

hip—and a Bowie knife, singularly inoffensive in appearance, was thrust through her girdle. The Burglar looked curiously a moment, then smiled.

"How did you know me?" he asked.
"By your chin," she replied. "You can never hide yourself behind a mask that doesn't cover that."

The Burglar touched his chin with one gloved hand.

"I forgot that," he remarked ruefully. "Hadin't you seen me?"

"No."
The Girl drew nearer and laid one hand lightly on his arm; her voice dropped mysteriously.

"Is everything ready?" she asked.
"Oh, yes," he assured her quickly. His voice, too, was lowered cautiously.

"Did you come in the auto?"
"Yes."

"And the casket?"
For an instant the Burglar hesitated.

"The casket?" he repeated.
"Certainly, the casket. Did you get it all right?"

The Burglar looked at her with a new, businesslike expression on his lips. The Girl returned his steady gaze for an instant, then her eyes dropped. A faint colour glowed in her white chin. The Burglar suddenly laughed admiringly.

"Yes, I got it," he said.
She took a deep breath quickly, and her white hands fluttered a little.

"We will have to go in a few minutes, won't we?" she asked uneasily.

"I suppose so," he replied.
"Certainly before unmasking time," she said, "because—because I think there is some one here who knows or suspects, that—"

"Suspects what?" demanded the Burglar.

"S-h-h-h!" warned the Girl, and she laid a finger on her lips. "Not so loud. Some one might hear. Here are some people coming now that I'm afraid of. They know me. Meet me in the conservatory in five minutes. I don't want them to see me talking to you."

She moved away quickly, and the Burglar looked after her with admiration and some impalpable quality other than that in his eyes. He was turning away toward the conservatory when he ran into the arms of an oversized man humpily clad in the dress of a courtier. The lumpy individual stood back and sized him up.

"Say, young fellow, that's a swell rig you got there," he remarked.

The Burglar glanced at him in polite astonishment—perhaps it was the tone of the remark.

"Glad you like it," he said coldly, and passed on.

As he waited in the conservatory the amusement died out of his eyes, and his lips were drawn into a straight, sharp line. He had seen the lumpy individual speak to another man, indicating generally the direction of the conservatory as he did so. After a moment the Girl returned in deep agitation.

"We must go now—at once," she whispered hurriedly. "They suspect us. I know it—I know it!"

"I'm afraid so," said the Burglar grimly. "That's why that detective spoke to me."

"Detective?" gasped the Girl.
"Yes, a detective disguised as a gentleman."

"Oh, if they are watching us, what shall we do?"

The Burglar glanced out, and seeing the man to whom the lumpy individual had spoken coming toward the conservatory, turned suddenly to the Girl.

"Do you really want to go with me?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied eagerly.
"You are making no mistake?"

"No, Dick, no!" she said again. "But if we are caught—"

"Do as I say and we won't be caught," declared the Burglar. His tone was sharp, commanding. "You go on alone toward the front door. Pass out as if to get a breath of fresh air. I'll follow in a minute. Watch for me. This detective is getting too curious for comfort. Outside we'll take the first auto and run for it."

He thoughtfully whirled the barrel of his revolver in his fingers as he stared out into the ballroom. The Girl clung to him helplessly a moment; her hand trembled on his arm.

"I'm frightened," she confessed. "Oh, Dick, if—"

"Don't lose your nerve," he commanded. "If you do, we'll both be caught. Go on now, and do as I say. I'll come—but it is possible that I shall come in a hurry. Watch for me."

For just a moment more the Girl clung to his arm.

"Oh, Dick, you darling!" she whispered. Then, turning, she left him there.

From the door of the conservatory the Burglar watched the splendid, lithe figure as she threaded her way through the crowd. Finally she passed beyond his view, and he sauntered carelessly toward the door. Once he glanced back. The lumpy individual was following slowly. Then he saw a liveried servant approach the lust and whisper to him excitedly.

"This is my cue to move," the Burglar told himself grimly.

Still watching, he saw the servant point directly at him. The host, with a sudden gesture, tore off his mask, and the Burglar accelerated his pace.
"Stop that man!" called the host.

For one brief instant there was the dead silence which follows general astonishment—and the Burglar ran for the door. Several pairs of hands reached out from the crowd toward him.

"There he goes—there!" exclaimed the Burglar excitedly. "That man ahead! I'll catch him!"

The ruse opened the way, and he went

came a pistol-shot from behind, followed instantly by another.

The car sped on.

III.

Stuyvesant Randolph, millionaire, owner of Seven Oaks, and host of the masked ball, was able to tell the police only what had happened, and not the manner or its happening. Briefly, this was that a thief, cunningly disguised as a Burglar, with dark lantern and revolver in hand, had surreptitiously attempted the masked ball by entering at the front door and presenting an invitation card. And when Mr. Randolph got this far in his story even he couldn't keep his face straight.

The sum total of everyone's knowledge, therefore, was this:

Soon after the grand march a servant entered the smoking-room and found the Burglar there alone, standing beside an open window, looking out. This smoking-room connected, by a corridor, with a small dining-room where the Randolph gold plate was kept in ostentatious seclusion. As the servant entered the smoking-room the Burglar turned away

then into the dining-room, dropped the gold plate into a sack, and threw the sack out of a window. It was beautifully simple. Just what the Girl had to do with it wasn't very clear; perhaps a score or more articles of jewellery which had been reported missing by guests, engaged her attention.

