

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1949

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WEIRD TALES CLUB

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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The Ubiquitous Professor Karr

BY STANTON A. COBLENTZ

A blameless man, the Professor . . . everybody thought!

“WHAT would you say, Chief, was your most baffling experience in all your years with the force?”

Larry Finch, until recently Chief of Police in our home town of Coleton, leaned back among the amply upholstered pillows of the Antelope Club. His square, ruddy face, marked by the bald head, the pugnose, and the little blue-gray eyes that squinted shrewdly from above their wrinkles of fat, wore a sort of vague, tantalizing smile.

“Well, you know, boys,” said he, while the four or five of us gathered closer on the club chairs and sofas, “nobody can hold down a job like mine for thirty years without having some hard nuts to crack. Just the same, I don’t think any case ever came to near driving me crazy as the Emerson J. Karr affair. It had elements in it that went way beyond a regular police case. In fact, I can’t say I understand it entirely even now. Any of you fellows remember Emerson J. Karr?”

“Seems to me there was something about him once in the papers, wasn’t there, Chief?” I asked, for the name did strike a faint echo.

“You bet there was!” Finch affirmed, as he knocked out the ashes from a fat cigar. “However, that was all of twenty years back—yes, nearer twenty-five. Emerson J. Karr



Heading by Matt Fox



was a pretty well-known man in his field. He was the head of the Department of Sanskrit at Newlands University, and he'd written some highbrow books and made some translations that they say were in every college library. All in all, he was about the last man you'd ever have connected with organized crime."

"Organized crime?" several of us gasped; while, leaving our Martinis half-finished, we leaned closer in tingling excitement.

"If you'd ever seen the guy," went on the Chief, after he had slipped down the remains of his Old-fashioned and taken another puff or two at his cigar, "you'd have expected him to be as proper as a parson. He was a sort of walking beanpole, with a huge head perched on top. I never saw another such a head; it looked big enough for two, a monstrous bald bulb, with great yellowish teeth, like a hallow'en goblin's, and two pale green eyes that seemed to stare out at you from some sort of a dream-world of his own. His face was always pasty-pale, and the big Adam's apple on his thick neck wobbled up and down, but what made him look queerest of all was a long twisted gray scar running down from the left corner of his lips."

"Not exactly a beauty, was he?" remarked Fred Mayfield, from over my shoulder.

"**B**ELIEVE me, he wasn't! Maybe that was one reason no woman had ever taken to him. He was sixty-one or two, and had never married; lived with his eighty-three-year-old mother in a dilapidated two-story house in the suburbs. At the college he was a sort of an institution, having been at the place longer than most folks could remember; everybody respected him, but he was the sort of guy that has a crowd of acquaintances and no friends. His habits were as regular as a monk's; he never went out anywhere, and I doubt if he'd been seen for years anywhere much except on the half-mile stretch between his home and the campus. A story went the rounds that you could set your watch by his goings and comings, and I believe it, too—which was why I just couldn't take it seriously when the reports seemed to connect him with the Nich Rocco gang."

"Nich Rocco gang?" I burst forth. "Wasn't that the one that—"

"Yes sirree, worst gang this part of the country ever saw. Sure did more than anything else to turn me gray," stated Finch, with a growl, as his fingers ranged over the few grizzled hairs that remained at the sides of his head. "Their specialty was robbing safes in banks, stores and factories, and they got away with so many crack-ups they took to leaving a big R, painted in red, out of sheer bravado whenever they finished a job. I tell you it was maddening, and for a while it looked like I'd lose my own job if I couldn't outwit them. Just about this time, Emerson J. Karr began to stick his nose into things."

"What could Emerson J. Karr have to do with a thug like Nich Rocco?"

"That's the question that worried us all. When the first stories began coming in, I called them pipe dreams. I remember when Officer Pete Kelly, who was pretty new on the force, said he saw Professor Karr standing on the street, just in front of the Seaboard National Bank at 3 a.m., right before its safes were blown open. He swore he knew Karr by sight, because his first assignment had been to the University beat. But he couldn't tell me what in blazes a man like Karr would be doing at 3 a.m. at the Seaboard National Bank."

