." The words tumbled out. He went on to tell of Duane's story of the night before, how he had stopped in a place in the Catskills and, purely by accident, witnessed the kidnapping of Doctor Fraile.

"Doctor Fraile, Mr. Nye!" Molloy repeated, as the publisher started back, his eyes half closing. "The war department's scientist! Irving Fraile!"

Nye didn't move. Apparently he was thinking that this was hardly believable. Masking his thoughts, he fired questions at his editor as to what Duane had seen

and done in connection with the happening which Nye had heard of from Knox Reeder. Molloy recited what the reporter from the west had told him.

Nye stood up. "I heard this three hours ago," he blurted out suddenly. "From the——" he broke off.

Molloy, gaping, was also on his feet. "*You* heard it? From——" That sentence, too, went uncompleted. J. J. Molloy was staring at his employer.

Nye sat down. "I heard it," he said, quietly, "from the secretary of war. He had just learned of it from a private investigator of his own."

Neither man spoke for another minute. Then Molloy burst out with speech he could plainly not control, despite the august position of his chief. He told of sending Duane to see Nick Carter and lay the facts before him.

What was the government doing right now? Should he get in touch with Duane and call him back? Were agents on the case yet?

Martin Nye, after a long hesitation, told his editor what he knew. Nothing had been done at the time he had learned the news from Knox Reeder. He believed that action was being deferred, until the secretary of war returned to Washington and notified the president. As for sending the man, Jack Duane, to see Nick Carter, Nye didn't see how that would affect things one way or the other. Carter should know enough to keep it quiet.

The conversation came to an abrupt end. Nye at the door, pulled his hat from a rack. For a moment his eyes rested on those of his editor as he said, "I'll have to do something about this," and went out.

Molloy watched the door close, whistled softly and followed the publisher. Neither man, however, had seen the shadow of a crouched shape on the fire escape outside the closed window.

VERY shortly after that, behind the locked door and drawn shades of the large white, stone building in Forty-seventh Street that had been built for an art museum and now was the headquarters of Mr. B's espionage ring—the blonde, voluptuous woman with the dreamy eyes answered the telephone, heard the curt, cold voice of the master.

Mr. B was saying: "Have the men left yet to get Toya?"

The woman said they had, but that they had not returned.

"When they arrive, dispatch them immediately to the laboratory in the Catskills, to get the missing lens. I have reason to believe the coast is clear. But there is no time to be lost. Government men may be on their

way there now.”

The woman assured him it would be done.

“Anton and the other two are back from their ambush at the hotel?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell them for me”—the voice became biting, contemptuous and ominous—“that they failed dismally! That cursed reporter is still alive!”

“What?” cried the woman. “How is it possible? How do you know?”

“It’s possible because they shot instead of the reporter a maid who was opening the door. I know because I learned—never mind now. That man may be dangerous! He started off to contact Nick Carter. By now, he may have located him, unless Carter, himself, is already working on the business, as I suspect.

“Tell Toya and the others to go heavily armed to the place in the Catskills, to take every precaution. As for Anton and his two bungling assistants—they will wait there for me.”

“You are coming?”

“I will be there within an hour, in time to meet Toya when he returns from the Catskills.”

The telephone clicked dead. The blonde, voluptuous female spy hung up carefully her own receiver and turned to face a roomful of questioning eyes.

CHAPTER VII. TRACING TOYA.

JACK DUANE opened his eyes to find himself lying on his bed, his head bandaged, Moses bending over him, and the room full of police. He could not remember what had happened for a moment; he seemed to be back in his old Cardova at eleven last night, with Moses at his side, rattling through rain toward New York City, to get a job from J. J. Molloy.

Then his head cleared in a flash; it all came back to him. He sat up suddenly. “The maid!” he said. “Was she——”

“She was killed, boss,” said Moses, hoarsely. “Four bullets got her.”

Duane sank back. Shocked as he was, he did not fail to realize that the three men had been after him, had laid an ambush for him here in his room, which could only mean that they were enemy spies, already aware that he had witnessed last night’s affray in the Catskills.

How they had learned was what astounded the reporter. He could think of no way, though strangely

his mind brought back a man who had passed him in the lobby of the *Globe* building, who might have overheard him and Moses talking. Had that been a spy, he could have had Duane watched immediately——

The cops were at the bed, having observed his return to consciousness. They began firing questions. That the three men had escaped in the confusion, Duane learned immediately. His first impulse was to blurt out the whole story to the police what he had seen last night, who the men were, why they were trying to kill him.

But at once a thought jerked him up. Molloy’s statement of the situation made him suddenly realize that the war department might be as anxious to keep Fraile’s abduction a secret for the present as were the enemy spies.

“I don’t know who it was or what it was all about!” he protested at once. “We were just about to come in when these three fellows—who were hiding here—started shooting. I never saw them before! I’m a stranger here, from San Francisco! I just got in this morning!”

The detective sergeant in charge of the detail that had arrived post-haste after the call from the management narrowed his eyes on Duane’s face. Beyond him, the big journalist could see bluecoats, other detectives, the white face of the manager. Dimly he could make out a sheet-covered something just outside the door.

“What’s your name?” clipped the sergeant, though he must have learned already from the management.

Duane told him. Sitting up, his mind traveling more swiftly every second, he jerked out his wallet and showed his press card.

Shouts came from outside the window, where detectives were examining the fire escape. From the hall, Duane could hear the press and babble of guests, drawn by the shooting. He steeled his face to a shocked, incredulous innocence and, after a single warning glance at Moses, stared back at the sergeant.

“Jack Duane,” the latter was saying curtly. “San Francisco *News-Leader*. Whatcha doin’ here in New York?”

“I came to get a job. That paper let me out a month ago, and I came on here to get a job on the *Globe*. Listen! You know Molloy, editor of the *Globe*?”

“Never mind Molloy, Get up off the bed, Duane, or whatever your name is. Those punks were after you, so you must’ve known ‘em. They killed the maid.”

Duane swung his feet to the floor. “But, sergeant, I tell you——”

The sergeant grabbed him. “Come on, let’s have the truth! Who were those guys? What are you—some

sort of reporter racketeer? And those mugs were trying to rub you out?"

Duane drew a deep breath, tried to take it easy. "Listen, sergeant," he said in his sincerest voice, "I'm telling you the truth. I never saw those guys before; I don't have an idea why they tried to bump me. They must have made a mistake. I just got in here this morning. I don't know a soul in New York but J. J. Molloy, the editor of the *Globe*. I just came from seeing him about a job. Call him up! He'll tell you the same thing!"

The sergeant took pause. "How could they have made a mistake?" he demanded, though over his shoulder he told a detective to get Molloy on the wire.

"Maybe they took me for some one else!" Duane said. "Maybe they got in the wrong room!"

THAT idea, plus Duane's obvious air of sincerity, suddenly made the sergeant waver. He turned, gave orders that all guests in nearby rooms were to be held for questioning. Molloy had been reached on the phone meanwhile; and, though the sergeant took it without letting Duane speak to the editor, the *Globe* man must have realized what had happened, and done some quick thinking.

He told the sergeant that Duane's story was absolutely true, and that he could think of no reason why the west coast reporter should be shot at. It must have been a mistake.

The sergeant turned back to Duane. The tide had turned. Moses was questioned about the men—how much he had seen—what he had done, etc.

But it was plain now that Duane's story was believed; it was only a matter of time until he would be released.

By now, the reporter had begun to chafe at this delay. The fact that his own life was in danger made him all the more eager to get started on what he believed was a good clue to running down the spies and rescuing Fraile and his daughter: that of the skin disease of the Chinese leader.

All the same, it was another hour before he and Moses got away. They were taken to the nearest precinct station, booked as witnesses, questioned again, and so on. As a matter of course, Duane's effects were searched and his .38 automatic discovered.

He showed a pistol permit for that, however, that luckily applied in New York State, and was allowed to keep it.

So at sometime after one that afternoon, Jack Duane and Moses, free at last from the police, stepped into

the reporter's car and headed down Fourth Avenue for the East Side, and Chinatown. In a pocket, Duane already had a list of Chinese doctors obtained at a hospital where he had gone to get his head wound treated.

While that was going on, a third person still occupied a room on the lower East Side—the personal investigator for the secretary of war who went under the name of Smith. Sitting on the bed of the dead spy, Shakoff, with a revolver beside him, he waited still—impatiently, fearing with every passing moment that his hope was not to be realized, that Mr. B would not send some one here, whom he might trail back to the spy headquarters.

If so, he rather dreaded to think what he might tell to Mr. Knox Reeder, who at that moment was arriving in Washington in an army plane, intent on hurrying straight to the White House and giving the news of Fraile's abduction to the president.

IT was half past two when Jack Duane and Moses entered a doorway on Pell Street in Chinatown and climbed a flight of stairs to a doctor's office above. They had visited six already, asking each whether he treated for a certain skin trouble a man who answered the description of the Chinese leader of last night.

This time they were slated for success. The doctor, a small, bespectacled, intelligent Celestial, recognized the description immediately.

"Yes, sir, he is one of my patients. He comes in here twice a week for X ray treatments. If you have authority, I can give you his address in a moment."

It took several minutes for Duane to prove the authority, but his countenance plus his press card managed to do the trick. To the big, tanned reporter, the Chinese doctor handed a card taken from his files. Duane read the card, which said:

TOYA SONG.

The address was not many blocks away, and his heart went a little faster as he realized he had at least traced down one of Fraile's abductors.

"I'll write this down," he said in a steady voice, and proceeded to do so, then handed the card back. "Thanks terribly. I can't say much about this, but it's police business. I want to get this Toya badly."

Duane and Moses departed. The reporter's car was near by. They entered, started north, Duane talking while they drove.

He was hopeful that Toya's address might prove to

be the headquarters of the spies, where they were holding Fraile and his daughter. If that were so, shouldn't he get reinforcements, in the shape of either police or government agents?

He could call Molloy, he reflected, and have him attend to that; but first he decided to reconnoiter Toya's lodging, which might not be the main spy hideout at all.

A narrow doorway was all that it consisted of, as Duane saw the moment he braked his car on the other side. Two streets came together at an angle, and the building that housed Toya's room or rooms was shaped like a pie wedge. Four stories in height, of brick, it looked quite large—large enough to be the headquarters for a number of men.

Duane stepped from his machine and, telling Moses to wait, crossed over to the doorway. To one side was a fish store; on the other a laundry. He guessed that the building above contained rooms for rent; a tenement or cheap lodging house.

Duane stepped into the doorway; his eyes lighted on four metal mail boxes that were tacked to the dirty wall. He saw that one of the boxes bore the name of Toya Song, with the room number, 7.

He climbed the stairs, having decided to move boldly and see what happened. He looked up a hallway at the top—a hallway that ran through the building to the other street, and saw another stairway at its end. Moving cautiously, he came to Room 7. Then he stiffened, whirled, hearing feet.

The head of Moses appeared above the staircase, his eyes like platters. He came all the way up and sneaked down to Duane, whispered, "Ah couldn't let you come in alone, Mistah Duane."

Duane shrugged, nodded, and turned his head to the door, from which low voices were coming. Then he looked at Moses and whispered, "He's here!"

CHAPTER VIII.

GAS.

THE black servant nodded his big head. His eyes were bulging. "Toya!" whispered Duane. "And some one else!"

Duane reached carefully under his coat, drew his automatic, palmed it. His heart was thumping with satisfaction and anticipation. He listened. The voices were low. Four men were in there, he thought. Were the other three spies, too?

He could not hear much, but from the rise and fall of talk thought that three of the men were urging Toya

to come with them at once, but that Toya did not want to go, even though the leader wanted him back at headquarters, he arguing that they had just arrived there.

