The Clairvoyants And Other Stories

Arthur Benjamin Reeve

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THE CLAIRVOYANTS (1913)

"Do you believe in dreams?" Constance Dunlap looked searchingly at her interrogator, as if her face or manner betrayed some new side of her character.

Mrs. deForest Caswell was an attractive woman verging on forty, a chance acquaintance at a shoppers' tea room downtown who had proved to be an uptown neighbor.

"I have had some rather strange experiences, Mildred," confessed Constance tentatively. "Why?"

"Because−−" the other woman hesitated, then added, "why should I not tell you? Last night, Constance, I had the strangest dream. It has left such an impression on me that I can't shake it off, although I have tried all day."

"Yes? Tell me about it."

Mildred Caswell paused a moment, then began slowly, as if not to omit anything from her story.

"I dreamt that Forest was dying. I could see him, could see the doctor and the nurse, everything. And yet somehow I could not get to him. I was afraid, with such an oppressive fear. I tried−−oh, how I tried! I struggled, and how badly I felt!" and she shuddered at the very recollection.

"There seemed to be a wall," she resumed, "a narrow wall in the way and I couldn't get over it. As often as I tried, I fell. And then I seemed to be pursued by some kind of animal, half bull, half snake. I ran. It followed closely. I seemed to see a crowd of people and I felt that if I could only get to that crowd, somehow I would be safe, perhaps might even get over the wall and−−I woke up−−almost screaming."

The woman's face was quite blanched.

"My dear," remonstrated Constance, "you must not take it so. Remember−−it was only a dream."

"I know it was only a dream," she said, "but you don't know what is back of it."

Mildred Caswell had from time to time hinted to Constance of the growing incompatibility of her married life, but as Constance was getting used to confidences, she had kept silent, knowing that her friend would tell her in time.

"You must have guessed," faltered Mrs. Caswell, "that Forest and I are not−−not on the best of terms, that we are getting further and further apart."

It rather startled Constance to hear frankly stated what she already had observed. She wondered how far the estrangement had gone. The fact was that she had rather liked deForest Caswell, although she had only met her friend's husband a few times. In fact she was surprised that momentarily there flashed through her mind the query as to whether Mildred herself might be altogether blameless in the growing uncongeniality.

Mildred Caswell had drawn out of her chatelaine a bit of newspaper and handed it to Constance, not as if it was of any importance to herself but as if it would explain better than she could tell what she meant.

Constance read:

MME. CASSANDRA,
THE VEILED PROPHETESS

Born with a double veil, educated in occult mysteries in Egypt and India. Without asking a q
name and reads your secret troubles and the remedy. Reads your dreams. Great questions of life
Failure turned to success, the separated brought together, advice on all affairs of life, love,
business, speculation, and investments. Overcomes all evil influences. Ever ready to help and a
capital to find a safe and paying investment. No fee until it succeeds. Could anything be faire

THE RETREAT,
−−− W. 47th Street.

"Won't you come with me to Madame Cassandra?" asked Mrs. Caswell, as Constance finished reading. "She always seems to do me so much good."

"Who is Madame Cassandra?" asked Constance, rereading the last part of the advertisement.

"I suppose you would call her a dream doctor," said Mildred.

It was a new idea to Constance, this of a dream doctor to settle the affairs of life. Only a moment she hesitated, then she answered simply, "Yes, I'll go."

"The retreat" was just off Longacre Square among quite a nest of fakers. A queue of automobiles before the place testified, however, to the prosperity of Madame Cassandra, as they entered the bronze grilled plate glass door and turned on the first floor toward the home of the Adept. Constance had an uncomfortable feeling as they entered of being watched behind the shades of the apartment. Still, they had no trouble in being admitted, and a soft−voiced colored attendant welcomed them.

The esoteric flat of Madame Cassandra was darkened except for the electric lights glowing in amber and rose−colored shades. There were several women there already. As they entered Constance had noticed a peculiar, dreamy odor. There did not seem to be any hurry, any such thing as time here, so skilfully was the place run. There was no noise; the feet sank in half−inch piles of rugs, and easy−chairs and divans were scattered about.

Once a puff of light smoke appeared, and Constance awoke to the fact that some were smoking little delicately gold−banded cigarettes. Indeed it was all quite recherché.

Mrs. Caswell took one from a maid. So did Constance, but after a puff or two managed to put it out and later to secure another which she kept.

Madame Cassandra herself proved to be a tall, slender, pale woman with dark hair and a magnetic eye, an eye that probably accounted more than anything else for her success. She was clad in a house gown of purplish silk which clung tightly to her, and at her throat a diamond pendant sparkled, as well as other brilliants on her long, slender fingers.

She met Mildred and Constance with out−stretched hands.

"So glad to see you, my dears," purred Madame, leading the way into an inner sanctum.

Mrs. Caswell had seated herself with the air of one who worshipped at the shrine, while Constance gazed about curiously.

"Madame," she began a little tremulously, "I have had another of those dreadful dreams."

"You poor dear soul," soothed Madame, stroking her hand. "Tell me of it−−all."

Quickly Mrs. Caswell poured forth her story as she had already told it to Constance.

"My dear Mrs. Caswell," remarked the high priestess slowly, when the story was complete, "it is all very simple. His love is dead. That is what you fear and it is the truth. The wall is the wall that he has erected against you. Try to forget it−−to forget him. You would be better off. There are other things in the world−−"

"Ah, but I cannot live as I am used to without money," murmured Mrs. Caswell.

"I know," replied Madame. "It is that that keeps many a woman with a brute when financial and economic independence come, then woman will be free and only then. Now, listen. Would you like to be free−−financially! You remember that delightful Mr. Davies who has been here? Yes? Well, he is a regular client of mine, now. He is a broker and never embarks in any enterprise without first consulting me. Just the other day I read his fortune in United Traction. It has gone up five points already and will go fifteen more. If you want, I will give you a card to him. Let me see yes, I can do that. You too will be lucky in speculation."

Constance, with one ear open, had been busy looking about the room. In a bookcase she saw a number of books and paused to examine their titles. She was surprised to see among the old style dream books several works on modern psychology, particularly on the interpretation of dreams.

"Of course, Mrs. Caswell, I don't want to urge you," Madame was saying. "I have only pointed out a way in which you can be independent. And, you know, Mr. Davies is a perfect gentleman, so courteous and reliable. I know you will be successful if you take my advice and go to him."

Mildred said nothing for a few moments, but as she rose to go she remarked, "Thank you very much. I'll think about it. Anyhow, you've made me feel better."

"So kind of you to say it," murmured the Adept. "I'm sorry you must go, but really I have other appointments. Please come again−−with your friend. Good−bye."

"What do you think of her?" asked Mrs. Caswell on the street.

"Very clever," answered Constance dubiously.

Mrs. Caswell looked up quickly. "You don't like her?"

"To tell the truth," confessed Constance quietly, "I have had too much experience in Wall Street myself to

trust to a clairvoyant."

They had scarcely reached the corner before Constance again had that peculiar feeling which some psychologists have noted, of being stared at. She turned, but saw no one. Still the feeling persisted. She could stand it no longer.

"Don't think me crazy, Mildred," she said, "but I just have a desire to walk back a block."

Constance had turned suddenly. As she glanced keenly about she was aware of a familiar figure gazing into the window of an art store across the street. He had stopped so that although his back was turned he could, by a slight shift of his position, still see by means of a mirror in the window what was going on across the street behind him.

One look was enough. It was Drummond, the detective. What did it mean?

Neither woman said much as they rode uptown, and parted on the respective floors of their apartment house. Still Constance could not get out of her head the recollection of the dream doctor and of Drummond.

Restless, she determined that night to go down to the Public Library and see whether any of the books at the clairvoyant's were on the shelves. Fortunately she found some, found indeed that they were not all, as she had half suspected, the works of fakers but that quite a literature had been built up around the new psychology of dreams.

Deeply she delved into the fascinating subjects that had been opened by the studies of the famous Dr. Sigmund Freud of Vienna, and as she read she found that she began to understand much about Mrs. Caswell−−and, with a start, about her own self.

At first she revolted against the unpleasant feature of the new dream philosophy−−the irresistible conclusion that all humanity, underneath the shell, is sensuous or sensual in nature, that practically all dreams portray some delight of the senses and that sexual dreams are a large proportion of all visions. But the more she thought of it, the more clearly was she able to analyze Mrs. Caswell's dream and to get back at the causes of it, in the estrangement from her husband and perhaps the brutality of his ignorance of woman. And then, too, there was Drummond. What was he doing in the case?

She did not see Mildred Caswell again until the following afternoon. But then she seemed unusually bright in contrast with the depression of the day before. Constance was not surprised. Her intuition told her that something had happened and she hardly needed to guess that Mrs. Caswell had followed the advice of the clairvoyant and had been to see the wonderful Mr. Davies, to whom the mysteries of the stock market were an open book

"Have you had any other dreams?" asked Constance casually.

"Yes," replied Mildred, "but not like the one that depressed me. Last night I had a very pleasant dream. It seemed that I was breakfasting with Mr. Davies. I remember that there was a hot coal fire in the grate. Then suddenly a messenger came in with news that United Traction had advanced twenty points. Wasn't it strange?"

Constance said nothing. In fact it did not seem strange to her at all. The strange thing to her, now that she was a sort of amateur dream reader herself, was that Mrs. Caswell did not seem to see the real import of her own dream.

"You have seen Mr. Davies to−day?" Constance ventured.

Mrs. Caswell laughed. "I wasn't going to tell you. You seemed so set against speculating in Wall Street. But since you ask me, I may as well admit it."

"When did you see him before?" went on Constance. "Did you have much invested with him already?"

Mrs. Caswell glanced up, startled. "My−−you are positively uncanny, Constance. How did you know I had seen him before?"

"One seldom dreams," said Constance, "about anything unless it has been suggested by an event of the day before. You saw him to−day. That would not have inspired the dream of last night. Therefore I concluded that you must have seen him and invested before. Madame Cassandra's mention of him yesterday caused the dream of last night. The dream of last night probably influenced you to see him again to−day, and you invested in United Traction. That is the way dreams work. Probably more of conduct than we know is influenced by dream life. Now, if you should get fifteen or twenty points you would be in a fair way to join the ranks of those who believe that dreams do come true."

Mrs. Caswell looked at her almost alarmed, then attempted to turn it off with a laugh, "And perhaps breakfast with him?"

"When I do set up as interpreter of dreams," answered Constance simply, "I'll tell you more."

On one point she had made up her mind. That was to visit Mr. Davies herself the next day.

She found his office a typical bucket shop, even down to having a section partitioned off for women clients of the firm. She had not intended to risk anything, and so was prepared when Mr. Davies himself approached her courteously. Instinctively Constance distrusted him. He was too cordial, too polite. She could feel the claws hidden in his velvety paw, as it were. There was a debonaire assurance about him, the air of a man who thought he understood women, and indeed did understand a certain type. But to Constance, who was essentially a man's woman, Davies was only revolting.

She managed to talk without committing herself, and he in his complacency was glad to hope that he was making a new customer. She had to he careful not to betray any of the real and extensive knowledge about Wall Street which she actually possessed. But the glib misrepresentations about United Traction quite amazed her.

When she rose to go, Davies accompanied her to the door, then out into the hall to the elevator. As he bent over to shake hands, she noted that he held her hand just a little longer than was necessary.

"He's a swindler of the first water," she concluded as she was whisked down in the elevator. "I'm sure Mildred is in badly with this crowd, one urging her on in her trouble, the other making it worse and fleecing her into the bargain."

At the entrance she paused, undecided which was the quickest route home. As by chance she turned just for a moment she thought she caught a fleeting glimpse of Drummond dodging behind a pillar. It was only for an instant but even that apparition was enough.

"I will get her out of this safely," resolved Constance. "I will keep one more fly from his web."

Constance felt as if, even now, she must see Mildred and, although she knew nothing, at least put her on her guard. She did not have long to wait for her chance. It was late in the afternoon when her door buzzer sounded.

"Constance, I've been looking for you all day," sighed Mildred, dropping sobbing into a chair. "I am−−distracted."

"Why, my dear, what's the matter?" asked Constance. "Let me make you a cup of coffee."