"Simply doesn't seem reasonable," muttered Joe Tracy, just to my left.

"You're telling me, are you? But just as sure as I'm a man, and not a monkey, I didn't feel quite so positive two days later, when I heard from Captain O'Donnell, one of our veterans. He rushed with a squad of men down to the Coddings Lumber Mills right after the alarm came in. They almost nabbed two of the crooks, but they got away somehow over a fence, and he swore one of them was a tall rambling stake of a fellow, with a huge head and a big Adam's apple, and a twisted gray scar running down from the left corner of his lips."

"Must have been Karr's double," I suggested. "I've sometimes seen two men look so much alike you could take them for twin brothers."

The Chief leaned far forward in his chair, while one pudgy hand fondled his bony chin.

"Tell the truth, I thought it was something like that, too. Even the detail of the scar—after all, in his excitement, a man mightn't really see what he thinks he sees. So I let things rest for another week, until Officers Muzzio and Olsen—two men I really trusted—described a fellow with exactly the same features, who'd been seen running away after a street robbery."

"If he was seen so often," I argued, "I should think he'd have been caught."

FINCH shook his great square head ruefully; his face seemed even redder than usual by the light of the overhead lamps.

"That was just what puzzled us most of all. Before the month was up, he was reported again four or five times. More than once the boys came within an inch of getting him, but suddenly he would slip away—whisk around corners, or through windows or over walls, they couldn't ever explain just how, except that he was gone like a shot."

"Sounds weird to me."

"Weird? Wait till you hear the rest! Of course, being pretty hard-boiled, none of us supposed we were up against anything but a specially clever crook. I know I expected to clear up the mystery the day I went to visit Professor Karr. I didn't think any dry-as-dust bookworm could put anything over on me. But I still had some things to learn. Believe me, I had some things to learn."

The Chief called for a second Old-fashioned; and having hastily consumed it, went on on a wry, hesitant manner.

"You know, boys, I'm not a guy that embarrasses easy—couldn't, in my line of work, if I wanted to get along. Just the same, I was like a school kid reciting his first piece when I let myself in there with the professor. I'd trumped up some sort of phony excuse, about maybe wanting him to appear as a witness—it was still a police secret what about. He was so damned polite you would have thought I was the King of England: 'Won't you kindly step in, Officer,' 'Make yourself comfortable, Officer,' and that kind of junk, all in a deep burring bass you'd never forget. He led me upstairs to his study, which was lined with books from floor to ceiling—God, I don't see how any man could ever read all that stuff. I sure

began hemming and hawing, when I found myself opposite his desk, where he had a portable typewriter open; he looked at me with such a peculiar steady stare of those big round pale-green eyes that I sort of felt I was the one that was under inspection. However, I did manage to jerk my questions out.

"Professor, do you remember where you were last Thursday night?"

"He didn't give even a second's thought. 'Thursday—why, yes, Thursday I remember being busy all evening writing my paper on 'Some Aspects of the Philosophy of Sankara' for *The International Scholar*.'

"Anyway, I think that was what he said, and it had me sort of stumped, so I went on to ask, 'And Tuesday evening?'

"There still wasn't the faintest hesitation as he answered, 'Why, yes, Tuesday evening—Tuesday evening I always prepare my lecture for my advanced course on the Sutras of Patan—Patanjali, I guess it was, or something like that anyway.'

"Believe me, boys, that had me cornered. He answered every other question right off, too; let out he hadn't been away from home any evening the whole blasted month. What's more, he looked so damned honest I couldn't in my heart believe he was lying, especially as his story was confirmed by his mother. She was a birdlike lovely little thing, with such clear blue eyes that looked you straight in the face you felt like a louse for having any suspicions. This lady—she didn't look at all like eighty-three—came in at about nine with a pot of tea. 'Emerson always has his tea at this time,' she said. 'Won't you join us, Officer?' Just imagine, boys, me having tea! Just the same, you have to submit to pretty near anything in my line, so I took it with a perfectly smooth face.

"Got the mother to chat, too; said, 'Well, Ma'am, what does your son do about his tea the evenings when he's out?'

