

**FRANK
L. PACKARD**



**THE WHITE
MOLL**

Frank L. Packard

The White Moll

EAN 8596547329947

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



Table of Contents

I. NIGHT IN THE UNDERWORLD

II. SEVEN—THREE—NINE

III. ALIAS GYPSY NAN

IV. THE ADVENTURER

V. A SECOND VISITOR

VI. THE RENDEZVOUS

VII. FELLOW THIEVES

VIII. THE CODE MESSAGE

IX. ROOM NUMBER ELEVEN

X. ON THE BRINK

XI. SOME OF THE LESSER BREED

XII. CROOKS Vs. CROOKS

XIII. THE DOOR ACROSS THE HALL

XIV. THE LAME MAN

XV. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

XVI. THE SECRET PANEL

XVII. THE SILVER SPHINX

XVIII. THE OLD SHED

XIX. DREAD UPON THE WATERS

XX. A LONE HAND

XXI. THE RECKONING

It was the Adventurer who spoke first.

I. NIGHT IN THE UNDERWORLD

[Table of Contents](#)

It was like some shadowy pantomime: The dark mouth of an alleyway thrown into murky relief by the rays of a distant street lamp... the swift, forward leap of a skulking figure... a girl's form swaying and struggling in the man's embrace. Then, a pantomime no longer, there came a half threatening, half triumphant oath; and then the girl's voice, quiet, strangely contained, almost imperious:

“Now, give me back that purse, please. Instantly!” The man, already retreating into the alleyway, paused to fling back a jeering laugh.

“Say, youse've got yer nerve, ain't youse!”

The girl turned her head so that the rays of the street lamp, faint as they were, fell full upon her, disclosing a sweet, oval face, out of which the dark eyes gazed steadily at the man.

And suddenly the man leaned forward, staring for an instant, and then his hand went awkwardly to touch his cap.

“De White Moll!” he mumbled deferentially. He pulled the peak of his cap down over his eyes in a sort of shame-faced way, as though to avoid recognition, and, stepping nearer, returned the purse.

“‘Scuse me, miss,” he said uneasily. “I didn't know it was youse—honest to Gawd, I didn't! ‘Scuse me, miss. Good-night!”

For a moment the girl stood there motionless, looking down the alleyway after the retreating figure. From somewhere in the distance came the rumble of an elevated train. It drowned out the pound of the man's speeding footsteps; it died away itself—and now there was no other

sound. A pucker, strangely wistful, curiously perturbed, came and furrowed her forehead into little wrinkles, and then she turned and walked slowly on along the deserted street.

The White Moll! She shook her head a little. The attack had not unnerved her. Why should it? It was simply that the man had not recognized her at first in the darkness. The White Moll here at night in one of the loneliest, as well as one of the most vicious and abandoned, quarters of New York, was as safe and inviolate as—as—She shook her head again. Her mind did not instantly suggest a comparison that seemed wholly adequate. The pucker deepened, but the sensitive, delicately chiseled lips parted now in a smile. Well, she was safer here than anywhere else in the world, that was all.

It was the first time that anything like this had happened, and, for the very reason that it was unprecedented, it seemed to stir her memory now, and awaken a dormant train of thought. The White Moll! She remembered the first time she had ever been called by that name. It took her back almost three years, and since that time, here in this sordid realm of crime and misery, the name of Rhoda Gray, her own name, her actual identity, seemed to have become lost, obliterated in that of the White Moll. A “dip” had given it to her, and the underworld, quick and trenchant in its “monikers,” had instantly ratified it. There was not a crook or denizen of crimeland, probably, who did not know the White Moll; there was, probably, not one to-day who knew, or cared, that she was Rhoda Gray!

She went on, traversing block after block, entering a less deserted, though no less unsavory, neighborhood. Here, a saloon flung a sudden glow of yellow light athwart the sidewalk as its swinging doors jerked apart; and a form lurched out into the night; there, from a dance-hall came the rattle of a tinny piano, the squeak of a raspy violin, a high-

pitched, hectic burst of laughter; while, flanking the street on each side, like interjected inanimate blotches, rows of squalid tenements and cheap, tumble-down frame houses silhouetted themselves in broken, jagged points against the sky-line. And now and then a man spoke to her—his untrained fingers fumbling in clumsy homage at the brim of his hat.

