

THE SLEEPING GERM

By
Broughton
Brandenburg

OUT of the side street entrance of the great John Stoneyman's Fifth Avenue mansion a burly little man dashed, throwing on his fur overcoat as he bounded into his limousine car standing at the curb.

"Around the park, Jenks, till I tell you to stop. Shove her along like blazes, I have got to think, I have got to think."

Thoroughly familiar with the matchless promoter's habit of laying his plans for huge crowds while riding at breakneck speed through the night, the faithful Jenks swung the machine across into the park and set the engine jumping.

His senses engulfed, so that they did not bother him, Christopher Cripps, dimly conscious of the streaking lights and bulky blurs of trees and of the roaring, jolting, thumping car, wrestled with the problem of his life. His was the master mind that long since had perceived that man must have and use certain things, that by intercepting these things and adding a handling price to the cost price of them, a flood of millions, unfailing and gracious, could be turned into the treasury of the interceptor, also, that the best way to intercept was to monopolize the sources of supply, dam up the channels of distribution, and, under a republic, an form of government, paralyze the defensive functions of the government. Then, having made what vulgar people would call a "rapacious trust," sit back and let the machine run and calculate the dividends.

He had shown the great captains of industry how to do it. When they tried to get along without him, they slipped a cog somewhere. Now, for three years these captains, one and all, had been restive; they had confessed to themselves that they had monopolized all the necessities of life, and, robbed of their amusement, had turned to the distribution of their enormous surplus of wealth as a diversion. Some had financed beautiful and hopeful actresses in theaters of their own; some had endowed schools and colleges; others had given money to science and art millions with which to play for the amusement of the donors.

Stoneyman had founded an institute of scientific research and a result of this had just bowled Cripps over.

That evening he had gone to Stoneyman's house sad, dull, and pensive, to talk over with his great patron the good old days when life was worth living—when there still were necessities of life not yet cornered, and when there still was enough spirit in the public so that it raised a sufficient protest to make the game worth while.

They had had their chat, and it was getting late, when Dr. Simian Bendable of the Stoneyman Institute was announced.

"Poor fellow," said Stoneyman, smiling indulgently at Cripps across the jasper smoking table. "He does something he thinks is wonderful once in a while, he and his understrapper scientists, and he thinks he must come and tell me about it. I pretend a little enthusiasm to please the doctor—he's a good sort—though, of course, I don't know what he is talking about most of the time."

With narrow, pin point eyes, Cripps surveyed the eminent scientist, as he shook the thin, white, chemical stained hand. But the enthusiast had not uttered 10 words before Cripps' eyes began to expand and soften, and before Doctor Bendable had told his story the orbs of vision of the promoter were the great, sunken, wide, dreaming, imaginative things that his associates knew and feared. They were the shaded windows of a giant mind in travail. The promoter was evolving a tremendous work of interception.

This, in a few words, is what he had heard.

Some months before, in studying the germs of the African sleeping sickness, Doctor Bendable had discovered—in line with the theory that all conditions of man are but the reflexes of germ action—that sleep, physical restlessness, cataplexy, yawns, and other symptoms of the periodical assertion, by colonies of beneficent germs, of their presence in the human makeup. He had succeeded in isolating and identifying the sleep germs and in fact had created artificial colonies of them—on the good doctor's private laboratory shelves he had six jars filled with the germs, and these had evolved a shape 15 diameters greater than normal. He had found that, wherever an electric current traveled, the germs would, as if they were a part of it, be carried along, and that to make sure that insomnia and similar disturbed conditions were merely a sort of "strike" in the sleep germ colonies, Doctor Bendable had spent months of time experimenting and at last he had discovered that the premise was false, the theory deceptive. The sleep germ had its enemies in another germ, the germs of wakefulness—a most dangerous thing—and now at last he had discovered this toxic opposition to the sleep germ. Doctor Bendable had come, therefore, to Stoneyman, restless, bad dreams, nightmares, and delirium tremens.

That was the moment when Christopher Cripps, who had been waiting for Bendable's good night, and had hurried from the house.

