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A LEAK in the FOUNTAIN of YOUTH

*A new story by the author of
"Scandal in the 4th Dimension"*

by A. R. Long

THIS is not an attempt to seek vulgar publicity for the extraordinary experimental work in gland control carried on by my friend, Professor Aloysius O'Flannigan; neither is it an effort to exonerate him in the public mind of the supposed murder of Gustavus Adolphus Lindstrom. In the first place, any type of publicity whatsoever is highly distasteful to Aloysius; and, in the second, the living presence of Gustavus himself is exoneration enough. All I wish to do is to set down the truth, in order that the wild rumors accusing a reputable man of science of such preposterous—not to say scandalous—behavior, may be stilled.

Although Aloysius O'Flannigan is still a very young man, he has already accomplished some most remarkable things in the field of biochemistry. Not least among these is his growth-and-age-control serum, based upon a series of highly intricate experiments with the glandular system.

"It is really quite simple when you get down to it, Eric," he told me one day in his laboratory. "Science has known for a long time that the growth and aging of the body are governed by certain glands. There is, for example, the pituitary gland, controlling skeletal growth; the thymus, regulating physical development to adolescence; the thyroid,

governing mental and nervous development; and all the rest of them.

"Science has even realized that the control of these glands and their hormones means practical control of the development of the individual. And that is what I plan to do, Eric."

Here he leaned forward and tapped me impressively on the knee, while his blue eyes shone excitedly behind his shell-rimmed spectacles. "I mean to control the entire glandular system, so that a man may become old or young, large or small, at will. It's entirely logical."

I shook my head. "It may sound entirely logical in theory," I told him, "but you'll find it's going to be something else in practice. I don't want to hurt your feelings, Aloysius, but if you think, for example, that you can turn an old man into a boy, you're—well, due for a keen disappointment. It can't be done."

"And why not?" he demanded.

"Why not!" I echoed. "Well, for one thing, there's skeletal growth. Be reasonable, Aloysius. It is perfectly comprehensible that you may be able to arrest bodily development through control of the glandular system; but to claim that you can reverse the process is sheer nonsense."

"You understand the process of coal-



"Merciful Heaven! Where did that come from?"

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tion in the unicellular animals, don't you?" he asked. The light of battle was beginning to appear in his usually mild eyes.

"Certainly," I answered, a little nettled that he should question my knowledge on such an elemental point of zoölogy. "It is the reverse of the process of subdivision. Instead of one amoeba or protozoan subdividing to form two new individuals, two amoebæ coalesce to form one. But what has that got to do with——"

He interrupted me. "And you realize that the individual cell structure of the human body is similar to that of the unicellular animals, including cell division in the process of growth, don't you?" he persisted. "Well, then, why couldn't coalition take place in a similar manner, also?"

"But it doesn't," I protested. "You know very well that it doesn't."

"But it could through control of the glandular system. Don't you see it?"

All I could see was that we were arguing in a circle; so I gave it up.

IT WAS about three months after this that the bank robbery occurred. I read the account of it in the morning paper as I ate my breakfast; but at the time noticed nothing beyond the fact that our largest suburban bank had been relieved of one hundred thousand dollars by a masked man who had entered just a minute before closing time the day before, and held up the place single-handed. Just as he was leaving, his mask had slipped down; the paying teller had seen—— Here the story was continued on an inside page; and I, being in something of a hurry, did not take the time to finish it.

I had planned to drop around to see Aloysius that morning to ask his opinion on an article I had written on the unemployment situation in early Babylonian; but when I reached his home, all thoughts of the matter were driven from

my mind. Our old college friend, Gustavus Adolphus Lindstrom, had just arrived ahead of me; and he was in trouble.

Now, being in trouble is not precisely a new position for Gustavus Adolphus. In the first place, he is a free-verse poet; and in the second—— But the first will cover everything, so I will not trouble to elaborate.

Usually his escapades are of the picturesque but comparatively harmless variety; but this one was different. In fact, it was so different that it centered around the Suburban Bank robbery, with Gustavus Adolphus cast in the leading rôle.

It was one of those damning cases of circumstantial evidence and mistaken identification. The paying teller of the bank had been taken down to police headquarters to try to identify the holdup man in the rogues' gallery. When he had failed to find his man among the accepted celebrities, the police, in desperation, had brought out a collection of minor offenders; and from these the misguided bank clerk had picked out Gustavus Adolphus!