How strange a thing memory was! How strange, too, the coincidences that sometimes roused it into activity! It was a man, a thief, just like the man to-night, who had first brought her here into this shadowland of crime. That was just before her father had died. Her father had been a mining engineer, and, though an American, had been for many years resident in South America as the representative of a large English concern. He had been in ill health for a year down there, when, acting on his physician's advice, he had come to New York for consultation, and she had accompanied him. They had taken a little flat, the engineer had placed himself in the hands of a famous specialist, and an operation had been decided upon. And then, a few days prior to the date set for the operation and before her father, who was still able to be about, had entered the hospital, the flat had been broken into during the early morning hours. The thief, obviously not counting on the engineer's wakefulness, had been caught red-handed. At first defiant, the man had finally broken down, and had told a miserable story. It was hackneyed possibly, the same story told by a thousand others as a last defense in the hope of inducing leniency through an appeal to pity, but somehow to her that night the story had rung true. Pete McGee, alias the Bussard, the man had said his name was. He couldn't get any work; there was the shadow of a long abode in Sing Sing that lay upon him as a curse—a job here to-day, his record discovered to-morrow, and the next day out on the street again. It was very old, very threadbare, that story;

there were even the sick wife, the hungry, unclothed children; but to her it had rung true. Her father had not placed the slightest faith in it, and but for her intervention the Bussard would have been incontinently consigned to the mercies of the police.

Her face softened suddenly now as she walked along. She remembered well that scene, when, at the end, she had written down the address the man had given her.

“Father is going to let you go, McGee, because I ask him to,” she had said. “And to-morrow morning I will go to this address, and if I find your story is true, as I believe it is, I will see what I can do for you.”

“It's true, miss, so help me God!” the man had answered brokenly. “Youse come an' see. I'll be dere-an'-an'-God bless youse, miss!”

And so they had let the man go free, and her father, with a whimsical, tolerant smile, had shaken his head at her. “You'll never find that address, Rhoda-or our friend the Bussard, either!”

But she had found both the Bussard and the address, and destitution and a squalor unspeakable. Pathetic still, but the vernacular of the underworld where men called their women by no more gracious names than “molls” and “skirts” no longer strange to her ears, there came to her again now the Bussard's words in which he had paid her tribute on that morning long ago, and with which he had introduced her to a shrunken form that lay upon a dirty cot in the barefloored room:

“Meet de moll I was tellin' youse about, Mag. She's white—all de way up. She's white, Mag; she's a white moll—take it from me.”

The White Moll!

The firm little chin came suddenly upward; but into the dark eyes unbidden came a sudden film and mist. Her

father's health had been too far undermined, and he had been unable to withstand the shock of the operation, and he had died in the hospital. There weren't any relatives, except distant ones on her mother's side, somewhere out in California, whom she had never seen. She and her father had been all in all to each other, chums, pals, comrades, since her mother's death many years ago. She had gone everywhere with him save when the demands of her education had necessarily kept them apart; she had hunted with him in South America, ridden with him in sections where civilization was still in the making, shared the crude, rough life of mining camps with him—and it had seemed as though her life, too, had gone out with his.

She brushed her hand hastily across her eyes. There hadn't been any friends either, apart from a few of her father's casual business acquaintances; no one else—except the Bussard. It was very strange! Her reward for that one friendly act had come in a manner little expected, and it had come very quickly. She had sought and found a genuine relief from her own sorrow in doing what she could to alleviate the misery in that squalid, one-room home. And then the sphere of her activities had broadened, slowly at first, not through any preconceived intention on her part, but naturally, and as almost an inevitable corollary consequent upon her relations with the Bussard and his ill-fortuned family.

The Bussard's circle of intimates was amongst those who lay outside the law, those who gambled for their livelihood by staking their wits, to win against the toils of the police; and so, more and more, she had come into close and intimate contact with the criminal element of New York, until to-day, throughout its length and breadth, she was known, and, she had reason to believe, was loved and trusted by every crook in the underworld. It was a strange eulogy, self-pronounced! But it was none the less true. Then, she had

been Rhoda Gray; now, even the Bussard, doubtless, had forgotten her name in the one with which he himself, at that queer baptismal font of crimeland, had christened her—the White Moll. It even went further than that. It embraced what might be called the entourage of the underworld, the police and the social workers with whom she inevitably came in contact. These, too, had long known her as the White Moll, and had come, since she had volunteered no further information, tacitly to accept her as such, and nothing more.

Again she shook her head. It wasn't altogether a normal life. She was only a woman, with all the aspirations of a woman, with all the yearning of youth for its measure of gayety and pleasure. True, she had not made a recluse of herself outside her work; but, equally, on the other hand, she had not made any intimate friends in her own station in life. She had never purposed continuing indefinitely the work she was doing, nor did she now; but, little by little, it had forced its claims upon her until those claims were not easy to ignore. Even though the circumstances in which her father had left her were barely more than sufficient for a modest little flat uptown, there was still always a little surplus, and that surplus counted in certain quarters for very much indeed. But it wasn't only that. The small amount of money that she was able to spend in that way had little to do with it. The bonds which linked her to the sordid surroundings that she had come to know so well were stronger far than that. There wasn't any money involved in this visit, for instance, that she was going now to make to Gypsy Nan. Gypsy Nan was...

