The Human Four

A Clever Detective Story

(Continued from last week.)

He swung round and strode across the He swung round and strode across the room. Without a backward glance he opened and closed the door behind him. They heard his footsteps as he ran lightly down the stone stairs. Pryde crossed the room to where the girl was citting. The telephone bell was ringing softly on her desk. She took up the receiver in her left hand and held it to her ear. Her right hand still clasped the handle of the pistol.

"Are you there?" she said. "Yes, you can have the first folio at once. I believe that the others will come later. Goodbye!"

She replaced the receiver and turned round to Pryde with a curious expression in her face. "Shall I follow him?" he asked quickly.

in her face.

"Shall I follow him?" he asked quickly.

"He must be one of the gang."

She shook her head. "It is not necessary. He will be arrested within a few moments, or as soon as he is safely out of sight of this building."

Pryde gasped. He glanced toward the telephone; she nodded.

"Oh, I am not quite mad!" she assured him. "Nor are we either of us running such a terrible risk as you think. My telephoning was a code, of course."

"To the police?"

"To the police?"

"To the police," she admitted calmly. "The man who put that image into your pocket was one of the Human Four, without a doubt. The man who has just left us was another. For him, too, it is over. There are two more. The man who will be arrested below will not return to them. They will think that he has made off with the idol. Then I think that one of them will come here to make sure. The other—"

"What about the other?" Pryde de-

'What about the other?" Pryde de what about the otherr Pryde demanded.

She shook her head. "I do not know," she said quietly. "He is the man whom they sall the professor, the man who has done nearly all the killing, the man whom the police are wild to get hold of. I do not think that he will come at all."

Pryde was still a little bewildered. "Are there any more questions wou wish to ask me?" she inquired.

"I thought," he said, "that you were simply looking out for adventures on your own account, the sort of person who liked to help women out of small troubles. In any case, I thought that you acted independently."

"I started like that," she told him. "Then I came to be weard!

pendently."
"I started like that," she told him.
"Then I came to be useful to the police.
There are some of those in authority who
have confidence in me. I have been conerned in one or two important matters. I had not meant to tell you so much just yet, but it is you who have stumbled into this affair to-day, so we move forward a little more rapidly than I had thought. I have a private wire from here to a certain

little more rapidly than I had thought. I have a private wire from here to a certain police station, and a private code. I have also an alarm hell under my foot which rings into a single room on the ground floor, where the men are waiting who will follow our last visitor. I can summon help by means of it, if necessary. You see, I am not so foolhardy as you thought. All the same, I am glad that you were not afraid."

He looked at her in wonder. Her tone had been perfectly matter-of-fact. She had taken him into her confidence very much as she might have confessed to a secret liking for golf, or any other wholly harmless pursuit. At that moment she was inspecting the mechanism of the pistol which she had taken from their visitor's pocket. Her face was exactly like the face of a child examining with pleased interest a new toy.

"Do you see what a beautiful piece of work this is?" she exclaimed, with the enthusiasm of a critic. "I have others here, but nothing so perfectly finished."

She opened a drawer on her right. There were four pistols there and an open box of cartridges. She slipped her latest acquisition in by their side.

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"Do you see what a beautiful piece of work this is?" she exclaimed, with the enthusiasm of a critic. "I have others here, but nothing so perfectly finished." She opened a drawer on her right. There were four pistols there and an open box of cartridges. She slipped her latest acquisition in by their side.

"I always have these where my fingers tan reach them in a moment," she explained, "although I have never used one in my life. It is not a woman's place to fight. There are other and more delicate methods."

He shivered. Her face, for a moment, had been positively cruel.
"I think," she continued, "that you had better spend the rest of the day with me. It may be interesting. Only I am afraid that you will not be able to go as far, even, as the Cafe de Lugano for luncheon. Don't you think that you had better seen in here from some luncheon to be sent in here from some where?"

Pryde was feeling a little like a man in a dream. He glanced at his watch; it was past one o'clook.

"Yes, I will do that," he assented. "I wonder, though, if it is safe to leave you?" she assured him. "They will wait for some time, at any rate, for their friend who has just left us, to return. When they find that he does not the they find that he does not the content and he looked at Pryde, and he looked in the looked at Pryde, and he looked like the look at Pryde, and he looked in the looked at Pryde, and

you?"
"Quite," she assured him. "They will wait for some time, at any rate, for their friend who has just left us, to return. When they find that he does not, they will be suspicious, but it is my belief that they will risk everything for the sake of that little image."
He turned and looked at it. Again the same uneasy fascination possessed him. He stretched out his hand, but she etopped him.

ped him.
"Let it alone," she begged. "I believe
I am superstitious about it myself. When
you come back, we will examine it together. Somehow, I can't help fancying
that it means something more to these

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men than as yet we have rightly under-stood."

stood."