"'Oh, but he's never out!' she answered. 'Why, I don't believe Emerson's been away one evening since he gave his lectures over to Clinton College, a year ago last May.'

"I've interviewed lots of men and women in my day, boys, and caught 'em in packs of lies, but I'd have staked my reputation there wasn't even the chance of a lie in the pure,

sweet eyes of that old lady. No, somehow we'd made a dreadful mistake.

"I stuck around a while after the mother went out, just for the sake of appearances, while the professor showed me some of the books he'd written. There was some hifalutin thing, a study of some old Hindu poem or other, and others with jaw-cracking names, I don't even begin to know what about. That was why it gave me a whale of a surprise, as I was leaving, to see a strip of gaudy color peeping out at me from under a pile of highbrow magazines on the rack. Jerking it out, I sure got a shock to see a copy of 'Stirring Crime Stories.'

"I GAVE a low whistle, and could see the professor's face going from white to red. 'Lord bless me, but I'm getting careless!' he burst out, looking like a schoolboy who's been caught red-handed stealing something. 'Please push it back, Officer, so my mother won't see it. I wouldn't have her know—you see, in my work, I sometimes need relief from tension, and have been finding it of late in crime and detective stories. Of course, it's only a sowing of intellectual wild oats, so if you'll just help me keep it from Mother—'

"I knew that brainy men sometimes did turn to blood-and-thunder thrillers so as to sort of let off steam. Still, I wondered if I mightn't be running into a clue. But before I had time to ask questions, somebody rapped at the door, and a lean tall man with a black face and black moustache and hair came in and took the professor's hand in a familiar sort of way. 'Officer, meet my friend Mr. Rasmani,' he introduced us. 'He used to be my student, but I'm his student now; he's instructing me in the practice of Yogi.'

"This was a little beyond my depth, and I was getting uncomfortable as hell in the presence of that Hindu, who gave me a look that seemed to go through me like a bullet. So I snatched my cap and left. God! but was I glad to be out of that house!"

The Chief reached for another cigar, and passed half a minute in lighting it.

"Well, I don't see that you were getting anywhere," I filled in the interval. "You came away without any evidence, so far as I can see"

"So far as I could see, either," Finch resumed, sitting back with a smile as of one who enjoys a good joke on himself. "Just try to imagine how befuddled I was when a call came that very night. The Firestone Jewelers had been robbed at 2:30, and the same walking beanpole, who resembled the professor even to the scar under his lips, had been seen directing the robbers just before they made their get-away."

"Well, my theory," contributed Fred Mayfield, "is that it was a case of split or dissociated personality. You've heard, haven't you, of men with a sort of Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde division inside themselves, so that they act like two men, one of whom doesn't know what the other is doing. Thus, old Karr might have been chumming with gangsters part of the time, without his normal self having any notion of the crimes."

"Well, don't you ever think we overlooked that bet, boys. In fact, it was the only theory that looked halfway sound. If Karr really was a divided personality, maybe he did go out nights and get mixed up with thugs. On that supposition, I set two plain-clothes men to guarding the house every night, hiding in the shrubbery so that no one could come or go without their knowing. But for the next three nights, nothing happened. It looked like the Rocco gang was laying low. Then, on the fourth night, it was the old story again. Hawley's Cash Market, down on Main Street, had been broken into, and several hundred dollars taken from the tray. Two guys who happened to be passing just before the crime took place, said they'd seen a tall, lean man with a huge head, tortoise-shell glasses and a scarred lip, prowling in front of the Market. But Officers Ryan and Benton, who'd been guarding Karr's house, swore a blue streak nobody could have possibly left.

"I gave special orders then for the boys to concentrate on that skinny daredevil. Whoever he was, Karr or his twin brother, we'd have to catch him damned quick. Well, can you believe it, it was just like he was playing with us all. He kept on being reported, and was almost caught time after time. Take what happened to Patrolman Pat Mulligan. 'Sure, an' the dirty loafer was hangin' roun' Jefferson Square at two in the mornin';' Pat reported. 'Well, muh

boy, ye'll come with me,' he said, and reached out to handcuff the fellow. 'By the Holy Mother, Chief,' he swore, 'ye'll think I'm dreamin', but when I stuck my hand out he just wasn't there no more. I say there's somethin' spooky about it, Chief. Sure looks like he's been a-firtin' with the Evil One.'