Rhoda Gray had halted before the doorway of a small, hovel-like, two-story building that was jammed in between two tenements, which, relatively, in their own class, were even more disreputable than was the little frame house itself. A secondhand-clothes store occupied a portion of the ground floor, and housed the proprietor and his family as

well, permitting the rooms on the second floor to be “rented out”; the garret above was the abode of Gypsy Nan.

There was a separate entrance, apart from that into the secondhand-clothes store, and she pushed this door open and stepped forward into an absolutely black and musty-smelling hallway. By feeling with her hands along the wall she reached the stairs and began to make her way upward. She had found Gypsy Nan last night huddled in the lower doorway, and apparently in a condition that was very much the worse for wear. She had stopped and helped the woman upstairs to her garret, whereupon Gypsy Nan, in language far more fervent than elegant, had ordered her to begone, and had slammed the door in her face.

Rhoda Gray smiled a little wearily, as, on the second floor now, she groped her way to the rear, and began to mount a short, ladder-like flight of steps to the attic. Gypsy Nan's lack of cordiality did not absolve her, Rhoda Gray, from coming back to-night to see how the woman was—to crowd one more visit on her already over-expanded list. She had never had any personal knowledge of Gypsy Nan before, but, in a sense, the woman was no stranger to her. Gypsy Nan was a character known far and wide in the under-world as one possessing an insatiable and unquenchable thirst. As to who she was, or what she was, or where she got her money for the gin she bought, it was not in the ethics of the Bad Lands to inquire. She was just Gypsy Nan. So that she did not obtrude herself too obviously upon their notice, the police suffered her; so that she gave the underworld no reason for complaint, the underworld accepted her at face value as one of its own!

There was no hallway here at the head of the ladder-like stairs, just a sort of narrow platform in front of the attic door. Rhoda Gray, groping out with her hands again, felt for the door, and knocked softly upon it. There was no answer. She knocked again. Still receiving no reply, she tried the door,

found it unlocked, and, opening it, stood for an instant on the threshold. A lamp, almost empty, ill-trimmed and smoking badly, stood on a chair beside a cheap iron bed; it threw a dull, yellow glow about its immediate vicinity, and threw the remainder of the garret into deep, impenetrable shadows; but also it disclosed the motionless form of a woman on the bed.

Rhoda Gray's eyes darkened, as she closed the door behind her, and stepped quickly forward to the bedside. For a moment she stood looking down at the recumbent figure; at the matted tangle of gray-streaked brown hair that straggled across a pillow which was none too clean; at the heavy-lensed, old-fashioned, steel-bowed spectacles, awry now, that were still grotesquely perched on the woman's nose; at the sallow face, streaked with grime and dirt, as though it had not been washed for months; at a hand, as ill-cared for, which lay exposed on the torn blanket that did duty for a counterpane; at the dirty shawl that enveloped the woman's shoulders, and which was tightly fastened around Gypsy Nan's neck-and from the woman her eyes shifted to an empty bottle on the floor that protruded from under the bed.

"Nan!" she called sharply; and, stooping over, shook the woman's shoulder. "Nan!" she repeated. There was something about the woman's breathing that she did not like, something in the queer, pinched condition of the other's face that suddenly frightened her. "Nan!" she called again.

Gypsy Nan opened her eyes, stared for a moment dully, then, in a curiously quick, desperate way, jerked herself up on her elbow.

"Youse get t'hell outer here!" she croaked. "Get out!"

"I am going to," said Rhoda Gray evenly. "And I'm going at once." She turned abruptly and walked toward the door. "I'm

going to get a doctor. You've gone too far this time, Nan, and—”

“No, youse don't!” Gypsy Nan's voice rose in a sudden scream. She sat bolt upright in bed, and pulled a revolver out from under the coverings. “Youse don't bring no doctor here! See! Youse put a finger on dat door, an' it won't be de door youse'll go out by!”

Rhoda Gray did not move.

“Nan, put that revolver down!” she ordered quietly. “You don't know what you are doing.”

“Don't!” leered Gypsy Nan. The revolver held, swaying a little unsteadily, on Rhoda Gray. There was silence for a moment; then Gypsy Nan spoke again, evidently through dry lips, for she wet them again and again with her tongue: “Say, youse are de White Moll, ain't youse?”

“Yes,” said Rhoda Gray.

Gypsy Nan appeared to ponder this for an instant.

“Well den, come back here an' sit down on de foot of de bed,” she commanded finally.

Rhoda Gray obeyed without hesitation. There was nothing to do but humor the woman in her present state, a state that seemed one bordering on delirium and complete collapse.