Over the steaming little cups Mildred grew more calm.

"Forest has found out in some way that I am speculating in Wall Street," she confided at length. "I suppose some of his friends−−he has lots down there−−told him."

Momentarily the picture of Drummond back of the post in Davies' building flashed over Constance.

"And he is awfully angry. Oh, I never knew him to be so angry−−and sarcastic, too."

"Was it wholly over your money?" asked Constance. "Was there nothing else?"

Mrs. Caswell started. "You grow more weird, every day, Constance. Yes−−there was something else."

"Mr. Davies?"

Mildred had risen. "Don't−−don't−−" she cried.

"Then you do really care for him?" asked Constance mercilessly.

"No−−no, a thousand times−−no. How can I? I have put all such thoughts out of my mind−−long ago." She paused, then went on more calmly, "Constance, believe me or not−−I am just as good a woman to−day as I was the day I married Forest. No−−I would not even let the thought enter my head−−never!"

For perhaps an hour after her friend had gone, Constance sat thinking. What should she do? Something must be done and soon. As she thought, suddenly the truth flashed over her.

Caswell had employed Drummond to shadow his wife in the hope that he might unearth something that might lead to a divorce. Drummond, like so many divorce detectives, was not averse to guiding events, to put it mildly. He had ingratiated himself, perhaps, with the clairvoyant and Davies. Constance had often heard before of clairvoyants and brokers who worked in conjunction to fleece the credulous. Now another and more serious element than the loss of money was involved. Added to them was a divorce detective and honor itself was at stake. She remembered the doped cigarettes. She had heard of them before at clairvoyants'. She saw it all−−Madame Cassandra playing on Mildred's wounded affections, the broker on both that and her desire to be independent−−and Drummond pulling the wires that all might take advantage of her woman's frailty.

That moment Constance determined on action.

First she telephoned to deForest Caswell at his office. It was an unconventional thing to do to ask him to call, but she made some plausible pretext. She was surprised to find that he accepted it without hesitating. It set her thinking. Drummond must have told him something of her and he had thought this as good a time as any to face

her. In that case Drummond would probably come too. She was prepared.

She had intended to have one last talk with Mildred, but had no need to call her. Utterly wretched, the poor little woman came in again to see her as she had done scores of times before, to pour out her heart. Forest had not come home to dinner, had not even taken the trouble to telephone. Constance did not say that she herself was responsible.

"Do you really want to know the truth about your dreams?" asked Constance, after she had prevailed upon Mildred to eat a little.

"I do know," she returned.

"No, you don't, " went on Constance, now determined to tell her the truth whether she liked it or not. "That clairvoyant and Mr. Davies are in league, playing you for a sucker, as they say."

Mrs. Caswell did not reply for a moment. Then she drew a long breath and shut her eyes. "Oh, you don't know how true what she says is to me. She−−"

"Listen," interrupted Constance. "Mildred, I'm going to be frank, brutally frank. Madame Cassandra has read your character, not the character as you think it is, but your unconscious, subconscious self. She knows that there is no better way to enter into the intimate life of a client, according to the new psychology, than by getting at and analyzing the dreams. And she knows that you can't go far in dream analysis without finding sex. It is one of the strongest natural impulses, yet subject to the strongest repression, and hence one of the weakest points of our culture.

"She is actually helping along your alienation for that broker. You yourself have given me the clue in your dreams. Only I am telling you the truth about them. She holds it back and tells you plausible falsehoods to help her own ends. She is trying to arouse in you those passions which you have suppressed, and she has not scrupled to use drugged cigarettes with you and others to do it. You remember the breakfast dream, when I said that much could be traced back to dreams? A thing happens. It causes a dream. That in turn sometimes causes action. No, don't interrupt. Let me finish first.

"Take that first dream," continued Constance, rapidly thrusting home her interpretation so that it would have its full effect. "You dreamed that your husband was dying and you were afraid. She said it meant love was dead. It did not. The fact is that neurotic fear in a woman has its origin in repressed, unsatisfied love, love which for one reason or another is turned away from its object and has not succeeded in being applied. Then his death. That simply means that you have a feeling that you might be happier if he were away and didn't devil you. It is a survival of childhood, when death is synonymous with absence. I know you don't believe it. But if you had studied the subject as I have in the last few days you'd understand. Madame Cassandra understands.

"And the wall. That was Wall Street, probably, which does divide you two. You tried to get over it and you fell. That means your fear of actually falling, morally, of being a fallen woman."

Mildred was staring wildly. She might deny but in her heart she must admit.

"The thing that pursued you, half bull, half snake, was Davies and his blandishments. I have seen him. I know what he is. The crowd in a dream always denotes a secret. He is pursuing you, as in the dream. But he hasn't caught you. He thinks there is in you the same wild demimondaine instinct that with many an ardent woman slumbers unknown in the back of her mind.

"Whatever you may say, you do think of him. When a woman dreams of breakfasting cozily with some one other than her husband it has an obvious meaning. As for the messenger and the message about the United Traction, there, too, was a plain wish, and, as you must see, wishes in one form or another, disguised or distorted, lie at the basis of dreams. Take the coal fire. That, too, is susceptible of interpretation. I think you must have heard the couplet:

"'No coal, no fire so hotly glows
As the secret love that no one knows.'"

Mildred Caswell had risen, an indignant flush on her face.

Constance put her hand on her arm gently to restrain her, knowing that such indignation was the first sign that she had struck at the core of truth in her interpretation.

"My dear," she urged, "I'm only telling you the truth, for your own sake, and not to take advantage of you as Madame Cassandra is doing. Please remember that the best evidence of your normal condition is just what I find, that absence of love would be abnormal. My dear, you are what the psychologists call a consciously frigid,

unconsciously passionate woman. Consciously you reject this Davies; unconsciously you accept him. And it is the more dangerous, although you do not know it, because some one else is watching. It was not one of his friends who told your husband−−−−"

Mrs. Caswell had paled. "Is−−is there a−−detective?" she faltered.

Constance nodded.

Mildred had collapsed completely. She was sobbing in a chair, her head bowed in her hands, her little lace handkerchief soaked. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

There was a sudden tap at the door.

"Quick−−in there," whispered Constance, shoving her through the portières into the drawing room.

It was Forest Caswell.

For a moment Constance stood irresolute, wondering just how to meet him, then she said, "Good evening, Mr. Caswell. I hope you will pardon me for asking you to call on me, but, as you know, I've come to know your wife perhaps better than you do."

"Not better," he corrected, seeming to see that it was directness that she was aiming at. "It is bad enough to get mixed up badly in Wall Street, but what would you yourself say−−you are a business woman−−what would you say about getting into the clutches of a−−a dream doctor−−and worse?"

He had put Constance on the defensive in a sentence.

"Don't you ever dream?" she asked quietly.

He looked at her a moment as if doubting even her mentality.

"Lord," he exclaimed in disgust, "you, too, defend it?"

"But, don't you dream?" she persisted.

"Why, of course I dream," he answered somewhat petulantly. "What of it? I don't guide my actions by it."

"Do you ever dream of Mildred?" she asked.

"Sometimes," he admitted reluctantly.

"Never of other−−er−−people?" she pursued.

"Yes," he replied, "sometimes of other people. But what has that to do with it? I cannot help my dreams. My conduct I can help and I do help."

Constance had not expected him to be frank to the extent of taking her into his confidence. Still, she felt that he had told her just enough. She discerned a vague sense of jealousy in his tone which told her more than words that whatever he might have said or done to Mildred he resented, unconsciously, the manner in which she had striven to gain sympathy outside.

"Fortunately he knows nothing of the new theories," she said to herself.

"Mrs. Dunlap," he resumed, "since you have been frank with me, I must be equally frank with you. I think you are far too sensible a woman not to understand in just what a peculiar position my wife has placed me."

He had taken out of his pocket a few sheets of closely typewritten tissue paper. He did not look at them. Evidently he knew the contents by heart. Constance did not need to be told that this was a sheaf of the daily reports of the agency for which Drummond worked.

He paused. She had been watching him searchingly. She was determined not to let him justify himself first.

"Mr. Caswell," she persisted in a low, earnest tone, "don't be so sure that there is nothing in this dream business. Before you read me those reports from Mr. Drummond, let me finish."

Forest Caswell almost dropped them in surprise.

"Dreams," she continued, seeing her advantage, "are wishes, either suppressed or expressed. Sometimes the dream is frank and shows an expressed wish. Other times it shows a suppressed wish, or a wish which in its fulfilment in the dream is disguised or distorted.

"You are the cause of your wife's dreams. She feels in them anxiety. And, according to the modern psychologists who have studied dreams carefully and scientifically, fear and anxiety represent love repressed or suppressed."

She paused to emphasize the point, glad to note that he was following her.

"That clairvoyant," she went on, "has found out the truth. True, it may not have been the part of wisdom for Mildred to have gone to her in the first place. I pass over that. I do not know whether you or she was most to blame at the start. But that woman, in the guise of being her friend, has played on every string of your wife's

lonely heart, which you have wrung until it vibrates.

"Then," she hastened on, "came your precious friend Drummond, Drummond who has, no doubt, told you a pack of lies about me. You see that?"

She had flung down on the table a cigarette which she had managed to get at Madame Cassandra's.

"Smoke it."

He lighted it gingerly, took a puff or two, puckered his face, frowned, and rubbed the lighted end on the fireplace to extinguish it.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Hashish," she answered tersely. "Things were not going fast enough to suit either Madame Cassandra or Drummond. Madame Cassandra helped along the dreams by a drug noted for its effect on the passions. More than that," added Constance, leaning over toward him and catching his eye, "Madame Cassandra was working in league with a broker, as so many of the fakers do. Drummond knew it, whether he told you the truth about it or not. That broker was a swindler named Davies."

She was watching the effect on him. She saw that he had been reserving this for a last shot at her, that he realized she had stolen his own ammunition and appropriated it to herself.

"They were only too glad when Drummond approached them. There you are, three against that poor little woman−−no, four, including yourself. Perhaps she was foolish. But it was not so much to her discredit as to those who cast her adrift when she had a natural right to protection. Here was a woman with passions which she herself did not understand, and a little money−−alone. Her case appealed to me. I knew her dreams. I studied them."

Caswell was listening in amazement. "It is dangerous to be with a person who pays attention to such little things," he said.

Evidently Drummond himself must have been listening. The door buzzer sounded and he stepped in, perhaps to bolster up his client in case he should be weakening.

As he met Constance's eye he smiled superciliously and was about to speak. But she did not give him time even to say good evening.

"Ask him," she cried, her eyes flashing, for she realized that it had been part of the plan to confront her, perhaps worm out of her just enough to confirm Drummond's own story to Caswell, "ask him to tell the truth−−if he is capable of it−−not the truth that will make a good daily report of a hired shadow who colors his report the way he thinks his client desires it, but the real truth."

"Mr. Caswell," interrupted Drummond. "this woman−−−−"

"Mr. Drummond," cried Constance, rising and shaking the burnt stub of the little gold−banded cigarette at him to impress it on his mind, "Mr. Drummond, I don't care whether I am a−−a she−devil"−−she almost hissed the words at him−−"but I have evidence enough to go before the district attorney of this city and the grand jury and get indictments for conspiracy against a certain clairvoyant and a bucket shop operator. To save themselves, they will probably tell all they know about a certain crook who has been using them."

Caswell looked at her, amazed at her denunciation of the detective. As for Drummond, he turned his back on her as if to ignore her utterly.

"Mr. Caswell," he said bitterly, "in those reports−−−−"

"Forest Caswell," insisted Constance, rising and facing him, "if you have in that heart of yours one shred of manhood it should move you. You−−this man−−the others−−have placed in the path of a woman every provocation, every temptation for financial, physical, and moral ruin. She has consulted a clairvoyant−−yes. She has speculated−−yes. Yet she was proof against something greater than that. And I know−−because I know her unconscious self which her dreams reveal, her inmost soul−−I know her better than you do, better than she does herself. I know that even now she is as good and true and would be as loving as−−"

Constance had paused and taken a step toward the drawing room. Before she knew it, the portières flew apart and an eager little woman had rushed past her and flung her arms about the neck of the man.

