

“Medick is dead!”

Jackson Barrett crashed through John Buchanan’s dressing room door, waving the Cognac bottle they kept for opening nights and bankable reviews.

Buchanan was blacking his face for tonight’s *Othello*—his Moor, opposite Barrett’s Iago. He tossed his greasepaint stick with a jubilant, “Best news we’ve had in a year!”

Nothing personal against Medick. That workman-like actor had struck it rich playing the dual title roles in the old Mansfield–Sullivan dramatization of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. But his sudden death left the gold mine up for grabs, and they had a scheme to grab it with an all-new,

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modernized *Jekyll and Hyde* that would clean up on Broadway and launch the richest cross-country tour since *Ben-Hur*.

They banged glasses and thundered toasts.

“Barrett and Buchanan . . .”

“Present . . .”

“*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!*”

The brandy barely wet their lips. They worked too hard managing the Barrett & Buchanan Theater Company to be drinking men, and their temperate habits kept them ruggedly youthful. Tall and broad-shouldered—“Lofty of stature,” in the words of the *New York Sun* critic pinned above Buchanan’s mirror—they bounded onstage like athletes a decade younger than their forties. Jackson Barrett was fair, John Buchanan, his near twin, was slightly darker, his hair more sandy than Barrett’s golden locks. Both shimmered with the glow of stardom, and their intense blue eyes famously pierced women’s hearts in the back row of the highest balcony. The ladies’ husbands rated Jackson Barrett and John Buchanan as hearty men’s men—fellows they could trust.

“I’ve been thinking . . .” said Barrett.

“Never a good sign,” said Buchanan.

“What do you say we switch our roles back and forth—keep ’em guessing who’s who. First night, I’m Jekyll, and—”

“Next night, you’re Hyde. Sells tickets, and might even keep you from getting stale.”

“Sells even more if we can talk Isabella Cook back on the stage.”

“Rufus Oppenheim will never allow her.”

Isabella Cook’s husband held the controlling interest in the

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Theatrical Syndicate, a booking trust with an iron-claw grip on seven hundred top theaters around the country. You could not tour first class without Rufus Oppenheim's syndicate, and you paid through the nose for the privilege.

"Why did the most beautiful actress on Broadway marry the spitting image of a bald bear smoking a cigar?"

"Money."

"She would never go with us even if Oppenheim let her," said Buchanan. "There's no *Jekyll and Hyde* role big enough for the 'Great and Beloved Isabella.'"

"Actually," said Barrett, "I've been tinkering with the manuscript."

"How?" Buchanan asked sharply, not pleased.

"I wrote a new role for Miss Great and Beloved—the beautiful heiress Gabriella Utterson—which makes her central to the plot. Gabriella sets her cap for our handsome young Jekyll. The audience sees the evil Hyde through her eyes and *fears* for her."

Buchanan understood immediately. His partner had gone off half cocked, per usual, but rewriting Robert Louis Stevenson's stuffed-shirt narrator into a beautiful leading lady was a crack-erjacks scheme.

"Any other changes I should know about?"

"Added some biff-bang stuff," said Barrett.

"Like what?"

"An airplane."

"*Airplane?* What will an airplane cost?" They had warred over money since they opened their first theater down on 29th Street.

Barrett said, "Stage manager at the Casino says they're closing

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He Came from Milwaukee. They'll practically *give* us their bi-plane if we pay for removing it from the theater. Meantime, you better bone up on your swordplay. We'll give them a duel they'll never forget."

"An airplane makes the play too modern for sword fights."

"The transformation potion makes Dr. Jekyll hallucinate. Jekyll and Hyde fight a Dream Duel."

"Jekyll and Hyde onstage together?"

"Brilliant, isn't it?" said Barrett. "Good and evil battle for each other's soul."

"Any more biff-bang?"

"Mr. Hyde escapes a howling Times Square mob on the subway."

"*Jekyll and Hyde* is set in London."

"London's old hat. I moved it to New York. Jekyll lives in a skyscraper."

Buchanan worried that erecting, striking, and transporting stage sets for a subway train would cost a fortune. Except a New York subway was not a bad idea if you subscribed to the Weber & Fields theory that audiences were more apt to respond in familiar, "realistic" settings. It worked for laughs. Could they put it across for melodrama?