It was also easy to see how the Burglar and the Girl had been able to shake off pursuit by the police in two other automobiles. The car they had chosen was admittedly the fastest of the scores there, the night was pitch dark, and, besides, a Burglar like that was liable to do anything. Two shots had been fired at him by the lumpy courtier, who was really Detective Cunningham, but they had only spurred him on.

These things were easy to understand. But the identity of the pair was a different and more difficult proposition, and there remained the task of yanking them out of obscurity. This fell to the lot of Detective Mallory, who represented the Supreme Police Intelligence of the Metropolitan District, happily combining a No. 11 shoe and a No. 10 hat. He was a cautious, suspicious, far-seeing man—as police detectives go. For instance, it was he who explained the method of the theft with a lucidity that was astounding.

Detective Mallory and two or three of his satellites heard Mr. Randolph's story, then the statements of his two men who had attended the ball in costume, and the statements of the servants. After all this Mr. Mallory chewed his cigar and thought violently for several minutes. Mr. Randolph looked on expectantly; he didn't want to miss anything.

"As I understand it, Mr. Randolph," said the Supreme Police Intelligence at last, "each invitation card presented at the door by your guests bore the name of the person to whom it was issued?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Randolph.

"Ah!" exclaimed the detective shrewdly. "Then we have a clue."

"Where are those cards, Curtis?" asked Mr. Randolph of the servant who had received them at the door.

"I didn't know they were of further value, sir, and they were thrown away—into the furnace."

Mr. Mallory was crest-fallen.
"Did you notice if the card presented at the door by the Burglar at the evening of the masked ball at Seven Oaks bore a name?" he asked. He liked to be explicit like that.

"Yes, sir, I noticed it particularly, because the gentleman was dressed so queerly."

"Do you remember the name?"

"No, sir."

"Would you remember if you saw it or heard it again?"

The servant looked at Mr. Randolph helplessly.

"I don't think I would, sir," he answered.

"And the Girl? Did you notice the card she gave you?"

"I don't remember her at all, sir. Many of the ladies wore wraps when they came in, and her costume would not have been noticeable if she had on a wrap."

The Supreme Intelligence was thoughtful for another few minutes. At last he turned to Mr. Randolph again.

"You are certain there was only one man at that ball dressed as a Burglar?" he asked.

"Yes, thank Heaven," replied Mr. Randolph fervently. "If there'd been another one they might have taken the piano."

The Supreme Intelligence frowned.

"And this girl was dressed like a Western Girl?" he asked.

"Yes. A sort of Spirit of the West costume."

"And no other woman there wore such a dress?"

"No," responded Mr. Randolph.

"Now, Mr. Randolph, how any invitations were issued for the ball?"

"Three or four hundred. It's a big house," Mr. Randolph apologised, "and we tried to do the thing properly."

"How many persons do you suppose actually attended the ball?"

"Oh, I don't know. Three hundred, perhaps."

Detective Mallory thought again.

"It's unquestionably the work of two bold and clever professional crooks," he said at last judicially, and his satellites hung on his words eagerly. "It has every earmark of it. They perhaps planned the thing weeks before, and forged invitation cards, or perhaps stole them—perhaps stole them."



"Was it a pistol shot?" Hatch went on calmly.

through. The Girl was waiting at the foot of the steps.

"They're coming!" he panted as he dragged her along. "Climb in that last car on the end there!"

Without a word the girl ran to the auto and clambered into the front seat. Several men dashed out of the house. Wonderingly her eyes followed the vague figure of the Burglar as he sped along in the shadow of a wall. He paused beneath a window, picked up something and raced for the car.

"Stop him!" came a cry.

The Burglar flung his burden, which fell at the Girl's feet with a clatter, and leaped. The auto swayed as he landed beside her. With a quick twist of the wheel he headed out.

"Hurry, Dick, they're coming!" gasped the Girl.

The motor beneath them whirred and panted, and the car began to move.

"Halt, or I'll fire!" came another cry.

"Down!" commanded the Burglar.

His hand fell on the Girl's shoulder heavily, and he dragged her below the level of the seat. Then, bending low over the wheel, he gave the car half power. It leaped out into the road in the path of its own light, just as there

from the window and went out into the ballroom. He did not carry a bundle; he did not appear to be excited.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later the servant discovered that eleven plates of the gold service, valued roughly at \$15,000, were missing. He informed Mr. Randolph. The information, naturally enough, did not elevate the host's enjoyment of the ball, and he did things hastily.

Meanwhile—that is, between the time when the Burglar left the smoking-room and the time when he passed out the front door—the Burglar had talked earnestly with a masked Girl of the West. It was established that, when she left him in the conservatory, she went out the front door. There she was joined by the Burglar, and then came their sensational flight in the automobile—a forty-horse-power car that moved like the wind. The automobile in which the Burglar had gone to Seven Oaks was left behind; thus far it had not been claimed.

The identity of the Burglar and the Girl made the mystery. It was easy to conjecture—that's what the police said—how the Burglar got away with the gold plate. He went into the smoking-room,