"But, Gussie," inquired Aloysius, "how in the world did your picture ever get in the rogues' gallery?"

Gustavus Adolphus looked somewhat embarrassed. "You see, it was this way," he began. "A few years ago, I headed a movement for the practical revival of classicism. One of our aims was to bring back the ancient Greek form of dress for both men and women; and I, as head of the movement, felt it my duty to put the theory into practice.

"But, when I walked down Broadway in the tunic and sandals of Sophocles' time, I was arrested at Forty-second Street and charged with both appearing in public improperly clad and attracting a crowd that obstructed traffic. I—I spent three months in jail," he finished lamely.

WHILE he was explaining this to Aloysius, my mind was busy with the problem at hand. "Of course, it's a case of wrong identification based on coincidental resemblance," I said now. To assume that Gustavus Adolphus would have held up a bank, even if he had known how, was naturally ridiculous. "But the mistake can be cleared up readily enough. All you need to is produce your alibi for yesterday afternoon, and then——"

"But that's just the trouble," he interrupted piteously. "I haven't got an alibi."

"You—what?" Aloysius and I stared at him in blank amazement.

"What I mean is, I've got an alibi, but I can't prove it," he explained. He looked pathetically from one of us to the other.

"But where were you?" I demanded.

"In a Greek sarcophagus at the university museum," he answered meekly.

I began to lose patience. "This is no time for flippancy," I told him. "Stop trying to create a sensation, and tell us where you were."

"But I have told you," he protested. "I wanted to write a poem on the death of Socrates; so I went to the Greek wing of the museum, and climbed into the stone sarcophagus—the one with the opening above the face and shoulders of the occupant—to put myself in the mood. I—I'm afraid no one saw me there."

"Didn't any one come into the Greek wing?" Aloysius inquired.

"Oh, yes," Gustavus Adolphus said. "One of the university students came in with a young lady. He came quite close to where I was, and flicked cigarette ashes through the opening of the sarcophagus. But since the interior of one of those things is rather dark, he couldn't have seen me unless he had deliberately leaned over and peered in."

"But you must have been able to see him," I pointed out. "Couldn't you rec-

ognize him if you saw him again?"

"I'm afraid not," he admitted regretfully. "You see, the cigarette ashes landed in my eye; and I wasn't able to see anything for quite some time. All I know about him is that the young lady addressed him as Lover Boy; and that is hardly sufficient for identification."

Aloysius and I agreed that it was not.

"This is beginning to be serious," Aloysius said gravely, as we appeared to be at a deadlock. "If you can't prove an alibi, you'll never be able to convince the police that a mistake has been made."

"I realize it," Gustavus said; "and I don't know what to do, or where to go."

I was tempted to suggest back into the sarcophagus; but, as I had warned him only a minute before, it was hardly the time for levity. Something had to be done, and done quickly.

I looked at Aloysius. "What are we going to do?" I queried.

"I thought," Gustavus Adolphus ventured timidly, "that perhaps Aloysius could do something to me with his science, so that the police couldn't recognize me."

Aloysius' nostrils quivered. "Be quiet, both of you," he commanded, "while I think."

He began to stride up and down the room, his chin sunk forward upon his breast, and his hands clasped loosely behind his back. Gustavus and I watched him anxiously. We both knew that if he was to think of something, it would have to be fast and it would have to be good.

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of his pacing, and smote his left palm with his right fist. His eyes were gleaming behind his thick-lensed spectacles.

"I've got it!" he cried. "My glandular control serum, of course!"

I sprang out of my chair at the words. "No, Aloysius, no!" I exclaimed aghast. "You wouldn't dare!"

He ignored me, and addressed Gustavus Adolphus. "It's a new formula that I completed less than a week ago," he explained. "By its use, I can change you temporarily to a boy of about sixteen. Shall I do it?"

"Don't you let him," I warned Gustavus. "It's liable to kill you."

Gustavus looked uncertainly from me to Aloysius. "Is it dangerous?" he inquired.

"Of course not," Aloysius declared impatiently. "Why, only yesterday I changed a battle-scarred tomcat to a mewling kitten; and to-day it's enjoying life to the full."

"Will it hurt?"