"We'll cut down the subway for the tour."

"Don't patronize me with your cutting-down!" Barrett shot back.

"We'll be carrying sixty people on the road," Buchanan answered coldly, and they exploded into a red-faced, clenched-jaw shouting match.

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“Melodrama is whipsawed! Why else are we attempting bloody *Othello*?”

“Cutting down *saves* money so we can *make* money.”

“Movies are driving us out of the theaters, and theater audiences are nuts for vaudeville.”

“Your free spending will kill us.”

“Damn the expense! We’re dead without spectacle.”

Their stage manager stuck his head in the door with a finger to his lips.

“Angels,” he whispered.

“Thank you, Mr. Young. Send them in.”

The partners manufactured warm smiles for their investors.

Joe and Jeff Deaver, almost as tall as Barrett and Buchanan and considerably heavier than in their college football days, were heirs to their mother’s locomotive factories and their father’s love of showgirls. Deckerd out in capes and top hats, twirling canes, and trailing the scent of the perfumed blondes they’d parked in the hall, they could finance *Jekyll and Hyde* with a stroke of a pen.

“Your timing is exquisite!” boomed Barrett.

“I’ll say. We just got invited to back *Alias Jimmy Valentine*. Broadway and a tour. They’ve got Vietor from England to play Valentine. And Lockwood to play Doyle. We’re going to clean up.”

“Not so fast,” said Barrett.

“Why?”

“Opportunity has arisen closer to home,” Buchanan explained. “Poor Medick is dead.”

Jeff, the brains of the duo, asked, “Is your *Jekyll* ready?”

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Barrett nodded, arousing Buchanan's suspicion that his partner's "tinkering" had included private negotiation with the money-men. "We are ready to go."

"Do you have Isabella Cook?"

"We'll find a way."

"If you get Miss Cook on board, we say the heck with *Jimmy Valentine*," said Joe. "Don't we, Jeff? Vietor wants too much dough just 'cause he's English. And Lockwood's always getting chorus girls in trouble."

"Wait a minute," Jeff said. "Medick's young. What killed him?"

"They say he fell from a fire escape. Fourth floor."

"That's crazy. The man was terrified of heights. We had him in our *Black Crook*. Remember, Joe? They couldn't get him near the orchestra pit."