Now as he crouched in the leather cushions, he breathed to himself in tense whisper:

"Fool that I have been. Sleep is a necessity of life. Sleep we must have. They can't boycott it, they can't go on any vegetable diet, or do anything to beat it. They must have it, and Bendable has got control of the secret of wakefulness and the secret of pounding your ear. Why, oh, why, then, I never thought of it before! How many times have I listed them—from beef to toothache drops. The nearest we have ever come to monopolizing sleep was in controlling the places where people sleep. Oh, what a fool I have been! It's been under my nose ever since I was a baby, and I never saw it before tonight. But now I see it. He! he! Even old Stoneyman never guessed it, but Bendable is his man! I've got to build this necessity into a trust for Stoneyman. Now, how—that is the question—how, how?"

"Did you call me just then, sir?" called back his chauffeur.

"No, Jenks, no. Can't you go a little faster?"

The problem dazzled and evaded him. Bendable could make a man awake, or he could let him sleep. Stoneyman owned Bendable's brains, but even the American public might not like patenting a protecting, monopolizing, advertising and selling sleep tablets, one or more of which would allow a night's sleep.

How to make them pay to sleep of nights?

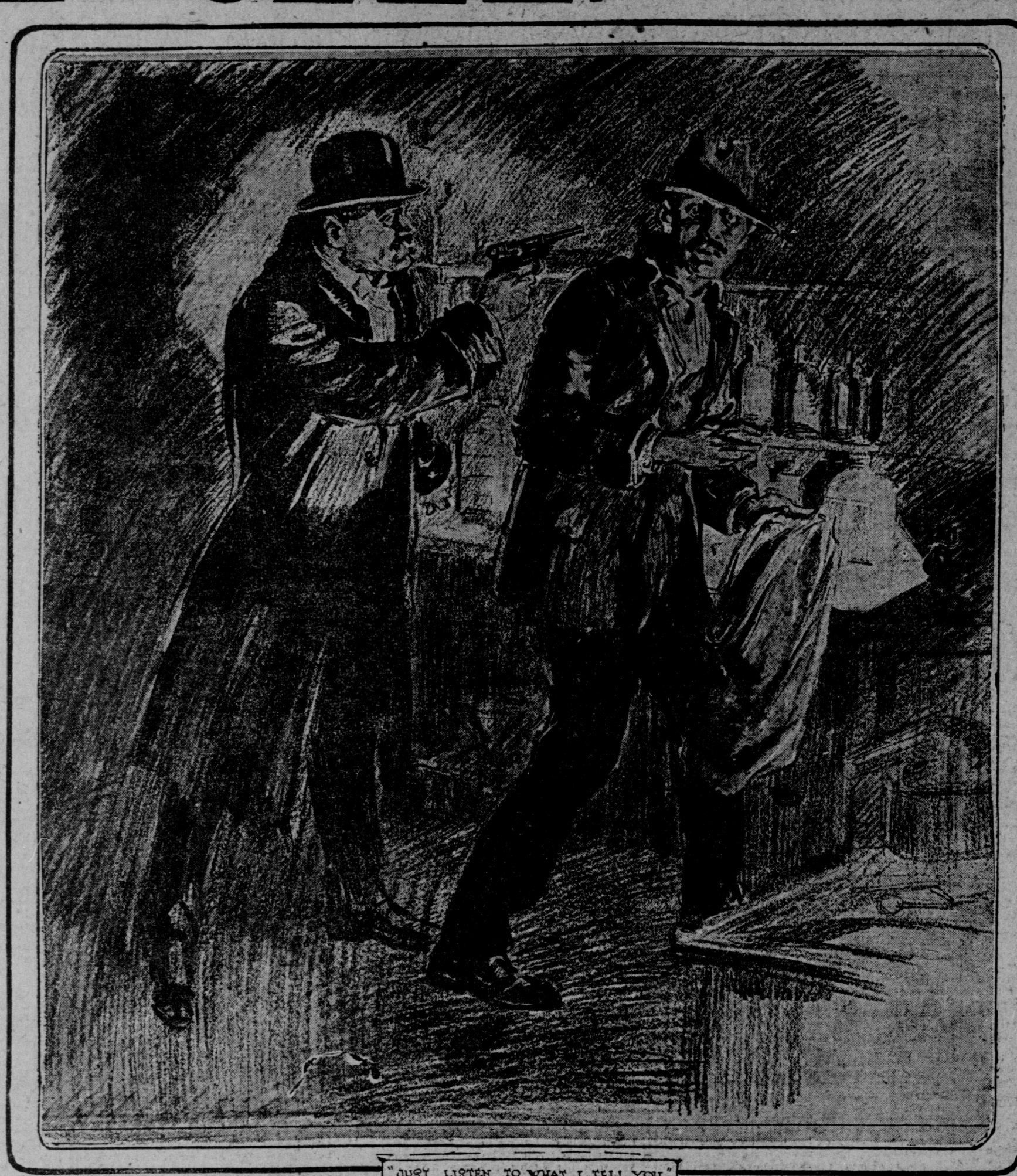
How to keep them awake if they wouldn't pay?