Duane's heart thumped harder. Toya responded in guttural monologue. He seemed to have a grudge against the leader for ordering him out.

Then:

"Will you sit and argue?" cried one of the others. "There is no time to be lost. If we are going back to the laboratory to hunt for that missing lens, it will have to be done soon! Even now, Mr. B may have called, left word for us to——"

Duane heard no more, but here, he thought, was another possibility, something entirely new. Had the spies actually lost something last night?

He pushed the safety off his weapon, having made up his mind what to do. He might slip out and wait, try to trail these men now; and in many ways that was the wisest thing to do. But if he lost them, he would never forgive himself.

With a gesture for Moses to stand aside and be ready, he slipped a hand around the doorknob, tried it gently.

The door was locked. A faint sound came from it as the reporter, untrained in sleuthing, tested it. At once the voices stopped within, and Duane cursed himself for a fool.

He stood there a moment, not knowing what to do, then backed off, releasing the knob. His mind was a whirl; the gun felt wet in his hands. Those men in there knew now that some one was outside; at this instant they were doubtlessly going for guns.

Duane whispered to Moses. Shoulder to shoulder, they set themselves in the hallway. They were at the door together, lunging with all their strength, and before the charge of the big Negro the lock was shattered; the door crashed in, hurling them into the room.

Stumbling, still clutching his gun, Duane strove to pull up short and cover the men. He had not reckoned with a small rug that lay just over the threshold, on which a foot went sliding from beneath him, throwing him headlong.

The automatic went spinning just as the reporter from San Francisco saw four men springing forward from three sides of the square, furnished room. Moses was downed with one terrific blow from a gun butt. Duane, caught flat on his face, was knocked out just as readily.

FOR the second time in an hour or so, he opened his eyes after being in a coma and looked up at faces. But these were not the faces of policemen and

detectives; and Duane was not lying on a bed.

He was on the floor; his hands and feet were tied.

The four spies, including Toya, looked down in astonishment at their prisoners. Then one of them, pointing to the still unconscious Moses, burst out, "It's them! The newspaperman and the Negro! We heard—" And he went on to tell how Mr. B had called some time before and told of a reporter and a Negro who had learned of Fraile's capture, two who had to be put out of the way.

"Anton and two others were sent to a hotel to wait, for this man! They must have failed!"

Jack Duane nodded grimly. "They failed," he agreed.

Toya, his loathsome face contorted with alarm, stooped over, grabbed up the reporter by the throat and flung him across the room against a cot. One of the others rushed to the door, peered out, closed and locked it. Apparently, the disturbance had gone unnoticed.

Clenching and unclenching his big hands, the Chinaman who had led the raid on Fraile's last night suddenly exclaimed, "We'll finish them here, and then leave." He strode over to Duane, jammed his head against the wall and, half choking him, demanded how he had learned of what had happened the night before.

But before the journalist could even attempt to answer, one of the others broke through with explanations. He cited Barsino's story of seeing the Negro on the road. This white man, with him, must have been inside Fraile's fence, looking on.

For a moment the ugly Toya looked frightened. "And there is that detective, too! The one who attacked us!"

"I say we must finish these and leave! At once! Now you can understand the need for haste, maybe!"

By now, Toya understood. Saying nothing more, he threw the bound, husky Duane to his back on the bed, snatched up more rope from a tangled heap on the floor that appeared to have come from a trunk in the corner, and proceeded to tie the reporter down to the bed.

Over his shoulder meanwhile, he snarled instructions to the others, who at once went to work on Moses. In a few moments the two intruders were both thoroughly helpless, the white man on the bed, the Negro pinioned in spread-eagle fashion on the floor, between a radiator and a heavy clothes closet.

Moses's eyes had fluttered open during this process. He closed them again, almost at once.

As for Duane, he was cursing himself for the way he had bungled this job from the very moment when he arrived outside the door. He should have crept

outside and called Molloy, he now saw clearly. Should have arranged for police or agents to come and watch the house, to trail the four spies when they left, without any possibility of losing them.

All that he had accomplished was now to be lost; he and Moses would probably be finished off, merely because he had thought he could play the sleuth—he, a mere reporter, and a reporter out of a job at that.

Toya was standing near the door, surveying the room and nodding quickly with satisfaction. He whispered something to the others who were beside him, and they, too, nodded, their eyes going to a point on the side wall.

Duane threw his glance that way.

It was the gas jet at which they were looking—and the blond fellow from San Francisco suddenly understood.

One of the spies came back, heading for the window. Picking up a newspaper, he tore it into strips and choked the cracks at top and bottom. Returning, he joined the others in scanning the scene, having dragged what rugs there were closer to the door.

"It is good," said Toya. "Now we must fly. We are going again, you said? To Fraile's?"

"If my guess is right, almost at once."

"Come. Turn it on!"

The four went out, shutting the lock-shattered door, against which the rugs were stuffed as well as possible from the inside. But not before one of them had turned the gas jet wide open.

“MOSES.” The big Negro on the floor opened his eyes, rolled his head. "Yasah, Mistah Duane."

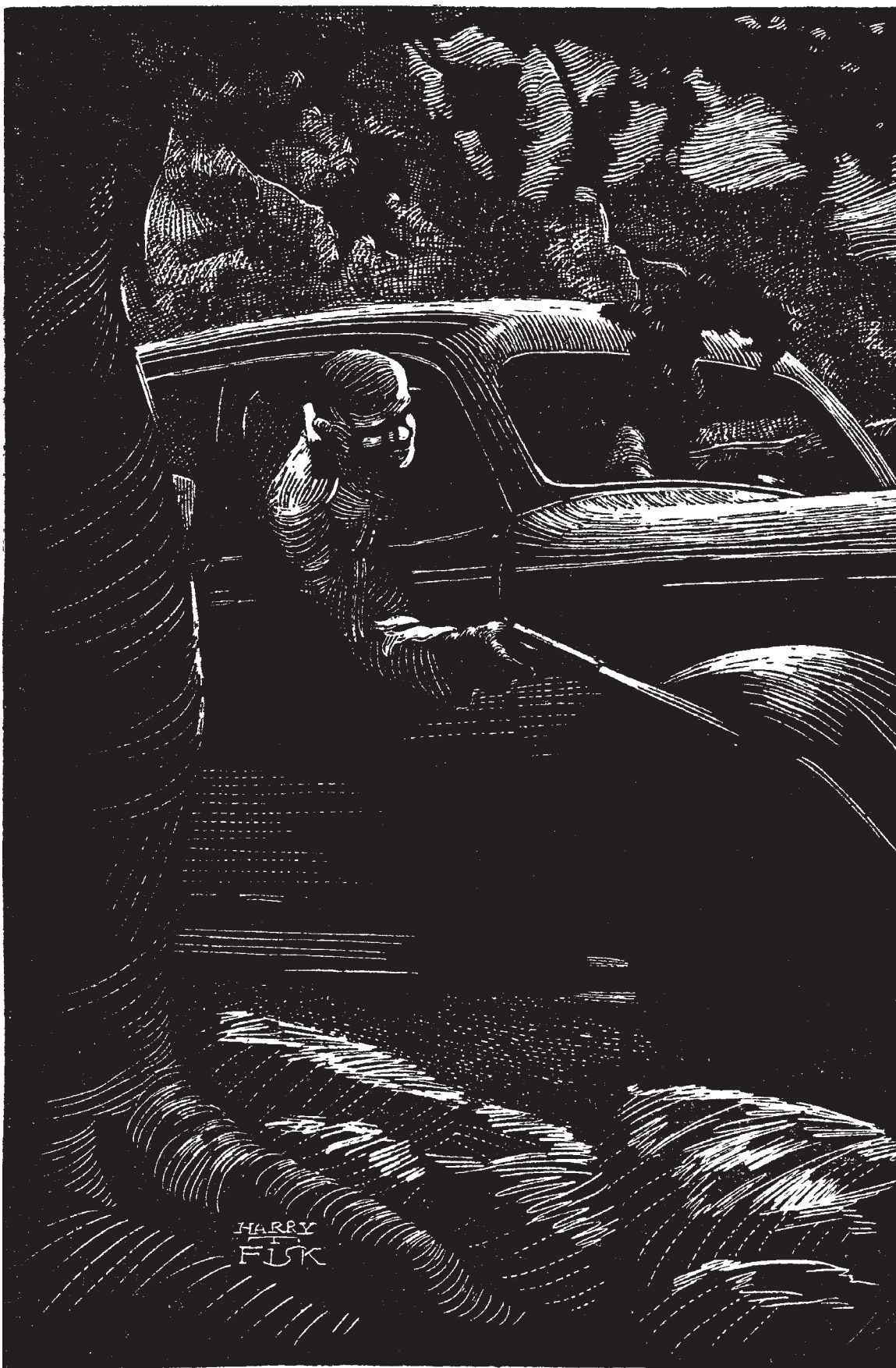
"We're in trouble. Bad trouble."

"Yasah, Mistah Duane!"

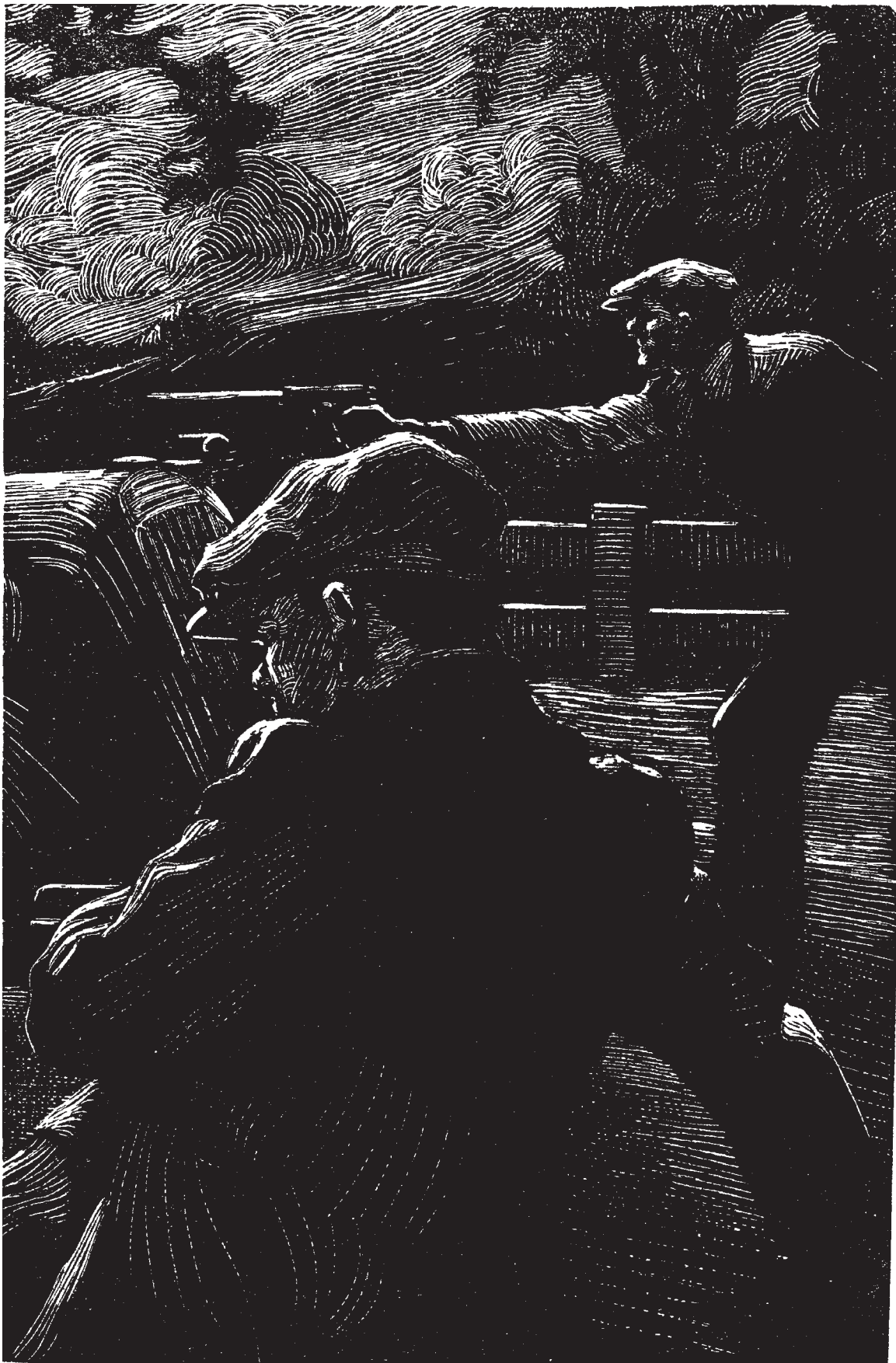
Jack Duane stared at the ceiling. Through his mind ran a fleeting panorama of what had happened since last midnight, when he had seen the lights of Fraile's place through the trees and had decided to stop for gas; he marveled at the adventure he had stumbled on.