“Nan,” she said, “you—”

“De White Moll!” mumbled Gypsy Nan. “I wonder if de dope dey hands out about youse is all on de level? My Gawd, I wonder if wot dey says is true?”

“What do they say?” asked Rhoda Gray gently.

Gypsy Nan lay back on her pillow as though her strength, over-taxed, had failed her; her hand, though it still clutched the revolver, seemed to have been dragged down by the weapon's weight, and now rested upon the blanket.

“Dey say,” said Gypsy Nan slowly, “dat youse knows more on de inside here dan anybody else—t’ings youse got from de spacers’ molls, an’ from de dips demselves when youse was lendin’ dem a hand; dey say dere ain’t many youse couldn’t send up de river just by liftin’ yer finger, but dat youse’re straight, an’ dat youse’ve kept yer map closed, an’ dat youse’ re safe.”

Rhoda Gray’s dark eyes softened, as she leaned forward and laid a hand gently over the one of Gypsy Nan that held the revolver.

“It couldn’t be any other way, could it, Nan?” she said simply.

“Wot yer after?” demanded Gypsy Nan, with sudden mockery. “De gun? Well, take it!” She let go her hold of the weapon. “But don’t kid yerself dat youse’re kiddin’ me into givin’ it to youse because youse have got a pretty smile an’ a sweet voice! Savvy? I”—she choked suddenly, and caught at her throat—“I guess youse’re de only chance I got-dat’s all.”

“That’s better,” said Rhoda Gray encouragingly. “And now you’ll let me go and get a doctor, won’t you, Nan?”

“Wait!” said Gypsy Nan hoarsely. “Youse’re de only chance I got. Will youse swear youse won’t t’row me down if I tells youse somet’ing? I ain’t got no other way. Will youse swear youse’ll see me through?”

“Of course, Nan,” said Rhoda Gray soothingly. “Of course, I will, Nan. I promise.”

Gypsy Nan came up on her elbow.

“Dat ain’t good enough!” she cried out. “A promise ain’t good enough! For Gawd’s sake, come across all de way! Swear youse’ll keep mum an’ see me through!”

“Yes, Nan”—Rhoda Gray’s eyes smiled reassurance—“I swear it. But you will be all right again in the morning.”

“Will I? You think so, do you? Well, I can only say that I wish I did!”

Rhoda Gray leaned sharply forward, staring in amazement at the figure on the bed. The woman's voice was the same, it was still hoarse, still heavy, and the words came with painful effort; but the English was suddenly perfect now.

“Nan, what is it? I don't understand!” she said tensely. “What do you mean?”

“You think you know what's the matter with me.” There was a curious mockery in the weak voice. “You think I've drunk myself into this state. You think I'm on the verge of the D.T.'s now. That empty bottle under the bed proves it, doesn't it? And anybody around here will tell you that Gypsy Nan has thrown enough empties out of the window there to stock a bottle factory for years, some of them on the flat roof just outside the window, some of them on the roof of the shed below, and some of them down into the yard, just depending on how drunk she was and how far she could throw. And that proves it, too, doesn't it? Well, maybe it does, that's what I did it for; but I never touched the stuff, not a drop of it, from the day I came here. I didn't dare touch it. I had to keep my wits. Last night you thought I was drunk when you found me in the doorway downstairs. I wasn't. I was too sick and weak to get up here. I almost told you then, only I was afraid, and—and I thought that perhaps I'd be all right to-day.”

“Oh, I didn't know!” Rhoda Gray was on her knees beside the bed. There was no room to question the truth of the woman's words, it was in Gypsy Nan's eyes, in the struggling, labored voice.

“Yes.” Gypsy Nan clutched at the shawl around her neck, and shivered. “I thought I might be all right to-day, and that I'd get better. But I didn't. And now I've got about a chance in a hundred. I know. It's my heart.”

“You mean you've been alone here, sick, since last night?” There was anxiety, perplexity, in Rhoda Gray's face. “Why didn't you call some one? Why did you even hold me back a few minutes ago, when you admit yourself that you need immediate medical assistance so badly?”

“Because,” said Gypsy Nan, “if I've got a chance at all, I'd finish it for keeps if a doctor came here. I—I'd rather go out this way than in that horrible thing they call the 'chair.' Oh, my God, don't you understand that! I've seen pictures of it! It's a horrible thing—a horrible thing—horrible!”

“Nan”—Rhoda Gray steadied her voice—“you re delirious. You do not know what you are saying. There isn't any horrible thing to frighten you. Now you just lie quietly here. I'll only be a few minutes, and—” She stopped abruptly as her wrists were suddenly imprisoned in a frantic grip.