Round and round the park the car sped. Dawn was showing in the east, and the only thing that had broken the tour was when Cripps had stopped at the Plaza and sent nine telegrams to nine of Stoneyman's greatest associates to meet him in Stoneyman's office in lower Broadway in three days' time. By this time the unfortunate Jenks was numb and exhausted and he was pleased when Cripps tapped him on the shoulder and said, in his natural, mild voice:

"All right, Jenks, home now."

The plan was ready.

It suddenly occurred to Cripps that he was riding through the street on which Bendable lived, and as he turned to look out of the window he caught a flashing view of a lighted window in



"JUST LISTEN TO WHAT I TELL YOU," SAID CRIPPS QUIETLY.

the long, low laboratory building down the side street. Maybe Bendable was awake. An excellent chance for a talk with him.

"Drop me here, Jenks; take the car home and get to bed," said Cripps, and in a moment more, when the car had slowed and swung back, the matchless promoter stepped out on the curb before the laboratory side door. He was about to ring, when he noticed that the light he had seen in the window burned no longer. Peering in, he saw a flash travel along the casement—the dash of a lantern!

Softly Cripps tried the door.

It was open. It had been forced!

Shifting his Luger pistol from under his arm, where it hung in its silken holster, he held it ready in his overcoat side pocket and entered with the tread of a cat. Down the hall and up the steps he passed, then turned into an open door at the landing. The light from the street illuminated the place silently for an instant. Cripps saw the arrangement of the interior—rows of glass and nickel-steel cases with aisles between and furnaces at the farther end. Skulking in the shadow of the cases Cripps made his way to the center of the room. If this were a common burglary he could cover the man and call the police. If this were a strategic burglary, well—he, but not the public, must know about it.

Was Bendable's secret out?

Was there a rival in the field, so soon?

He had gathered that not even Bendable's assistants knew the full significance of the researches.

Was Bendable mistaken?

The character of the intruder was soon made plain. As he stepped into the room he had reached was a dark figure. It moved. There was another slow ray from the dark lantern, and where a glance reflected, the burglar, for an instant, Cripps saw the coarse features and dull, heavy lines of the face of a human beast of prey of the lower order. He drew out his pistol, and, as he did, the burglar, who had been watching him curiously as he went carefully from article to article, seeking something convertible into ready cash through the "fence" or the melting pot.

The burglar stopped before a glass shelf on the wall.

Cripps' heart stirred within him as he saw the dark lantern's circle illuminate six heavy bottles with ground glass stoppers, one small one with a red label, and one small one with a blue label.

The bottles of the germs of sleep, the bottle of the germs of wakefulness, the bottle of the antitoxin!

Under the shelf, in its ordered place, hung the usual book with its file sheets of notes. What Cripps knew contained all that Doctor Bendable knew about the matter. He knew Bendable well enough to know that if notes and results both were taken, Bendable would be lost; and not only that, but any other scientist could do what Bendable might do with these things placed in his hands. Cripps almost choked with the thought that gripped him. He could do without Stoneyman, and without Stoneyman's associates. He alone could rule the world or keep it awake till it was insane.