Caswell's features were working, as he gently disengaged her arms, still keeping one hand. Half shoving her aside, ignoring Constance, he had faced Drummond. For a moment the brazen detective flinched.

As he did so, deForest Caswell crumpled up the mass of tissue paper reports and flung them into the fireplace.

"Get out!" he said, suppressing his voice with difficulty. "Send me your bill. I'll pay it−−but, mind, if it is one penny more than it should be, I'll−−I'll fight if it takes me from the district attorney and the grand jury to the

highest court of the State. Now−−go!"

Caswell turned slowly again toward his wife.

"I've been a brute," he said simply.

Something almost akin to jealousy rose in Constance's heart as she saw Mildred, safe at last.

Then Caswell turned slowly to her. "You," he said, stroking his wife's hand gently but looking at Constance, "you are a real clairvoyant."

The Dope Fiends

"I have a terrible headache," remarked Constance Dunlap to her friend, Adele Gordon, the petite cabaret singer and dancer of the Mayfair, who had dropped in to see her one afternoon.

"You poor, dear creature," soothed Adele. "Why don't you go to see Dr. Price! He has cured me. He's splendid−−splendid."

Constance hesitated. Dr. Moreland Price was a well−known physician. All day and even at night, she knew, automobiles and cabs rolled up to his door and their occupants were, for the most part, stylishly gowned women.

"Oh, come on," urged Adele. "He doesn't charge as highly as people seem to think. Besides, I'll go with you and introduce you, and he'll charge only as he does the rest of us in the profession."

Constance's head throbbed frantically. She felt that she must have some relief soon. "All right," she agreed, "I'll go with you, and thank you, Adele."

Dr. Price's office was on the first floor of the fashionable Recherché Apartments, and, as she expected, Constance noted a line of motor cars before it.

They entered and were admitted to a richly furnished room, in mahogany and expensive Persian rugs, where a number of patients waited. One after another an attendant summoned them noiselessly and politely to see the doctor, until at last the turn of Constance and Adele came.

Dr. Price was a youngish middle−aged man, tall, with a sallow countenance and a self−confident, polished manner which went a long way in reassuring the patients, most of whom were ladies.

As they entered the doctor's sanctum behind the folding doors, Adele seemed to be on very good terms indeed with him.

They seated themselves in the deep leather chairs beside Dr. Price's desk, and he inclined his head to listen to the story of their ailments.

"Doctor," began Constance's introducer, "I've brought my friend, Mrs. Dunlap, who is suffering from one of those awful headaches. I thought perhaps you could give her some of that medicine that has done me so much good."

The doctor bowed without saying anything and shifted his eyes from Adele to Constance. "Just what seems to be the difficulty?" he inquired.

Constance told him how she felt, of her general lassitude and the big, throbbing veins in her temples.

"Ah−−a woman's headaches!" he smiled, adding, "Nothing serious, however, in this case, as far as I can see. We can fix this one all right, I think."

He wrote out a prescription quickly and handed it to Constance.

"Of course," he added, as he pocketed his fee, "it makes no difference to me personally, but I would advise that you have it filled at Muller's−−Miss Gordon knows the place. I think Muller's drugs are perhaps fresher than those of most druggists, and that makes a great deal of difference."

He had risen and was politely and suavely bowing them out of another door, at the same time, by pressing a button, signifying to his attendant to admit the next patient.

Constance had preceded Adele, and, as she passed through the other door, she overheard the doctor whisper to her friend. "I'm going to stop for you tonight to take a ride. I have something important I want to say to you."

She did not catch Adele's answer, but as they left the marble and onyx, brass−grilled entrance, Adele remarked "That's his car−−over there. Oh, but he is a reckless driver−−dashes along pell−mell−−but always seems to have his eye out for everything−−never seems to be arrested, never in an accident."

Constance turned in the direction, of the car and was startled to see the familiar face of Drummond across the street dodging behind it. What was it now, she wondered−−a divorce case, a scandal−−what?

The medicine was made up into little powders, to be taken until they gave relief, and Constance folded the paper of one, poured it on the back of her tongue, and swallowed a glass of water afterward.

Her head continued to throb, but she felt a sense of well−being that she had not before. Adele urged her to take another, and Constance did so.

The second powder increased the effect of the first marvelously. But Constance noticed that she now began to feel queer. She was not used to taking medicine. For a moment she felt that she was above, beyond the reach of ordinary rules and laws. She could have done any sort of physical task, she felt, no matter how difficult. She was amazed at herself, as compared to what she had been only a few moments before.

"Another one?" asked Adele finally.

Constance was by this time genuinely alarmed at the sudden unwonted effect on herself. "N−no" she replied dubiously, "I don't think I want to take any more, just yet."

"Not another?" asked Adele in surprise. "I wish they would affect me that way. Sometimes I have to take the whole dozen before they have any effect."

They chatted for a few minutes, and finally Adele rose.

"Well," she remarked with a nervous twitching of her body, as if she were eager to be doing something, "I really must be going. I can't say I feel any too well myself."

"I think I'll take a walk with you," answered Constance, who did not like the continued effect of the two powders. "I feel the need of exercise−−and air."

Adele hesitated, but Constance already had her hat on. She had seen Drummond watching Dr. Price's door, and it interested her to know whether he could possibly have been following Adele or someone else.

As they walked along Adele quickened her pace, until they came again to the drug store.

"I believe I'll go in and get something," she remarked, pausing.

For the first time in several minutes Constance looked at the face of her friend. She was amazed to discover that Adele looked as if she had had a spell of sickness. Her eyes were large and glassy, her skin cold and sweaty, and she looked positively pallid and thin.

As they entered the store Muller the druggist, bowed again and looked at Adele a moment as she leaned over the counter and whispered something to him. Without a word he went into the arcana behind the partition that cuts off the mysteries of the prescription room in every drug store from the front of the store.

When Muller returned he handed her a packet, for which she paid and which she dropped quickly into her pocketbook, hugging the pocketbook close to herself.

Adele turned and was about to hurry from the store with Constance. "Oh, excuse me," she said suddenly as if she had just recollected something, "I promised a friend of mine I'd telephone this afternoon, and I have forgotten to do it. I see a pay station here." Constance waited.

Adele returned much quicker than one would have expected she could call up a number, but Constance thought nothing of it at the time. She did notice, however, that as her friend emerged from the booth a most marvelous change had taken place in her. Her step was firm, her eye clear, her hand steady. Whatever it was, reasoned Constance, it could not have been serious to have disappeared so quickly.

It was with some curiosity as to just what she might expect that Constance went around to the famous cabaret that night. The Mayfair occupied two floors of what had been a wide brownstone house before business and pleasure had crowded the residence district further and further uptown. It was a very well−known bohemian rendezvous where under−, demi−, and upper−world rubbed elbows without friction and seemed to enjoy the novelty and be willing to pay for it.

Adele, who was one of the performers, had not arrived yet, but Constance, who had come with her mind still full of the two unexpected encounters with Drummond, was startled to see him here again. Fortunately he did not see her, and she slipped unobserved into an angle near the window overlooking the street.

Drummond had been engrossed in watching someone already there, and Constance made the best use of her eyes to determine who it was. The outdoor walk and a good dinner had checked her headache, and now the excitement of the chase of something completed the cure.

It was not long before she discovered that Drummond was watching intently, without seeming to do so, a nervous−looking fellow whose general washed−out appearance of face was especially unattractive for some reason or other. He was very thin, very pale, and very stary about the eyes. Then, too, it seemed as if the bone in his nose was going, due perhaps to the shrinkage of the blood vessels from some cause.

Constance noticed a couple of girls whom she had seen Adele speak to on several other occasions approaching

the young man.

There came an opportune lull in the music, and from around the corner of her protecting angle Constance could just catch the greeting of one of the girls: "Hello, Sleighbells! Got any snow?"

It was a remark that seemed particularly malapropos to the sultry weather, and Constance half expected a burst of laughter at the unexpected sally.

Instead, she was surprised to hear the young reply in a very serious and matter−of−fact manner, "Sure. Got any money, May?"

She craned her neck, carefully avoiding coming into Drummond's line of vision, and as she did so she saw two silver quarters gleam momentarily from hand to hand, and the young man passed each girl stealthily a small white paper packet.

Others came to him, both men and women. It seemed to be an established thing, and Constance noted that Drummond watched it all covertly.

"Who is that!" asked Constance of the waiter who had served her sometimes when she had been with Adele, and knew her.

"Why, they call him Sleighbells Charley," he replied, "a coke fiend."

"Which means a cocaine fiend, I suppose?" she queried.

"Yes. He's a lobbygow(1) for the grapevine system they have now of selling the dope in spite of this new law."

"Where does he get the stuff?" she asked.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. "Nobody knows I guess. I don't. But he gets it in spite of the law and peddles it. Oh, it's all adulterated−−with some white stuff, I don't know what, and the price they charge is outrageous. They must make an ounce retail at five or six times the cost. Oh, you can bet that someone who is at the top is making a pile of money out of that graft, all right."

He said it not with any air of righteous indignation, but with a certain envy.

Constance was thinking the thing over in her mind. Where did the "coke" come from? The "grapevine system interested her.

"Sleighbells" seemed to have disposed of all the "coke" he had brought with him. As the last packet went, he rose slowly and shuffled out. Constance, who knew that Adele would not come for some time, determined to follow him. She rose quietly and, under cover of a party going out, managed to disappear without, as far as she knew, letting Drummond catch a glimpse of her. This would not only employ her time, but it was better to avoid Drummond as far as possible at present, too, she felt.

At a distance of about half a block she followed the curiously shuffling figure. He crossed the avenue, turned and went uptown, turned again, and, before she knew it, disappeared in a drug store. She had been so engrossed in following the lobbygow that it was with a start that she realized that he had entered Muller's.

What did it all mean? Was the druggist, Muller, the man higher up? She recalled her own experience of the afternoon. Had Muller tried to palm off something on her? The more she thought of it the more sure she was that the powders she had taken had been doped.

Slowly, turning the matter over in her mind, she returned to the Mayfair. As she peered in cautiously before entering she saw that Drummond had gone. Adele had not come in yet, and she went in and sat down again in her old place.

Perhaps half an hour later, outside, she heard a car drive up with a furious rattle of gears. She looked out of the window and, as far as she could determine in the shadows, it was Dr. Price. A woman got out−−Adele. For a moment she stopped to talk, then Dr. Price waved a gay goodbye and was off. All she could catch was a hasty, "No; I don't think I'd better come in tonight," from him.

As Adele entered the Mayfair she glanced about, caught sight of Constance, and came and sat down by her.

It would have been impossible for her to enter unobserved, so popular was she. It was not long before the two girls whom Constance had seen dealing with "Sleighbells" sauntered over.

"Your friend was here tonight," remarked one to Adele.

"Which one?" laughed Adele.

"The one who admired your dancing the other night and wanted to take lessons."

"You mean the young fellow who was selling something?" asked Constance pointedly.

"Oh, no," returned the girl quite casually. "That was Sleighbells," and they all laughed.

Constance thought immediately of Drummond. "The other one, then," she said, "the thickset man who was all alone?"

"Yes; he went away afterward. Do you know him?"

"I've seen him somewhere," evaded Constance; "but I just can't quite place him."

She had not noticed Adele particularly until now. Under the light she had a peculiar worn look, the same as she had had before.

The waiter came up to them. "Your turn is next," he hinted to Adele.

"Excuse me a minute," she apologized to the rest of the party. "I must fix up a bit. No," she added to Constance, "don't come with me."

She returned from the dressing room a different person, and plunged into the wild dance for which the limited orchestra was already tuning up. It was a veritable riot of whirl and rhythm. Never before had Constance seen Adele dance with such abandon. As she executed the wild mazes of a newly imported dance, she held even the jaded Mayfair spellbound. And when she concluded with one daring figure and sat down, flushed and excited, the diners applauded and even shouted approval. It was an event for even the dance−mad Mayfair.

Constance did not share in the applause. At last she understood. Adele was a dope fiend, too. She felt it with a sense of pain. Always, she knew, the fiends tried to get away alone somewhere for a few minutes to snuff some of their favorite nepenthe. She had heard before of the cocaine "snuffers" who took a little of the deadly powder placed it on the back of the hand, and inhaled it up the nose with a quick intake of breath. Adele was one. It was not Adele who danced. It was the dope.