“You swore it!” Gypsy Nan was whispering feverishly. “You swore it! They say the White Moll never snitched. That's the one chance I've got, and I'm going to take it. I'm not delirious—not yet. I wish to God it was nothing more than that! Look!”

With a low, startled cry, Rhoda Gray was on her feet. Gypsy Nan was gone. A sweep of the woman's hand, and the spectacles were off, the gray-streaked hair a tangled wig upon the pillow—and Rhoda Gray found herself staring in a numbed sort of way at a dark-haired woman who could not have been more than thirty, but whose face, with its streaks of grime and dirt, looked grotesquely and incongruously old.

II. SEVEN—THREE—NINE

[Table of Contents](#)

For a moment neither spoke, then Gypsy Nan broke the silence with a bitter laugh. She threw back the bedclothes, and, gripping at the edge of the bed, sat up.

“The White Moll!” The words rattled in her throat. A fleck of blood showed on her lips. “Well, you know now! You're going to help me, aren't you? I—I've got to get out of here—get to a hospital.”

Rhoda Gray laid her hands firmly on the other's shoulders.

“Get back into bed,” she said steadily. “Do you want to make yourself worse? You'll kill yourself!”

Gypsy Nan pushed her away.

“Don't make me use up what little strength I've got left in talking,” she cried out piteously, and suddenly wrung her hands together. “I'm wanted by the police. If I'm caught, it's—it's that 'chair.' I couldn't have a doctor brought here, could I? How long would it be before he saw that Gypsy Nan was a fake? I can't let you go and have an ambulance, say, come and get me, can I, even with the disguise hidden away? They'd say this is where Gypsy Nan lives. There's something queer here. Where is Gypsy Nan? I've got to get away from here—away from Gypsy Nan—don't you understand? It's death one way; maybe it is the other, maybe it'll finish me to get out of here, but it's the only thing left to do. I thought some one, some one that I could trust, never mind who, would have come to-day, but-but no one came, and—and maybe now it's too late, but there's just the one chance, and I've got to take it.” Gypsy Nan tore at the shawl around her throat as though it choked her, and flung it from her shoulders. Her eyes were gleaming with an

unhealthy, feverish light. "Don't you see? We get out on the street. I collapse there. You find me. I tell you my name is Charlotte Green. That's all you know. There isn't much chance that anybody at the hospital would recognize me. I've got money. I take a private room. Don't you understand?"

Rhoda Gray's face had gone a little white. There was no doubt about the woman's serious condition, and yet—and yet—She stood there hesitant. There must be some other way! It was not likely even that the woman had strength enough to walk down the stairs to begin with. Strange things had come to her in this world of shadow, but none before like this. If the law got the woman it would cost the woman her life; if the woman did not receive immediate and adequate medical assistance it would cost the woman her life. Over and over in her brain, like a jangling refrain, that thought repeated itself. It was not like her to stand hesitant before any emergency, no matter what that emergency might be. She had never done it before, but now...

"For God's sake," Gypsy Nan implored, "don't stand there looking at me! Can't you understand? If I'm caught, I go out. Do you think I'd have lived in this filthy hole if there had been any other way to save my life? Are you going to let me die here like a dog? Get me my clothes; oh, for God's sake, get them, and give me the one chance that's left!"

A queer little smile came to Rhoda Gray's lips, and her shoulders straightened back.

"Where are your clothes?" she asked.

"God bless you!" The tears were suddenly streaming down the grimy face. "God bless the White Moll! It's true! It's true—all they said about her!" The woman had lost control of herself.

"Nan, keep your nerve!" ordered Rhoda Gray almost brutally. It was the White Moll in another light now, cool,

calm, collected, efficient. Her eyes swept Gypsy Nan. The woman, who had obviously flung herself down on the bed fully dressed the night before, was garbed in coarse, heavy boots, the cheapest of stockings which were also sadly in need of repair, a tattered and crumpled skirt of some rough material, and, previously hidden by the shawl, a soiled, greasy and spotted black blouse. Rhoda Gray's forehead puckered into a frown. "What about your hands and face—they go with the clothes, don't they?"

"It'll wash off," whispered Gypsy Nan. "It's just some stuff I keep in a box—over there—the ceiling—" Her voice trailed off weakly, then with a desperate effort strengthened again. "The door! I forgot the door! It isn't locked! Lock the door first! Lock the door! Then you take the candle over there on the washstand, and—and I'll show you. You—you get the things while I'm undressing. I—I can help myself that much."

Rhoda Gray crossed quickly to the door, turned the key in the lock, and retraced her steps to the washstand that stood in the shadows against the wall on the opposite side from the bed, and near the far end of the garret. Here she found the short stub of a candle that was stuck in the mouth of a gin bottle, and matches lying beside it. She lighted the candle, and turned inquiringly to Gypsy Nan.