The burglar was sorrowfully placing some small silver objects in a big burlap bag he carried, for it was a poor crib he had cracked. He was going to hurt you! Just listen to what I tell you," said Cripps quietly, shoving the muzzle of the Luger under the burglar's ear, where the feel and sight of the cold steel barrel would convince the man he was not being held up with a shoe horn.

When the burglar's hands were duly

elevated and he was trembling properly, Cripps continued with icy clearness:

"Take all this blamed truck you want to. I want you to take something for me in that bag of yours. I will give you \$1,000 if you will do just what I tell you and then forget it. Will you do it?"

"Surest thing you know," answered the burglar after a slight hesitation.

This pausing may have been due to fright, slow thought or a mental quibble over some point of professional ethics. It is hardly likely, though, that he realized that he was dealing with a modern promoter.

"All right! See those bottles in front of you? Hand me the two little ones. That's right. I can carry them this way in my coat. Now hand me that book hanging there. All right. Stop your shaking. Don't you dare look around. It does not matter to you what I look like. Now put those bottles carefully, one by one, in that bag."

"All right; put them in the empty one."

Tensely Cripps watched the burglar's obedience to his commands, and when the bags were ready, he continued: "Now, leave your dark lantern where it is. Walk straight ahead to the door, down the steps, and out to the street. Go over to Madison Avenue and walk down to the granite entrance and check the bag with the bottles in it, in the parcel room. This thing I am slipping in your side pocket is a \$1,000 bill. I am going to walk behind you with my gun in my overcoat pocket pointing at you and I tell you flat, if you make one false move I will drill you to full of holes that you will look like a bird cage."

Steadily and in order from the little procession took up his march—down the street, over to Madison Avenue, and down toward Forty-second street, very innocent as to appearance in the growing daylight to the eyes of all passing. The burglar, who had been watching him curiously as he went carefully from article to article, seeking something convertible into ready cash through the "fence" or the melting pot.

He was on the back end of a Madison Avenue car about Forty-seventh street chatting with the conductor.

"Gee, will you look at that!" he exclaimed. "Stubby Connors strolls home wide two dry loads of goods. The novie of 'Iml Watch me nail 'im.'"

He swung from the car and came back on the run.

The burglar heard the heavy, familiar footfalls, glanced around enough to see that his conjectures were correct and before Cripps realized what had happened, the two men, burglar and detective, were speeding down the street in advance of him.

Christopher Cripps thought, as he ran, that the increasing throngs of the city's toilers bound to work presented an added danger with each individual, and that some one might see him and recognize him engaged in a sensational chase that must lead to explanations. Each added person meant so much greater chance of discovery of what the burglar had in the bags. And oh, terrible thought! What if the detective should overhaul the feet footed marauder and the marauder should tell of the man who gave \$1,000 bills at the point of a gun! And then, if he should point him out as the man? Cripps stopped short, thanking his lucky stars that he had realized his danger in time.

But the bottles! the bottles!

They were getting out of his hands and into the hands of the police—the newspapers—the public! He must follow, he must claim them. He must bribe the police, he must lead to work presented a should overhaul the feet footed marauder and the marauder should tell of the man who gave \$1,000 bills at the point of a gun! And then, if he should point him out as the man? Cripps stopped short, thanking his lucky stars that he had realized his danger in time.

On the other hand, if the burglar saw him and pointed him out, the bottles in the pockets of his fur coat

would damn him. He had resumed his place in the tearing, plunging, yelling race and cry with the thought that he must follow the bottles, and now, with the realization of the incriminating evidence he carried, he whirled aside into the street—that of an employment agency.

A huge, fat Italian padrona sat by the door. Back in the gloom lay a swarm of immigrant laborers asleep on the floor awaiting early work train's departure. With one comprehensive glance Cripps saw these things—at least all that were obvious—and he paused and stared at the woman's wide but, shivering lip he gasped:

"Keep these! Hundred dollars!"

He was once more in the chase.

Full well Stubby Connors knew that the head of the police department, Full well Stubby Connors knew that his sole hope now lay in stopping the detective. Thrusting a hand into one of the bags, which he would have dropped had they not been strung around his turtle like neck, he drew the hand forth. There was a flash—a swirl, and over the detective's head, over the head of Christopher Cripps flew one of the massive bottles. Stubby Connors had gained the time the detective took in dodging.