"You'll have to ask the tomcat. But it's practically certain to be painless, since you merely fall asleep, and, when you waken, years have dropped from your age."

"It sounds rather attractive," Gustavus confessed.

"It sounds too quick to be good," I commented.

"Eric, you be quiet," Aloysius snapped at me. Now that the chance to try out his pet theory upon a human being had been practically dropped into the lap, he wasn't going to have it snatched away by anybody. "Under ordinary circumstances, the treatment would cover a period of months; but we've got no time for that now. We've got to act fast."

A SUDDEN, businesslike ring at the front doorbell was like an exclamation point after his words!

"The police!" Gustavus gasped, and went limp.

Aloysius seized him by the scruff of the neck, and propelled him toward the laboratory. "Answer the door, Eric," he said. "If it's the police, hold them off until I get back."

I had the sensation that each board

I trod upon was on springs and gave under me as I walked down the hall to the front door. When I opened it, the worst was realized: A burly policeman confronted me!

"Are you Professor O'Flannigan?" he bellowed. I realized afterward that he must have spoken in only an ordinary tone of voice, but it sounded differently to me then.

"No, officer," I replied, glad that my first words, at least, could be the truth. "I'm only his friend, Eric Dale. Did you want to see the professor?"

"An' what would I be doin' here if I didn't?" he answered.

This didn't seem to call for an answer, so I didn't attempt one. "If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll go and call him," I offered instead, and started back down the hall. To my horror, the policeman followed me!

For a moment I had the hideous vision of his forcing me to guide him straight to the laboratory where Aloysius was doing heaven alone knew what to Gustavus Adolphus, and, then, clapping irons on both of us for aiding and abetting a dangerous criminal; but the situation was saved by the entrance of Aloysius in person, alone and wholly self-possessed.

"Was some one at the door, Eric?" he inquired innocently; then, pretending to see the policeman for the first time, "Oh, good morning, officer. Can I do something for you?"

The policeman touched his cap. "It's about a friend of yours I've come, professor," he explained. "A man named Gustavus Lindstrom. Have you seen him this mornin'?"

Aloysius registered just the right amount of annoyance and concern. "Don't tell me that Gussie's gone and got himself into trouble again!" he exclaimed protestingly.

The policeman explained that Gustavus was wanted for the robbery of the

Suburban Bank. Aloysius was properly shocked.

"I simply can't believe it!" he declared. "Why, I saw him only day before yesterday, and he said nothing at all about intending to rob a bank."

"They seldom do," the policeman said. "But seein' as you're such a good friend of his, he may try to get in touch with you now that it's over; and, if he does, will you let us know, professor? If he's innocent, you'll be doin' him a favor by helpin' him prove it."

Aloysius intimated that he would—without, however, definitely committing himself; and the policeman departed.

"Now," I demanded, turning with the ferocity of overwrought nerves upon Aloysius, "what have you done with Gussie?"

He raised a calming hand. "Gussie's all right," he assured me. "I gave him a large dose of the glandular control serum, and he's sleeping quietly in my room. Would you like to see him?"

I replied that I most certainly would.

He conducted me to his bedroom adjoining the laboratory. There lay Gussie sleeping peacefully, and with an expression on his face that for sheer guilelessness would have done credit to a hydrocephalic idiot.

I bent over him and examined him. "Heavens!" I cried almost at once. "He's young already!"

Aloysius laughed. "Your imagination, Eric," he said. "The serum won't begin to take effect for nearly an hour."

In spite of Aloysius' assurance that everything was now all right and that Gustavus would be safe until the real bank robber was discovered, I returned to my home with a feeling of strong misgiving. Suppose the serum should fail to take effect upon a human being; or suppose, having been given in one large portion instead of small quantities, it should kill or cripple Gustavus! But, as the day wore on and none of

the papers brought out an extra featuring either his capture or his murder, I decided that I was giving myself needless worry; and so I banished the matter from my mind.

BUT it was false security. At three o'clock the next morning, my telephone rang. Aloysius was on the wire.

"Eric," he almost whispered, "come over at once! We're in the devil's own predicament!"

"Gussie——" I began incautiously, but he interrupted.

"Don't ask questions over the phone," he warned. "I'll explain when you get here." He rang off.

I dressed as quickly as possible, and hurried around to where he lived. He was waiting for me at the door.