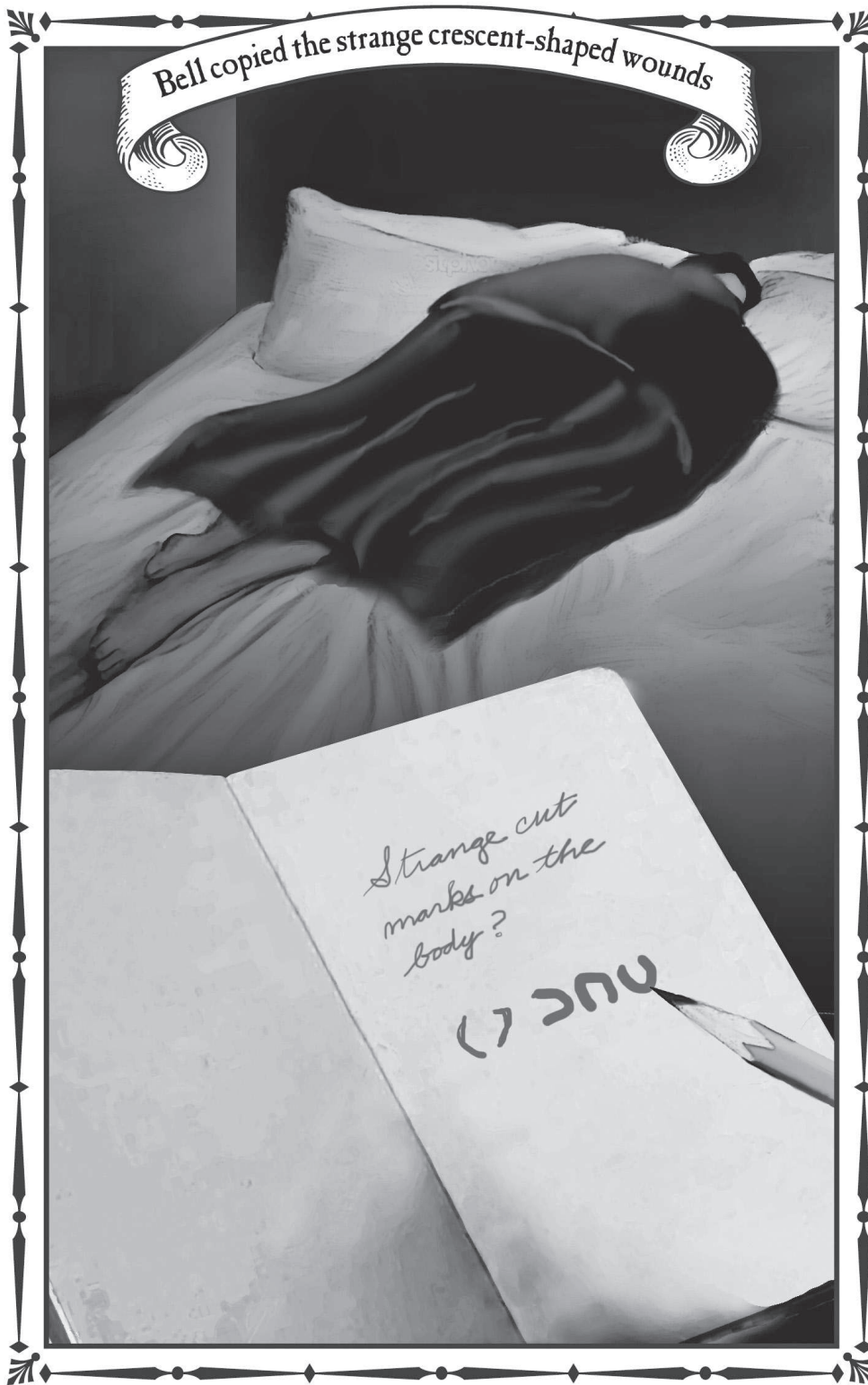
"Something's fishy. What was he doing on a fire escape?"

"Exiting a lady's back door," said Jackson Barrett, "pursued by a husband."

ACT ONE

SPRING 1911 (SIX MONTHS LATER)





Bell copied the strange crescent-shaped wounds

Strange cut
marks on the
body?

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On the second floor of New York's finest hotel, the Knickerbocker, at the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street, the Van Dorn Detective Agency's Chief Investigator sized up a new client through the reception room spy hole. The Research Department had provided a snapshot dossier of a "stiff-necked, full-of-himself Waterbury Brass King worth fifty million."

Isaac Bell reckoned they had their facts straight.

William Lathrop Pape looked newly rich. A broad-bellied man in his early fifties, he stood rock-still, gloved hands clamping a gold-headed cane. His suit and shoes were English, his hat Italian. He boasted a heavy watch chain thick enough to moor a steam yacht, and his cold gaze bored through the front desk man as if the young detective were a piece of furniture.

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Research had not discovered why the industrialist needed private detectives, but whatever William Lathrop Pape's troubles, he had pulled numerous wires for a personal introduction to Joseph Van Dorn, the founder of the agency. As Van Dorn was three thousand miles away in San Francisco, it had fallen to Isaac Bell to extend the favor requested by an old friend of the Boss.

"O.K. Bring him in."

The apprentice hovering at Bell's elbow raced off.

Bell stepped behind Van Dorn's desk, cleared candlestick telephones and a graphophone diaphragm out of his way, and laid down his notebook and fountain pen. He was tall and about thirty years of age, built lean and hard, with thick golden hair, a proud mustache, and probing blue eyes. On this warm spring day, he wore a tailor-made white linen suit. The hat he had tossed on Van Dorn's rack was white, too, with a broad brim and a low crown. His made-to-order boots were calfskin, well worn and well cared for. He looked like he might smile easily, but a no-nonsense gaze and a panther's grace promised anything but a smile were he provoked.