The woman pointed to the end of the garret where the roof sloped sharply down until, at the wall itself, it was scarcely four feet above the floor.

"Go down there. Right to the wall—in the center," instructed Gypsy Nan weakly. And then, as Rhoda Gray obeyed: "Now push up on that wide board in the ceiling."

Rhoda Gray, already in a stooped position, reached up, and pushed at a rough, unplanned board. It swung back without a sound, like a narrow trap-door, until it rested in an upright position against the outer frame of the house,

disclosing an aperture through which, by standing erect, Rhoda Gray easily thrust her head and shoulders.

She raised the candle then through the opening—and suddenly her dark eyes widened in amazement. It was a hiding place, not only ingenious, but exceedingly generous in expanse. As far as one could reach the ceiling metamorphosed itself into a most convenient shelf. And it had been well utilized! It held a most astounding collection of things. There was a cashbox, but the cashbox was apparently wholly inadequate—there must have been thousands of dollars in those piles of banknotes that were stacked beside it! There was a large tin box, the cover off, containing some black, pastelike substance—the “stuff,” presumably, that Gypsy Nan used on her face and hands. There was a bunch of curiously formed keys, several boxes of revolver cartridges, an electric flashlight, and a great quantity of the choicest brands of tinned and bottled fruits and provisions—and a little to one side, evidently kept ready for instant use, a suit of excellent material, underclothing, silk stockings shoes and hat were neatly piled together.

Rhoda Gray took the clothing, and went back to the bedside. Gypsy Nan had made little progress in disrobing. It seemed about all the woman could do to cling to the edge of the cot and sit upright.

“What does all this mean, Nan,” she asked tensely; “all those things up there—that money?”

Gypsy Nan forced a twisted smile.

“It means I know how bad I am, or I wouldn't have let you see what you have,” she answered heavily. “It means that there isn't any other way. Hurry! Get these things off! Get me dressed!”

But it took a long time. Gypsy Nan seemed with every moment to grow weaker. The lamp on the chair went out for want of oil. There was only the guttering candle in the gin

bottle to give light. It threw weird, flickering shadows around the garret; it seemed to enhance the already deathlike pallor of the woman, as, using the pitcher of water and the basin from the washstand now, Rhoda Gray removed the grime from Gypsy Nan's face and hands.

It was done at last—and where there had once been Gypsy Nan, haglike and repulsive, there was now a stylishly, even elegantly, dressed woman of well under middle age. The transformation seemed to have acted as a stimulant upon Gypsy Nan. She laughed with nervous hilarity she even tried valiantly to put on a pair of new black kid gloves, but, failing in this, pushed them unsteadily into the pocket of her coat.

“I'm—I'm all right,” she asserted fiercely, as Rhoda Gray, pausing in the act of gathering up the discarded garments, regarded her anxiously. “Bring me a package of that money after you've put those things away—yes, and you'll find a flashlight there. We'll need it going down the stairs.”

Rhoda Gray made no answer. There was no hesitation now in her actions, as, to the pile of clothing in her arms, she added the revolver that lay on the blanket, and, returning to the little trap-door in the ceiling, hid them away; but her brain was whirling again in a turmoil of doubt. This was madness, utter, stark, blind madness, this thing that she was doing! It was suicide, literally that, nothing less than suicide for one in Gypsy Nan's condition to attempt this thing. But the woman would certainly die here, too, with out medical assistance—only there was the police! Rhoda Gray's face, as she stood upright in the little aperture again, throwing the wavering candle-rays around her, seemed suddenly to have grown pinched and wan. The police! The police! It was her conscience, then, that was gnawing at her—because of the police! Was that it? Well, there was also, then, another side. Could she turn informer, traitor, become a female Judas to a dying woman, who had sobbed and

thanked her Maker because she had found some one whom she believed she could trust? That was a hideous and an abominable thing to do! "You swore it! You swore you'd see me through!"—the words came and rang insistently in her ears. The sweet, piquant little face set in hard, determined lines. Mechanically she picked up the flashlight and a package of the banknotes, lowered the board in the ceiling into place, and returned to Gypsy Nan.

"I'm ready, if there is no other way," she said soberly, as she watched the other tuck the money away inside her waist. "I said I would see you through, and I will. But I doubt if you are strong enough, even with what help I can give you, to get down the stairs, and even if you can, I am afraid with all my soul of the consequences to you, and—"

Gypsy Nan blew out the candle, and staggered to her feet.

"There isn't any other way." She leaned heavily on Rhoda Gray's arm. "Can't you see that? Don't you think I know? Haven't you seen enough here to convince you of that? I— I'm just spilling the dice for—for perhaps the last time—but it's the only chance—the only chance. Go on!" she urged tremulously. "Shoot the glim, and get me to the door. And—and for the love of God, don't make a sound! It's all up if we're seen going out!"