"What on earth's happened?" I demanded. "Have the police——"

He waived the police aside as if they had been of no consequence.

"It's nothing to do with the police," he said. "Eric, we've a *real* problem on our hands now. Come into the study."

He seized me by the arm, and almost propelled me into the room. "Look," he commanded, and pointed dramatically at a large, overstuffed armchair.

I looked. Something was lying upon the seat of the chair. At first I thought that it was merely a blanket roll; then, I realized that it was alive. Bending closer, I discovered with a sense of shock that it was a very young baby!

"Merciful Heaven!" I gasped, and took a step backward. "Where did that come from?"

"Don't you know?" Aloysius asked.

I raised my eyebrows. "Doorstep contribution?" I inquired.

He made an impatient gesture. "Won't you understand, Eric?" he asked piteously. There was soul sickness in his eyes. "It's Gussie!"

"Gussie!" I sat down weakly upon the nearest chair, and tried to keep my head from spinning while he explained. It seemed that either he had given Gustavus a slight overdose of the serum, or the stuff taken in quantity acted differently than when taken in small amounts. In any case, Gustavus had failed to stop rejuvenating when he had reached the physiological age of sixteen, but had continued to grow younger and younger until he had reached his present state.

"It was terrible!" Aloysius said, shuddering. "For a while I was afraid he was going to vanish entirely right there before my eyes. Eric, what are we going to do with him?"

I considered the situation. Once the shock of beholding Gustavus as an infant had abated, matters did not really look so bad. After all, what Aloysius had set out to do was to disguise Gustavus so that the police would not recognize him; and that was precisely what he had done. Why not, I argued, permit Gustavus to remain as he was until after the real criminal had been apprehended, when he could be restored to his normal state?

This suggestion relieved Aloysius enormously. He permitted me to go home and finish my night's sleep in peace.

The following noon I dropped around again to see how he was getting on. I found him preparing a bottle for Gustavus.

"Eric," he said through clenched teeth, "this can't go on. I've done nothing since five o'clock this morning but wait on Gussie."

"Five o'clock!" I echoed. "That's no hour to get a child up. Why didn't you let him sleep?"

He looked at me in disgust. "That shows how much you know about it," he retorted resentfully. "He got me up. At five o'clock sharp he started to

yell like a banshee, and I had to walk the floor with him for two hours before he'd quiet. Since then it's been one thing after another. I tell you, I can't stand it!"

It was on the tip of my tongue to remind him that I had warned him against this experiment in the first place, but I saw the dark circles under his eyes and refrained. After all, it would be unkind to twist the weapon in the wound just then.

"There's only one thing to do that I can think of," I told him. "You'll have to hire a nurse."

He hired a nurse, a grim-visaged man-hater named Miss Mabel McGillicuddy. She was a woman with an iron jaw and a physique like a horse, but she understood the care of infants. Aloysius gave her an apologetic-sounding story about Gustavus' being his orphaned nephew, and conducted her to the nursery. She appeared a trifle dashed when she discovered that her charge's entire wardrobe consisted of an old, cut-down polo shirt and a dozen and a half dinner napkins; but she said nothing and got to work.

TWO MONTHS PASSED, not entirely uneventfully. The police, for some reason that we never entirely fathomed, were positive that Gustavus had come to Aloysius the day after the bank robbery; but they could prove nothing. Repeated questioning of Aloysius and even a search of the premises during his absence, got them nowhere. And, meanwhile, he whom they searched rode out in his own perambulator under their very noses.

Of course, we knew that this state of things could not go on indefinitely; but when the next move came, it found us unprepared. It was, in fact, nothing more nor less than the arrest of the real bank robber, taken in the attempted holdup of a bank in a neighboring city.

Upon being identified by the teller of the Suburban, he admitted the first robbery; so, the good name of Gustavus Adolphus Lindstrom had been cleared.

It would now seem that all that remained for us to do was to administer the serum that would restore Gustavus to his normal physiological age. That was what we thought, too; but we soon learned that it was not so simple. The realization came to us when we approached the nursery door with a hypodermic of the serum, and discovered that Gustavus was not alone. We had forgotten Miss McGillicuddy.

"What," I inquired, "are you going to tell the nurse?"

Aloysius looked blank. "I hadn't thought of that," he confessed. "You—you don't suppose she'd believe the truth?"

"I *know* she wouldn't," I answered with conviction. "You'll have to do better than that."