"'Mulligan,' I answered, severely, 'looks like you've been flirting with the bottle. You'll have to steer clear of it when you're on duty, if you want to stay with the force.'

"Just the same, I knew Mulligan wasn't much of a boozier. I was all the more knocked off kilter since there'd been a big fur theft at Jefferson Square sometime between two and two thirty that morning. A few nights later I was still befuddled when Officer Kelley, along with Swensen and McGrath, reported they'd cornered Professor Karr right at the entrance of the blind alley leading from East Fifth Street toward the Athens Grill. 'Take my word for it, Chief, I knew him, all right!' Kelley insisted. 'We came across him just under the street lamp, and there was that funny green light coming from his big goggle eyes—I'd have known him in a million.' The boys held back from shooting; had orders not to fire unless it was necessary, and this time it didn't seem necessary, as they ran him down that blind alley, with no way of escaping except over a ten-story brick wall. But when they got to the end of the alley, there wasn't a sign of him. Not one deuced sign! All three of them swore he couldn't have gotten out by any natural means. Later that night, the Athens Grill was robbed of nine hundred dollars."

"Were you still keeping guard around Karr's house?"

THE CHIEF nodded. He sat back in his chair; blew out several hearty mouthfuls of cigar smoke; and waited a moment, while the rest of us inched nearer.

"Of course, we kept guard, never skipping a night. But the boys said the professor never went out any evening—went to bed at 10:30, regular as the clock. They could see him snapping on his bedroom light; then winding his watch and the clock, then pulling the covers back on his bed, then drawing the blinds, and finally putting the

light out—all done so damned methodically it didn't look like one night was a hair's breadth different from the next."

"Well, maybe that was only a ruse, to put you off the track," conjectured Joe Tracy. "Maybe he sneaked out later at night."

"We didn't overlook that bet, either, even if it wasn't easy to see how he could get by the boys. One morning at about one o'clock, I called his number. When he answered, which he did only after a long time, he sounded drowsy as the devil, but I couldn't help recognizing that burring bass of his. 'Is this Elliott 2539?' I barked into the receiver, purposely giving the wrong number. 'No; damn you, it's 2598!' he growled back at me; and I was a little surprised to learn he could swear. 'What d'ye mean, waking a man this hour of the night?' As I heard the receiver slam back into place, I was more baffled than ever.

"But that wasn't anything to the way I was mystified half an hour later, when I got a call about a robbery in the Atlas Plating Mills. Professor Karr had been seen by two of the boys as they dashed down to the scene, but he'd gotten round the side of a building and escaped."

"Well, wasn't it possible," asked Fred Mayfield, "that he rushed down there just after your phone call?"

"No, that's the hell of it. It just wasn't possible. Don't suppose you know where the Atlas Plating Mills are—over toward Dumbarton, at the extreme other end of the city from Karr. A racing car might have made it in forty-five minutes. But the robbery, remember, occurred less than half an hour after I spoke to Karr on the phone."

"Well then, obviously," I concluded, "it must have been some mistake in identity."

"Mistake in identity—my eye!" Finch argued, impatiently. "Couldn't have made any mistake in identity, not with that gink, if you'd ever had a squint at him. Besides, what happened later showed it wasn't a mistake in identity."

"Well, what did happen later?"

"Plenty, believe me! The big climax didn't come, though, till I stuck my own finger into the pudding. Ordinarily, of course, I didn't go out with the boys on any of the cases. But I swore I'd lie in wait with them for the professor, by glory if I wouldn't!

By this time, you see, I was getting desperate. The robberies of that blasted gang were coming so thick and fast there was getting to be a public furor, and my job hadn't the chance of a snowflake in hell if they kept up the game. So I thought I'd better crack the case wide-open myself."

"Did you?" I asked.