The apprentice delivered Pape.

Isaac Bell offered his hand and invited him to sit.

Pape spoke before the apprentice was out the door. "I was informed that Van Dorn would make every effort to be here."

"Sincere as Mr. Van Dorn's efforts were, they could not free him from previous obligations in San Francisco. I am his Chief Investigator. What can the Van Dorn Detective Agency do for you?"

"It's imperative that I locate a person who disappeared."

Bell picked up his pen. "Tell me about the person."

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William Lathrop Pape stared, silent for so long that Bell wondered if he had not heard. “The person’s name?” he asked.

“Pape! Anna Genevieve Pape,” said Pape, and fell silent again.

“A member of your family?” Bell prompted. “Your wife?”

“Of course not.”

“Then who?”

“My daughter, for pity’s sake. My wife wouldn’t . . .” His voice trailed off.

Bell asked, “How old is your daughter, Mr. Pape?”

“Eighteen.”

“When did you last see Anna?”

“At breakfast on February twenty-seventh.”

“Did she often go away for long periods of time?”

“Of course not. She lives at home, and will until she marries.”

“Is she engaged?”

“I told you, she’s only just turned eighteen.”

Isaac Bell asked a question that he was reasonably sure he already knew the answer to. “When did you report that the girl was missing?”

“I’m doing that right now.”

“But today is March twenty-fourth, Mr. Pape. Why have you waited so long to raise the alarm?”

“What does it matter?”

“It is the first question the police will ask when they get wind we’re looking.”

“I do not want the police involved.”

The tall detective had a steady, baritone voice. He used it to speak soothingly as if explaining a disappointment to a child.

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“Police involve themselves when the facts of a case indicate the possibility of foul play.”

“She’s an innocent girl. There’s no question of foul play.”

“Policemen suspect the worst. Why did you wait so long to raise the alarm if Anna’s disappearance was unusual?”

Pape gripped his stick harder. “I suspected that she ran away to New York.”

“What did she want in New York?”

“To become an actress.”

Isaac Bell hid a smile. The situation was immensely clearer.

“May I ask why you have come to the Van Dorn Agency at this juncture?”

“She should have come home with her tail between her legs after a couple of weeks.”

“Are you concerned for her safety?”

“Of course.”

“But you still waited another week after those ‘couple of weeks’?”

“I kept waiting for Anna to come to her senses. Her mother has persuaded me that we cannot wait any longer . . . Listen here, Bell, she was always a levelheaded child. Since she was a little girl. Eyes wide open. She’s no flibbertigibbet.”

“Then you can comfort your wife with the thought that a girl with Anna’s qualities stands a good chance of a successful career in the theater.”

Pape stiffened. “She would disgrace my family.”

“Disgrace?”

“This sort of behavior attracts the newspapers. Waterbury is not New York, Mr. Bell. It’s not a fast city. My family will never

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live it down if the papers get wind of a well-born Pape on the stage.”

Bell’s manner cooled. “I will have a Van Dorn detective familiar with the theater districts work up the case. Good afternoon, Mr. Pape.”

“Hold on!”

“What?”

“I demand you personally conduct the search if Van Dorn can’t.”

“The agency parcels out assignments according to their degree of criminality. Mr. Van Dorn and I specialize in murderers, gangsters, bank robbers, and kidnapers.”

At the moment, he was supervising investigations into train robbers derailing express cars in the Midwest, bank robbers crisscrossing state lines in autos, Italian gangs terrorizing the New York docks, a Chicago jewel thief cracking the safes of tycoons’ mistresses, and blackmailers victimizing passengers on ocean liners.

“A temporarily missing young lady is not the line I’m in. Or are you suggesting she was kidnapped?”

Pape blinked. Obviously accustomed to employees obeying his orders and his whims, the industrialist looked suddenly at sixes and sevens. “No, of course not. I checked at the station. She bought a train ticket to New York— Bell, you don’t understand.”

“I do understand, sir. I was not much older than Anna when I went against my own father’s wishes and became a detective rather than follow him into the banking business.”

“Banking? What bank?”

“American States.”