Constance was determined to speak.

"You remember that man the girls spoke of?" she began.

"Yes. What of him!" asked Adele with almost a note of defiance.

"Well, I really do know him," confessed Constance. "He is a detective."

Constance watched her companion curiously, for at the mere word she had stopped short and faced her. "He is!" she asked quickly. "Then that was why Dr. Price−−"

She managed to suppress the remark and continued her walk home without another word.

In Adele's little apartment Constance was quick to note that the same haggard look had returned to her friend's face.

Adele had reached for her pocketbook with a sort of clutching eagerness and was about to leave the room.

Constance rose. "Why don't you give up the stuff?" she asked earnestly. "Don't you want to!"

For a moment Adele faced her angrily. Then her real nature seemed slowly to come to the surface. "Yes," she murmured frankly.

"Then why don't you?" pleaded Constance.

"I haven't the power. There is an indescribable excitement to do something great, to make a mark. It's soon gone, but while it lasts, I can sing, dance, do anything−−and then−−every part of my body begins crying for more of the stuff again.

There was no longer any necessity of concealment from Constance. She took a pinch of the stuff, placed it on the back of her wrist, and quickly sniffed it. The change in her was magical. From a quivering, wretched girl she became a self−confident neurasthenic.

"I don't care," she laughed hollowly now. "Yes, I know what you are going to tell me. Soon I'll be 'hunting the cocaine bug,' as they call it, imagining that in my skin, under the flesh, are worms crawling, perhaps see them, see the little animals running around and biting me."

She said it with a half−reckless cynicism. "Oh you don't know. There are two souls in the cocainist−−one tortured by the pain of not having enough of the stuff, the other laughing and mocking at the dangers of it. It stimulates. It makes your mind work−−without effort, by itself. And it gives such visions of success, makes you feel able to do so much, and to forget. All the girls use it."

"Where do they get it?" asked Constance. "I thought the new law prohibited it."

"Get it!" repeated Adele. "Why, they get it from that fellow they call 'Sleighbells.' They call it 'snow,' you know and the girls who use it 'snowbirds.' The law does prohibit its sale, but−−"

She paused significantly.

"Yes," agreed Constance; "but Sleighbells is only a part of the system after all. Who is the man at the top?"

Adele shrugged her shoulders and was silent. Still Constance did not fail to note a sudden look of suspicion which Adele shot at her. Was Adele shielding someone?

Constance knew that someone must be getting rich from the traffic, probably selling hundreds of ounces a week and making thousands of dollars. Somehow she felt a sort of indignation at the whole thing. Who was it? Who was the man higher up?

In the morning as she was working about her little kitchenette an idea came to her. Why not hire the vacant apartment cross the hall from Adele? An optician, who was a friend of hers, in the course of a recent conversation had mentioned an invention, a model of which he had made for the inventor. She would try it.

Since, with Constance, the outlining of a plan was tantamount to the execution, it was not many hours later before she had both the apartment and the model of the invention.

Her wall separated her from the drug store, and by careful calculation she determined about where came. the little prescription department. Carefully, so as to arouse no suspicion, she began to bore away at the wall with various tools, until finally she had a small, almost imperceptible opening. It was tedious work, and toward the end needed great care so as not to excite suspicion. But finally she was rewarded. Through it she could see just a trace of daylight, and by squinting could see a row of bottles on a shelf opposite.

Then, through the hole, she pushed a long, narrow tube, like a putty blower. When at last she placed her eye at it, she gave a low exclamation of satisfaction. She could now see the whole of the little room.

It was a detectascope, invented by Gaillard Smith, adapter of the detectaphone, an instrument built upon the principle of the cytoscope which physicians use to explore internally down the throat. Only, in the end of the tube, instead of an ordinary lens, was placed what is known as a "fish−eye" lens, which had a range something like nature has given the eyes of fishes, hence the name. Ordinarily cameras, because of the flatness of their lenses, have a range of only a few degrees, the greatest being scarcely more than ninety. But this lens was globular, and, like a drop of water, refracted light from all directions. When placed so that half of it caught the light "saw" through an angle of 180 degrees, "saw" everything in the room instead of just that little row of bottles on the shelf opposite.

Constance set herself to watch, and it was not long before her suspicions were confirmed, and she was sure that this was nothing more than a "coke" joint. Still she wondered whether Muller was the real source of the traffic of which Sleighbells was the messenger. She was determined to find out.

All day she watched through her detectascope. Once she saw Adele come in and buy more dope. It was with difficulty that she kept from interfering. But, she reflected, the time was not ripe. She had though t the thing out. There was no use in trying to get at it through Adele. The only way was to stop the whole curse at its source, to dam the stream. People came and went. She soon found that he was selling them packets from a box hidden in the woodwork. That much she had learned, anyhow.

Constance watched faithfully all day with only time enough taken out for dinner. It was after her return from this brief interval that she felt her heart give a leap of apprehension, as she looked again through the detectascope. There was Drummond in the back of the store talking to Muller and a woman who looked as if s he might be Mrs. Muller, for both seemed nervous and anxious.

As nearly as she could make out, Drummond was alternately threatening and arguing with Muller. Finally the three seemed to agree, for Drummond walked over to a typewriter on a table, took a fresh sheet of carbon paper from a drawer, placed it between two sheets of paper, and hastily wrote something.

Drummond read over what he had written. It seemed to be short, and the three apparently agreed on it. Then, in a trembling hand, Muller signed the two copies which Drummond had made, one of which Drummond himself kept and the other he sealed in an envelope and sent away by a boy. Drummond reached into his pocket and pulled out a huge roll of bills of large denomination. He counted out what seemed to be approximately half, handed it to the woman, and replaced the rest in his pocket. What it was all about Constance could only vaguely guess. She longed to know what was in the letter and why the money had been paid to the woman.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour after Drummond left Adele appeared again, pleading for more dope. Muller went back of the partition and made up a fresh paper of it from a bottle also concealed.

Constance was torn by conflicting impulses. She did not want to miss anything in the perplexing drama that was being enacted before her, yet she wished to interfere with the deadly course of Adele. Still, perhaps the girl

would resent interference if she found out that Constance was spying on her. She determined to wait a little while before seeing Adele. It was only after a decided effort that she tore herself away from the detectascope and knocked on Adele's door as if she had just come in for a visit. Again she knocked, but still there was no answer. Every minute something might be happening next door. She hurried back to her post of observation.

One of the worst aspects of the use of cocaine, she knew, was the desire of the user to share his experience with someone else. The passing on of the habit, which seemed to be one of the strongest desires of the drug fiend, made him even more dangerous to society than he would otherwise have been. That thought gave Constance an idea.

She recalled also now having heard somewhere that it was a common characteristic of these poor creatures to have a passion for fast automobiling, to go on long rides, perhaps even without having the money to pay for them. That, too, confirmed the idea which she had.

As the night advanced she determined to stick to her post. What could it have been that Drummond was doing? It was no good, she felt positive.

Suddenly before her eye, glued to its eavesdropping aperture, she saw a strange sight. There was a violent commotion in the store. Blue−coated policemen seemed to swarm in from nowhere. And in the rear, directing them, appeared Drummond, holding by the arm the unfortunate Sleighbells, quaking with fear, evidently having been picked up already elsewhere by the wily detective.

Muller put up a stout resistance, but the officers easily seized him and, after a hasty but thorough search, unearthed his cache of the contraband drug.

As the scene unfolded, Constance was more and more bewildered after having witnessed that which preceded it, the signing of the letter and the passing of the money. Muller evidently had nothing to say about that. What did it mean?

The police were still holding Muller, and Constance had not noted that Drummond had disappeared.

"It's on the first floor−−left, men," sounded a familiar voice outside her own door. "I know she's there. My shadow saw her buy the dope and take it home."

Her heart was thumping wildly. It was Drummond leading his squad of raiders, and they were about to enter the apartment of Adele. They knocked, but there was no answer.

A few moments before Constance would have felt perfectly safe in saying that Adele was out. But if Drummond's man had seen her enter, might she not have been there all the time, be there still, in a stupor? She dreaded to think of what might happen if the poor girl once fell into their hands. It would be the final impulse that would complete her ruin.

Constance did not stop to reason it out. Her woman's intuition told her that now was the time to act−−that there was no retreat.

She opened her own door just as the raiders had forced in the flimsy affair that guarded the apartment of Adele.

"So!" sneered Drummond, catching sight of her in the dim light of the hallway. "You are mixed up in these violations of the new drug law, too!"

Constance said nothing. She had determined first to make Drummond display his hand.

"Well," he ground out, "I'm going to get these people this time. I represent the Medical Society and the Board of Health. These men have been assigned to me by the Commissioner as a dope squad. We want this girl. We have others who will give evidence; but we want this one, too."

He said it with a bluster that even exaggerated the theatrical character of the raid itself. Constance did not stop to weigh the value of his words, but through the door she brushed quickly. Adele might need her if she was indeed there.

As she entered the little living room she saw a sight which almost transfixed her. Adele was there lying across a divan, motionless.

Constance bent over. Adele was cold. As far as she could determine there was not a breath or a heartbeat!

What did it mean? She did not stop to think. Instantly there flashed over her the recollection of an instrument she had read about at one of the city hospitals. It might save Adele. Before any one knew what she was doing she had darted to the telephone in the lower hall of the apartment and had called up the hospital frantically, imploring them to hurry. Adele must be saved.

Constance had no very clear idea of what happened next in the hurly−burly of events, until the ambulance pulled up at the door and the white−coated surgeon burst in carrying a heavy suitcase.

With one look at the unfortunate girl he muttered, "Paralysis of the respiratory organs−−too large a dose of the drug. You did perfectly right," and began unpacking the case.

Constance, calm now in the crisis, stood by him and helped as deftly as could any nurse.

It was a curious arrangement of tubes and valves, with a large rubber bag, and a little pump that the doctor had brought. Quickly he placed a cap, attached to it, over the nose and mouth of the poor girl, and started the machine.

"Wh−what is it?" gasped Drummond as he saw Adele's hitherto motionless breast now rise and fall.

"A pulmotor," replied the doctor, working quickly and carefully, "an artificial lung. Sometimes it can revive even the medically dead. It is our last chance with this girl."

Constance had picked up the packet which had fallen beside Adele and was looking at the white powder.

"Almost pure cocaine," remarked the young surgeon, testing it. "The hydrochloride, large crystals, highest quality. Usually it is adulterated. Was she in the habit of taking it this way?"

Constance said nothing. She had seen Muller make up the packet−−specially now, she recalled. Instead of the adulterated dope he had given Adele the purest kind. Why? Was there some secret he wished to lock in her breast forever?

Mechanically the pulmotor pumped. Would it save her?

Constance was living over what she had already seen through the detectascope. Suddenly she thought of the strange letter and of the money.

She hurried into the drug store. Muller had already been taken away, but before the officer left in charge could interfere she picked up the carbon sheet on which the letter had been copied, turned it over, and held it eagerly to the light.

She read in amazement. It was a confession. In it Muller admitted to Dr. Moreland Price that he was the head of a sort of dope trust, that he had messengers out, like Sleighbells, that he had often put dope in the prescriptions sent him by the doctor, and had repeatedly violated the law and refilled such prescriptions. On its face it was complete and convincing.

Yet it did not satisfy Constance. She could not believe that Adele had committed suicide. Adele must possess some secret. What was it?

"Is−−is there any change?" she asked anxiously of the young surgeon now engrossed in his work.

For answer he merely nodded to the apparently motionless form on the bed, and for a moment stopped the pulmotor.

The mechanical movement of the body ceased. But in its place was a slight tremor about the lips and mouth.

Adele moved−−was faintly gasping for breath!

"Adele!" cried Constance softly in her ear. "Adele!"

Something, perhaps a faraway answer of recognition, seemed to flicker over her face. The doctor redoubled his efforts.

"Adele−−do you know me?" whispered Constance again.

"Yes," came back faintly at last. "There−−there's something−−wrong with it−−They−−they−−"

"How? What do you mean?" urged Constance. "Tell me, Adele."