It was nearly five o'clock before their second visitor arrived. Grace and her partner were having tea together when they heard a sharp and somewhat insistent knocking upon the door, followed by the ringing of the bell. Grace rose at once and glided into her place before the typewriter. Pryde walked to the door and threw it open. A very resplendent person stood there, sleek, black haired, dressed in the height of fashion, Semitic. He stood upon the threshold and smiled at them reassuringly; they were not to be overcome!

overcome!

"My name," he announced, removing his shiny silk hat, "ith Nathan—Mr. Richard Nathan. I called, with your permission, to make a few enquireth."

to make a few enquireth."

"Come in, Mr. Nathan," Pryde replied quietly. "My name is Pryde. Is it I whom you want to see?"

The man's eyes were everywhere. Suddenly he saw what he sought. The smile faded from his thick lips, the oily suaveness left him. He stared at the image upon the table. The hand which held his hat shook. He was, without doubt, agita.ed.

hat shook. He was, without doubt, agitated.

"It ith you I want to talk to, my dear Mither Pryde," he began. "Just a few words, most important bithneth—most important indeed; good bithneth for you."

"Really?" Pryde remarked politely.

"Who ith the young lady?" the new-comer demanded. "Introduthe me, if you please."

"This is Miss Grace Burton, who is good enough to do some typewriting for me."
Pryde explained. "These are really her rooms, and I don't know how it is that you should have come to look for me here."

"Never mind that," Mr. Nathan declared impressively. "Never mind that. I have come to do you a good turn. I have come on a matter of moth important bithneth."

"Would you like me to go away?" Grace asked.

Mr. Nathan noddad his head with satis.

"Would you like me to go away?" Grace asked.

Mr. Nathan nodded his head with satisfaction. "It will be a shame to lothe you, my dear," he said, "but the bithneth ith of a private nature."

"Pray do not move, Miss Burton," Pryde intervened. "I can have no business with a perfect stranger which is of any great importance so far as I am concerned. You can say anything you like to me before Miss Burton," he went on, "and the sooner you tell me exactly what it is that has brought you here the better I shall be pleased."

has brought you here the better I shall be pleased."

Mr. Nathan pointed with the shining knob of his stick toward the idol. The knob quivered a little in the air.
"Very well, then," he said. "Just as you pleathe. Where did you get that?"
Pryde, too, glanced toward the image. Was it his fancy, or was there indeed, at that moment, a red and threatening light in the deep-set eyes?
"That," Pryde answered, "is not mine. I am keeping it in trust."
Mr. Nathan held out his hand. "Shake hands, sir." he insisted. "You are an honest young man. You shall not lose by it. Listen. I am the owner of that little curio."
"Indeed!" Pryde replied dryly.

it. Listen. I am the owner of that little curio."

"Indeed!" Pryde replied dryly.

"Tell me at once," Mr. Nathan begged,
"why do you look at me the doubtfully?
Hath anyone elthe been here to claim it?"
"There was a man same in," Pryde admitted, "only a few hours ago, who said very much what you are saying. He could not prove his ownership, however, and he grew rather offensive. In the end we were obliged to get rid of him hurriedly."

The face of Mr. Richard Nathan became a study. He was at the same time suspicious, alarmed, and surprised.

"Went away without it," he repeated, half to himself. "Came here and went away without it! You are sure he thaw it?"

"You must be you mind," she reminded in "Dear me! Dear me!" Mr. Nathan went to fore me, thaw this little image, too; but you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you were not able to come to termth, the you will be a the you have a sentent of the your "I will be to work the your" I have come here for this idol. What ith it worth to your, "I have to the image into his fingers and held it out the image into his fingers and held it out the image into his fingers and held it out the in worth to your you were not able to the image into his fingers and held it out that you have no right to it at all. It was than agreed, "and you know very well that you have no right to it at all. It was through the young he you have the young he young he you have the young he young he you have the young he you have the young he yo

"That, my friend," Pryde remarked dryly. "I should be inclined to doubt." Nathan staggered to his feet. The telephone bell was ringing. He turned sharply toward it.
"What'th that?"

Nathan staggered to his feet. The telephone bell was ringing. He turned sharply toward it.

"What'th that?"

"Only one of my clients," Grace answered calmly. "Are you there?" she went on. "Yes, the second lot of folios will be ready in a very few moments now: the third lot probably to-night. Yes! Yes! Quite, thank you. Good-bye-"

Mr. Nathan wiped his forehead. He was not a very pleasant sight. "Look here," he said to Pryde. "we don't need to quarrel. It'th an infernal piece of luck, but you've thumbled into this. There'th enough for all of uth. Turn them out upon the table. We'll share them up, you and I; half for me, half between you two. That'th fair, ithr' it? Only let's do the job quickly and let me got off. There's sixty thousand poundth' worth of jewelth there. You're made for life, and if you take my advithe, you'll clear out. I can give you an addreth or two in Amtherdam, where you can get rid of them, if you want to know."