Adventure, though, was hardly the word to express his present situation. It looked more like a sort of suicide.

He had only himself to blame, he knew, for no one had asked him to play the freelance in attempting to trace the men who had kidnapped Doctor Fraile and his daughter. Molloy had suggested Nick Carter and, though Carter was busy on something else, Duane could well have gone somewhere else, and thus washed his hands of the matter. It was, after all, government business, and Duane had enough to worry about on his



Before he could move, an oath sounded from the roadside and two



men--one of them Toya--rushed at him with drawn guns, firing.

own, what with trying to get a job.

He wasn't sorry, however, even now. He could not have picked a more vital business in which to seek excitement. After what he had been told by J. J. Molloy, he reckoned that what he had been doing was just about as important as anything in the country today.

And then, too, there was Doctor Fraile's daughter—

He shook himself out of his momentary reverie. The smell of gas was in the room. He began to fight his bonds, throwing himself this way and that; and on the floor Moses started doing the same thing.

It was a couple of minutes before the reporter realized that he was wasting his strength, that his only chance of getting free was by getting his fingers on one of the knots.

"Take it easy," he called to Moses, noticing that the gas smell was a little stronger. The hiss as it came through the jets was a kind of venomous reminder that they did not have forever. The spies, he thought, were on their way to the headquarters.

And from there, they were going back to Fraile's laboratory in the Catskills to get something lost or forgotten last night, judging from what they had said.

If only he could get away! If only some one else knew that fact, which now loomed as the one hope of getting their trail, finding the main hiding place.

"Find a knot!" he snapped to Moses. "Get your teeth or fingers on it. You won't escape that way. This rope is too strong."

The Negro said: "I'll yell, Mistah Duane! Dere sho oughta be somebody else in dis heah place!"

Duane wondered why he had not thought of that. Capping that, came the question: why had the spies not thought of it, too—and gagged them?

A SHOUT from Moses reverberated through the room. Duane's eyes flickered to the one window, which had been stuffed with paper. His heart sank, and he partially understood why the men had not troubled to gag them. The window gave on an air shaft; the rooms above and below might be untenanted, even if Moses's cry escaped through the stuffing.

"Heyy-ulp!" yelled Moses, stretching his mouth to the size of a grapefruit. "Muuhhh-dah! Pohhhlice!"

It echoed and reechoed. To Duane, it seemed impossible that some one in the tenement or lodging house, whatever it was, would not hear; or at least some one on the street. He had forgotten how city traffic drowns out other noises.

For another moment Moses yelled, then subsided. Duane shouted on his own, shouted until he was hoarse.

The gas was strong now, and he coughed. Moses, too, burst into a fit of sneezing that left tears running down his ebony face.

Still the jet hissed on, as though the room were a balloon which was being inflated.

Jack Duane went back to working on his bonds. There was a knot just under his chin where the rope had been pulled tight around the bedpost, tied there to keep his shoulders flat.

By squirming and sinking lower in the bed, he managed to ease the knot, until it slipped up near his lips. Then he tried to get his teeth on it, to pull it loose.

Unfitted for such subtlety, Moses had resumed his threshing on the floor. The big Negro's two hundred and thirty pounds sounded like a piano being moved.

Duane could accomplish nothing with his teeth against the knot. The gas was thick in the room now, and his head had begun to spin. A glance showed that Moses's efforts were getting weaker; a glazed look had come over the big Negro's eyes.

Desperately, the reporter tried to shout—a final effort. Scarcely a sound came forth; only a weak croak. Silence came suddenly from Moses. He was out. Duane kept on trying to get his teeth on the knot.

It could not last long. The small room, sealed up, was laden with the odorous atmosphere. A terrific headache, that had been creeping up on Duane for the past fifteen minutes, now struck him with full force. He sank back, writhing. His eyes protruded, and his mouth came open wide as he fought vainly for the oxygen that wasn't there.

After a few more minutes, he slackened on the bed.

NOT very far away, just then, the private investigator for Mr. Knox Reeder, the detective who called himself Smith, was pulling on his hat and preparing to abandon the room of Shakoff.

After spending four hours—except for a brief interlude when he slipped out to telephone his house—in sitting on the dead spy's bed, gun at hand and hoping that Mr. B would send some one here to get Shakoff's effects, he had now decided that the hope was not to be realized.

Either the spy leader had not even considered the possibility that his headquarters might be traced through the missing Shakoff, or he had known from the start that the dead man would have nothing dangerous in his lodging.

Whatever the case, the Shakoff clue had proved valueless. If anything were to be done by Mr. B, it would have been attempted by this time. And that left the

secretary's investigator with practically nothing on which to base a hunt for the place where Doctor Fraile and his daughter were captives.

He pulled open the door and stepped out into the hall. Where to turn now? It was sixteen hours since Fraile had been abducted and his invention stolen last night; almost five since he had given the facts to Secretary Reeder at the Battery.

By now, the secretary was in Washington, had already notified the president. By now agents of the intelligence service were doubtless pouring into New York City by the dozen; and by this time, too, Mr. B and his spies might be spiriting away their prisoners and the stolen invention, to some place even more impossible to locate than their present hideout.

The man called Smith went down the hall toward the stairs. Just what would be his next move he didn't know. There was still the question of the "leak" of Tait, Lomas and Nye—but he pinned small faith on that for immediate results.

He had stepped out, telephoned his office an hour before. There had been no word from the three assistants whom he had detailed to do certain things regarding those civilian members of the war council. His servant's voice had told him instead of two oddly-matched visitors—visitors who had called that morning, in whom the man had no interest whatsoever.

Pondering what he was to do next, Smith hurried down the stairs to the second floor of the triangular building, and was making for the last flight, when something stopped him.

The smell of gas. It came down the hall to his nostrils—thick, alarming—too strong to be normal.

He turned back, looked quickly up and down the hall lined with doors. He was in no mood for wasting time. This place was a rat trap; the gas escape might be natural enough; his only interest here had been in Shakoff's room upstairs, and that was a dead issue now.

But the idea that something might be wrong, that some one might be attempting suicide, kept him from going his way peremptorily. Suddenly he strode down the hall, stopping and sniffing before each door.

THE smell got stronger. Conviction that somebody was trying to end his life spurred his movements. He came to a door numbered 7, sniffed, and was certain that this was the room. He tried the knob; the door pushed in, and he entered.

What he saw, on the bed and floor, held him motionless a moment in utter astonishment. "The devil!" he muttered as he ducked his head. "They look

like the two that Stanislaus told me had——"

He dashed in, turned off the gas, crashed out a window with a scooped-up chair. Jerking a knife from his pocket, he slashed the bonds of the big Negro on the floor, dragged him into the hall.

When he had done the same thing for the big, tanned blond man who had been on the bed, he stared again, rubbing his cheek, muttering: "It's them, for sure! The ones who tried to see me this morning!"

Dropping to his knees, he applied artificial respiration to the white man. Jack Duane's face was blue. After several minutes, he coughed; his eyelids fluttered. In the house, meanwhile, some one else had smelled the gas, had set up a cry, and people were running.

Duane looked up. The world was spinning; he still thought he had reached the end as he looked into the face of a stranger. As for Smith, though the mystery of these men was baffling him, a more urgent problem was back in his mind.

He had to get away before police arrived, asked questions, delayed him.

"Man—fellow—listen—Molloy——" The blond man was choking out words to this man he had never seen before. "Mr. B—spies—going back to Fraile's—lost something last night—tell Molloy——"

He sank back. The words he had uttered, had they been said to a perfect stranger, as he thought, would have been meaningless. But the man, though amazed, understood. He said: "Good Lord!" And then stared down. His eyes suddenly flashed with hope.

CHAPTER IX. BACK TO FRAILE'S.

THAT night. In Washington, a conference at the White House that included the president, the cabinet, the army staff and special advisers.

In New York, in the art museum on Forty-seventh Street, another conference between Mr. B and his spies, the purpose of which was to plan a swift flight as soon as Toya and his men returned with the missing lens from Fraile's, to which they had started an hour before.

In New York also, a car containing Jack Duane and Moses, made as fast as possible for the place in the Catskills.

And farther along the road to Fraile's laboratory upstate, a coupe contained investigator Smith. And several miles behind it, a limousine with Toya and four other spies.

An hour or more had passed since Duane had

regained complete consciousness in the tenement of Toya's room. He had found police about him, and a crowd.

Discovery that his bonds had been slashed, the gas turned off, a window broken open, had left him baffled; though somewhere was a memory of a lean face bending over him, of words spoken.

The police had been inquisitive, but Duane had fallen back on complete ignorance. It had not been easy to make the story stick, but he had managed it. Now, with that behind him, he was off to make a final effort to rescue Doctor Fraile and his daughter.

If what the spies had said was really coming to pass—that a contingent was returning to the Fraile place tonight to get something lost there—then there was still a chance of trailing them as they returned, letting them lead him to their headquarters.

All that bothered the San Francisco reporter now was the mystery of how he had been rescued. Some one had certainly done it, and Duane even had a vague notion that he had muttered something to this man—something about the spies going back to Fraile's tonight.

Delirious, he had thought himself finished, had grabbed at any straw.

The road unwound before his car as he switched on the lights and settled down for the seventy-mile drive. Moses, still badly shaken from the ordeal in the room, the excitement of the day, was not doing much talking. Only now and then he turned his black face, to cast a round-eyed and wondering glance at his master.

"How're you feeling now, Moses?"

After a hesitation: "Well, I'se been bettah, Mistah Duane."

"Big day we're having, eh?"

"It sho is, suh! I've been thinkin', maybe you oughta gone somewhere else to look fer a job."

Duane smiled, a trifle grimly. "No," he said, "I'm glad I came here."

THEY crossed from New Jersey into New York about eight o'clock. It was getting chilly. Duane thought wonderingly of his trip down this road late last night, or rather early this morning, heading for New York after witnessing Fraile's kidnapping. Though he had known then that he would do something about what he had seen, he could hardly have anticipated the excitement of today.

If only, he thought, the spies went ahead with their projected return to Fraile's tonight. He was not entirely certain that he had heard correctly; it seemed strange

that Fraile's captors had been so careless as to lose something from the death-ray cylinder—a cylinder which they had taken such risks to get. But at this stage, it was the only hope.

By eight-thirty they were within fifteen miles of the tucked-away spot in the woods where Duane had happened on Fraile's laboratory. Cars had passed them both ways, and the reporter had looked searchingly at all going north, but without seeing anything that looked suspicious.