Cripps heard the crash and splash of the bottle behind him and then strange cries, but on he sped. Another and then a third bottle, the last knocking the detective's hat from his head. He paused and stooped for it.

Cripps now caught up with the burglar and choked back, with an effort, the cry that rose to his lips—a cry imploring the burglar to throw away no more hundreds of millions of dollars.

The entrance of the subway was just ahead and, pausing to hurl yet another of the precious jars, which went howling into Forty-second street this time, as the pursuit made the turn, Stubby Connors darted down into the tube.

Quicker witted than either officer or fugitive, Cripps knew that the burglar was trapped, even though he boarded a train, for the dispatcher could stop it before the next station. Stubby Connors was as good as looked up and contenting to his jailer. Therefore, Christopher Cripps slowed down, followed leisurely gasping for breath, and got to the first landing of the subway stairs in time to be paralyzed with the events transpiring before him.

Down the platform between the trains rushed the burglar, but a guard slammed the door in his face quite as he would have done to an ordinary passenger. Whereupon Stubby Connors whirled and brought the fifth bottle crashing down on the head of the detective, and with a crash and splash there fell a shower of a greenish dust that scarcely seemed to reach the cement floor of the platform, before it rolled away in a spreading thin blue vapor, that appeared to increase into miraculous quantities in the fraction of a second. In one glance Cripps saw the burglar and the detective droop peacefully as if they were ordinary passengers rushing toward them on the platform reeled back in a wave and lay flat. A motor man just ready to start his train pitched forward with a prodigious yawn and was motionless.

The sleep germs! The gigantic sleep germs! Afloat in the air by the billions! The sleep germs!

"Run for your lives! Run for your lives!" cried an ashen faced man, clambering up out of the subway entrance. But thousands had been drawn to the chase and no one heeded the cries of Christopher Cripps.

If they had looked back! Up Forty-second street, where the last bottle Stubby Connors had thrown in the open air had smashed on a post, the thin,

almost imperceptible cloud was spreading. The eager, curious, running multitude met it—paused and pitched out their faces; sat down and then laid back; knelt down and then rolled over; fought to get away, while yawning with an overwhelming somnolence, or perchance leaned up against a wall or post and stayed there. A great four-horse wagon, piled with trunks, came sweeping out of Vanderbilt place. Suddenly the horses checked themselves, spread their legs wider and wider, rolled like drunken sailors, and dropped to rest. A motor man, turning his car into Madison Avenue, gave an enormous yawn, his head went back and he was about to crumple down on the front platform, but before he did so he whirled his controller, stopping the car in obedience to a duty he could not forget. As the passengers piled off they were met by the germ laden air, and at the front and back steps two great heaps of humanity gradually slid down to a level of composure, showed their heads, and then, as if they were from a fox terrier came down from the direction of Fifth Avenue. So great was her momentum that she rolled over and over she stopped, and the dog, answering the instinct to turn around, at least twice before going to sleep, threw himself into a series of amazing, whirling somersaults before he lit on his head in the gutter and stayed there.

Christopher Cripps was the one man running who had both speed and understanding. He alone had observed that the germ laden air did not blow about, that it did not rise, and that he might be able to make the door of the Hotel Belmont before he was overtaken. And he did so, but the porter that swung it wide for him laid down on the "welcome" mat and yawned but an instant before the full slumber seized him.

Without waiting, and no longer crying out warnings, Christopher Cripps rushed into the first elevator. "Take me up to the roof and stay there. To the roof, for heaven's sake, quick!"

Crouching in the corner, the bell boy on the elevator gazed at the man who wanted to commit suicide.

Cripps sprang at the lever, but his ignorant tug did not stir the car.

In the lobby there was wild excitement. A man with his eyes closed, his hands black with printers' ink, a fresh copy of the Sun in his pocket, came staggering in the door.