Pryde shook his head. "Mr. Nathan," he declared, "you are wasting your time. Neither this young lady nor I myself have the slightest idea of heneiting by the possession of these jewels. We have grave doubts," he went on, with a faint smile at the corners of his lips, "as to how they may have come into our possession. We shall run no risk in the matter. We shall seal the idol up, and if no one comes here to lay claim to it with better credentials than you and your friend, during the next twenty-four hours, we shall send it to Scotland Yard." Nathan glared at them. He was half suspicious, half stupefied. "You mean that you are on the straight?" he demanded fiercely.

"Absolutely" Pryde assured him. "I must admit that I had some sympathy for that poor fellow when I saw him being hounded, and I meant to keep possession of the little idol until some authenticated person came to claim it. Now, of course, it is a different thing. I shall keep it only for another twenty-four hours."

Mr. Nathan opened his mouth and closed it again. He looked at the carpet, he looked at the idol, he looked

want money? Don't you know what money ith?"

"We want it very badly sometimes," Pryde replied "but, you see, there is always the risk that these jewels may not have been honestly come by."

Mr. Nathan tried to speak and failed. He had no words. Very slowly he took un his hat, brushed it with his coat sleeve, and turned toward the door. "If I hear that the poor fellow hath left any written inthructionth," he promised, "I will let you know. L understand you to thay that you will keep the jewels for at leatht twenty-four hours?"

Pryde nodded. Mr. Nathan turned away to hide a somewhat curious expression at the corners of his lips.

"Very well," he said, "I wish you good afternoon. You are very honest, both of you. I hope you will find that honethty will pay."

He walked out, slamming the door a lit-

you. I hope you will find that housely will pay."
He walked out, slamming the door a Httle behind him. They heard his retreating footsteps. Grace touched the bell at her feet and raised the telephone receiver

her feet and raised the telephone receiver once more to her ear.

"Our visitor," she announced softly, "has just left. Please do not let anything important happen just round here. There is one more to come. Yes, quite all right, thank you. Good-bye!"

She laid the receiver down.

"After all," Pryde remarked, "our friend Mr. Nathan was not one of the fighting sort. Somehow or other, I fancy that our last visitor, if he comes, may be different." ing a pistol, was stretched out behind him.

"Ah!" he muttered. "I see some friends. Mr. Detective Simmons, I think; Inspector Johnson. Not a step nearer, please. Remember, I have nothing to lose by killing a few more of you. These are my last moments. I want to think."

There was a queer, breathless silence. Pryde was still lying where he had been thrown, and had the air of being unconscious. Grace had advanced toward him, but had suddenly stopped and retreated. She was sheltered now behind an easychair. Then the inspector spoke.

"Better give yourself up, Helski. There's no hope for you. We've other men upon the stairs."

"You are right," the professor admitted. "I have fought too many battles not to know when the end has come, but don't any of you flatter yourselves that I walked blindfolded into this trap. I knew very well that the odds were ten to one

sort. Somehow or other, I fancy that our last visitor, if he comes, may be different."

That night, for the first time, Pryde dined with his partner. The meal sent in from a neighboring restaurant was by no means an elaborate one, nor did Grace unbend in the least. Nevertheless, Pryde began to feel more cheerful. The living together through these few thrilling moments of adventure could scarcely fail, at any rate, to foster the spirit of comradeship. She trusted him, too—had confidence in him. It was impossible, he told himself, that she was really so cold and sexless as she appeared. The evening wore on. Occasionally they heard the elevator pass up; oftener still, there were footsteps on the stairs. Their expected visitor, however, did not arrive. Toward ten o'clock was always a quiet time in the flats. There were very few people coming or going. With the silence Pryde became conscious of a curious feeling of uneasiness. He found himself watching the door every mome it.

"I wonder," he said, half to himself, "what devilish scheme this man who calls himself the professor will invent!"

Grace looked up from the book which she had been reading. There was not the slightest sign of excitement in her face. Her hair was primly arranged, drawn back tightly with the obvious intent to nullify its natural fluffiness. Her plain black dress was unrelieved by even a touch of white at the neck. Her cheeks were as pale as ever.

"You must bear in mind," she reminded him, "that neither Mr. Nathan nor his predecessor will have had an opportunity of communicating with him. If they had any plans for meeting formed, he may have become suspicious. On the other hand, he may believe that they have gone

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his word.



against me, but I have never learned the trick of poverty. If I could have got away with our little friend here, you'd never have been troubled with me any more."
"Put up your hands, Helski," the inspector ordered. "I am coming to take you." honest fools, you may be criminals yourselves, you may be creatures of the police. I am taking no risks. Dead men
and women are the safest witnesses."
He spoke in a slow, almost monotonous
tone, but with a manner curicusly impressive. Somehow or other, they beth of
them felt that he was a being of a dif
ferent order from either Nathan or his
predecessor. The master was there. Grace
knew perfectly well that if she even
stretched out her hand toward the receiver of the telephone, he would keep
his word.