The girl moved uneasily. The doctor administered a stimulant and she vaguely opened her eyes, began to talk hazily, dreamily. Constance bent over to catch the faint words which would have been lost to the others.

"They−−are going to−−double−cross the Health Department," she murmured as if to herself, then gathering strength she went on, "Muller and Sleighbells will be arrested and take the penalty. They have been caught with the goods, anyhow. It has all been arranged so that the detective will get his case. Money−−will be paid to both of them, to Muller and the detective, to swing the case and protect him. He made me do it. I saw the detective, even danced with him, and he agreed to do it. Oh, I would do anything−−I am his willing tool when I have the stuff. But−−this time it was−−" She rambled off incoherently.

"Who made you do it? Who told you?" prompted Constance. "For whom would you do anything?"

Adele moaned and clutched Constance's hand convulsively. Constance did not pause to consider the ethics of questioning a half−unconscious girl. Her only idea was to get at the truth.

"Who was it?" she reiterated.

Adele turned weakly.

"Dr. Price," she murmured as Constance bent her ear to catch even the faintest sound. "He told me−−all about it−−last night−−in the car."

Instantly Constance understood. Adele was the only one outside who held the secret, who could upset the carefully planned frame−up that was to protect the real head of the dope trust who had paid liberally to save his own wretched skin.

She rose quickly and wheeled about suddenly on Drummond.

"You will convict Dr. Price also," she said in a low tone. "This girl must not be dragged down, too. You will leave her alone, and both you and Mr. Muller will hand over that money to her for her cure of the habit."

Drummond started forward angrily, but fell back as Constance added in a lower but firmer tone, "Or I'll have you all up on a charge of attempting murder."

Drummond turned surlily to those of his "dope squad," who remained.

"You can go, boys," he said brusquely. "There's been some mistake here."

(1) In underworld slang, lobbygow means a hanger−on, go−between, or message runner, particularly one involved in the drug traffic−−the speculation being that such persons usu about in lobbies. <==== BACK

The Campaign Grafter

"What a relief it will be when this election is over and the newspapers print news again," I growled as I turned the first page of the Star with a mere glance at the headlines.

"Yes," observed Kennedy, who was puzzling over a note which he had received in the morning mail. "This is the bitterest campaign in years. Now, do you suppose that they are after me in a professional way or are they trying to round me up as an independent voter?"

The letter which had called forth this remark was headed, "The Travis Campaign Committee of the Reform League," and, as Kennedy evidently intended me to pass an opinion on it, I picked it up. It was only a few lines, requesting him to call during the morning, if convenient, on Wesley Travis, the candidate for governor and the treasurer of his campaign committee, Dean Bennett. It had evidently been written in great haste in longhand the night before.

"Professional," I hazarded. "There must be some scandal in the campaign for which they require your services."

"I suppose so," agreed Craig. "Well, if it is business instead of politics it has at least this merit−−it is current business. I suppose you have no objection to going with me?"

Thus it came about that not very much later in the morning we found ourselves at the campaign headquarters, in the presence of two nervous and high−keyed gentlemen in frock coats and silk hats. It would have taken no great astuteness, even without seeing the surroundings, to deduce instantly that they were engaged in the annual struggle of seeking the votes of their fellow−citizens for something or other, and were nearly worn out by the arduous nature of that process.

Their headquarters were in a tower of a skyscraper, whence poured forth a torrent of appeal to the moral sense of the electorate, both in printed and oral form. Yet there was a different tone to the place from that which I had ordinarily associated with political headquarters in previous campaigns. There was an absence of the old−fashioned politicians and of the air of intrigue laden with tobacco. Rather, there was an air of earnestness and efficiency which was decidedly prepossessing. Maps of the state were hanging on the walls, some stuck full of various coloured pins denoting the condition of the canvass. A map of the city in colours, divided into all sorts of districts, told how fared the battle in the stronghold of the boss, Billy McLoughlin. Huge systems of card indexes, loose leaf devices, labour−saving appliances for getting out a vast mass of campaign "literature" in a hurry, in short a perfect system, such as a great, well−managed business might have been proud of, were in evidence everywhere.

Wesley Travis was a comparatively young man, a lawyer who had early made a mark in politics and had been astute enough to shake off the thraldom of the bosses before the popular uprising against them. Now he was the

candidate of the Reform League for governor and a good stiff campaign he was putting up.

His campaign manager, Dean Bennett, was a business man whose financial interests were opposed to those usually understood to be behind Billy McLoughlin, of the regular party to which both Travis and Bennett might naturally have been supposed to belong in the old days. Indeed the Reform League owed its existence to a fortunate conjunction of both moral and economic conditions demanding progress.

"Things have been going our way up to the present," began Travis confidentially, when we were seated democratically with our campaign cigars lighted. "Of course we haven't such a big 'barrel' as our opponents, for we are not frying the fat out of the corporations. But the people have supported us nobly, and I think the opposition of the vested interests has been a great help. We seem to be winning, and I say 'seem' only because one can never be certain how anything is going in this political game nowadays.

"You recall, Mr. Kennedy, reading in the papers that my country house out on Long Island was robbed the other day? Some of the reporters made much of it. To tell the truth, I think they had become so satiated with sensations that they were sure that the thing was put up by some muckrakers and that there would be an expose of some kind. For the thief, whoever he was, seems to have taken nothing from my library but a sort of scrap−book or album of photographs. It was a peculiar robbery, but as I had nothing to conceal it didn't worry me. Well, I had all but forgotten it when a fellow came into Bennett's office here yesterday and demanded−− tell us what it was, Bennett. You saw him."

Bennett cleared his throat. "You see, it was this way. He gave his name as Harris Hanford and described himself as a photographer. I think he has done work for Billy McLoughlin. At any rate, his offer was to sell us several photographs, and his story about them was very circumstantial. He hinted that they had been evidently among those stolen from Mr. Travis and that in a roundabout way they had come into the possession of a friend of his without his knowing who the thief was. He said that he had not made the photographs himself, but had an idea by whom they were made, that the original plates had been destroyed, but that the person who made them was ready to swear that the pictures were taken after the nominating convention this fall which had named Travis. At any rate the photographs were out and the price for hem was $25,000."

"What are they that he should set such a price on them?" asked Kennedy, keenly looking from Bennett quickly to Travis.

Travis met his look without flinching. "They are supposed to be photographs of myself," he replied slowly. "One purports to represent me in a group on McLoughlin's porch at his farm on the south shore of the island, about twenty miles from my place. As Hanford described it, I am standing between McLoughlin and J. Cadwalader Brown, the trust promoter who is backing McLoughlin to save his investments. Brown's hand is on my shoulder and we are talking familiarly. Another is a picture of Brown, McLoughlin and myself riding in Brown's car, and in it Brown and I are evidently on the best of terms. Oh, there are several of them, all in the same vein. Now," he added, and his voice rose with emotion as if he were addressing a cart−tail meeting which must be convinced that there was nothing criminal in riding in a motor−car, "I don't hesitate to admit that a year or so ago I was not on terms of intimacy with these men, but at least acquainted with them. At various times, even as late as last spring, I was present at conferences over the presidential outlook in this state, and once I think I did ride back to the city with them. But I know that there were no pictures taken, and even if there had been I would not care if they told the truth about them. I have frankly admitted in my speeches that I knew these men, that my knowledge of them and breaking from them is my chief qualification for waging an effective war on them if I am elected. They hate me cordially. You know that. What I do care about is the sworn allegation that now accompanies these−−these fakes. They were not, could not have been taken after the independent convention that nominated me. If the photographs were true I would be a fine traitor. But I haven't even seen McLoughlin or Brown since last spring. The whole thing is a−−−−"

"Lie from start to finish," put in Bennett emphatically. "Yes, Travis, we all know that. I'd quit right now if I didn't believe in you. But let us face the facts. Here is this story, sworn to as Hanford says and apparently acquiesced in by Billy McLoughlin and Cad. Brown. What do they care anyhow as long as it is against you? And there too, are the pictures themselves−−at least they will be in print or suppressed, according as we act. Now, you know that nothing could hurt the reform ticket worse than to have an issue like this raised at this time. We were supposed at least to be on the level, with nothing to explain away. There may be just enough people to believe that there is some basis for this suspicion to turn the tide against us. If it were earlier in the campaign I'd say accept the

issue, fight it out to a finish, and in the turn of events we should really have the best campaign material. But it is too late now to expose such a knavish trick of theirs on the Friday before election. Frankly, I believe discretion is the better part of valour in this case and without abating a jot of my faith in you, Travis, well, I'd pay first and expose the fraud afterward, after the election, at leisure."

"No, I won't," persisted Travis, shutting his square jaw doggedly. "I won't be held up."

The door had opened and a young lady in a very stunning street dress, with a huge hat and a tantalizing veil, stood in it for a moment, hesitated, and then was about to shut it with an apology for intruding on a conference.

"I'll fight it if it takes my last dollar," declared Travis "but I won't be blackmailed out of a cent. Good morning, Miss Ashton. I'll be free in a moment. I'll see you in your office directly."

The girl, with a portfolio of papers in her hand, smiled, and Travis quickly crossed the room and held the door deferentially open as he whispered a word or two. When she had disappeared he returned and remarked, "I suppose you have heard of Miss Margaret Ashton, the suffragette leader, Mr. Kennedy? She is the head of our press bureau." Then a heightened look of determination set his fine face in hard lines, and he brought his fist down on the desk. "No, not a cent," he thundered.

Bennett shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and looked at Kennedy in mock resignation as if to say, "What can you do with such a fellow?" Travis was excitedly pacing the floor and waving his arms as if he were addressing a meeting in the enemy's country. "Hanford comes at us in this way," he continued, growing more excited as he paced up and down. "He says plainly that the pictures will of course be accepted as among those stolen from me, and in that, I suppose, he is right. The public will swallow it. When Bennett told him I would prosecute he laughed and said, 'Go ahead. I didn't steal the pictures. That would be a great joke for Travis to seek redress from the courts he is criticizing. I guess he'd want to recall the decision if it went against him−−hey?' Hanford says that a hundred copies have been made of each of the photographs and that this person, whom we do not know, has them ready to drop into the mail to the one hundred leading papers of the state in time for them to appear in the Monday editions just before Election Day. He says no amount of denying on our part can destroy the effect−−or at least he went further and said 'shake their validity.'

"But I repeat. They are false. For all I know, it is a plot of McLoughlin's, the last fight of a boss for his life, driven into a corner. And it is meaner than if he had attempted to forge a letter. Pictures appeal to the eye and mind much more than letters. That's what makes the thing so dangerous. Billy McLoughlin knows how to make the best use of such a roor−back on the eve of an election, and even if I not only deny but prove that they are a fake, I'm afraid the harm will be done. I can't reach all the voters in time. Ten see such a charge to one who sees the denial."

"Just so," persisted Bennett coolly. "You admit that we are practically helpless. That's what I have been saying all along. Get control of the prints first, Travis, for God's sake. Then raise any kind of a howl you want−−before election or after. As I say, if we had a week or two it might be all right to fight. But we can make no move without making fools of ourselves until they are published Monday as the last big thing of the campaign. The rest of Monday and the Tuesday morning papers do not give us time to reply. Even if they were published today we should hardly have time to expose the plot, hammer it in and make the issue an asset instead of a liability. No, you must admit it yourself. There isn't time. We must carry out the work we have so carefully planned to cap the campaign, and if we are diverted by this it means a let−up in our final efforts, and that is as good as McLoughlin wants anyhow. Now, Kennedy, don't you agree with me? Squelch the pictures now at any cost, then follow the thing up and, if we can, prosecute after election?"

Kennedy and I, who had been so far little more than interested spectators, had not presumed to interrupt. Finally Craig asked, "You have copies of the pictures?"

"No," replied Bennett. "This Hanford is a brazen fellow, but he was too astute to leave them. I saw them for an instant. They look bad. And the affidavits with them look worse."

"H'm," considered Kennedy, turning the crisis over in his mind. "We've had alleged stolen and forged letters before, but alleged stolen and forged photographs are new. I'm not surprised that you are alarmed, Bennett−−nor that you want to fight, Travis."