"Call up the Sun for me, quick, quick!" Evening Sun! Patrick McGuire, printer, aged 54, residing—residing—

Then he lurched into the manager's arms, and in a moment the manager reeled and the two dropped on the marble floor. The captain of the bellboys stooped to pick them up, and he, too, yawned, tried to rise, but sank back.

There might be some noise about motion pictures. Fortunately, the bell boy saw, also, and without further command he shot the car to the cupola.

Cripps sprang out by the wireless station.

"Can we break the cables to keep any one else from coming up?" he shouted at the boy.

"Better than that," said the boy, pulling a switch. "We can shut off the power."

Christopher Cripps sighed, felt of his wallet and checked book and was himself again.

From the edge of the roof the scene unfolded like the battle area did below the rocky brow of sea born Salamis.

Little zephyrs, that now swirled in all directions, took the germ laden air and near. Some who met it contrived to dash to some distance before they dropped, and wherever they passed they spread the infection of somnolence as powerfully as if one of the original bottles had been broken in that spot. Two or three blocks in either direction

the street—between and around the stalled cars, trucks, cabs, and automobiles—was black, with countless thousands at rest. In the distance other thousands, drawn by the evidence of excitement, came peering up to a confusion of confusion. Running in black swarms; and when they struck the sleep germs, they melted as if before machine gun fire. The people indoors, above the first floors were rarely enough to remain there. They rushed for the open air and stopped when they struck the street. The sleeping piles were largest before the main entrances of the hotels and apartment houses. Over in the New York Central yards, Cripps saw a train trying to make its way out. At the window the trailing voice of the bellboy at Cripps' elbow.

Bendable had said that electric currents carried the germs.

In half an hour the whole United States would be going to sleep!

The promoter dashed to the wireless room shouting:

"Quick, man, quick! Wire Chief Marley to bring up the connection with all trunk lines out of New York!"

Cripps heard the message crashing out, and then the distant clatter of gongs drew him again to the roof edge. Some one had pulled a grand alarm for the fire department, the ambulance corps, and the police patrols. From every direction they were approaching and the crowds that now were feeling from danger collided with those following the racing vehicles of succor.

On came the careering, clattering, careening chariots of the city's defense, but the horses tottered and fell one and all, and the men rolled from their perches or dropped to sleep where they sat or clung. From the east, four ambulances and pieces of fire apparatus came very close to the Grand Central station, as the germs had spread slowly in the direction of Third Avenue. One of the wagons had a corps of men with air tight oxygen masks, and the men were getting these ready as they came. The wireless man shouted that it had been discovered that the whole affair was the result of some subterranean gas that had broken from the bowels of the earth into the subway and that Mayor Jacoby and Police Commissioner Adamson were on the way to take command of the situation.

Cripps saw that, with the exception of three men, the helmeted firemen did not get their helmets on in time. Only three were able to advance. An idler struck him. When they were near, he let a shower of silver coins fall at their feet. The three looked up. In sign language he begged one of them to come up, and he waved two fists full of yellow backed money at them.

They consulted an instant and then one of them entered the center of the street, slow thought or a mental quibble or rather the apparent center of the catastrophe, seeking its source.

In a short space of time, the first fireman appeared on the roof.

"Great head, great head, Brother Fireman!" shouted Cripps. "I am the engineer of the subway. I know just where the leak is, it's in the gutter out this deadly gas. Give me a chance to save my reputation. Give me your helmet. Here is a thousand dollars. If you have got sense enough to know a good thing when you see it and take this bill and stay here. Is it a go?"

"I wish you would kinda point a gun at me or suthin'," said the fireman, and Cripps cowed him with his Luger and took the helmet.

It seemed that he would never reach the street. The stairways and hallways were interminable, but at last he dashed by the hodge-podge of guests and servants lying on the lobby floor, thrust in his pocket, and leaping over the manager, Patrick McGuire the printer, and the captain of the bellboys. There was a terrible roaring noise in the place, but it did not occur to Cripps just then that it was.

Out in the street he bounded, over human forms more thickly spread than at Gettysburg, and as he sped, each of the six gentlemen, each with something held to their noses and mouths coming on the run for the entrance across the street. He must get to the sixth floor, before the gas could reach it, but they had the nearer side, and seeking the source of the gas, were drawn to the spot from which the swirling clouds of odor rose.