The man's pistol never wavered. Only for one second he glanced around and back again. Pryde was lying quite still; Grace was out of sight.

"I am not quite ready yet, Inspector," he said softly. "I have no grudge against you. Stay where you are. I have a matter of twelve lives here. I don't think it will pay you to rush me. You know I don't often miss. I shouldn't advise you to try any tricks. Where's the girl?"

There was no reply. "I have a sort of fancy," the professor went on, "that she is the brains of this enterprise, that she is the person I ought to reckon with. I wonder!"

Once more he turned his head, looking back again instantly.

"Ah!" he proceeded. "Behind that easychair! A very insufficient shelter, an asychair. I think I can do a little damage through that. Mr. Inspector, I congratulate you. You will probably effect my capture without the loss of a single one of your force. It's the girl I'll settle accounts with this time."

His pistel covered them no longer. He

knew perfectly well that if she even stretched out her hand toward the receiver of the telephone, he would keep his word.

"Thank you," she faltered. "I am terrified to death. I can assure you that I shall let the telephone ring."

The visitor moved a step or two nearer still. He was now within a few feet of them. "You are not terrified to death," he said coldly. "That is what alarms me. I will confess to you that I have the feeling that I am in a trap, but in case you are deriving any satisfaction from that fact, let me assure you that if I am, both of you will answer for it with your lives. You know who I am? I am Helski, chief of the Human Four. I have killed a dozen men this year. I believe in killing; it has become an art with me. If it were not for the noise, I think I should kill you both, just as a precaution. Young lady," he added, a peremptory note in his tone, "get up. Into that corner, if you please. I don't like the way your hand is prowling around that drawer. Quick!"

She hesitated for only a single mement. Then she rose.

"Back! And you, too!" the professor ordered, turning suddenly to Pryde. "No nonsense! I could shoot your teeth away, one by one, if I chose. Back, both of you."

They obeyed. He looked into the drawer. From the drawer he looked back again into their faces, and there was something terrible in his silence. He drew his hands from his pockets. He held a repeating pistol in either hand.

"Bring me that idol," he directed Pryde. "Bring there and place it on the table before me."

Pryde walked slowly to the other end of the room, took up the image, and brought it toward the table. He was within about a yard of his destination when the door was suddenly opened. The professor's arm shot out, and Pryde, without hesitation, threw himself bodily upon him, pushing his arm toward the ceiling. The nort second he himself was thrown half-way across the room. With amazing ease the professor had freed himself. He dropped on his knees behind the writing-table. The dull metal of his pistol gleamed one of your force. It's the girl I'll settle accounts with this time."

His pistol covered them no longer. He swung round, turning toward the easy-chair. Then Pryde, who had been creeping gradually closer, gathered himself up and sprang at him. The attack was so unexpected that for a moment Pryde had the advantage. From the first he knew that he was struggling with a stronger man, but it was a matter of seconds only. He went for the hands which held the pictols, forcing them toward the floor. For the first few seconds he was successful. Then slowly his arms, inch by inch, were forced back. The right hand with the pistol in it came traveling round toward the easy-chair. Pryde's strength was almost exhausted, but it lasted long enough. The affair, after all, was only one of seconds. The inspector and policemen were swarming around. With a blow of his truncheon, the former knocked the weapon out of the hand of the professor, and a policeman, stooping down, kicked the other one from the man's doubled-up left arm. Even then the struggle was not over. With a cry of rage, the trapped man flung himself, unarmed as he was, upon them all. One of the policemen went over like a ninepin. For a moment it seemed as though he would break through them. Then the inspector seized him from behind, a policeman tripped him. Even when they had him on the floor, it was several moments before they could handcuff him. They got him out of the room at last. The inspector lingered behind.

"Young lady," he said to Grace, "this is the best day's work you've ever done.

"Young lady," he said to Grace, "this is the best day's work you've ever done. We've got the lot."

is the best day's work you've ever done. We've got the lot."

"Keep me out of it," she begged.

"We'll keep you out of everything 'except the reward," the inspector replied, holding but his hand to Pryde, "That was a brave tackle of yours, sir," he declared. "We should have had to shoot, if you hadn't been there, and we mightn't have been in time. Good night!"

He hurried off. Pryde turned, with a little shiver, to the girl who was standing by his side. She was absolutely unruffled. Even her hair was still perfectly tidy. She was looking toward the wall by the side of the door, with a slight frown upon her face.

"I must have that switch moved tomorrow," she said.—Cosmopolitan Magazine.

THE END.

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