Another half hour of driving, and Duane knew that the long sheet-metal shed which he had thought last night looked like a couple of Pullman cars, was only half a mile or so ahead.

He slowed down, until he was running at a crawl. Moses perked up. Duane, tense now, watching the sides of the road, said: "I want to find a place to run into the woods; get the car out of sight."

Moses, comprehending, watched his own side. After a hundred yards they saw an old road, over which trees hung, that afforded what they sought.

Duane drew up ahead of it, backed around until the old sedan was twenty feet off the road and well screened by the dusk and woods.

He got out, slapping his pocket to make sure the gun was handy. "I'm going on ahead, Moses, and take a look at the place. If Toya Song and the others are there now, I'll come right back here. We'll wait until they start back. If they're not"—he paused, pondered—"I'll come back, anyway, and we'll watch the road to see them arrive."

The Negro nodded.

"Stay here in the car. Don't move. I'm not walking into any danger, so you needn't get protective. All I want to do is sneak up and see if they're there."

"Yasah."

Duane made his way back to the road, peered out cautiously, listened, to make certain that no car was coming at this moment, then trotted across to the other side and vanished in the woods.

The laboratory was on this side of the road, half a mile farther. He had seen the high steel fence, guessed that it did not extend this far. It would be easy enough to scale it, and he wondered why something more protective had not been provided for the war department's ace scientist. Possibly, he mused, they did not want to draw too much attention to his secret laboratory.

The ground was muggy, the trees still moist from last night's rain. It was not hard to walk quietly, even for this journalist who had spent the bulk of his life on

city streets. He kept a hand on the gun in his pocket, more for the feeling of confidence it gave him than anything else. He had no expectation of using it.

After fifteen minutes of careful advance, he caught his first sight of the fence that surrounded Fraile's land. Trees on its other side still obscured any vision of the laboratory, which was not far away now. Duane moved along the fence until he found a sapling that grew close beside it on his side, and up this he shinnied, until he was level with the top.

After that, it was easy work to get over the fence. Memory hit him again as he crouched momentarily on the inside. A picture of himself last night—doing just this thing after having been hoisted by Moses—came back to him.

He went on, more cautiously now, and very soon he caught his first sight of the long shed that was Fraile's laboratory. Skirting a little, he could even glimpse the cottage near by which he had noticed last night. No lights were showing in either place; but that did not worry Duane.

He could see also a dark limousine that stood at one end of the shed.

DUANE'S heart pumped a little harder. They had come! That these were the spies, here already, he had no doubt whatever. Had he entertained any, they would have been speedily dissipated by a voice that called hoarsely from inside, "I can't find the light switch."

Toya!

At the same instant, almost, a man appeared out of the woods not far from the reporter, where he had seemingly been searching the road that led to Fraile's cottage. He made his way to the door at the nearer end of the laboratory—it was still open from last night—and entered.

Lights went on in the laboratory. Duane backed off softly into the woods, until there was no possibility of being seen. Now for the rest, he was telling himself. Once again, luck had been with him. But what lay ahead required work and the utmost caution.

He would sneak back to the car and Moses, would wait there until the spies left. Then, when they had a start of maybe half a mile, he would take out after in his car, driving without lights.

There were no turn-offs, he had noticed as they arrived, for two or three miles. The gravel road was not much used. Six miles south, it ran into the concrete highway, and once on that Duane thought he could safely follow the spies without arousing their

suspicious, thanks to the traffic.

After that, it would simply be a matter of keeping a safe distance until they were back at their headquarters, or whatever they called the place where they were keeping Fraile and his daughter. In New York City, probably. It seemed a certainty that after this expedition they would go nowhere else.

With a last grim look at the waiting limousine, the lighted laboratory, the San Francisco reporter turned and beat a stealthy retreat.

He was back at his car a little later, to find Moses still sitting rigidly upright in the front seat. In a low voice, Duane told him what he had found. Moses, gulping with inward excitement, nodded. The reporter slipped in beside him.

He wanted a cigarette, but an excess of caution bade him forego it. It was possible that the spies had left a lookout on the road near the gate, that the spark of a match might be seen through the trees.

Duane settled back stolidly, to wait for what was to come.

It was almost an hour before he heard the dim hum of the spies' limousine as it came out from Fraile's road and into the country "highway." The hum increased; in a very few minutes the glare of headlights picked out objects on the road in front of Duane.

For the first time he wondered if his own machine had been heard as it arrived here and backed around.

He wouldn't allow himself to think of that. The spies' car came on, growing louder and brighter as it gathered speed on the way back to New York. Duane nudged Moses, and they both sank lower, scarcely showing their heads above the bottom of the windshield.

That was wasted effort Duane realized, even as they did it. If the spies should happen to see that old convertible sedan tucked back in the woods, they would not need the sight of men in it to become alarmed.

But the limousine went past without a head in it turning, as far as the reporter could make out. He glimpsed two men in the front, three in the back, and thought he recognized the round Oriental head of Toya, though he could not be sure.

He elbowed Moses again, saying hoarsely, "Wait!" as the big Negro threatened to straighten up and burst into speech.

Silent, they sat for three more minutes, while the noise of the retreating car grew dimmer and dimmer. Then Duane jerked up, snapped on the ignition and pressed his starter, went into gear.

The old sedan struggled to escape from the mud of

the woods. A near panic clutched Duane's insides as the thought of being mired here flitted through his mind. What a farcical ending for his expedition!

THAT, however, was spared him. The tires caught and rolled them out to the road, and Duane twisted the wheel. They set out after the now-invisible limousine.

He drove without lights, as planned. They could no longer hear the sound of the spies' car because of their own, but no misgivings assailed the reporter on that score. They were ahead; they could not get away. Moreover, this was no road on which to risk speeding.

A mile was covered, and Jack Duane's nerves had steadied after the first excitement. Something suddenly loomed in the road ahead—something that had not been there as they arrived.

Scarcely able to see more than the edges of the road, he hesitated, then tentatively kicked his brake. The sedan slowed just as Duane saw that the something was a board laid crosswise in the road. Even then, his mind was more on the limousine half a mile ahead than on this trifling obstruction. He touched the gas.

The next instant he realized his mistake, and realized, too, that something had gone wrong.

His two front tires went out with an overlapping *bang!* that sounded like doom in his ears. His car stopped. He started to jump out, opened the door.

Before he could move, an oath sounded from the roadside and two men—one of them Toya—rushed at him with drawn guns, firing.

Duane jerked out his own automatic and fired point-blank at the nearest of the pair. It staggered him, but no more.

Stunned, not knowing yet where he had erred, but realizing clearly enough that he had stepped into a trap, he yelled for Moses to duck down, and shot again.

Toya fell back, leveled his weapon, snarled, "You will follow us, eh?" and pulled the trigger three times. He had not recognized Duane.

The first shot missed. The second broke Duane's left arm. The third split his cheek.

He slumped in the seat, unconscious, and Toya lunged forward, his gun aimed at Duane's head.

"Yow!" yelled Moses in savage rage, then rose up like a tiger. In the very face of Toya the big Negro emptied his gun. The Chinaman went down with his head almost shot away. The second man, mouth agape, recovered himself just in time. With an oath he raised his gun. It exploded twice.

Moses moaned weakly, then pitched forward, his

head crashing against the windshield as he doubled up. The spy looked, hesitated, then turned and ran like mad up the road.

SILENCE fell for two minutes, except for the distant sound of excited talk, of cursing. Then, followed by two other spies, Toya's companion returned at a run. The trio stopped and looked down at the butchered Toya, looked into the sedan—a car which contained two unknown men to them, both apparently as dead as Toya.

"Fill them full of lead!" cried one. "They got Toya!"

Guns in hand, two of them leaned forward to deliver the shots.

"Wait!" yelled another suddenly.

All poised, listening. Running feet were coming toward them down the road, from the direction of Fraile's. It was too dark to see, but some one else was coming.

They stared at each other for a split-second of frightened surprise.

"Grab Toya. Let's go!"

They heaved the big corpse between them and half staggered, half ran away from the sedan. Around the bend in the road not far away, they came upon the limousine, where the fifth man waited behind the wheel.

"Toya is dead," announced one, as the Chinaman was dumped unceremoniously into the back, "but we finished that pair, and we have the missing lens. They won't catch us. Let's go!" The big car leaped ahead as the three piled in. It roared away and disappeared up the road, heading back to New York.

CHAPTER X. THE TRAIL.

BACK at Duane's sedan, the scene remained unchanged for a minute or two. The running feet, coming closer, were louder, though unaccompanied by any voice. A dim figure came out of the darkness.

It was the private investigator for the secretary of war. He saw Duane's sedan, jerked to a halt, stared ahead as he heard the limousine getting away, then swung and looked into the machine beside him. Two figures he saw there; their postures were expressive.

A flashlight flicked on and played over the faces.

"Damn!" muttered the man, and then: "But I might have guessed it! It's the same pair!"

He set to work swiftly, stopping only once or twice to gaze down the road in the direction taken by the spies' car. Strangely, there was not the frustration on



Jack Duane . . . had lost his head. In full view of the house, he started a dash around his hiding place, to charge the hide-out.

his face one might have expected.

By the time Duane recovered consciousness, the investigator had removed both him and Moses from the sedan, had bandaged their wounds as best he could, was hastily throwing water in their faces.

Duane himself, though in considerable pain, was not hurt a good deal. Moses, however, would be out of the picture for some time. The bullets of Toya's companion had both found a lodging in the big Negro's body, and though he was in no immediate danger, he was due for the hospital.

The reporter, starting up from his prone position, on the damp road, saw that the lights of his sedan were turned on, illuminating the road, saw the tall, lean detective bending over him. A streamlined coupe was now in position in back of his car.

Duane stared.

"Yes," the man said swiftly, "it's me again. Don't talk now. We haven't time. Can you move?"

DUANE raised himself tentatively, discovered that his left arm was throbbing fiercely. It was bound up; the hand had been poked into his coat. Yet he asked himself a question. Who was this man? His face loomed as if out of a dream.

The reporter's cheek was still bleeding, despite swabbing. Nonetheless, he managed to find his feet with the other's assistance.

But when he saw his car there, saw Moses lying like a dead man near by, saw the empty road—everything rushed back to him. He burst out with: "Where are they? They got away! They trapped me! Must have seen me." He whirled on the other. "And who the devil——"

"In my car," snapped the man peremptorily. "I said not to talk!"

Dazed, disheartened and hopeless. Jack Duane pulled himself into the coupe and slumped behind the wheel.

The man was lifting Moses. He did it as though the huge Negro were a child. Presently, Duane's man was deposited in the rumble seat, and the other motioned for the reporter to move over.

Duane was too foggy to resist or ask questions. He slid aside, and the man got in quickly, started the motor. They moved off, leaving the reporter's sedan behind. The moment they were under way, the investigator turned his head.

"Now," he said, "who the devil are you, fellow, and what are you up to?"

The reporter felt like coming back with the same

question. Who was this man? How had he got here? Was it possible that he had been Duane's saviour in the tenement?

The man, proceeding, cut off the blond fellow's thoughts. "Whoever you are, I've got something to thank you for. If it hadn't been for you and what you told me there in that tenement, I wouldn't be out here. But *who are you?* How did you get mixed up in this business? Was that why you called at my house this morning?"

Duane's mind was having trouble. He batted his eyes. Finally the other's last words sank into his consciousness, gradually took effect, and he straightened like a shot. "You—you——" he said, pointing. "Do you mean to say you're Nick Carter, the private detective?"

Knox Reeder's investigator smiled briefly. "Correct. I'm Carter."