The flashlight's ray danced in crazy gyrations as the two figures swayed and crept across the garret. Rhoda Gray unlocked the door, and, as they passed out, locked it again on the outside.

"Hide the key!" whispered Gypsy Nan. "See—that crack in the floor under the partition! Slip it in there!"

The flashlight guiding her, Rhoda Gray stooped down to where, between the rough attic flooring and the equally rough boarding of the garret partition, there was a narrow space. She pushed the key in out of sight; and then, with her arm around Gypsy Nan's waist, and with the flashlight at

cautious intervals winking ahead of her through the darkness, she began to descend the stairs.

It was slow work, desperately slow, both because they dared not make the slightest noise, and because, too, as far as strength was concerned, Gypsy Nan was close to the end of her endurance. Down one flight, and then the other, they went, resting at every few steps, leaning back against the wall, black shadows that merged with the blackness around them, the flashlight used only when necessity compelled it, lest its gleam might attract the attention of some other occupant of the house. And at times Gypsy Nan's head lay cheek to Rhoda Gray's, and the other's body grew limp and became a great weight, so heavy that it seemed she could no longer support it.

They gained the street door, hung there tensely for a moment to make sure they were not observed by any chance passer-by, then stepped out on the sidewalk. Gypsy Nan spoke then:

"I—I can't go much farther," she faltered. "But—but it doesn't matter now we're out of the house—it doesn't matter where you find me—only let's try a few steps more."

Rhoda Gray had slipped the flashlight inside her blouse.

"Yes," she said. Her breath was coming heavily. "It's all right, Nan. I understand."

They walked on a little way up the block, and then Gypsy Nan's grasp suddenly tightened on Rhoda Gray's arm.

"Play the game!" Gypsy Nan's voice was scarcely audible. "You'll play the game, won't you? You'll—you'll see me through. That's a good name—as good as any—Charlotte Green—that's all you know—but—but don't leave me alone with them—you—you'll come to the hospital with me, won't you—I—"

Gypsy Nan had collapsed in a heap on the sidewalk.

Rhoda Gray glanced swiftly around her. In the squalid tenement before which she stood there would be no help of the kind that was needed. There would be no telephone in there by means of which she could summon an ambulance. And then her glance rested on a figure far up the block under a street lamp—a policeman. She bent hurriedly over the prostrate woman, whispered a word of encouragement, and ran in the officer's direction.

As she drew closer to the policeman, she called out to him. He turned and came running toward, and, as he reached her, after a sharp glance into her face, touched his helmet respectfully.

“What's wrong with the White Moll to-night?” he asked pleasantly.

“There's—there's a woman down there”—Rhoda Gray was breathless from her run—“on the sidewalk. She needs help at once.”

“Drunk?” inquired the officer laconically.

“No, I'm sure it's anything but that,” Rhoda Gray answered quickly. “She appears to be very sick. I think you had better summon an ambulance without delay.”

“All right!” agreed the officer. “There's a patrol box down there in the direction you came from. We'll have a look at her on the way.” He started briskly forward with Rhoda Gray beside him. “Who is she d'ye know?” he asked.

“She said her name was Charlotte Green,” Rhoda Gray replied. “That's all she could, or would, say about herself.”

“Then she ain't a regular around here, or I guess you'd know her!” grunted the policeman.

Rhoda Gray made no answer.

They reached Gypsy Nan. The officer bent over her, then picked her up and carried her to the tenement doorway.

“I guess you're right, all right! She's bad! I'll send in a call,” he said, and started on the run down the street.

Gypsy Nan had lost consciousness. Rhoda Gray settled herself on the doorstep, supporting the woman's head in her lap. Her face had set again in grim, hard, perplexed lines. There seemed something unnatural, something menacingly weird, something even uncanny about it all. Perhaps it was because it seemed as though she could so surely foresee the end. Gypsy Nan would not live through the night. Something told her that. The woman's masquerade, for whatever purpose it had been assumed, was over. “You'll play the game, won't you? You'll see me through?” There seemed something pitifully futile in those words now!

The officer returned.

“It's all right,” he said. “How's she seem?”

Rhoda Gray shook her head.

A passer-by stopped, asked what was the matter—and lingered curiously. Another, and another, did the same. A little crowd collected. The officer kept them back. Came then the strident clang of a gong and the rapid beat of horses' hoofs. A white-coated figure jumped from the ambulance, pushed his way forward, and bent over the form in Rhoda Gray's lap. A moment more, and they were carrying Gypsy Nan to the ambulance.

Rhoda Gray spoke to the officer:

“I think perhaps I had better go with her.”