He sighed. "The only thing I can think of, is to tell her that her services are no longer needed," he said; "and I'll have on awful slim chance of getting away with it."

"There's only one other way," I pointed out. "The woman must sleep some time out of the twenty-four hours. You'll have to watch your chance and give Gussie the serum then."

But it was easier said than accomplished. All our visits to the nursery found Miss McGillicuddy wide awake and on the job. Finally, we divided the day into six-hour shifts during which we alternately kept watch in an effort to catch her napping; but this met with no success, either.

Worse yet, Miss McGillicuddy now seemed to know that she was under secret surveillance; for she began to regard Aloysius and me with a suspicious eye, and kept the nursery door locked most of the time, so that we had to knock to gain admittance.

It was at about this time that Aloysius discovered that we ourselves were being spied upon. He mentioned it to me when I dropped around one morning.

"Eric," he began uneasily, "I don't know what can be the matter, now that the bank robber has been arrested and Gussie is no longer under suspicion; but a policeman's been watching this house for the past three days. He's taken a room across the street, and he keeps looking over here with a pair of field glasses."

"Miss McGillicuddy——" I suggested.

He nodded. "I'm afraid so," he said. "That female never did like me from the beginning. And now our watching her has made her suspect Heaven alone knows what, and she's gone to the police about it."

"I'm afraid we'll have to do what we should have done in the beginning," I told him gloomily; "definitely discharge the woman."

We each took a neat drink of Irish whisky to help our courage; then we tackled the job. To our amazement, it was easier than we had anticipated. Miss McGillicuddy said nothing, but she gave us one long, unreadable look. Then she executed a military about face, and marched off to her room to pack her belongings. A half hour later, we heard the front door close firmly behind her.

WITH a combined sigh of relief that sounded like the open steam valve of a locomotive, Aloysius and I bounded upstairs to the nursery. He was ahead of me as we reached the nursery door, and so it was he who first bent over the bassinet. The next instant I saw him clap his hands to his head and stagger back.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "She's taken Gussie along with her!"

For a minute or so we could only stare at each other in dumb stupefac-

tion. Then my brain cleared a little.

"It's kidnaping!" I cried indignantly. "She can't do this! We'll go to the police ourselves, and enter a complaint."

But we were saved the trouble. At that very minute, the doorbell rang.

On the step stood the policeman who had called on us two months before!

"Professor O'Flannigan," he pronounced severely when he had shouldered his way into the hall, "I want to know what it is you've done with Gustavus Lindstrom."

And then the awful facts came out: Gustavus had been known to come to Aloysius' house the day after the bank robbery, but had not been known to leave. It had been assumed by the police that Aloysius was protecting his friend from arrest for the bank robbery; but when the real criminal had been apprehended and Gustavus still failed to appear, it was felt that something serious must be the matter.

When a check-up with Gustavus' relatives revealed no clue to his whereabouts, the police had formulated a theory. It was that Gussie had been foully murdered by his mad scientist friend, Professor Aloysius O'Flannigan!

"But that's preposterous!" Aloysius protested indignantly. "I haven't harmed Gussie!"

"Then what have you done with him?" the policeman asked, not unreasonably.

Aloysius opened his mouth to reply, but closed it again without uttering a word. If he told the truth now, he'd be locked up as a raving lunatic.

"Professor O'Flannigan is not quite himself this morning," I put in helpfully. "His little nephew has just been kidnaped by the nurse who was employed to look after him."

The policeman smiled sourly. "We know all about that," he told me. "That nurse told us how the professor here was actin', and it was what decided us

in thinkin' that somethin' was wrong up here." He turned back to Aloysius. "I guess you'd better come along with me to the station, professor," he said. "The sergeant'll be wantin' to talk to you."

Aloysius paled. "Very well, officer," he said weakly. "Excuse me while I get my hat and coat."

He started slowly down the hall toward the laboratory. At the door, however, he turned.

"Eric, remember Socrates," he called, and disappeared into the room.

We waited in stony silence. What the policeman's thoughts were, I have no idea; but I know that mine were in a turmoil. If Aloysius was locked up on suspicion of having murdered Gussie, how would he be able to bring Gussie back to normal? And unless Gussie was brought back to normal, how was Aloysius going to prove his innocence? It would do no good to tell the truth; there are some things that even the police refuse to believe.