"Then you will take up the case?" urged the latter eagerly, forgetting both his campaign manager and his campaign manners, and leaning forward almost like a prisoner in the dock to catch the words of the foreman of the jury. "You will trace down the forger of those pictures before it is too late?"

"I haven't said I'll do that−−yet," answered Craig measuredly. "I haven't even said I'd take up the case. Politics is a new game to me, Mr. Travis. If I go into this thing I want to go into it and stay in it−−well, you know how you lawyers put it, with clean hands. On one condition I'll take the matter up, and on only one."

"Name it," cried Travis anxiously.

"Of course, having been retained by you," continued Craig with provoking slowness, "it is not reasonable to suppose that if I find−−how shall I put it−−bluntly, yes?−−if I find that the story of Hanford has some−−er−−foundation, it is not reasonable to suppose that I should desert you and go over to the other side. Neither is it to be supposed that I will continue and carry such a thing through for you regardless of truth. What I ask is to have a free hand, to be able to drop the case the moment I cannot proceed further in justice to myself, drop it, and keep my mouth shut. You understand? These are my conditions and no less."

"And you think you can make good?" questioned Bennett rather sceptically. "You are willing to risk it? You don't think it would be better to wait until after the election is won?"

"You have heard my conditions," reiterated Craig.

"Done," broke in Travis. "I'm going to fight it out, Bennett. If we get in wrong by dickering with them at the start it may be worse for us in the end. Paying amounts to confession."

Bennett shook his head dubiously. "I'm afraid this will suit McLoughlin's purpose just as well. Photographs are like statistics. They don't lie unless the people who make them do. But it's hard to tell what a liar can accomplish with either in an election."

"Say, Dean, you're not going to desert me?" reproached Travis. "You're not offended at my kicking over the traces, are you?"

Bennett rose, placed a hand on Travis's shoulder, and grasped his other. "Wesley," he said earnestly. "I wouldn't desert you even if the pictures were true."

"I knew it," responded Travis heartily. "Then let Mr. Kennedy have one day to see what he can do. Then if we make no progress we'll take your advice, Dean. We'll pay, I suppose, and ask Mr. Kennedy to continue the case after next Tuesday."

"With the proviso," put in Craig.

"With the proviso, Kennedy," repeated Travis. "Your hand on that. Say, I think I've shaken hands with half the male population of this state since I was nominated, but this means more to me than any of them. Call on us, either Bennett or myself, the moment you need aid. Spare no reasonable expense, and−−and get the goods, no matter whom it hits higher up, even if it is Cadwalader Brown himself. Good−bye, and a thousand thanks−−oh, by the way, wait. Let me take you around and introduce you to Miss Ashton. She may be able to help you."

The office of Bennett and Travis was in the centre of the suite. On one side were the cashier and clerical force as well as the speakers' bureau, where spellbinders of all degrees were getting instruction, tours were being laid out, and reports received from meetings already held.

On the other side was the press bureau with a large and active force in charge of Miss Ashton, who was supporting Travis because he had most emphatically declared for "Votes for Women" and had insisted that his party put this plank in its platform. Miss Ashton was a clever girl, a graduate of a famous woman's college, and had had several years of newspaper experience before she became a leader in the suffrage cause. I recalled having read and heard a great deal about her, though I had never met her. The Ashtons were well known in New York society, and it was a sore trial to some of her conservative friends that she should reject what they considered the proper "sphere" for women. Among those friends, I understood, was Cadwalader Brown himself.

Travis had scarcely more than introduced us, yet already I scented a romance behind the ordinarily prosaic conduct of a campaign press bureau. It is far from my intention to minimise the work or the ability of the head of the press bureau, but it struck me, both then and later, that the candidate had an extraordinary interest in the newspaper campaign, much more than in the speakers' bureau, and I am sure that it was not solely accounted for by the fact that publicity is playing a more and more important part in political campaigning.

Nevertheless such innovations as her card index system by election districts all over the state, showing the attitude of the various newspaper editors, of local political leaders, and changes of sentiment, were very full and valuable. Kennedy, who had a regular pigeon−hole mind for facts, was visibly impressed by this huge mechanical memory built up by Miss Ashton. Though he said nothing to me I knew he had also observed the state of affairs between the reform candidate and the suffrage leader.

It was at a moment when Travis had been called back to his office that Kennedy, who had been eyeing Miss Ashton with marked approval, leaned over and said in a low voice, "Miss Ashton, I think I can trust you. Do you want to do a great favour for Mr. Travis?"

She did not betray even by a fleeting look on her face what the true state of her feelings was, although I fancied that the readiness of her assent had perhaps more meaning than she would have placed in a simple "Yes" otherwise.

"I suppose you know that an attempt is being made to blackmail Mr. Travis?" added Kennedy quickly.

"I know something about it," she replied in a tone which left it for granted that Travis had told her before even we were called in. I felt that not unlikely Travis's set determination to fight might be traceable to her advice or at least to her opinion of him.

"I suppose in a large force like this it is not impossible that your political enemies may have a spy or two," observed Kennedy, glancing about at the score or more clerks busily engaged in getting out "literature".

"I have sometimes thought that myself," she agreed. "But of course I don't know. Still, I have to be pretty careful. Some one is always over here by my desk or looking over here. There isn't much secrecy in a big room like this. I never leave important stuff lying about where any of them could see it."

"Yes," mused Kennedy. "What time does the office close?"

"We shall finish to−night about nine, I think. To−morrow it may be later."

"Well, then, if I should call here tonight at, say, half− past nine, could you be here? I need hardly say that your doing so may be of inestimable value to−−to the campaign."

"I shall be here," she promised, giving her hand with a peculiar straight arm shake and looking him frankly in the face with those eyes which even the old guard in the legislature admitted were vote−winners.

Kennedy was not quite ready to leave yet, but sought out Travis and obtained permission to glance over the financial end of the campaign. There were few large contributors to Travis's fund, but a host of small sums ranging from ten and twenty−five dollars down to dimes and nickels. Truly it showed the depth of the popular uprising. Kennedy also glanced hastily over the items of expense−−rent, salaries, stenographer and office force, advertising, printing and stationery, postage, telephone, telegraph, automobile and travelling expenses, and miscellaneous matters.

As Kennedy expressed it afterwards, as against the small driblets of money coming in, large sums were going out for expenses in lumps. Campaigning in these days costs money even when done honestly. The miscellaneous account showed some large indefinite items, and after a hasty calculation Kennedy made out that if all the obligations had to be met immediately the committee would be in the hole for several thousand dollars.

"In short," I argued as we were leaving, "this will either break Travis privately or put his fund in hopeless shape. Or does it mean that he foresees defeat and is taking this way to recoup himself under cover of being held up?"

Kennedy said nothing in response to my suspicions, though I could see that in his mind he was leaving no possible clue unnoted.

It was only a few blocks to the studio of Harris Hanford, whom Kennedy was now bent on seeing. We found him in an old building on one of the side streets in the thirties which business had captured. His was a little place on the top floor, up three flights of stairs, and I noticed as we climbed up that the room next to his was vacant.

Our interview with Hanford was short and unsatisfactory. He either was or at least posed as representing a third party in the affair, and absolutely refused to permit us to have even a glance at the photographs.

"My dealings," he asserted airily, "must all be with Mr. Bennett, or with Mr. Travis, direct, not with emissaries. I don't make any secret about it. The prints are not here. They are safe and ready to be produced at the right time, either to be handed over for the money or to be published in the newspapers. We have found out all about them; we are satisfied, although the negatives have been destroyed. As for their having been stolen from Travis, you can put two and two together. They are out and copies have been made of them, good copies. If Mr. Travis wishes to repudiate them, let him start proceedings. I told Bennett all about that. To−morrow is the last day, and I must have Bennett's answer then, without any interlopers coming into it. If it is yes, well and good; if not, then they know what to expect. Good−bye."

It was still early in the forenoon, and Kennedy's next move was to go out on Long Island to examine the library at Travis's from which the pictures were said to have been stolen. At the laboratory Kennedy and I loaded

ourselves with a large oblong black case containing a camera and a tripod.

His examination of the looted library was minute, taking in the window through which the thief had apparently entered, the cabinet he had forced, and the situation in general. Finally Craig set up his camera with most particular care and took several photographs of the window, the cabinet, the doors, including the room from every angle. Outside he snapped the two sides of corner of the house in which the library was situated. Partly by trolley and partly by carriage we crossed the island to the south shore, and finally found McLouglin's farm, where we had no trouble in getting half a dozen photographs of the porch and house. Altogether the proceedings seemed tame to me, yet I knew from previous experience that Kennedy had a deep laid purpose.

We parted in the city, to meet just before it was time to visit Miss Ashton. Kennedy had evidently employed the interval in developing his plates, for he now had ten or a dozen prints, all of exactly the same size, mounted on stiff cardboard in a space with scales and figures on all four sides. He saw me puzzling over them.

"Those are metric photographs such as Bertillon of Paris takes," he explained. "By means of the scales and tables and other methods that have been worked out we can determine from those pictures distances and many other things almost as well as if we were on the spot itself. Bertillon has cleared up many crimes with this help, such as the mystery of the shooting in the Hotel Quai d'Orsay and other cases. The metric photograph, I believe, will rank in time with the portrait parle, finger prints, and the rest.

"For instance, in order to solve the riddle of a crime the detective's first task is to study the scene topographically. Plans and elevations of a room or house are made. The position of each object is painstakingly noted. In addition, the all−seeing eye of the camera is called into requisition. The plundered room is photographed, as in this case. I might have done it by placing a foot rule on a table and taking that in the picture, but a more scientific and accurate method has been devised by Bertillon. His camera lens is always used at a fixed height from the ground and forms its image on the plate at an exact focus. The print made from the negative is mounted on a card in a space of definite size, along the edges of which a metric scale is printed. In the way he has worked it out the distance between any two points in the picture can be determined. With a topographical plan and a metric photograph one can study a crime as a general studies the map of a strange country. There were several peculiar things that I observed to−day, and I have here an indelible record of the scene of the crime. Preserved in this way it cannot be questioned.

"Now the photographs were in this cabinet. There are other cabinets, but none of them has been disturbed. Therefore the thief must have known just what he was after. The marks made in breaking the lock were not those of a jimmy but of a screwdriver. No amazing command of the resources of science is needed so far. All that is necessary is a little scientific common sense, Walter.

"Now, how did the robber get in? All the windows and doors were supposedly locked. It is alleged that a pane was cut from this window at the side. It was, and the pieces were there to show it. But take a glance at this outside photograph. To reach that window even a tall man must have stood on a ladder or something. There are no marks of a ladder or of any person in the soft soil under the window. What is more, that window was cut from the inside. The marks of the diamond which cut it plainly show that. Scientific common sense again."

"Then it must have been some one in the house or at least some one familiar with it?" I exclaimed.

Kennedy nodded. "One thing we have which the police greatly neglect," he pursued, "a record. We have made some progress in reconstructing the crime, as Bertillon calls it. If we only had those Hanford pictures we should be all right."

We were now on our way to see Miss Ashton at headquarters and as we rode downtown I tried to reason out the case. Had it really been a put−up job? Was Travis himself faking, and was the robbery a "plant" by which he might forestall exposure of what had become public property in the hands of another, no longer disposed to conceal it? Or was it after all the last desperate blow of the Boss?

The whole thing began to assume a suspicious look in my mind. Although Kennedy seemed to have made little real progress, I felt that, far from aiding Travis, it made things darker. There was nothing but his unsupported word that he had not visited the Boss subsequent to the nominating convention. He admitted having done so before the Reform League came into existence. Besides it seemed tacitly understood that both the Boss and Cadwalader Brown acquiesced in the sworn statement of the man who said he had made the pictures. Added to that the mere existence of the actual pictures themselves was a graphic clincher to the story. Personally, if I had been in Kennedy's place I think I should have taken advantage of the proviso in the compact with Travis to back

out gracefully. Kennedy, however, now started on the case, hung to it tenaciously.

Miss Ashton was waiting for us at the press bureau. Her desk was at the middle of one end of the room in which, if she could keep an eye on her office force, the office force also could keep an eye on her.