Duane swallowed. "And you've been on this case all the time? This spy business? This thing of finding those men that have Fraile, his daughter and his invention?"

"Of course," Nick Carter said. "I was hired by the secretary of war a week ago to run down this espionage ring that kidnapped Fraile last night and stole his invention. That's why my servant turned you down this morning. That's how I happened to be in that house today, where I rescued you and your man. I was after another spy who lived a floor above in the same house."

DUANE, trying hard to get all this through his head, began to see light. He had not been the only one at work to rescue Fraile. The man—why, it must have been Carter who attacked the spies on this road last night as they left with Fraile!

They were speeding now along the country road, retracing the course that Duane had taken an hour and a half before.

The reporter looked at the profile of this famous investigator, of whom he had heard so much. Nick Carter. So this was he. Not a demi-god or a Sherlock or anything like that. He was a quite ordinary-looking man, in fact, except for a certain something about his face—a hardness, a blandness, strength. Duane remembered how the detective had handled Moses.

"Where are we going?" he demanded abruptly.

"South," was the laconic answer.

"But what about the spies?" Duane said. "We've lost them!" And then: "If you came out here to do the same thing I did, what were you figuring on doing to follow them?"

Carter turned his head. He studied the other, narrow-eyed. What he saw must have reassured him, though his voice was curt as he said: "For a man in your position, you ask a lot of questions. How about answering mine? I still want to know who you are, how you got into this business, how you happened to try to get me this morning?"

The road rushed past them as they sped on. The private detective added, "Don't worry about my plans, or the spies."

Duane suddenly wondered what that meant. Something about the tone gave him hope. He drew a deep breath, then launched into his story, his name, where he was from, how he had witnessed Fraile's abduction last night from the roof of his laboratory. He then explained his visit to J. J. Molloy that morning, how he had been recommended to Nick Carter, then decided to do something on his own.

When he came to the point of tracing Toya through the skin disease he had noticed—which he had known required X ray treatments—the detective at his side nodded in appreciation. The rest was brief.

The spies in Toya's room had caught him and Moses; it was during their preparation for the gas ordeal that Duane had learned that something had been lost or forgotten at Fraile's, that they were going back for it tonight. Duane, coming to after Carter's rescue, had remembered that as the only remaining chance of finding their headquarters.

"So you rushed out here," Carter nodded. "But they spotted you or your car somehow, blocked the play."

Duane looked at the passing woods. They were almost to the concrete highway. He began, "For crying out loud, Carter, tell me what's up? Are we sunk? Have we lost the spies, or have you——"

"Hold it!" The words were clipped out. Nick Carter suddenly was thinking of something else. His head turned slightly as he said, "How much do you really know about what this means? This abduction of Fraile, the theft of his invention?"

Duane said: "About the government, you mean? The war department? The coming war?"

One eyebrow lifted slightly in the detective's face. He said nothing for a moment. The headlights had suddenly swung onto concrete; they curved out and increased speed. Here was some traffic, in contrast to the road they had just left.

"That's what I mean," the detective said then. "So you know——"

Duane said that J. J. Molloy had revealed to him how vital the disappearance of Fraile and his death ray

actually was at this time. The man beside him again held a moment's silence. He seemed to be thinking.

Then he said: "Well, he's right. I'm not exaggerating when I say it's the biggest case I've ever worked on. And that covers a good many years."

AT that moment, he went on, the secretary of war was undoubtedly conferring with the president on what was to be done. There ought to be ninety per cent of the intelligence service massed in New York by now.

If Fraile was not rescued, if the death ray remained in the hands of the enemy spies, and it looked as though it might reach their own war department, it was a good chance that Washington would decide to declare war without further delay.

Duane goggled at that. "You really mean it? But why?"

"To get a jump on the enemy before they have an opportunity to produce the death ray and profit by it. Only my guess, of course, but it seems likely."

Duane said nothing for a moment or two. The detective's car was making top speed. "Listen," he said, almost tearfully, "tell me where we're going!"

"To find the spies," said Nick Carter quietly. "To rescue Fraile. Where did you think?"

Duane stammered, "But how—how——? You mean by the license plates or something like that?"

Carter grinned patronizingly. "You didn't think they'd be that dumb, did you? They've probably got three sets of plates in that car."

"But how, then?" Duane yelled. "They're out of sight now? How do you know where they're going?"

The car stopped abruptly, pulling to the side of the concrete under the private detective's capable hands. He jabbed Duane with an elbow, bent over and pointed to the roadway. "See that?"

The San Francisco reporter leaned, peered out. Something quite tiny glowed visibly, like a firefly, there on the concrete highway. Before Duane could speak, Nick Carter had started the coupe off again, and they shot ahead. The reporter was just finding his voice after three hundred yards had been traversed, when the machine jerked to another stop.

"And that?" said Carter.

Duane looked. There was another of those tiny, glowing spots on the highway.

Duane grabbed his companion's arm. "What is it? You mean they're dropping those as they go along, without knowing it?" His excitement was reaching a pitch. "You mean you managed to put something in their car that would——"

His voice was drowned in the wind as they shot ahead again and increased speed, until they were making forty miles an hour. Not until then did the detective vouchsafe to explain. "That's about it. Not in the car, but under it. I got out to Fraile's place before they did, bringing what I needed with me. While they were inside, I sneaked under the car and attached it. After that I just waited for them to leave, having parked my car farther up the road. There wasn't any particular rush then."

Duane, now for the first time, regarded the man beside him with amazement and admiration, muttered in a low voice, "And I thought I was being smart!"

Carter smiled, but said no more. His face had gone grim again; his eyes probed the highway ahead, as he increased the speed of his powerful coupe to seventy miles. Along here the road ran straight without crossroads. It was hardly necessary to watch for the telltale specks of light that marked the trail every three or four hundred yards.

FOR a quarter of an hour they drove in silence. By now they were fifteen miles or more nearer New York than was Fraile's laboratory. The spies in their limousine were probably fifteen miles farther. But it didn't matter! Duane thought suddenly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Phosphorous in solution. In a big metal can with an adjustable nipple."

Duane nodded. "Suppose it runs out?"

"There's enough in the can for a hundred miles."

Again, silence. Duane thought of Moses, turned in the seat and peered back. The big Negro was riding peacefully enough, huddled up in the rumble. Carter said above the wind that they would take time to leave him at a hospital.

"And you're sure," said Duane, "you're *sure* that we can't lose the trail of the spies' car?"

Nick Carter thought a moment, then nodded tentatively. "I'm practically sure," he stated. "The only trouble is, it will take time. When they get in the city we'll need three cars to diverge at each intersection. I've got assistants waiting for me; our cars will have two-way radio communication—but, even so, it will take time to follow the trail to the headquarters."

"Time!" murmured Duane. "Time!"

"That's it," nodded the other grimly. "We don't know what they'll be doing!"

CHAPTER XI.

"WE HAVE SUCCEEDED!"

DOCTOR FRAILE put down his pen and stood up. For an hour he had been busy, forced at a gun's point to write out a complete explanation of the death-ray gun, to be smuggled out if anything should happen to the gun itself.

Before him, on the table at the side of the main meeting room of the spy headquarters, lay dozens of sheets of paper, covered with fine writing and figures and drawings. He laid down the pen and stood up.

Mr. B said, "That is good." He turned and spoke to a pale-haired young man near by who was busily using a typewriter, asked him how long before he would have copied Fraile's work. Another half hour, said the young man.

Fraile pushed back his chair, walked across the big room to where his daughter, Jocelyn, sat stiffly, her hands in her lap, a man on either side.

Mr. B looked at his watch, glanced at the back door, frowned and muttered: "They should be here by now!"

Nobody answered him, for every one else was harboring the same thought. It was four hours and a quarter since Toya and the others had left to seek the missing lens. Their limousine should have averaged almost forty miles an hour. They should not have taken longer than thirty minutes to find the lens.

A knock sounded suddenly at the back door; some one leaped to open it. A moment later Toya's four companions rushed into the room. One had a bloody arm; all were excited, though triumphant.

Mr. B barked at once: "Where is Toya?"

They told him. The spy leader did not stir as he listened. The others, having risen, circled about during the brief recital.

Mr. B clenched his hands. He turned and pounced on one of the three who, with Toya, had bound and left Duane and Moses to die of gas, and he shook the man until his teeth rattled.

"It was them again!" he screamed. "You fools! It was that reporter and his servant! They escaped you in that room for the second time!"

Blank astonishment gave way to incredulity. Mr. B raged. The men who had helped finish Duane in Toya's room swore that they had left him helpless. The tirade was cut short by a shout from one of the new arrivals: "What does it matter now? They are finished this time for certain!"

The spy leader paused, looked at the speaker. "If—you—should—be—wrong—this time"—his voice

said, and it was a terrible thing to hear—"you will pray for death!"

The threat was received in surly silence. Mr. B fell back a pace, wiped a hand across his forehead, sweat gleamed above the mask. Then he snapped his fingers.

"The lens!"

A man passed it over—a round, thick crystal of strange-appearing blue glass.

"Where is the corpse?"

"Toya? Outside, in the car."

Mr. B looked at the glass in his hand, muttered, "I wonder how they escaped," and then wheeled around to Doctor Fraile. "This is it?"

The scientist, perforce, nodded. It was the missing lens, true enough; matching exactly the description Toya had forced out of him immediately before leaving.

"Get the cylinder," clipped Mr. B over his shoulder. "There is no time to be lost."

THEY brought out the cylinder from a closet where it had been locked since morning, stood Doctor Fraile at one end of the room, and the spies ranged themselves along the side wall.

Behind the war department's inventor stood his wide-eyed daughter, and behind Jocelyn Fraile stood Mr. B. The blue-black automatic with the silencer attached—with which he had that morning snuffed out the life of Walker—was held against the spine of the girl.

"You know what we want," rang out the voice of the head of the espionage ring. "Fit the lens in as it belongs; show us how the cylinder works. Don't lose a minute. Make a false move and I'll shoot your daughter!"

Doctor Fraile held the cylinder in his hands—the long, black heavy thing, that in the hands of an initiate could wipe out the lives of a score of people in a few seconds. He hesitated.

"Hurry up!" cried Mr. B, looking at his watch. "It's nine-thirty. A man must leave here in twenty minutes with that contrivance, packed in a box, to catch a plane in Newark for San Francisco. If you haven't demonstrated it by that time, I'll kill you both!"

Doctor Fraile, his face white, turned full about. Looking into the masked eyes of the spy leader, over the head of his daughter, he said: "What you demand is impossible. I cannot demonstrate it. All you have here are the ordinary electric outlets of the city supply. I need a high-voltage current. I also need the motor transformer which is in my laboratory."

Mr. B stood there as though he could not believe

his ears.

Fraile's hands came up and clutched the shoulders of Jocelyn.

"And you did not say so this morning?" shouted the spy leader in rage. "You let me think that all you needed was that lens? When you knew all the time—" His own anger choked him.

"Yes," was the answer.

Mr. B backed off, took in a deep breath. Along the wall, the dozen and a half men and women of motley nationalities waited for what was to come next. Finally:

"Is it complete as it is?" asked the thick, controlled voice of the leader.

"Except for the transformer, it is complete," nodded Fraile. His arms went around his daughter as he added reasonably: "What is the point of a demonstration for you, anyway? It would mean nothing, would be merely a sideshow. Your scientists——"

Mr. B cut him off. Pushing aside the girl as though she were a branch in his path; he wrenched the cylinder and the lens from Fraile's hands, turned, jerked his head at the nearest of the men against the wall.

As the man leaped to his side, the leader handed over the death-ray machine, told him to take it to the back and pack it immediately in the box that waited.