“Sure!” said the officer.

She caught snatches of the officer's words, as he made a report to the doctor:

“Found her here in the street... Charlotte Green... nothing else... the White Moll, straight as God makes 'em... she'll see the woman through.” He turned to Rhoda Gray. “You can get in there with them, miss.”

It took possibly ten minutes to reach the hospital, but, before that time, Gypsy Nan, responding in a measure to stimulants, had regained consciousness. She insisted on clinging to Rhoda Gray's hand as they carried in the stretcher.

"Don't leave me!" she pleaded. And then, for the first time, Gypsy Nan's nerve seemed to fail her. "I—oh, my God—I—I don't want to die!" she cried out.

But a moment later, inside the hospital, as the admitting officer began to ask questions of Rhoda Gray, Gypsy Nan had apparently recovered her grip upon herself.

"Ah, let her alone!" she broke in. "She doesn't know me any more than you do. She found me on the street. But she was good to me, God bless her!"

"Your name's Charlotte Green? Yes?" The man nodded. "Where do you live?"

"Wherever I like!" Gypsy Nan was snarling truculently now. "What's it matter where I live? Don't you ever have any one come here without a letter from the pastor of her church!" She pulled out the package of banknotes. "You aren't going to get stuck. This'll see you through whatever happens. Give me a—a private room, and"—her voice was weakening rapidly—"and"—there came a bitter, facetious laugh—"the best you've got." Her voice was weakening rapidly.

They carried her upstairs. She still insisted on clinging to Rhoda Gray's hand.

"Don't leave me!" she pleaded again, as they reached the door of a private room, and Rhoda Gray disengaged her hand gently.

"I'll stay outside here," Rhoda Gray promised. "I won't go away without seeing you again."

Rhoda Gray sat down on a settee in the hall. She glanced at her wrist watch. It was five minutes of eleven. Doctors

and nurses came and went from the room. Then a great quiet seemed to settle down around her. A half hour passed. A doctor went into the room, and presently came out again. She intercepted him as he came along the corridor.

He shook his head.

She did not understand his technical explanation. There was something about a clot and blood stoppage. But as she resumed her seat, she understood very fully that the end was near. The woman was resting quietly now, the doctor had said, but if she, Rhoda Gray, cared to wait, she could see the other before leaving the hospital.

And so she waited. She had promised Gypsy Nan she would.

The minutes dragged along. A quarter of an hour passed. Still another. Midnight came. Fifteen minutes more went by, and then a nurse came out of the room, and, standing by the door, beckoned to Rhoda Gray.

“She is asking for you,” the nurse said. “Please do not stay more than a few minutes. I shall be outside here, and if you notice the slightest change, call me instantly.”

Rhoda Gray nodded.

“I understand,” she said.

The door closed softly behind her. She was smiling cheerily as she crossed the room and bent over Gypsy Nan.

The woman stretched out her hand.

“The White Moll!” she whispered. “He told the truth, that bull did—straight as they make 'em, and—”

“Don't try to talk,” Rhoda Gray interrupted gently. “Wait until you are a little stronger.”

“Stronger!” Gypsy Nan shook her head. “Don't try to kid me! I know. They told me. I'd have known it anyway. I'm going out.”

Rhoda Gray found no answer for a moment. A great lump had risen in her throat. Neither would she have needed to be told; she, too, would have known it anyway—it was stamped in the gray pallor of the woman's face. She pressed Gypsy Nan's hand.

And then Gypsy Nan spoke again, a queer, yearning hesitancy in her voice:

“Do—do you believe in God?”

“Yes,” said Rhoda Gray simply.

Gypsy Nan closed her eyes.

“Do—do you think there is a chance—even at the last—if—if, without throwing down one's pals, one tries to make good?”

“Yes,” said Rhoda Gray again.

“Is the door closed?” Gypsy Nan attempted to raise herself on her elbow, as though to see for herself.

Rhoda Gray forced the other gently back upon the pillows.

“It is closed,” she said. “You need not be afraid.”

“What time is it?” demanded Gypsy Nan.

Rhoda Gray looked at her watch.

“Twenty-five minutes after twelve,” she answered.

“There's time yet, then,” whispered Gypsy Nan. “There's time yet.” She lay silent for a moment, then her hand closed tightly around Rhoda Gray's. “Listen!” she said. “There's more about—about why I lived like that than I told you. And—and I can't tell you now—I can't go out like a yellow cur—I'm not going to snitch on anybody else just because I'm through myself. But—but there's something on to-night that I'd—I'd like to stop. Only the police, or anybody else, aren't to know anything about it, because then they'd nip my friends. See? But you can do it—easy. You can do it alone without anybody knowing. There's time yet. They weren't going to pull it until halfpast one—and there won't be any