Kennedy had apparently taken in the arrangement during our morning visit, for he set to work immediately. The side of the room toward the office of Travis and Bennett presented an expanse of blank wall. With a mallet he quickly knocked a hole in the rough plaster, just above the baseboard about the room. The hole did not penetrate quite through to the other side. In it he placed a round disc of vulcanized rubber, with insulated wires leading down back of the baseboard, then out underneath it, and under the carpet. Some plaster quickly closed up the cavity in the wall, and he left it to dry.

Next he led the wires under the carpet to Miss Ashton's desk. There they ended, under the carpet and a rug, eighteen or twenty huge coils several feet in diameter disposed in such a way as to attract no attention by a curious foot on the carpet which covered them.

"That is all, Miss Ashton," he said as we watched for his next move. "I shall want to see you early to−morrow, and −−might I ask you to be sure to wear that hat which you have on?"

It was a very becoming hat, but Kennedy's tone clearly indicated that it was not his taste in inverted basket millinery that prompted the request. She promised, smiling, for even a suffragette may like pretty hats.

Craig had still to see Travis and report on his work. The candidate was waiting anxiously at his hotel after a big political mass meeting on the East Side, at which capitalism and the bosses had been hissed to the echo, if that is possible.

"What success?" inquired Travis eagerly.

"I'm afraid," replied Kennedy, and the candidate's face fell at the tone, "I'm afraid you will have to meet them, for the present. The time limit will expire to−morrow, and understand Hanford is coming up for a final answer. We must have copies of those photographs, even if we have to pay for them. There seems to be no other way."

Travis sank back in his chair and regarded Kennedy hopelessly. He was actually pale. "You−−you don't mean to say that there is no other way, that I'll have to admit even before Bennett−−and others that I'm in bad?"

"I wouldn't put it that way," said Kennedy mercilessly, I thought.

"It is that way," Travis asserted almost fiercely. "Why, we could have done that anyhow. No, no−−I don't mean that. Pardon me. I'm upset by this. Go ahead," he sighed.

"You will direct Bennett to make the best terms he can with Hanford when he comes up to−morrow. Have him arrange the details of payment and then rush the best copies of the photographs to me."

Travis seemed crushed.

We met Miss Ashton the following morning entering her office. Kennedy handed her a package, and in a few words, which I did not hear explained what he wanted, promising to call again later.

When we called, the girls and other clerks had arrived, and the office was a hive of industry in the rush of winding up the campaign. Typewriters were clicking, clippings were being snipped out of a huge stack of newspapers and pasted into large scrap−books, circulars were being folded and made ready to mail for the final appeal. The room was indeed crowded, and I felt that there was no doubt, as Kennedy had said, that nothing much could go on there unobserved by any one to whose interest it was to see it.

Miss Ashton was sitting at her desk with her hat on directing the work. "It works," she remarked enigmatically to Kennedy.

"Good," he replied. "I merely dropped in to be sure. Now if anything of interest happens, Miss Ashton, I wish you would let me know immediately. I must not be seen up here, but I shall be waiting downstairs in the corridor of the building. My next move depends entirely on what you have to report."

Downstairs Craig waited with growing impatience. We stood in an angle in which we could see without being readily seen, and our impatience was not diminished by seeing Hanford enter the elevator.

I think that Miss Ashton would have made an excellent woman detective, that is, on a case in which her personal feelings were not involved as they were here. She was pale and agitated as she appeared in the corridor, and Kennedy hurried toward her.

"I can't believe it. I won't believe it," she managed to say.

"Tell me, what happened?" urged Kennedy soothingly.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy, why did you ask me to do this?" she reproached. "I would almost rather not have known at

all."

"Believe me, Miss Ashton," said Kennedy, "you ought to know. It is on you that I depend most. We saw Hanford go up. What occurred?"

She was still pale, and replied nervously, "Mr. Bennett came in about quarter to ten. He stopped to talk to me and looked about the room curiously. Do you know, I felt very uncomfortable for a time. Then he locked the door leading from the press bureau to his office, and left word that he was not to be disturbed. A few minutes later a man called."

"Yes, yes," prompted Kennedy. "Hanford, no doubt."

She was racing on breathlessly, scarcely giving one a chance to inquire how she had learned so much.

"Why," she cried with a sort of defiant ring in her tone, "Mr. Travis is going to buy those pictures after all. And the worst of it is that I met him in the hall coming in as I was coming down here, and he tried to act toward me in the same old way−−and that after all I know now about him. They have fixed it all up, Mr. Bennett acting for Mr. Travis, and this Mr. Hanford. They are even going to ask me to carry the money in a sealed envelope to the studio of this fellow Hanford, to be given to a third person who will be there at two o'clock this afternoon."

"You, Miss Ashton?" inquired Kennedy, a light breaking on his face as if at last he saw something.

"Yes, I," she repeated. "Hanford insisted that it was part of the compact. They−−they haven't asked me openly yet to be the means of carrying out their dirty deals, but when they do, I−−I won't−−−−"

"Miss Ashton," remonstrated Kennedy, "I beg you to be calm. I had no idea you would take it like this, no idea. Please, please. Walter, you will excuse us if we take a turn down the corridor and out in the air. This is most extraordinary."

For five or ten minutes Kennedy and Miss Ashton appeared to be discussing the new turn of events earnestly, while I waited impatiently. As they approached again she seemed calmer, but I heard her say, "I hope you're right. I'm all broken up by it. I'm ready to resign. My faith in human nature is shaken. No, I won't expose Wesley Travis for his sake. It cuts me to have to admit it, but Cadwalader used always to say that every man has his price. I am afraid this will do great harm to the cause of reform and through it to the woman suffrage cause which cast its lot with this party. I−−I can hardly believe−−−−"

Kennedy was still looking earnestly at her. "Miss Ashton," he implored, "believe nothing. Remember one of the first rules of politics is loyalty. Wait until−−−−"

"Wait?" she echoed. "How can I? I hate Wesley Travis for giving in−−more than I hate Cadwalader Brown for his cynical disregard of honesty in others."

She bit her lip at thus betraying her feelings, but what she had heard had evidently affected her deeply. It was as though the feet of her idol had turned to clay. Nevertheless it was evident that she was coming to look on it more as she would if she were an outsider.

"Just think it over," urged Kennedy. "They won't ask you right away. Don't do anything rash. Suspend judgement. You won't regret it."

Craig's next problem seemed to be to transfer the scene of his operations to Hanford's studio. He was apparently doing some rapid thinking as we walked uptown after leaving Miss Ashton, and I did not venture to question him on what had occurred when it was so evident that everything depended on being prepared for what was still to occur.

Hanford was out. That seemed to please Kennedy, for with a brightening face, which told more surely than words that he saw his way more and more clearly, he asked me to visit the agent and hire the vacant office next to the studio while he went uptown to complete his arrangements for the final step.

I had completed my part and was waiting in the empty room when he returned. He lost no time in getting to work, and it seemed to me as I watched him curiously in silence that he was repeating what he had already done at the Travis headquarters. He was boring into the wall, only this time he did it much more carefully, and it was evident that if he intended putting anything into this cavity it must be pretty large. The hole was square, and as I bent over I could see that he had cut through the plaster and laths all the way to the wallpaper on the other side, though he was careful to leave that intact. Then he set up a square black box in the cavity, carefully poising it and making measurements that told of the exact location of its centre with reference to the partitions and walls.

A skeleton key took us into Hanford's well−lighted but now empty studio. For Miss Ashton's sake I wished that the photographs had been there. I am sure Kennedy would have found slight compunction in a larceny of

them, if they had been. It was something entirely different that he had in mind now, however, and he was working quickly for fear of discovery. By his measurements I guessed that he was calculating as nearly as possible the centre of the box which he had placed in the hole in the wall on the other side of the dark wallpaper. When he had quite satisfied himself he took a fine pencil from his pocket and made a light cross on the paper to indicate it. The dot fell to the left of a large calendar hanging on the wall.

Kennedy's appeal to Margaret Ashton had evidently had its effect, for when he saw her a few moments after these mysterious preparations she had overcome her emotion.

"They have asked me to carry a note to Mr. Hanford's studio," she said quietly, "and without letting them know that I know anything about it I have agreed to do so."

"Miss Ashton," said Kennedy, greatly relieved, "you're a trump."

"No," she replied, smiling faintly, "I'm just feminine enough to be curious."

Craig shook his head, but did not dispute the point. "After you have handed the envelope to the person, whoever it may be, in Hanford's studio, wait until he does something −−er−−suspicious. Meanwhile look at the wall on the side toward the next vacant office. To the left of the big calendar you will see a light pencil mark, a cross. Somehow you must contrive to get near it, but don't stand in front of it. Then if anything happens stick this little number 10 needle in the wall right at the intersection of the cross. Withdraw it quickly, count fifteen, then put this little sticker over the cross, and get out as best you can, though we shan't be far away if you should need us. That's all."

We did not accompany her to the studio for fear of being observed, but waited impatiently in the next office. We could hear nothing of what was said, but when a door shut and it was evident that she had gone, Kennedy quickly removed something from the box in the wall covered with a black cloth.

As soon as it was safe Kennedy had sent me posting after her to secure copies of the incriminating photographs which were to be carried by her from the studio, while he remained to see who came out. I thought a change had come over her as she handed me the package with the request that I carry it to Mr. Bennett and get them from him.

The first inkling I had that Kennedy had at last been able to trace back something in the mysterious doings of the past two days came the following evening, when Craig remarked casually that he would like to have me call on Billy McLoughlin if I had no engagement. I replied that I had none−−and managed to squirm out of the one I really had.

The Boss's office was full of politicians, for it was the eve of "dough day", when the purse strings were loosed and a flood of potent argument poured forth to turn the tide of election. Hanford was there with the other ward heelers.

"Mr. McLoughlin," began Kennedy quietly, when we were seated alone with Hanford in the little sanctum of the Boss, "you will pardon me if I seem a little slow in coming to the business that has brought me here to−night. First of all, I may say, and you, Hanford, being a photographer will appreciate it, that ever since the days of Daguerre photography has been regarded as the one infallible means of portraying faithfully any object, scene, or action. Indeed a photograph is admitted in court as irrefutable evidence. For when everything else fails, a picture made through the photographic lens almost invariably turns the tide. However, such a picture upon which the fate of an important case may rest should be subjected to critical examination for it is an established fact that a photograph may be made as untruthful as it may be reliable. Combination photographs change entirely the character of the initial negative and have been made for the past fifty years. The earliest, simplest, and most harmless photographic deception is the printing of clouds into a bare sky. But the retoucher with his pencil and etching tool to−day is very skilful. A workman of ordinary skill can introduce a person taken in a studio into an open−air scene well blended and in complete harmony without a visible trace of falsity.

"I need say nothing of how one head can be put on another body in a picture, nor need I say what a double exposure will do. There is almost no limit to the changes that may be wrought in form and feature. It is possible to represent a person crossing Broadway or walking on Riverside Drive, places he may never have visited. Thus a person charged with an offence may be able to prove an alibi by the aid of a skilfully prepared combination photograph.

"Where, then, can photography be considered as irrefutable evidence? The realism may convince all, will convince all, except the expert and the initiated after careful study. A shrewd judge will insist that in every case

the negative be submitted and examined for possible alterations by a clever manipulator."

Kennedy bent his gaze on McLoughlin. "Now, I do not accuse you, sir, of anything. But a photograph has come into the possession of Mr. Travis in which he is represented as standing on the steps of your house with yourself and Mr. Cadwalader Brown. He and Mr. Brown are in poses that show the utmost friendliness. I do not hesitate to say that that was originally a photograph of yourself, Mr. Brown, and your own candidate. It is a pretty raw deal, a fake in which Travis has been substituted by very excellent photographic forgery."

McLoughlin motioned to Hanford to reply. "A fake?" repeated the latter contemptuously. "How about the affidavits? There's no negative. You've got to prove that the original print stolen from Travis, we'll say, is a fake. You can't do it."

"September 19th was the date alleged, I believe?" asked Kennedy quietly, laying down the bundle of metric photographs and the alleged photographs of Travis. He was pointing to a shadow of a gable on the house as it showed in the metric photographs and the others.