SUDDENLY I began to realize that Aloysius had been gone a very long time. The policeman, too, realized it; for his face became ominous, and he made for the laboratory door. I, beset by a hundred whirling fears, followed, and was immediately behind him when he entered the room. It was empty; but an open window told the story: Aloysius had realized his predicament, and had chosen liberty by way of the laboratory window and the back fence.

For the next five minutes that policeman's language was awful. But he finally calmed down; and after grilling me on Aloysius' habits and possible hide-out, left for police headquarters. I, much to my surprise, was permitted to go home.

I spent the next few hours listening to police descriptions of Aloysius over the radio, and wondering what he was doing. I had not the faintest idea where

he could have gone, but I knew that I would have to get in touch with him some way to arrange for the restoration of Gussie.

And then, like enlightenment from Heaven, came the memory of his parting words to me: "Eric, remember Socrates."

I jammed on my hat and made a dash for the university museum.

The Greek wing was empty when I entered it; nevertheless, I approached the stone sarcophagus with caution. I was in the act of lighting a cigarette with elaborate nonchalance when a voice spoke from the sarcophagus' interior:

"Eric, if you drop ashes in here I'll come out and murder you."

"Aloysius!" I gasped in relief. "Thank Heaven you're here!"

"According to Gussie's experience, it seemed the one sure place where nobody would look," he replied. He squirmed to a sitting posture, so that his head protruded just above the opening in the sarcophagus. "You've got to help me get Gussie back in shape," he said. "Do you think you can carry out a few simple instructions?"

"I'll try," I promised. "What are they?"

"First," he went on, "go to my laboratory and get the hypodermic with the corrective serum; you know which one it is. Next, take another hypodermic and make it one quarter full from the bottle on the end of the second shelf in the closet. It's a sleeping formula of my own, and is pretty powerful; so don't take too much of it. Then drive back here after dark, and pick me up."

"What are you going to do?" I asked apprehensively.

"Never mind," he answered. "You know enough for the present. Now get going."

I had less trouble than I anticipated getting into the laboratory. The policeman on guard accepted my story that I had come for medicine for a sick dog,

and let me take what I wanted from the drug cupboard, as long as I made no effort to disturb anything else. I had a moment's uncertainty over preparing the second hypodermic, for Aloysius had not told me which end of the second shelf he meant. I finally decided upon the right end, and took down the bottle that stood there. Then I returned to the museum.

Aloysius was waiting for me behind a tree across the street. "I nearly got caught getting out," he said, climbing into the car. "The damned burglar alarm went off."

"Where to now?" I asked, releasing the brake.

He gave me an address. "It's Miss McGillicuddy's," he added.

WHILE I drove, he explained his plan. I was to get in to talk to Miss McGillicuddy on some pretext, while he remained hidden in the car. Then, when I had talked her off her guard, I was to plunge the second hypodermic into her arm. As soon as she had gone under, I was to snatch up Gussie, and dash back to the car. Aloysius would do the rest.

It sounded easy enough until I found myself standing on the doorstep facing Miss McGillicuddy.

"Well, what do *you* want?" she demanded uncompromisingly. Her iron jaw, when it moved, was overpoweringly suggestive of a cement mixer.

"Miss McGillicuddy," I began weakly, "I've got to speak to you about—about little Gussie. It's very important. May I come in?"

She moved aside reluctantly for me to enter. But the entrance was narrow, and she was a large woman; and, in that minute, I saw my chance. With a swiftness that surprised me myself, I plunged the hypodermic home. Miss McGillicuddy gave one startled snort, and wilted before my eyes.

Fighting down a feeling of panic, I

darted on into the house in search of Gussie. I found him without difficulty, and was back to the car and had handed him to Aloysius in the back seat in less than two minutes.

"Now," Aloysius cried triumphantly, "drive somewhere — anywhere — until this stuff takes effect! It acts quickly."

We dashed off at top speed, with Gussie yelling like an Indian on the back seat. We took the corner on two wheels, and almost collided with another car that was coming toward us. I heard the driver bawl a command at me to stop, but I paid no attention. There was no time to stand on ceremony just then.

But a moment later I heard an exclamation of dismay from Aloysius. "Divil an' all!" he gasped. "That was a police car, Eric, and they're following us!"