“You made a mistake,” said Pape. “An American States banker faces a lot more lucrative future than a private detective. Take my advice: you’re a young fellow, young enough to change. Get out of this gumshoe business and ask your father to persuade his boss to offer you a job.”

“He is the boss,” said Bell. “It’s his bank.”

“American States. *American Stat— Bell?* Is your father Ebenezer Bell?”

“I mention him to assure you that I understand that Anna wants something different,” said Bell. “Your daughter and I have disappointed fathers in common— Now, by any chance have you brought a photograph?”

Pape drew an envelope from an inside pocket and gave Bell a Kodak snapped out of doors of children in a summer camp theatrical performance. Anna was a cherubic, expressive, fair-haired girl. Whether she was levelheaded did not show—perhaps a tribute, Bell thought with another hidden smile, to her thespian talent.

“Shakespeare,” said Pape.

Bell nodded, engrossed in memories the picture brought forth. “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*”

“How did you know?”

“They made me play Oberon when I grew too tall for Puck— Anna’s a pretty girl. How old was she here?”

Pape muttered something Bell couldn’t understand. “What was that, sir?” He looked up from the photograph.

The Brass King had tears in his eyes. “What if I’m wrong?” he whispered.

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“How do you mean?”

“What if something terrible happened to her?”

“Young women come to the city every day,” Bell answered gently. “They eventually find something they want or they go home. But, in either event, the vast, vast majority survive, enriched, even happy. I would not start worrying needlessly. We’ll find your daughter.”

Eighteen-year-old Anna Waterbury read *Variety* aloud to Lucy Balant, her roommate in Mrs. Shine's Boarding House for Actors. They had pooled nickels to buy the show business magazine and—like a sign from Heaven, thought Anna—*Variety* headlined the new *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* tour about to cross the country on Barrett & Buchanan's private train.

“Jackson Barrett and John Buchanan—matinee idols who ignite melodrama like dreadnoughts on a rampage—will trade title roles as they did on Broadway. The chief interest centers around the struggle between the good and evil halves of the same man. Isabella Cook portrays the innocent love interest tormented by Hyde. Miss Cook returns to the stage after two years' retirement, during which she was married and widowed by the late

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Theatrical Syndicate chief, Rufus S. Oppenheim, who drowned when his yacht exploded.”

Anna whispered, “Can I tell you a secret?”

Lucy was reading the Wanted ads over her shoulder. “Look! ‘Wanted for Permanent Stock. General businesswoman. Must be tall, young, experienced, and have good wardrobe. Join at once. Sobriety, wardrobe, and ability essential. Long season. Money, sure—’How tall is ‘tall?’”

Anna said, “It’s a secret.”

“What?”

“You have to promise never, ever tell anyone.”

“O.K., I promise.”

“There’s a man who’s going to coach me to read for a role in a big hit.”

“Is he a teacher?”

“No! Much better. He’s a *producer*. A *Broadway* producer who knows someone in a big hit.”

Anna’s friend looked skeptical, or possibly envious. “Did he take you to Rector’s?”

“Rector’s? No!”

“*Anna!* A sport should at least treat a girl to a Beef Wellington. I mean, what does he want for ‘coaching’?— Why are you laughing?”

“Because three weeks ago I wouldn’t have known what ‘a Beef Wellington’ meant.”

Anna Waterbury had learned so much so fast since coming to New York, Beef Wellington was the least of it. “I am,” she said, “the only graduate in the history of St. Margaret’s School for Girls who knows to ask whether a road offer includes train fare.”

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Not to mention who supplied costumes. And to dodge theatrical managers who got the artist, coming and going, by appointing themselves her agent. And to never, ever take a job with the circus. Not that anyone had offered her any job in anything, yet.

“Welcome to Broadway,” Lucy fired back. She was jumpy, waiting to hear if she got the understudy part in *Alias Jimmy Valentine*, a big sensation based on an O. Henry story, which was sending a road company to Philadelphia. They had both tried out for it, but only Lucy had been called back for a second reading.

“No,” said Anna. “He’s not like that. He’s a sweet old thing.”

“How old?”

“I don’t know—old as my father. He limps, on a cane. Besides, he’s married. He wears a ring. He doesn’t hide it. He’s full of wonderful advice.”