"You see that shadow of the gable? Perhaps you never heard of it, Hanford, but it is possible to tell the exact time at which a photograph was taken from a study of the shadows. It is possible in principle and practice and can be trusted. Almost any scientist may be called on to bear testimony in court nowadays, but you would say the astronomer is one of the least likely. Well, the shadow in this picture will prove an alibi for someone.

"Notice. It is seen very prominently to the right, and its exact location on the house is an easy matter. You could almost use the metric photograph for that. The identification of the gable casting the shadow is easy. To be exact it is 19·62 feet high. The shadow is 14·23 feet down, 13·10 feet east, and 3·43 feet north. You see I am exact. I have to be. In one minute it moved 0·080 feet upward, 0·053 feet to the right, and 0·096 feet in its apparent path. It passes the width of a weatherboard, 0·37 foot, in four minutes and thirty−seven seconds."

Kennedy was talking rapidly of data which he had derived from his metric photograph, from plumb line, level, compass and tape, astronomical triangle, vertices, zenith, pole and sun, declination, azimuth, solar time, parallactic angles, refraction, and a dozen bewildering terms.

"In spherical trigonometry," he concluded, "to solve the problem three elements must be known. I knew four. Therefore I could take each of the known, treat it as unknown, and have four ways to check my result. I find that the time might have been either three o'clock, twenty−one minutes and twelve seconds, in the afternoon, or 3:21:31, or 3:21:29, or 3:21:33. The average is 3:21:26 and there can therefore be no appreciable error except for a few seconds. For that date must have been one of two days, either May 22 or July 23. Between these two dates we must decide on evidence other than the shadow. It must have been in May, as the immature condition of the foliage shows. But even if it had been in July, that is far from being September. The matter of the year I have also settled. Weather conditions, I find, were favourable on all these dates except that in September. I can really answer, with an assurance and accuracy superior to that of the photographer himself−−even if he were honest−−as to the real date. The real picture, aside from being doctored, was actually taken last May. Science is not fallible, but exact in this matter."

Kennedy had scored a palpable hit. McLoughlin and Hanford were speechless. Still Craig hurried on.

"But, you may ask, how about the automobile picture? That also is an unblushing fake. Of course I must prove that. In the first place, you know that the general public has come to recognize the distortion of a photograph as denoting speed. A picture of a car in a race that doesn't lean is rejected−−people demand to see speed, speed, more speed even in pictures. Distortion does indeed show speed, but that, too, can be faked.

"Hanford knows that the image is projected upside down by the lens on the plate, and that the bottom of the picture is taken before the top. The camera mechanism admits light, which makes the picture, in the manner of a roller blind curtain. The slit travels from the top to the bottom and the image on the plate being projected upside down, the bottom of the object appears on the top of the plate. For instance, the wheels are taken before the head of the driver. If the car is moving quickly the image moves on the plate and each successive part is taken a little in advance of the last. The whole leans forward. By widening the slit and slowing the speed of the shutter, there is more distortion.

"Now, this is what happened. A picture was taken of Cadwalader Brown's automobile, probably at rest, with Brown in it. The matter of faking Travis or any one else by his side is simple. If with an enlarging lantern the image of this faked picture is thrown on the paper like a lantern slide, and if the right hand side is a little further away than the left, the top further away than the bottom, you can print a fraudulent high speed ahead picture.

True, everything else in the picture, even if motionless, is distorted, and the difference between this faking and the distortion of the shutter can be seen by an expert. But it will pass. In this case, however, the faker was so sure of that that he was careless. Instead of getting the plate further from the paper on the right he did so on the left. It was further away on the bottom than on the top. He got distortion all right, enough still to satisfy the uninitiated. But it was distortion in the wrong way! The top of the wheel, which goes fastest and ought to be most indistinct, is, in the fake, as sharp as any other part. It is a small mistake, but fatal. That picture is really at high speed−−backwards! It is too raw, too raw."

"You don't think people are going to swallow all that stuff, do you?" asked Hanford coolly, in spite of the exposures.

Kennedy paid no attention. He was looking at McLoughlin. The Boss was regarding him surlily. "Well," he said at length, "what of all this? I had nothing to do with it. Why do you come to me? Take it to the proper parties."

"Shall I?" asked Kennedy quietly.

He had uncovered another picture carefully. We could not see it, but as he looked at it McLoughlin fairly staggered.

"Wh−−where did you get that?" he gasped.

"I got it where I got it, and it is no fake," replied Kennedy enigmatically. Then he appeared to think better of it. "This," he explained, "is what is known as a pinhole photograph. Three hundred years ago della Porta knew the camera obscura, and but for the lack of a sensitive plate would have made photographs. A box, thoroughly light−tight, slotted inside to receive plates, covered with black, and glued tight, a needle hole made by a number 10 needle in a thin sheet of paper−−and you have the apparatus for lensless photography. It has a correctness such as no image−forming means by lenses can have. It is literally rectigraphic, rectilinear, it needs no focusing and it takes a wide angle with equal effect. Even pinhole snapshots are possible where the light is abundant, with a ten to fifteen second exposure.

"That picture, McLoughlin, was taken yesterday at Hanford's. After Miss Ashton left I saw who came out−−but this picture shows what happened before. At a critical moment Miss Ashton stuck a needle in the wall of the studio, counted fifteen, closed the needle−hole, and there is the record. Walter, Hanford,−−leave us alone an instant."

When Kennedy passed out of the Boss's office there was a look of quiet satisfaction on his face which I could not fathom. Not a word could I extract from him either that night or on the following day, which was the last before the election.

I must say that I was keenly disappointed by the lack of developments, however. The whole thing seemed to me to be a mess. Everybody was involved. What had Miss Ashton overheard and what had Kennedy said to McLoughlin? Above all, what was his game? Was he playing to spare the girl's feelings by allowing the election to go on without a scandal for Travis?

At last election night arrived. We were all at the Travis headquarters, Kennedy, Travis, Bennett, and myself. Miss Ashton was not present, but the first returns had scarcely begun to trickle in when Craig whispered to me to go out and find her, either at her home or club. I found her at home. She had apparently lost interest in the election, and it was with difficulty that I persuaded her to accompany me.

The excitement of any other night in the year paled to insignificance before this. Distracted crowds everywhere were cheering and blowing horns. Now a series of wild shouts broke forth from the dense mass of people before a newspaper bulletin board. Now came sullen groans, hisses, and catcalls, or all together with cheers as the returns swung in another direction. Not even baseball could call out such a crowd as this. Lights blazed everywhere. Automobiles honked and ground their gears. The lobster palaces were thronged. Police were everywhere. People with horns and bells and all manner of noise−making devices pushed up one side of the thoroughfares and down the other. Hungrily, ravenously they were feeding on the meagre bulletins of news.

Yet back of all the noise and human energy I could only think of the silent, systematic gathering and editing of the news. High up in the League headquarters, when we returned, a corps of clerks was tabulating returns, comparing official and semi−official reports. As first the state swung one way, then another, our hopes rose and fell. Miss Ashton seemed cold and ill at ease, while Travis looked more worried and paid less attention to the returns than would have seemed natural. She avoided him and he seemed to hesitate to seek her out.

Would the up−state returns, I had wondered at first, be large enough to overcome the hostile city vote? I was amazed now to see how strongly the city was turning to Travis.

"McLoughlin has kept his word," ejaculated Kennedy as district after district showed that the Boss's pluralities were being seriously cut into.

"His word? What do you mean?" we asked almost together.

"I mean that he has kept his word given to me at a conference which Mr. Jameson saw but did not hear. I told him I would publish the whole thing, not caring whom or where or when it hit if he did not let up on Travis. I advised him to read his Revised Statutes again about money in elections, and I ended up with the threat, 'There will be no dough day, McLoughlin, or this will be prosecuted to the limit.' There was no dough day. You see the effect in the returns."

"But how did you do it?" I asked, not comprehending. "The faked photographs did not move him, that I could see."

The words, "faked photographs", caused Miss Ashton to glance up quickly. I saw that Kennedy had not told her or any one yet, until the Boss had made good. He had simply arranged one of his little dramas.

"Shall I tell, Miss Ashton?" he asked, adding. "Before I complete my part of the compact and blot out the whole affair?"

"I have no right to say no," she answered tremulously, but with a look of happiness that I had not seen since our first introduction.

Kennedy laid down a print on a table. It was the pinhole photograph, a little blurry, but quite convincing. On a desk in the picture was a pile of bills. McLoughlin was shoving them away from him toward Bennett. A man who was facing forward in the picture was talking earnestly to some one who did not appear. I felt intuitively, even before Kennedy said so, that the person was Miss Ashton herself as she stuck the needle into the wall. The man was Cadwalader Brown.

"Travis," demanded Kennedy, "bring the account books of your campaign. I want the miscellaneous account particularly."

The books were brought, and he continued, turning the leaves, "It seemed to me to show a shortage of nearly twenty thousand dollars the other day. Why, it has been made up. How was that, Bennett?"

Bennett was speechless. "I will tell you," Craig proceeded inexorably. "Bennett, you embezzled that money for your business. Rather than be found out, you went to Billy McLoughlin and offered to sell out the Reform campaign for money to replace it. With the aid of the crook, Hanford, McLoughlin's tool, you worked out the scheme to extort money from Travis by forged photographs. You knew enough about Travis's house and library to frame up a robbery one night when you were staying there with him. It was inside work, I found, at a glance. Travis, I am sorry to have to tell you that your confidence was misplaced. It was Bennett who robbed you−−and worse.

"But Cadwalader Brown, always close to his creature, Billy McLoughlin, heard of it. To him it presented another idea. To him it offered a chance to overthrow a political enemy and a hated rival for Miss Ashton's hand. Perhaps into the bargain it would disgust her with politics, disillusion her, and shake her faith in what he believed to be some of her 'radical' notions. All could be gained at one blow. They say that a check−book knows no politics, but Bennett has learned some, I venture to say, and to save his reputation he will pay back what he has tried to graft."

Travis could scarcely believe it yet. "How did you get your first hint?" he gasped.

Kennedy was digging into the wall with a bill file at the place where he had buried the little vulcanized disc. I had already guessed that it was a dictograph, though I could not tell how it was used or who used it. There it was, set squarely in the plaster. There also were the wires running under the carpet. As he lifted the rug under Miss Ashton's desk there also lay the huge circles of wire. That was all.

At this moment Miss Ashton stepped forward.

"Last Friday," she said in a low tone, "I wore a belt which concealed a coil of wire about my waist. From a wire ran under my coat, connecting with a small dry battery in a pocket. Over my head I had an arrangement such as the telephone girls wear with a receiver at one ear connected with the battery. No one saw it, for I wore a large hat which completely hid it. If any one had known, and there were plenty of eyes watching, the whole thing would have fallen through. I could walk around; no one could suspect anything; but when I stood or sat at my desk I

could hear everything that was said in Mr. Bennett's office."

"By induction," explained Kennedy. "The impulses set up in the concealed dictograph set up currents in the coils of wire concealed under the carpet. They were wirelessly duplicated by induction in the coil about Miss Ashton's waist and so affected the receiver under her very becoming hat. Tell the rest, Miss Ashton."

"I heard the deal arranged with this Hanford," she added, almost as if she were confessing something, "but not understanding it as Mr. Kennedy did, I very hastily condemned Mr. Travis. I heard talk of putting back twenty thousand into the campaign accounts, of five thousand given to Hanford for his photographic work, and of the way Mr. Travis was to be defeated whether he paid or not. I heard them say that one condition was that I should carry the purchase money. I heard much that must have confirmed Mr. Kennedy's suspicion in one way, and my own in an opposite way, which I know now was wrong. And then Cadwalader Brown in the studio taunted me cynically and−−and it cut me, for he seemed right. I hope that Mr. Travis will forgive me for thinking that Mr. Bennett's treachery was his−−−−"

A terrific cheer broke out among the clerks in the outer office. A boy rushed in with a still unblotted report. Kennedy seized it and read: "McLoughlin concedes the city by a small majority to Travis, fifteen election districts estimated. This clinches the Reform League victory in the state."

I turned to Travis. He was paying no attention except to the pretty apology of Margaret Ashton.

Kennedy drew me to the door. "We might as well concede Miss Ashton to Travis," he said, adding gaily, "by induction of an arm about the waist. Let's go out and watch the crowd."