My only answer was to step on the gas.

I shall never forget that wild ride, although its details were, even at the time, a series of blurs to me. I remember vaguely crashing through two or three red lights, while the shrilling of police whistles all but deafened me. Gussie's yells made our progress as conspicuous as that of the fire chief; and to add to our confusion, shouts of, "Kidnapers!" began to arise from all sides.

At Aloysius' suggestion, I made for the open country; but when I passed the city limits, there were already three police cars and a whole squad of motorcycle police on our trail.

"If we can only hold out for an hour or two," Aloysius said, "we'll be all—Ow! Devil fly away with you!"

"What's wrong?" I demanded, wondering fearfully whether one of the police cars had opened fire, and Aloysius had been hit.

But his reply reassured me. "Gussie's cutting teeth," he answered. "The little fiend just bit me."

During the next hour Gussie's growth was phenomenal. By the time we crossed the State line, he had reached the obstreperous stage, and was trying to climb over the back of the seat to assist me at the wheel.

It had been a little past eight o'clock in the evening when Aloysius had injected the corrective serum. By six o'clock the next morning, it had completely taken effect, and, to our unbounded relief, Gussie was quite himself again, and with only a hazy memory of what had transpired in the interval. But now two new problems had arisen: The car was almost out of gas, and Gussie—except for the car's best blanket—was embarrassingly out of raiment.

"We'll have to stop at the next gasoline station," I told Aloysius. "We can do it in safety, for the police haven't followed us across the State line."

BUT I had reckoned without my radio. The keeper of the gasoline station glanced at our license, deliberately raised the hood of our car and did something to our spark plugs, and then walked calmly into his house and closed the door. Before we realized what was happening, two State troopers had appeared from nowhere and taken possession of us!

"It's all right," Aloysius reassured as we were herded into a police car to be taken back whence we had come. "We can produce Gussie now, so that will squash the murder charge; and as for the remarks about kidnaping, Gussie can prove that he was the baby by the mole on his left thigh. Miss McGillicuddy, the nurse, can identify it."

"Ye gods;" exclaimed Gussie, aghast. "Did I have a nurse, and does she know about that?"

Returned to our home city, we told our story, individually and collectively, to a skeptical desk sergeant.

"A likely soundin' tale you be tellin'

me," he said. "I'm after thinkin' it's not Mr. Lindstrom alone that's had a second childhood, but all three of you; and I've a mind to put you all in the jug until you grow up."

Aloysius drew himself up. He can be impressive as well as persuasive when he tries. "Sergeant," he said, "I am a man of science, and what I tell you about the gland control serum is the truth. You must, at least, give us an opportunity to prove it by calling in the nurse, Miss McGillicuddy."

The sergeant was not unreasonable. He dispatched a man to summon our witness.

Fifteen minutes passed; then the telephone rang frantically. The sergeant took the call.

"My man O'Reilly's at the nurse's house," he announced tersely as he hung up. "He says something's happened to her, and he needs help. I'm going over there, and I'm takin' you birds along."

My heart sank. Aloysius had said that the sleeping formula was pretty powerful. Suppose I had given her too much, and——

Aloysius must have been thinking something of the same sort, for he whispered to me as we entered Miss McGillicuddy's residence; "Eric, tell me quick: From which bottle did you fill

that hypodermic? Right or left end of the shelf?"

"Right," I answered; and then, from his horrified expression, knew the worst: The bottle I had used had contained poison, and now Miss McGillicuddy was a stiffened corpse! What, I wondered, was the penalty in our State for manslaughter?

And then a voice from the room on our left spoke protectingly: "Nix, lady, lay off!" it was saying. "I'm a married man with a family!"

We rushed after the sergeant into the room beyond. And there a startling spectacle confronted us: Seated stiffly upon the edge of a chair was Officer O'Reilly, while perched coyly upon his knee—and very much alive—was Miss McGillicuddy! But not the Miss McGillicuddy we had known. Instead of an equine forty-odd, she was now a coltish twenty-one!

"O'Reilly, what's the meaning of this?" the sergeant roared; but I think he must have guessed even before he got the explanation.

Aloysius turned to me, and there was a look of mingled reproach and relief in his eyes.

"Eric, you're a blundering idiot!" he exclaimed. "But you've proven our story. You gave a shot of the gland serum to Miss McGillicuddy!"