

"No strap ever made those. Those were made by a man's fingers. Buckman was throttled by a pair of mighty strong hands."

Steve looked obstinate. "But he was hanging!" he argued.

"When he was dead, the murderer slung him up with his own belt. I expect he remembered the notion of suicide would come in convenient to give him a start any how, so he went to the typewriter and printed out those words. It was a right cute trick and it came wonderful near serving its turn." Joe paused.

Steve raised an altered face. "It's a cinch, I'm afraid," he admitted. "And a darned mean thing for me. The Company'll fire me over this."

"When did you last see Buckman alive?" inquired Joe.

"At midnight. Just before we passed Silent Water Siding."

"Was he alone?"

"He was then; Mrs. Buckman had gone to bed. But he'd been talking to a fellow 'bout half an hour before, that — man with a beard, I don't know his name."

"He's still on the cars; we have n't stopped since."

"Sure!"

"Then he can wait while I . . ."

November was not destined to say more just then. The door behind us was wrenched open and Mrs. Buckman stood in the opening. At her shoulder I could see the peering faces of the women who had been attending her.

"I tell you he was murdered, murdered!" she cried as she darted forward. "This talk of suicide is folly. He would never have killed himself! Never!"

SHE was frantic with grief; but the terror had left her face. She had only one thought now — to avenge her husband. And, indeed, she made a tragic figure — a slight woman, no longer young, held up by sheer will against the shock of the hideous blow fate had dealt her.

"Poor dear! Poor dear! She don't know what she's saying," murmured one of the women.

"Be silent! I do know! I tell you that my husband has been murdered. Won't any of you believe me?"

She wrung her hands, wrenching her fingers together. "Won't any of you believe me?"

November stepped forward. "I do, ma'am," he said. "I've been looking . . ."

She made an effort to master herself. "Tell me what you have seen. Don't spare me! He's dead, and all that is left to do is to find who killed him! It was murder! You know that!"

"There's plenty signs of it," said Joe, gently. "And I was just going to look around some more; but perhaps you might care to answer me a few questions first?"

"Ask me anything! But, Oh, send away those people!"

Joe glanced at Steve. "Lock the door and don't let anything be touched or disturbed." With that he led Mrs. Buckman into the farther compartment away from the sight of the poor shape upon the bunk.

"Just what brought you and Mr. Buckman here?" asked November. "Where were you going? Where have you come from? And what are your suspicions? The whole story, whatever you can think of; nothing is too trifling."

In terse, rapid sentences, Mrs. Buckman gave us the following facts:

"You have probably heard the name of Buckman before. Most people have. My husband was one of the greatest and most trusted oil experts in the

States. He had large holdings in the Giant Oil Company. About a fortnight ago, a situation developed that made it necessary for him to leave New York and come down to the Tiger Lily Oilfield. The Giant Company were thinking of buying it, or rather of buying a controlling interest in it. Before doing so, they wanted a first-hand opinion, and it was suggested that my husband should travel down to look into the matter."

She glanced at November's intent face and went on:

PERHAPS you know that this line runs close to the Tiger Lily Eastern section, so we had our private car attached. That was on Thursday, a week ago. We had the car run on to a siding, and since then my husband has been hard at work. He finished the day before yesterday; but as there was no express earlier than the evening we waited for it, and just before dark our car was linked on to this train. We dined together, and after dinner a man named Knowles, who was on the train, sent in to ask my husband to see him. My husband was much annoyed, for it appeared that Knowles had been manager of a large retail depot from which he had been dismissed for some carelessness. However my husband made it a rule to give personal in-



As the stranger turned to go . . . Joe and the police trooper leaped upon him

terviews whenever he could and he ordered Knowles to be sent along. When he came I went away; but I saw he was a big, sour-looking man in shabby clothes.

"I came into this compartment and began to read. For a good while only the murmur of their talking reached me; then a voice was raised, and I caught some words distinctly: 'You won't put me back? Think! I have a wife and children!' It was Knowles speaking. 'It is impossible as you know. Giant Oil never reconsiders a decision,' said my husband. 'Then look out for yourself!' Knowles shouted, and I at once opened the door. I was terrified, the man looked so threatening and bitter; but the instant I appeared he whipped round and went out of the car."

"Did Mr. Buckman tell you anything more about him?"

"Not much," she answered with a sort of trembling breath; "for he was a little annoyed that I should have come in when I heard Knowles angry. But that was soon forgotten and we sat talking for about an hour. At ten, as I was feeling tired, I said I would go to bed. My husband told me he had work to do which would keep him another couple of hours, and he would sleep in here so as not to disturb me."

"Do you know what work it was?"

"Yes; it was his report on the Tiger Lily Oilfield."

"The report that was to decide whether the Giant

Company would buy the Tiger Lily field or not?"

She made a movement of assent.

"I suppose it would have been worth a great deal to certain people if they could have found out the nature of that report?" said Joe.

"My husband told me that any one who could get knowledge of it in time could make a fortune."

"Can you tell me just how?"

"My husband explained that to me one day while we were down at the Tiger Lily. A month ago the shares of the Tiger Lily stood at eight dollars; but when rumors got about that the Giant Company meant to buy it, they rose to twelve dollars, which is about the price they stand at today. My husband said that if his report were favorable the shares would jump to twenty dollars or even thirty dollars, but that if it were unfavorable, they would of course sink very low indeed."

"I understand."

Mrs. Buckman went on: "Even I knew nothing of his decision being for or against the purchase. He never told me business secrets, for fear I should inadvertently let slip some information. I have no idea what line his report was to take."

"Was it not rather strange that Mr. Buckman should delay writing the report to the last moment?"

"In his life, my husband had had to deal with so many secrets of great commercial value, that secrecy had become second nature with him; and it was one of his invariable rules never to put anything into writing until the last possible moment."

"There's reason in that," said Joe. "And now, did you hear anything after you went to bed?"

"I heard my husband working on the typewriter until I fell asleep. When I awoke I fancied I heard him moving about, and I called to him to go to bed. He did not answer and as all was quiet, I fell asleep again. If I had only got up then, I might have saved him!" She hid her face in her hands, but after a minute mastered her emotion. "The next time, I started up in a fright and turned on the light. It was long past three. I snatched at my wrapper and rushed into the next compartment. You know what I saw."

"One more question, ma'am, and then I'll trouble you no more.

Have you any feeling as to who could have done this?" asked Joe, after a short silence.

"I don't know what to say. . . . Knowles looked a desperate man. I heard his threat. . . . But who are you and why . . .?"

STEVE, who had hung in the doorway while this conversation was going on, now interposed to explain Joe; but she hardly seemed to heed. Before he had said more than a few words, she put both her hands on November's arm.

"Remember, I'll spend the last cent I possess, if you will only find that man! . . . What are you going to do first?"

"I must examine the car. I have n't had time yet to do that thoroughly," said Joe. "But wait a minute. Look through his bag and see if the report of the Tiger Lily is in it."

It was not to be found. Steve took Mrs. Buckman away, and Joe and I remained in the car. November set about the examination in his peculiar swift yet minute way. The carpet, the chairs, the table, the walls — all underwent inspection. He stood by the uncovered window for some time. He turned about the pens and paper on the table; he pored over the sheet in the typewriter on which the words were printed. At the end, the only tangible result in my eyes was a collection of three matches, of which two were wooden and one of wax, three cigar stumps and a little heap of fragments of mud. His re-