"I'm telling you, I did! But not at first. Things kept going downhill fast. It only made things worse one night when the boys nabbed two of the Rocco gang just as they were getting away with the swag over at the Northern Security Company. We put them through the third degree, like we never put anybody before. But they swore up and down they'd never seen old Karr or anybody like him. I knew very well they'd both have lied a mile a minute to save their own hides, but I couldn't see why they'd lie to save the professor, especially as we promised to let them off easy for squealing. What was more, they didn't look like guys that were lying. I don't think they could have play-acted the surprise they showed when we spoke of the professor."

"Well, what about your cracking the case open?"

"I'M coming to that." With a wry smile, Finch rubbed one hand across his ruddy face. "Lord! I sure didn't know what I was bucking one night when the boys brought me a tip-off of a safe cracking coming off down at Morehouse Appliance Company. I figured that the professor wasn't likely to keep away from anything like that, and I made my mind up I'd catch him, if it was within human power. Well, I guess I had self-confidence enough, even if I was due for a jolt. Anyhow, that night is one I won't ever forget. No, not if I live to be a hundred," the Chief finished, with something between a sigh and a groan, as he dabbed at an unseen perspiration on his shiny bald pate.

"So you met your friend Professor Karr again?"

"Wait, wait, not so fast there," he held me back. "We had everything beautifully staged to take on whoever came. There were six of us ranged all about that office, which was a large rambling one—we were all well hidden behind doors, desks and cabinets. I

picked a prize place behind a row of large files, with just enough space between two of them to let me peek out without being seen. All of us boys was in place before midnight—and take my word it was a long, lonely wait there in the dark, none of us even daring to smoke or speak for fear of giving ourselves away."

"But did anybody come?" popped up Joe Tracy.

"Sure did. It was just 3:15 on the radium dial of my watch when we heard a faint creaking—and believe me, we tried not to breathe aloud. Maybe it was only the damned rats. But another creaking followed, and another, and we knew the rear window was being jimmed. I tell you I did admire the way those boys worked—quick and expert-like, didn't waste any time or make any unnecessary noise. It didn't seem more than a minute before we heard them coming. Luckily, the last half hour the moon, which was pretty near full, had moved far enough to shine right in through the big window opposite me; and there was enough light to see ordinary things, though the odd color of the walls, which were painted a sort of sickly blue, gave the moonlight a spooky look. Maybe it sounds queer to say it, but I felt just like somebody waiting patiently in a tomb."

"Yes, but what about those robbers? Was it really the Rocco gang?"

"Well, part of the gang. Three husky louts, looking just about as sure of themselves as the plumbers coming to fix a faucet, made a bee-line for the safe. Or, rather, two of them did, and the third kept a lookout. We didn't move a muscle till they were in place. It was our luck they didn't seem to have any hunch of anything wrong. Maybe success had made them careless. But all at once, when two of them were hunched over that safe, I gave the signal.

"Everything went off just the way we'd planned. Quicker'n you could draw a breath, those three bandits found themselves surrounded by the six of us, with our guns drawn. We didn't need to tell them to throw their hands up. They could see that the game was up, and anybody who made a move was a dead man."

"But Professor Karr? So Karr wasn't there?"

"JUST give me a chance, and you'll find out!" Finch reassured me, as he took time to light another cigar. "As I was saying, we'd covered all those three thugs. Everything happened so fast we didn't even have time to switch a light on. So here we had them cornered in that queer bluish moonlight, and two of the boys was about to slip on the handcuffs. But just at that moment I saw another figure. Swear to God I don't know where he came from; all the boys said afterwards they hadn't seen him come in. But there he was sure enough, motioning to the robbers as if trying to warn them; he was just across a wide desk from me, so near I couldn't help making out his features: his large bald head, his big eyes leering under their tortoise-shell glasses, his thin neck with the Adam's apple standing out from it.

"Well, I didn't waste any time letting my surprise bind and gag me. I leveled my pistol straight at the fellow. 'Hands up!'

"He didn't even seem to hear. In the most matter-of-fact way he started drifting—yes, drifting was how it looked to me—straight toward the hall door, about fifteen feet away.