The spy nodded and disappeared. Mr. B, still without paying further attention to the Frailes, strode down the room to where the pale-haired young man was still busy at the typewriter, the rattle of his machine having provided background for what had gone before.

"How soon?" he demanded, harshly.

"Fifteen minutes! I'm hurrying as much as I can!"

"You're making four copies?"

"Yes, sir."

THE leader spun around, came walking slowly back with his automatic hanging loosely from his right hand, his eyes fixed on the tall, bespectacled scientist and his pale, pretty daughter. He came all the way to them and stopped but a few inches from Fraile. His cold, metallic eyes, through their slits, rested on the face of the scientist.

But when he spoke, it was not to Fraile. It was as though he was putting off until the last moment some decision he had come to regarding these prisoners.

"Weimann!"

Out of the line stepped the blonde, voluptuous female, she of the childlike complexion and the dreamy eyes. "Yes?"

"Pack! Be all ready! Norstrom; you, too!"

The woman hurried out by a side door, could be

heard passing down a hall toward the back. On her heels went the small insignificant-looking man who had been assigned to accompany her in getting the death ray out of the country.

“Duce! Stillman! Sayiki! Rasch!”

Four more emerged from the wall—three men and a woman—and advanced toward the leader.

“You leave as soon as the copies are ready. Take cabs to your rooms, pack everything, then leave the city by the first train. Duce—Montreal. Stillman—Mexico City. Sayiki—Marseilles. There’s a steamer at midnight. Rasch”—he pondered but a moment—”Havana.”

All nodded, separately and together, though they did not quite understand.

The eyes through the mask had not yet left the face of Doctor Fraile a foot away. The voice came again, explaining: “Each of you will take a copy of what this man has written regarding the construction of the death ray. When you reach your destination—none of them in the United States, you note—you will mail your copy to the name I will give you before you leave——”

Faces clearing, brightening, they nodded again.

As Mr. B did not further address them, the four slowly returned to their positions against the wall—and now the spy leader concentrated only on the man before him.

“I don’t know what you have expected as the end of all this,” his voice said, quietly, tonelessly. “Whether you thought—that once the death ray had been disposed of and we had learned all you could tell us—we would let you go——” There was almost a question there.

Fraile paled.

Mr. B began shaking his head. “If so, dispose of such ideas immediately,” he said. “Aside from everything else, you are too valuable an asset to your country to be handed over alive.”

Jocelyn Fraile, held in her father’s arms, began to shake silently. Fraile gave no sign as yet.

They had captured him, said Mr. B, primarily so as to make sure that the death ray, as sent out of the country, was complete and in good order. Later had come the additional idea of forcing him to write out the detailed statement of its construction, so that in the event the machine itself went astray before reaching, there would still be the specifications.

Since Fraile had been unable to demonstrate the death ray—Mr. B implied that he personally would have liked to see it in operation—it would necessarily have to be sent without that. But there was no longer any further use for Irving Fraile.

“Our task here is done,” asserted the spy leader with obvious satisfaction. “We have carried out a coup that will make each of us independently wealthy for life, and some of us may stay right here in America to enjoy it. War can begin any moment now, as far as we are concerned. Do I need to tell you that one reason is that it has delayed this long because of you?”

FRAILE was immobile. Possibly his chin rose a little; his shoulders squared, though it was hard to be sure. Mr. B was nodding reflectively. As long ago as the first of March he had received advices from Emporia that they suspected that the United States was working on a death ray.

If that were so, it might change their warlike plans. They wanted to know all about it, and Mr. B had proceeded to learn. Then had come the ultimatum. If he and those under him in the espionage ring in New York could locate that death ray and steal it, nothing would be too good for them. If there were any chance of that, war would be delayed until it was accomplished.

“And tonight it is accomplished,” said the spy leader, hefting his automatic. “In half an hour—in less than that—your invention will be on its way to your country’s enemy. Four copies of your specifications will be leaving this country in twenty-four hours, to reach Emporia by an indirect route. The rest of us will leave this building as soon——”

“Where are we?” Fraile broke out suddenly, as though this had been worrying him since last night.

Mr. B gave him the address of the headquarters of the Eastern Relations League. “In the heart of New York City,” he added. “Listen.”

They could hear traffic, could even make out the rumble of a distant “el” train.

“People are passing us right now—Americans. If they knew——” He looked about him and waved his gun at the big brightly lighted room, the array of spies, the shaded and locked windows. “But they don’t know. And when this place is found, if it ever is, we will be gone. We are dispersing tonight.”

Fraile said after a pause, “And some of you are Americans!”

Mr. B tapped his chest.

“You will be rounded up eventually—executed. But that doesn’t concern me now,” Fraile said. “I can understand your killing me. I only beg of you to free my daughter.”

The young woman in his arms looked up quickly, opened her mouth to protest. It was unnecessary. Mr. B, stepping back and bringing up his automatic, was

shaking his head back and forth.

"Dad!"

"Be quiet, darling! For the sake of Heaven, man, don't do it to her!"

"Dad! Dad! He's about to——"

"Jocelyn!"

Crash!

The side door had burst open. The blonde woman plunged in, stopped dead at the tableau, then cried at Mr. B, "Come! Back! The car! I want to show you something!"

Mr. B snarled. He was all ready for the execution. "What is it?" he demanded harshly.

"I can't explain! Come at once! They may have been followed, trailed! Come!"

"Trailed?" Mr. B echoed then, his voice rising to a falsetto. "*Trailed!* What do you——" He dashed for the door.

The blonde was ahead of him. He ran after her down a long, wide hall. She whirled into a room at the back, across it to the window, grabbed Mr. B's arm and pointed. "Look!"

Crouched, still clutching the automatic, he peered out beneath a shade almost drawn, peered out at the wide back courtyard—which had been lavishly expended on the one-time art museum by the wealthy millionaire.

Cars were there—all belonging to the spies. The limousine in which Toya and the others had gone and come, in which Toya's bullet-riddled body still lay, was parked to one side. The place was dark.

"The ground! Beneath it!" whispered fiercely the woman spy. "Beneath the limousine they used!"

MR. B looked. What he saw caused his jaw to drop beneath the ever-present mask, caused him to move forward in an unsteady step, clutch the window ledge. He muttered something unintelligible.

"What is it?" demanded the woman in a tortured whisper.

Mr. B shook his head, began to straighten up.

Five men poured into the room, stopped, babbled questions. Others were hurrying toward them down the hall.

"What is it?" came the demand in four voices at once.

Mr. B spoke. "It is phosphorous," he said, "or something like it. I understand." His voice was flat, toneless.

"Phosphorous?" repeated some one, as though the spy leader had suddenly gone insane.

"Look," said Mr. B, and he himself pointed.

They saw, beneath the limousine, a yellow, glowing pile like a small ant hill, that shone in the darkness like a thousand lightning bugs. Even as they looked, another drop of the shining stuff was seen to fall from the bottom of the car and add itself to the pile.

"Followed!" whispered Mr. B. "Outwitted! By that detective! See—out there!" And his leveled finger showed where a speck of the stuff, dropped as the limousine came in twenty minutes before, lay halfway to the street.

Silence, growing terror held the others. Mr. B straightened. "He was out there—that detective. Somehow, he learned that we were going again. And while they were inside the laboratory, he crawled under the car and put that thing on. And all the way back from the Catskills—*right to our door*—they left a perfect trail!"

Behind him, some one made a low moan.

Mr. B choked, grabbed his throat, swayed as though about to fall.

The others clutched him. They didn't understand.

Only he had seen the long streamlined coupe tool slowly past out on the street—a coupe in which two men were looking directly his way.

CHAPTER XII.

TRAIL'S END.

SPOTTED!" said Carter.

"Was that it?"

"I saw the car! In that court!"

"You really mean——"

"We're there!"

Nick banked the wheel. Already twenty yards past the back court of the spy headquarters, the big coupe veered in to the curb, stopped with a jolt.

Carter faced Jack Duane. "We've nailed 'em. Sit tight!" He snapped a switch, spoke swiftly, curtly, into a microphone that came out from above the windshield. "Found it, Chick. That you, Pats? Get here, too. Forty-sixth, between Fifth and Sixth. Snap it up!"

The switch was cut off. "We've got to act fast. That trick of mine went haywire and leaked. It's only supposed to drop the stuff when the car's running, but I spotted a pile of phosphorous as big as your fist under the limousine!"

Duane drew breath through his teeth. "Back there?" He still couldn't believe it.

"Back there! Of course! I tell you we've found them! The car's back in that court we just passed! I

know the place. It's the court for that old museum on Forty-seventh Street. They must be holed up in there, and what a swell place it is. There are half a dozen other cars, too. It's the main scatter beyond a doubt."

Jack Duane, reporter from San Francisco, who last night at this time had been rattling southward toward New York without a notion of what lay ahead, gripped the door of Nick Carter's coupe.

He still found it difficult to realize that they were there, at the headquarters of the spy ring, were on the point of rescuing Doctor Fraile and his daughter.

The past hour had been a leaden thing. Crawling, circling blocks, moving back and forth from Washington Bridge southward in the city—it had seemed that they would never reach the end of the trail.

Carter was speaking again, looking up and down the dark, almost deserted street: "Now for reënforcements. We can't risk a thing like this alone. There's only the four of us—you, me, my two assistants."

He cut on again the switch of the two-way radio. Working a dial, he repeated in a singsong voice: "Calling headquarters. Calling headquarters. Calling headquarters. That you, McGowan?"

A voice spluttered.

"Carter. Nick Carter. Listen close." For three minutes the detective poured words into the microphone. Finally: "Tell the commissioner. Yes. At least thirty men. As many more as you can spare. No sirens."

The switch was snapped off.

"He doesn't know what it's all about, and he doesn't have to. We'll have to give them some story when it's all over. The government may not want them to know about Fraile and the rest. They'll have thirty men here in fifteen minutes."

He got out of the car, told Duane to wait there, shot a glance up and down the block again—a narrow gorge of dark buildings—then ran lightly to the other side and sneaked down to the edge of the court. Leaning out, he peered.

There was the dark court, laden with cars, and behind it the looming back of the art museum that faced on Forty-seventh Street. A few lights showed in the building. There was no sign of life about the cars.

But even as Carter looked, a light went out upstairs, followed by another that left the upper floors in blackness. At the same instant he caught a fleeting glimpse of a face pressed to a window on the lower floor.

CARTER ducked back, whirled, started running for his car. He was halfway there when headlights picked him out, coming from the west; and, one behind the other, two cars came racing up, pulled in near his coupe without regard for the fact that it was a one-way street.

Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, his assistants who that morning had done certain things with regard to Caspar Tait and Oscar Lomas—leaped out. Nick was on them the next second; a jerk of his head brought Jack Duane out of the coupe and onto the street.

"They're wise," he snapped. "Must have seen us. The lights are going out; they're watching; that phosphorous under the limousine must have given us away."

To his aids: "We can't lose a minute. Back in your cars and around to Forty-seventh Street, to the front. Cover that. Don't show yourselves or try to break in until you hear my whistle. We'll try to hold off till the cops get here. Duane—come with me."

Chick and Patsy wheeled to one of their cars, piled in and disappeared. With Jack Duane at his heels, his automatic showing already in the reporter's hand, Nick Carter headed back across the street for the court.

A rifle, taken from the ceiling of his coupe, was swinging from his hand. They reached again the court's edge, peered again, saw nothing. The faces were gone from the window.

Studying the layout, Carter pointed to the cars, whispered, "We'll have to sneak in, risk being seen. You get behind that sedan on this side. I'll cross over behind the limousine. Watch the windows. Don't show yourself or shoot, unless things pop."

Duane nodded once, then crouched and went after the detective as the other eased into the open space of the dark courtyard, sidled along the brick wall that was its western boundary. Without mishap they reached the first of the cars where Duane was to hide.