He looked with horror at the sight of the blood on the face of Detective McPheney, who lay in a position that indicated awful distortion, though a second look would have shown that this was not the case. Police Commissioner Adamson bent over him, and forgetting for the moment to protect himself, tried to speak. With lifted brows he fought to open his eyes, but he never saw the glow against the fatal yawn. To no avail; wearily he leaned over the policeman and sank. Then the mayor, rushing to raise the head of the chief of police, tried to make two hands do the work of three, and he, too, clutching wildly at the air a moment, folded himself across the top of the commissioner, and McPheney from beneath the load groaned fitfully.

Chuckling at his fortune, Cripps now dared to come from behind a pillar and descend to the platform. He was again aware of the mighty yawn, and he saw him and suddenly he realized what it was—the thousands of people snoring in the otherwise silent subway and 100,000 snoring on the stricken streets above!

Picking his way over the strangely conglomerate masses, noting a stenographer who had been on her way to early morning powdery her nose in her dreams, seeing a gay old lad still in evening dress talking glibly to himself as he sat against a post and shuffling, Cripps then saw, where the yawned, he came to where Stubby Connors lay, one hand clutching the thousand dollar bill.

Cripps took it from the tightened fingers and thrust it inside the man's undershirt.

With gentle care Cripps lifted the sixth bottle from the burlap bag, still sound and unharmed, and thrust it into the inner pocket of his overcoat. The left hand holds free and hid the bottle.

"It is as well to be careful," he said. "There might be some noise from Philadelphia. In this bunch, who is almost immune, if not quite so."

He was just about to make his way out when, at the head of the stairs, appeared the two helmeted firemen and an important looking personage who had a rubber mask over his face. He was writing things on cards and giving them to the men.

As they came down he advanced toward Cripps, who saw something familiar in his outlines, and gave him this written message:

"I am Doctor Bendable of the Stoneyman Institute. I am the only man who understands this and can save any of these people. Carry out the older ones first and lay them in easy natural positions."

A cold chill crept down the spine of Christopher Cripps and then another one crept up. How many hundred thousand people had he and Stubby Connors murdered? How many faces among the populace from which the strange somnolence into which it had fallen. None of the scientists made any pretense of understanding it, though Doctor Bendable had given out a statement that he was seeking in a promising direction for the solution of the mystery. No one seemed to have suffered, but many appeared to have been refreshed, though thousands were stiff and sore from lying over window sills, on door steps and pavements for from 12 to 36 hours, and a few believed that they were in the arms of the way corners of the city some 50,000 people were still asleep.

When Stoneyman's secretary had rung Cripps' home three times in three times without answer, and the matchless promoter was an hour late at

Continued on Page

"California Women Who Think"

Maybe the book would tell how to use the antitoxin. He drew it out and turned the pages. It was written in chemical formulas, mazes of inexpressible figures, and in German, Latin, and English. Cripps, who had been in his pocket, and turned to the door, motioning to the firemen to carry Doctor Bendable in behind him.

The clatter of the rickety door awoke the sleeping firemen, and they, in their normal repose, beheld three frightful helmeted beings and a dead man and sought to defend herself. In her hands she held a small bottle. Two bottles of the antitoxin she held.

The bottle with the blue label sent the second fireman sprawling, as it flew true from her hand, the bottle with the red label, and the little of its contents fell like dew on the upper lip of the venerable Bendable, who had been dropped to the floor like a log.

His eyes opened and he sat up. A new vapor filled the place. The germs of wakefulness were rife in a strange land. Also, would not the paralysis of the metropolis, evidently complete this very minute, so overturn things that he could not properly construct his monopoly? Also, did it not seem to be thinking clearly. His head felt heavy and the things at which he looked seemed to have red edges on them.

"Excuse me, Mister Chief, I don't know your name, but I thought I would just tell you you have about come to the limit of the oxygen in the tank of the helmet."

One of the firemen was yelling to him, speaking through the glass of the helmet.

Already he felt it. The moment was almost at hand when he must uncover to the germs or must smother in the helmet.

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