"Halt! I yelled. 'Or I'll shoot!'

"You'd have thought he was plumb deaf. He didn't hurry like a man who was trying to get away; he just kept on toward the door, like somebody walking in his sleep. In another second, his hand was lifted to the knob; a second more, and he'd have been out of reach. . . .

"I'll take my oath, boys, I don't know just how it happened. I'm mortally sure, though, I hadn't meant to fire—not, at least, the way I did. But I guess my fingers were shaky and my excitement got the best of me—you can picture it all for yourselves, with the blue moonlight filling that office, three men covering the three crooks with guns, and two others just about to clap the handcuffs on, when this lanky devil pops up God knows where from, and starts making his getaway as if he didn't give a damn for anybody. No wonder my gun went off.

"There was a bang that seemed louder than any pistol shot I ever heard before; a puff of smoke aimed right at the man's heart; and a terrible shuddering cry that I still remember in my nightmares, though to

this day I can't be sure if it came from the struck man or heaven knows who else. Anyhow—and this was what pretty near bowled me over—when the smoke cleared away, old Karr wasn't anywhere in sight. What was more, we didn't find his slumped dead body. There wasn't even a trace of blood. The door was closed, showing he couldn't have gotten out; the bullet, stuck deep in the wood, was proof that the door couldn't have been open when the shot was fired."

The Chief paused; heaved a long sigh; and called for another drink.

"Maybe you only imagined you saw him," Mayfield dared to suggest.

"Imagined? Like hell!" denied Finch, giving his thigh a resounding slap with one plump hand. "All the other boys swore they saw him, too. Besides, I had another proof before the night was over—yes, one that sends the cold waves running down my spine every time I think of it. We'd hardly got back to headquarters, taking those three gangsters in tow, when I was told there was a phone call—something urgent. It was Officer Ryan, who'd been guarding the Karr home; his voice shook so you'd have thought he was scared of an invasion from Mars.

"Chief—Chief, for Christ's sake, Chief, jump into your car and beat it up here like hell!"

"What in the devil's name is it all about?" I bawled back.

"Like a man who's been taken with delirium tremens, he'd already put the receiver down, without seeming to hear me. So there wasn't anything for me to do but dash over to the Karr house, growling and cursing like a soused sailor, and swearing I'd demote Ryan if he'd called me on a wild-goose chase."

"But was it a wild-goose chase?"

"No, by God, it wasn't!"

Finch bit his thick lower lip, shook his head grimly, and slowly went on.

"When I got to the Karr house, the whole cursed place was blazing with lights. Ryan met me as I jumped out of the car, and his face looked white in the glare of the street-lamp. I followed him up to the professor's bedroom, and even before I got there I heard a woman sobbing. As we rushed in, the first thing my eyes fell on was that Hindu, Rasmani, who looked at me a little

like a cat that's about to spring. In a second, I'd taken in the rest of the scene: poor old Mrs. Karr, all hunched up in one corner, crying like she wouldn't ever stop; and a heavy-set mustached fellow that I recognized as Dr. Edmunds, as he used to be my married sister's family doctor. But what really glued my eyes to the spot was someone else that lay on the bed, as motionless as a rock. He wasn't wearing his tortoiseshell glasses now, and his glazed eyes were wide open, with a look of the most awful pain and terror—"

"God in heaven! Was he—was he—"

"**W**HEN I pushed my way in," Larry continued, ignoring my interruption, "the doctor turned from the thing on the bed. 'Glad you're here, Chief. I've done about all I can, but it looks like it's no use.'

"'What was it, Doctor? Heart failure?'"

"'Well, you can call it that. We'll have to call it that in the report.' But it was plain as day he had some reservations in the back of his mind. 'Anyhow, I don't think you'll find any evidence of foul play.'

"Then, for the first time, the mother looked up. I was surprised at what blazing strength and fury she could show. 'Oh, but there must have been foul play! Emerson's heart was all right, I know it was! Why, you remember very well, Doctor, you examined it only last summer and said he ought to live to be a hundred!'"