He dropped behind it. The back of the museum was now but sixty feet away. Every window was dark, every shade drawn. The big back door that opened flush on the yard low down—a brass-studded affair like the front—was closed, probably bolted.

Carter, having left the reporter, moved sidewise, keeping behind cars, until he had reached the shelter of the limousine. He and Duane now covered the back thoroughly. From Forty-seventh Street, beyond the building, came faintly the noise of a car's braking, meaning that Garvan and the other Carter had reached their destination.

The rifle in Carter's hand was aimed loosely at the

back of the house, but he preferred to delay action until the arrival of the reinforcements. This was no time for fake heroics; for all they knew there were fifty spies in that big white edifice. To rush in madly would only mean having themselves butchered.

Five minutes of waiting, of silence, went by.

Suddenly a gun cracked from the downstairs window.

The bullet whipped off the radiator of the car behind which Jack Duane was hiding, and both men knew that things were starting.

STILL they crouched, waiting. The man who had fired had not been visible. Carter did not bother to shoot at the window. He was moving sidewise, to improve his position behind the limousine when three more shots came together. Flame burst from a trio of windows simultaneously, and both the detective and the reporter began to reply.

For perhaps two minutes there was a duel between the men in the court and the hidden spies in the house, without result on either side. Carter thought he had heard a man scream, but could not be certain.

Then, as before, the spies' shooting came to a sudden halt.

In the lull that followed a new sound made itself heard suddenly, as though by design of the spies. It was a girl's crying, terror-stricken scream, and Nick Carter froze as he realized what it meant.

From behind his sedan, Jack Duane leaped to his feet. "Carter! It's the girl! Fraile's daughter! They're—Come on!"

He had lost his head. In full view of the house, he started a dash around his hiding place, to charge the hideout.

"Get down, you fool!" yelled Nick and sprang forward. He caught the reporter and threw him to the stone yard just as a volley crashed out from the windows; bullets whined overhead.

"They're baiting us!" Nick ground out, roughly pulling Duane back behind the sedan. "Keep your head! You won't stand a chance!"

Duane fought to get free. "I don't care!" he cried. "Let me go! They're hurting her, killing her! Those reinforcements may not be here for an hour! I'm going——"

The detective threw him down.

Shots rang out from four windows, the spies trying to get the two men who were not quite concealed as they struggled behind the sedan. A bullet ripped Carter's sleeve.

"Don't!" he gritted into Duane's face. "Don't! Use your head! I know how you feel, but use your head. They aren't going to kill her—yet. They'll hold her to the last minute as a hostage. Now they're simply trying to get us into the open before the cops arrive——"

He grunted, fell sidewise. A shot had whipped through the flesh of his shoulder.

Duane, panting like a horse, his eyes staring, came to his senses a little. Still cursing fearfully and muttering to himself, he whipped out a handkerchief and tied it around the detective's shoulder, over the coat and all.

NO sounds had come from the front to indicate that the spies were sniping at the other Carter and Garvan. But now the muffled crack of shots was heard through the building from the front.

Duane had subsided, white-faced and trembling. He spasmed, as though a knife had hit him, when the scream of Fraile's daughter sounded again. Mingled with it was an agonized cry in a man's voice: that of the war department's scientist himself.

Carter lay flat, watching the windows, reloading his gun.

Would those cops never come?

More than Duane realized, the detective would have liked to do just what the reporter wanted: leap up and rush the house. But suppose they did, even now, and the police were a few minutes late in arriving? The result would be a total loss. The four men would be shot down before they got inside; the spies, having guessed the situation, afraid to charge even with this opportunity, would kill the Frailes, scatter and escape before the reinforcements arrived.

Suddenly, Carter tensed, gripped Duane's arm.

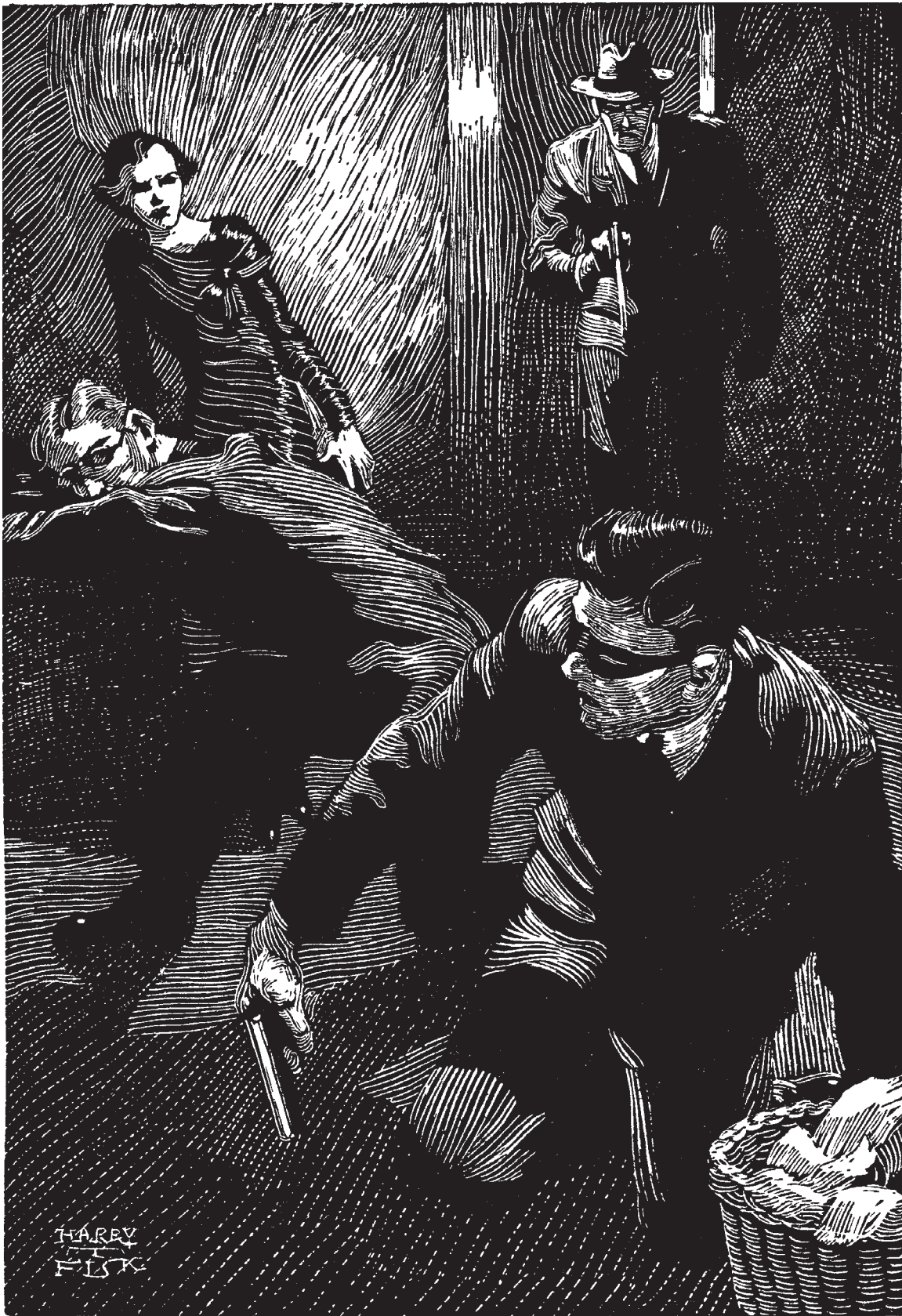
Staring upward, the reporter saw the latest development. Halfway across the roof of the art museum, five stories above them and dimly outlined against the night sky, two black figures were crouched over and hurrying toward the edge. They carried between them a long box—or so it seemed. They were making for the roof of an adjoining building.

"The death ray!" Duane whispered. "They're trying to get it out!"

"Down!" yelled the detective, and struck the other flat.

A burst of firing, brought on by Duane's coming up and the realization inside that the two on the roof had been seen, tore over their heads, ricocheted off the courtyard behind them, spattered into buildings on the other side of Forty-seventh Street.

High up, the two figures had almost reached their



There was no hesitation about Nick Carter. He covered the spy leader from twelve feet away and gave him the last bullet in his .45

destination. Moving as they were, as near the center of the museum's roof as possible, only their heads and shoulders were now visible. Even so, it looked as though one was a woman.

Carter cupped his hands, ignoring for a moment the back of the house. "Get back, up there! Get back in or we'll fire!"

The two poised, stared, then increased their speed for the safety of the nearby roof, still carrying the long box. Carter muttered something to Duane, pushed him aside, propped up the rifle and took aim.

Shots burst from the house. Duane answered.

The detective drew a bead, as though he had completely forgotten the danger from the lower quarter.

The *whack* of the rifle was clearly audible above the other shooting. The figure up there that was the man, toppled, struggled to stay upright, fell over the edge of the building which they had just reached, plummeted to the next roof, six feet below.

The woman turned, fled back toward the museum's skylight.

A PAUSE came after that. Carter lowered the rifle, looked at his watch. Only twelve minutes had elapsed since his call to the police. Duane, his head cocked as though listening for another cry from the captive girl, was feverishly inserting a fresh clip in his automatic. He was pale, distraught, as the detective glanced at him.

"Hang on a minute more," came the whispered words. "They ought to be here——"

"Oh," choked Duane.

From the second floor of the museum came again the tortured, uncontrollable scream of Fraile's daughter, mingled with the same sort of cry from her father. Some sort of torture was going on in there, that was certain.

Jack Duane could suddenly stand it no longer. He jumped to his feet, saying hoarsely: "I'm going in! I've got to! Stay here if you want to, but don't try to stop me or I don't know what I'll do!"

He rushed around the front of the sedan, head up, gun held high in desperation, and made for the back door of the big building directly before him.

Carter rose. Loudly and long he blew his whistle, the signal for Chick and Patsy. Then, dropping the rifle and putting a .45 revolver in each hand, he charged after Duane.

There was no more waiting, he realized.

CHAPTER XIII. THE WIPE-OUT.

THEY crashed through the window at the back, the door having resisted them. Bullets smacked at their feet; men yelled orders to each other from inside.

Still no noise of arriving cops came to the detective. Nick Carter was fatalistically deciding that this would finish them both, that he had erred, after all, when his ears caught the sound of the approaching cars and motor cycles.

At last, he thought, and brushed Duane aside as the latter slipped while getting a handhold on the window sill. Aiming through, the detective sent a burst of shots into the unknown darkness beyond, then swung himself up, landed, held out a hand for Duane.

The reporter dropped beside him. In dim light they charged for a door. A man appeared when they were almost there, coming out of a hallway. Carter shot at him, wounded him, then swung his gun and sent the fellow to the floor as they stepped out into the hall.

All around them they could hear shots; the sounds of running feet; the cold, ferocious voice of some one giving orders. As Duane heard the last he stood amazed, then shook his head as if unbelieving his own hearing.

Following Carter, the reporter pounded up the hallway—a hallway which ran from the front to the back, which was empty. A conglomerate clamor was coming from the front door—where Carter's two assistants were breaking in. Closer, and from both sides of Forty-sixth and Forty-seventh Streets cars could be heard stopping. Police were yelling; people were massing.

The two men burst into the big room that had been the meeting place for the spies. It was empty, at first glance. But even as they whirled to try elsewhere, the spy, Barsino, rose up from behind the corner divan, leveled an automatic, blasted twice.

Coughing, Jack Duane went around in a circle, hit the floor. Carter dropped to a knee and laid three .45 slugs, low down, through the divan. Bits of fluff popped up from the upholstered back; something flopped and crashed and moaned. Carter leaped to Duane's side.