“Like what?”

“Give the star the center of the stage and stay out of his way.”

“What’s his name?”

“I can’t tell you his name. He made me promise— Why? Because the cast would resent me if they knew he got me the part.”

“What big hit?”

Anna dropped her voice even lower, and she looked around, though who else could fit in their tiny room? “This!” She waved *Variety*. “The spring tour for *Jekyll and Hyde*! I can hardly believe my luck.”

There was a brisk knock at the door, and their landlady flung it open with an unusually warm smile. “Lucy Balant, you have a visitor.”

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Bouncing up and down beside Mrs. Shine, cap in hand, was a callboy from Wallack's Theatre. "Stage manager says to pack your bag!"

Lucy was out the door in minutes. "Good luck, Anna. Don't worry. It'll be your turn next."

Anna went to the narrow window and craned her neck to watch Lucy trotting alongside the callboy. She had a strong feeling that it really would be her turn next. What would she do if the nice old gentleman asked her to dine at Rector's? She knew in her heart that she did not have to answer that because he wouldn't. He really did want to help her. Although maybe after she got the part, he might ask her there to celebrate. Fair enough. As long as he brought his wife.

ALL CLOTHES WASHED GOOD AS NEW
THEATRE COSTUME OUR SPECIAL

Isaac Bell hurried out of the Chinese laundry.

A broad-shouldered hard case in an overcoat and derby blocked the sidewalk.

“Care to tell me why the Chief Investigator of a private detective agency, with field offices in every city worth the name, and foreign outposts in London, Paris, and Berlin, is personally sleuthing for one missing young lady?”

“I wondered when you’d show, Mike. Your plainclothes boys were pretending not to watch me exiting Hammerstein’s stage door.”

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“I train them to dislike surprises.”

Captain “Honest Mike” Coligney commanded the New York Police Department’s Tenderloin station house. His precinct included much of the Theater District and the hotel and boarding-house neighborhoods where actors lived. Bell had worked closely with him years ago on the Gangster case, but operating on the same side of the law at sharply different angles made them competitors as much as allies. The policeman danced an elaborate ballet with the politicians who bossed New York City. The private detective was beholden to none. Coligney had six thousand cops backing him up, Bell had the Van Dorn Agency’s ironclad guarantee: “We never give up! Never!”

“Haven’t seen you in a while,” said Coligney. “Where you been?”

“Out west.”

“What brought you back?”

Bell gave him a copy of Anna’s picture. Now that the captain had the police “involved,” as Pape had put it, he intended to recruit extra eyes.

“Sweet-looking kid,” Coligney said. “A hopeful actress explains why your sidekick Archie Abbott is hanging out in the theatricals’ saloons. The blue-blooded Mr. Archibald Abbott IV having been a thespian before you brought him into the agency.”

Bell remained reticent.

The captain probed drily, “It might even explain why Harry Warren’s Gang Squad is knocking on rooming house doors, though I’m not sure how far detectives disguised as gangsters will get with rooming house landladies. But it still doesn’t explain why *you* are gumshoeing personally—is the lassie’s father a big wheel?”

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“Not a Rockefeller or Judge Congdon, but big enough. Truth is, I had a couple of light days and felt sorry for the poor devil. He’s self-important and self-admiring—the richest man in the Brass City—but Anna is his only child, and it became clear to me that he loves her dearly.”

“Any luck?”

“Not a lot. I found a stage manager who sort of remembers hearing her read for a role. Archie found a callboy who told her ‘no parts.’ Harry found a landlady who thought she’d been looking for a room, three or four weeks ago. That would fit the time she left home, but if the name she gave was hers, she changed it for the stage.”

“So did Lillian Russell.”

“This one’s become ‘Anna Waterbury.’”

“Homesick.”

Bell and Abbott had made the rounds of dance and music schools, and the cheap eateries patronized by young actors starting out and older ones on the way down, and Bell was now finishing up low-cost laundries in the theater neighborhood. They had shown Anna’s photograph to landladies, young actors and actresses, and stage door tenders; a few thought they recognized her. In a tiny dressing room crammed with chorus girls at the Broadway Music Hall, Bell had found one who recognized her picture and recalled the name Anna Waterbury. So he was reasonably sure she was in New York, but still had no clue where.