"'Yes, but sometimes hidden complications, Mrs. Karr—'"

"'Oh, but the way he called out in the night! I'll never forget that scream—like a man being murdered! And then—then, when I got to his room, I found him—I found him—like you see him now—on the bed—'"

"'It was pitiful the way that poor woman struggled with her feelings, then broke down again and sobbed. Just the same, there were some questions I had to put to her. And so, as soon as she'd quieted down a bit, I asked her, as gently as I knew how, 'About what time, Ma'am, have you any idea, did this thing occur?'"

"'Yes, I have a very good idea,' she answered, as soon as she could control herself. 'I slept wretchedly, and had just gone for some sleeping tablets in the bathroom cabi-

net. I happened to notice the time: exactly three-eighteen.'

"'Three-eighteen?' I threw back at her, knocked right off my base. 'But it couldn't be! Why, that was just when I saw him down at Morehouse's. That was just when I fired at him!'"

"I was amazed at the way those remarks were taken up. No, not by Karr's mother—by Rasmani, who'd been standing darkly in a corner. 'Oh, so you fired at him?' he burst out, in a fierce, accusing way I'd never have stood from any man if I hadn't been about shot to pieces. 'So you fired at him?'"

"Well, what if I did? He was in the place, along with those safe-cracking thugs—"

"Rasmani muttered something I couldn't understand, probably an oath in his native jargon. But his next words were almost yelled at me. 'I see now! I see! From the moment I got that hysterical phone call from Mrs. Karr, I suspected something of the kind. So you fired at poor Emerson! Do you know what you've really done?'"

"I can't begin to tell you how powerfully these words were hurled at me. There was a weird force about them, something that backed me into a corner, while Rasmani stood before me, pointing one finger at me like a condemning judge.

"'Maybe you don't know,' he went on, 'that Karr was studying Yogi, under my care?'"

"'Yes, he mentioned that to me.'

"'Then mark this: he was still in the first stages. He'd only advanced far enough to release his astral part—his spirit, as you westerners would call it—while he lay asleep. This might travel wherever his desires would take it, and might actually be seen, since it was a real entity—'"

"'But in that case,' I forced out, getting more and more confused, 'why in perdition was he getting mixed up with all kinds of bandits—'"

"**W**ITH a savage swift motion, Rasmani reached under the bed, and drew out a pile of brightly covered magazines: 'Banner Crime Stories,' and the like. 'Because he'd been secretly feeding on stuff like this, as a relief from routine and monotony—gratifying his suppressed impulses for ad-

venture, which had been starved all his life. Naturally, in these early Yogi stages, when the soul was let loose in sleep, it took the road of least resistance—the road of its day-dreams—in this case, connected with crime and detectives. The lower astral, we Orientals would call it. Just the same, he'd have risen in time—if it hadn't been for your shot.'

"My shot?"

"Yes, your shot. Don't you see now what you did? When you fired at him in your blundering ignorance, you sent a terrific shock to his astral part. This shock in turn was transmitted to the physical body, which lay at home in deep sleep. It is well known that any man, even the most healthy, can be killed by a severe enough nervous jolt. Well, this jolt was more than our friend could stand. He awoke to one moment of intense horror, which caused the scream Mrs. Karr heard—and that was all. Maybe you don't know it, Chief Finch, but you are a murderer. *You are a murderer!*"

"While the eyes of Rasmani and old

Mrs. Karr followed me accurately, I left the room. I told myself that that Hindu fakir was crazier'n a bat, but just the same in my heart I did feel like a murderer. And after some time had gone by and that goggle-eyed beanpole hadn't ever shown up again near a night crime but the Rocco gang had been broken up like a rotten squash, I knew Rasmani had been right. Karr had done more than hang around when the Rocco boys did a job. Remembering how he'd been motioning to them just before I fired the shot, I knew he'd been their guide, their secret captain. Maybe some of them didn't see him or know anything about him, but I'm mortally sure some of them did follow him, not knowing he wasn't flesh and blood. He'd showed them where to find the loot; showed them how to get around our nets. And that's why, when I think things over, I'm glad I fired that shot. Because even if I did get old Karr, I ended the Rocco gang too. And put a stop to the worst crime wave this city ever had."