He was spirting blood, did not know where he was hit, but said he could fight. On his feet, Duane threw a murderous look around. At a snapped word from the detective, he followed him out of the room and back into the hallway.

The door at the front crashed down at that moment, disgorging the younger Carter and Patsy Garvan. Luckily, they recognized the others at first glance, and

came rushing to their sides. Behind them police surged, and all could hear the back door being battered down.

"Upstairs!" cried Nick Carter. "They're all above!"

In that, however, he was wrong. Three men appeared from a back door, having apparently delayed too long as rear guards. They burst into shooting at once.

Duane downed one. Garvan got a flesh wound. Chick dropped a second, and the third man ran yelling for the front—ran into the uniforms of the storming police. Later, his head was given a dozen stitches, though the others did not know that at the time.

They had spotted the stairs at the front of the hall, were making for them. That the bulk of the spy ring was up there, that Mr. B and the Frailes were either making ready to escape or settling down for a siege, was obvious.

It was too late now, however, to think of lying back, to fear the consequences that might result to Doctor Fraile and his daughter. The only move was to crush the spies as swiftly as possible, to trust to the gods that the Frailes were not killed before they reached them.

Bounding up the stairs, in the teeth of scattered fire from above—fire that tumbled back the already wounded Patsy Garvan—Carter, his adopted brother and Duane reached the upper hallway.

Room doors were open. Men shot from here and there. They charged abreast down the hall, pausing at each door, muttering, "Nothing!" or shooting with lightning swiftness.

That already the trio had not been butchered was miraculous, though their advance was now being backed up by the police—men who were rushing up the stairs in their wake.

BUT there was no sign of the Frailes who had been on this floor a moment before; no sign of the mysterious Mr. B, the spy leader. They were farther up, on the top floor.

The Carters and Jack Duane, still ahead of the police, ran for the last flight of stairs. No shots greeted them as they started up. The hallway was flanked by exhibition rooms—rooms which were empty. But from the roof, whose skylight was now above them, came the rush of many feet.

Spies up there were following the example of the pair who had tried to escape with the death ray. They were attempting to reach the roof of the adjoining building.

The ladder was in plain sight. As one man, the trio dashed for it, ignoring completely what rooms were on their floor, though one of the doors was closed. Nick Carter was halfway up the ladder; Chick was just below

him. Duane was just grasping the rungs, when—

"Help! In here! Help!"

Fraile's daughter! Behind the door in the room at the end of the hall!

Jack Duane abandoned the ladder that led to the roof, rushed down the hall. Halfway up the ladder, Nick Carter poised, stared, then kicked out and dropped to the floor below.

He urged Chick on. "To the roof! Stop them there! *And get the box with the death ray in it! It's near the edge!*" Then he was after Duane. They jerked up short before the closed door at the end of the hall.

"They're in there!" whispered Duane, hoarsely.

Carter nodded, slowly put out a hand for the big knob of the door.

Before he touched it, a voice called out from inside—a voice that both men knew, though under different conditions.

"Don't try to come in, or it will be the end of the Frailes!" It was Mr. B.

Duane's face became a blank.

"I have them here. I am alone, but I am well armed. The moment that door is opened, both Frailes will be riddled!"

Carter looked at his newspaperman companion. The reporter from San Francisco was dull-eyed, gaping at the door; his eyelids were blinking, as though some one had just given him a crack on the head.

"That's right," Nick whispered.

"Do you hear what I am saying?" cried the voice of Mr. B.

"I hear you!" Nick shouted back. "Have Fraile and his daughter call out, so we'll be sure they are still alive!"

ASILENCE came. Jack Duane gripped the detective's arm. He had regained his senses. "Am I crazy?" he asked in a thick whisper. "*Is it J. J. Molloy?*"

Carter, turning his head, nodded grimly. "J. J. Molloy!"

Duane suddenly went berserk. He rattled the knob of the door, shouted furious oaths at the man inside. He backed off and threw himself three times against the door's panels, to no avail.

Laughter jerked him up. Laughter in the cold, taunting voice of Mr. B, that was now hardly recognizable as that of J. J. Molloy, editor of the *Globe*. It died away. "So you are still alive, Duane? How did you escape the third time?"

Rage and impotence and shame choked Duane so he could not speak.

Nick Carter stuck to his point. "Have them call, Molloy! Have the Frailes call out, you rat! If they don't make a noise in two seconds we'll crash the door down!"

Molloy's laugh sounded again. Then he spoke in there, and another voice came, that of the war department's captive scientist.

"Don't do it—yet. We are both alive, though my daughter is suffering from what they did to her in the past few minutes. I am not armed and this—this man is covering me."

Carter paused. Around and above them the clamor of the round-up was still going on. From the roof came shrill cries, occasional yells from Chick, then the bark of his gun.

They heard, too, the clang of arriving hook-and-ladder engines, and knew that police were about to climb to the adjoining roof. No spies would escape the net that had been thrown, unless it was this leader inside, still holding Doctor Fraile and his daughter.

Molloy's voice sounded. "You are not going to take me, Nick Carter. You have defeated me, I admit. At the last minute you've blocked me. I recognize it. There is no further chance of getting the death ray out of the country, or its specifications. But you aren't going to take me!"

The detective outside didn't answer. After a swift glance at the still-stricken Duane, he had suddenly gone down on one knee.

The laugh from within again, and then: "I suppose you'll say you had guessed me?"

Carter, closing one eye and sighting at the door, replied loudly: "Two hours ago, Molloy—when I heard from Duane as to how much you'd told him when he first went to you. That was a slip-up, Mr. Spy. You weren't supposed to know that much. You got it all through Martin Nye, I expect?"

"He wasn't quite secretive enough with the editor of his New York paper."

Nick nodded. "I thought as much," he yelled back, and then drew a gun, aimed it tentatively at a spot on the door. "What do you expect to do in there?" he demanded. "Your gang is smashed. You're licked. You can't get away!"

A PAUSE followed. And then Molloy called back in an edged, decisive voice: "But that's exactly what I expect to do!" They heard his feet move.

Carter swiftly moved his gun muzzle half an inch.

"I'm walking out of here with Fraile's daughter held in front of me and a pistol in her back!"

"You've probably got her that way now!" Carter

yelled back in scorn, working backward on the floor.

"Not yet, but I'm about to. And don't think for a moment"—the man inside couldn't see the swift movement with which Nick Carter's revolver steadied, pointing at the door—"don't think I'll hesitate to shoot! I'm coming now with the girl! Keep out of my——"

A crash shook the walls.

Three more blasts converged on top of it, hammering, as Carter fired through the door in the direction he had chosen, cutting a circle in the wood of the door.

The echoes had not died before he was on his feet and putting a fifth shot into the lock of the door, throwing himself against it, breaking it open with a clatter.

In the big room that was half dark, only one thing was visible to the detective in that split-second. It was J. J. Molloy, otherwise Mr. B, on his knees on the floor, blood pouring from three wounds, striving fiercely to bring up an automatic to aim at Fraile.

Crouching there, horrified, were Doctor Irving Fraile and his daughter.

There was no hesitation about Nick Carter. He covered the spy leader from twelve feet away and gave him the last bullet in his .45, and Molloy rolled backward, flopped his arms, then lay flat on his back.

Carter looked at Fraile. "I guess he's dead," he said.

Jack Duane burst in, rushed toward the Frailes, then brought up abruptly, staring at the girl.

Her father lifted her up. "At last!" he said, brokenly. "Let us get out of here quickly! Is the death ray safe?"

Chick Carter answered that question by appearing in the doorway with the box in his arms.

CHAPTER XIV. LAST WORDS.

IN that part of New York that is within hearing distance of the block on west Forty-seventh Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, it is a mystery even today as to what happened on a certain spring night when hordes of policemen attacked a supposedly untenanted art museum, producing enough gunfire for a small war.

Why it was done; who was there; who were the men and women, some dead and some wounded, who were carried swiftly away in police wagons and ambulances—all that still remains unexplained.

The morning papers, beyond reporting tersely that "certain agents" aided by the New York police had completely demolished a huge enemy spy ring, had nothing whatever to say about it.

The agents were not mentioned. Even the identity of the spy leader was not divulged. A seeker might have learned from another part of his paper that J. J. Molloy, the editor of Martin Nye's *Globe*, had died suddenly the night before, but there was no connection shown.

As for the motive behind it all. Such was the item that appeared two days later:

Doctor Irving Fraile, the well-known inventor who has recently been connected with the war department in Washington, sailed with his daughter, Miss Jocelyn Fraile, last night for a two weeks' Bermuda cruise.

It could hardly have had any kinship with the feature story that came out a week afterward, telling in glowing terms of a new war machine that was now being manufactured in considerable quantities for the war department—a death ray that promised to make the United States immune to any fear of foreign attack.

IN Washington, the morning after the round-up, there was another meeting in the White House—a meeting similar in many respects to that called at six o'clock the previous evening.

The same men were present—the chief executive, his cabinet members and the members of the army general staff. The same subject was under discussion.

But there the resemblance ended. This was a conference of success, for at one o'clock that morning a long-distance call from New York City had reached Mr. Knox Reeder at his Sixteenth Street mansion, and the voice of a New York private investigator had told him the news.

He had lost no time communicating it to the president. The rest of the cabinet and the army staff had learned it the first thing in the morning.

"They found them? They recovered the death ray? They broke up the spy ring?" That was a major-general upon hearing the news a few minutes after entering the chamber. Knox Reeder nodded. "That detective I retained——" he began, but got no further.

The president was speaking. "Sit down, gentlemen. We all feel the same."

His advisers obeyed, informally dropping into chairs.

The president faced them. "From what Mr. Reeder tells me, it is definitely certain that the death-ray machine is in safe hands. Doctor Fraile and his daughter are safe and sound, and the espionage ring is completely broken up. I understand that they even recovered four copies of a detailed statement of the machine's

construction—a statement which Doctor Fraile was forced to write and which the spies were about to mail to——"

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"So that cloud seems to have passed." The president smiled, a trifle grimly. "And perhaps now the other cloud—the larger cloud—will pass, too."

The postmaster general said, "Just what do you mean, sir?"

The chief executive sat down. "I mean," he said, "that I now think it very possible that Emporia will hesitate to push us into a war, knowing that we have the death ray." He turned to Reeder.

"Didn't that investigator tell you that Fraile had told him that the spy leader, in one of his boasting speeches, implied that Emporia might alter her plans if we really had a death ray?"

The secretary of war nodded immediately. "He said exactly that. They learned of it only a month or so ago. It surprised them, but their hope was then to steal it from us and not lose but profit."

The president said, "Just so," in a decided tone. "And my suspicion now is that when they learn that their espionage ring failed in its attempt to steal the machine, they will reconsider."

There were murmurs of: "I hope so! Heaven grant that you are right!"

"If that is so," the president went on, "we owe an incalculable debt to those men who rescued Fraile and recovered his war invention." He turned to the secretary of war. "What is the New York address of that detective you hired? I want to write to him."

THERE were some people in New York who learned what had happened, read its meaning and were deeply affected. Caspar Tait, Oscar Lomas and Martin Nye of the secret war council, sat in a club uptown and toasted in a low voice to the life of a certain private detective.

As for Jack Duane, he spent several days in the hospital following the fight, recovering from four separate wounds. But he was contented, nevertheless.

Through Nick Carter, he had been promised a good job on the *Globe* by Martin Nye. Moses was coming along satisfactorily from his treatment on the road to Fraile's laboratory. But, best of all, Duane had a very positive understanding with Miss Jocelyn Fraile, that he would see her as soon as she had returned from Bermuda.

All this leaves Nick Carter and Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan to be accounted for—an operation which is scarcely needed.