“Hospitals?” asked Coligney.

“No Papes, no Waterburys.”

“Morgue?”

“Any unidentified young women I should know about?” Bell

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replied, doubting there were. He was neither especially concerned about young Anna's safety nor surprised he hadn't located her yet. New York was a huge city, and there were thousands of jobs for actresses in the vaudeville and dramatic theaters, in musicals and burlesque, and the road shows they spawned.

"None as of an hour ago," said Coligney. "Good to see you again, Isaac. Congratulations, by the way. I heard you finally persuaded Marion Morgan to marry you."

"Thank you. If there's a luckier man on the planet, I haven't met him."

"Lord knows what she sees in you."

"She's funny that way," Bell grinned back, and they shook hands good-bye.

"Say hello to Joe Van Dorn."

"Can I tell him you'll lend a hand?"

The captain nodded. "I'll pin up Anna's picture and have my sergeants mention her at roll call."

Two days later, running out of options and growing concerned, Isaac Bell mounted the front steps of a brick mansion on a dimly lighted cross street in the Tenderloin. The doorman stood six-four and weighed two-fifty. "Good evening, sir. It seems years since we've had the honor."

"Good evening, Skinner. Would you tell Mr. Sayers I want to see him?"

The doorman whispered into a voice tube.

Nick Sayers, handsome proprietor of the Grove Mansion

bordello—known as the “Ritz of the Tenderloin”—kept him waiting ten minutes. He was dressed in evening clothes and reeked of top-shelf cologne.

“Mr. Bell. Dare I ask? Business-business or pleasure-business?”

“Advice, Nick. In your office.”

Sayers led him up the grand staircase and into his richly appointed office. He sat at his desk and offered Bell a chair. Bell took notice of a glass display cabinet filled with remarkably specific pornographic ceramic figurines. Sayers beamed proudly. “I’ve become a collector. Turns out, not every Staffordshire potter produces statues of spaniels—what sort of advice?”

“Who recruits girls at Grand Central Terminal?”

“Not the Grove Mansion.”

“I am aware that you don’t lure them personally, Nick. Who does it for you? Who ambushes pretty country girls when they step off the train? Who promises a cushy life?”

“Mr. Bell, I’ve really never felt the need to recruit. Young ladies come to the Grove Mansion as volunteers.”

“Nick.”

“Why don’t I parade my girls by you? You can see with your own eyes that they could work in any house in New York. They work here because they want to.”

“Nick. The Van Dorn Detective Agency was not founded yesterday. Cheap pimps hunt poor farm daughters who can only afford steamers and trolleys at ferry piers and trolley stops. High class resorts like your ‘Ritz of the Tenderloin’ troll Pennsylvania Station and Grand Central for the class of girls who can purchase a railroad ticket to run away from home. I am looking for one particular well-off girl. I know she came by train. I know she

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arrived at Grand Central because she journeyed from Connecticut. I want to know who to interview at Grand Central. And I am running out of patience.”

“Patience?” Sayers got indignant. “Isaac! You helped me, a long time ago, and I helped you. I call us even steven.”

“*Isaac* instead of *Mr. Bell*? Sounds like you’re paying off ever-bigger friends at Tammany Hall.”

“It would pay *you* to remember how to get along in this town. How dare you barge into my house, making threats?”

“Threats?”

Isaac Bell stood up, draped a big hand on the glass cabinet, tipped it forward, and slammed it down to the floor, shattering glass and smashing ceramics.

Sayers gasped in disbelief. “Do you know what those cost?”

“That was not a threat,” said Bell. “Who is snagging girls at Grand Central?”

Sayers reached for his voice tube.

Bell said, “If you call Skinner, you’ll need a new doorman. That’s not a threat, either.”

The bordello procurer at Grand Central ran his operation from Nyren’s, a fancy station shop that sold French perfume, kid gloves, and silk scarves. Exquisitely dressed and barbered, he had the kindly, twinkly-eyed manner of an unmarried uncle. “May I help you, sir? Something for a young lady friend, perhaps?”

“I don’t have a young lady friend.”

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Nyren delivered an indulgent wink. “Well, until you get one, why not something nice for your wife?”

“What I want,” said Isaac Bell, “is a private conversation in your back room with each of your young gents who waylay girls off the trains and steer them in here.”

The twinkle hardened with an edge like limelight. “I don’t know what you are talking about. If you haven’t come to make a purchase, please leave my shop.”

“But first I want to talk to you, Mr. Nyren. I’m looking for this girl.”

He held out Anna’s picture.

Nyren pretended to study it. “I still don’t know what you are talking about, but I never met this girl.” Then, in an act that made the tall detective believe him, he dropped his mask long enough to leer, “I can assure you I never forget a pretty face.”

“I will watch your shop for you while you round up your young gents. One at a time.”

“I will call a policeman.”

“I will, too,” said Bell, “and it won’t be one of the New York Central rail dicks you paid off. It will be his boss.”

“Who the hell are you?”

“A friend of the young lady’s family. Get them in here—now!”

Three swaggered into the shop, one at a time as Bell ordered. They were young, well dressed, and it was not hard to imagine a frightened girl falling for their polished manners and charming smiles. Bell greeted each politely. “I’m not here to put you out of business. I’m looking for one particular young lady and I would appreciate your help. My appreciation will take the form of a monetary reward.”

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“How much?”

“One hundred dollars,” said Bell. The figure, two months’ earnings for a day laborer, captured their attention. “Have you seen this girl?”

Two shook their heads. The third said, “I remember her.”

“When did you see her?”

“Let me think . . . Month ago. Maybe five weeks.”

The time was right, and Bell asked, “Did you speak?”

“Tried to. She wasn’t buying any.”

“What happened?”

“She just brushed past like I wasn’t there and kept going.”

“Did one of the other boys accost her?”

“No. Only me.”

“How do you know?”

“I followed her out on the street.”

“Did you really? Which way did she go?”

“Across 42nd.”

“West?”

“Yes.”

“How far did you follow her?”

“Fifth Avenue.”

“Why’d you stop?”

“She was walking like she knew where she was going. Or knew what she wanted. So I figured, this is not a girl I could convert.”

Bell remained silent, and the brothel recruiter added, “Want to hear something funny?”

“What’s that?”

“I saw her a few weeks later—last week.”

“Where?”

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“Over on Broadway. She was strolling with an old swell. You tell me what she’s about.”

“What did he look like?”

“Old.”

“Stooped over? Bent?”

“No. Tall guy like you.”

“What color was his hair?”

“Gray.”

“Beard?”

“No, just a mustache.”

“What color were his eyes?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t that close. Say, maybe I could go now? Maybe you could give me a piece of that hundred?”

“Maybe I could,” said Isaac Bell. “You called him a swell. What was he wearing?”

“Homburg and a cape. Looked like he walked straight out of the operetta. Even had a gold-headed cane.”

“Frock coat under the cape?”

“No. More like a pinchback.”

“Pinchback?” Bell asked. “A bit up-to-date for an operetta.”

“I thought so, too. Maybe the young lady took him shopping.”

Bell passed him a one-hundred-dollar bill. “Here you go. Take a week off, give some poor girl a break.”

“If I don’t get her, some other guy will.”

Four men followed Isaac Bell from Grand Central and paced him on the other side of 44th Street. Snappy dressers—present-

THE CUTTHROAT

able for the neighborhood, if somewhat flashy in two-tone shoes—they might have been out-of-town buyers just off the train, or junior advertising men, except for their socks. The modern breed of Gopher street gangster favored yellow hose. They were still there when he crossed Fifth Avenue. A traffic cop shot them a look, but he had his hands full sorting carriages from motor trucks.

Bell did not expect them to make their move on the block between Fifth and Sixth. Shared by garages and carriage houses, the Yale, New York Yacht, and Harvard clubs, and the Iroquois and Algonquin hotels, there were too many people. At Sixth Avenue, he crossed quickly under the El and stopped suddenly in the shadows of the overhead train trestle with his back to a stanchion.