

IN A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION  
CANADA

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# 10¢ CLUES DETECTIVE STORIES

CONTENTS COPYRIGHTED 1935

JULY

The "Pawang" Ali, mysterious as the oriental night, moves again in the cause of the white man's law.  
And, if he lives, his report to the police will end as it always does: "—killed while resisting arrest."  
Pawang Ali—the Sherlock Holmes of Singapore, in—  
**THE CLAW OF IBLIS**  
By E. HOFFMANN PRICE





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# CLUES DETECTIVE STORIES

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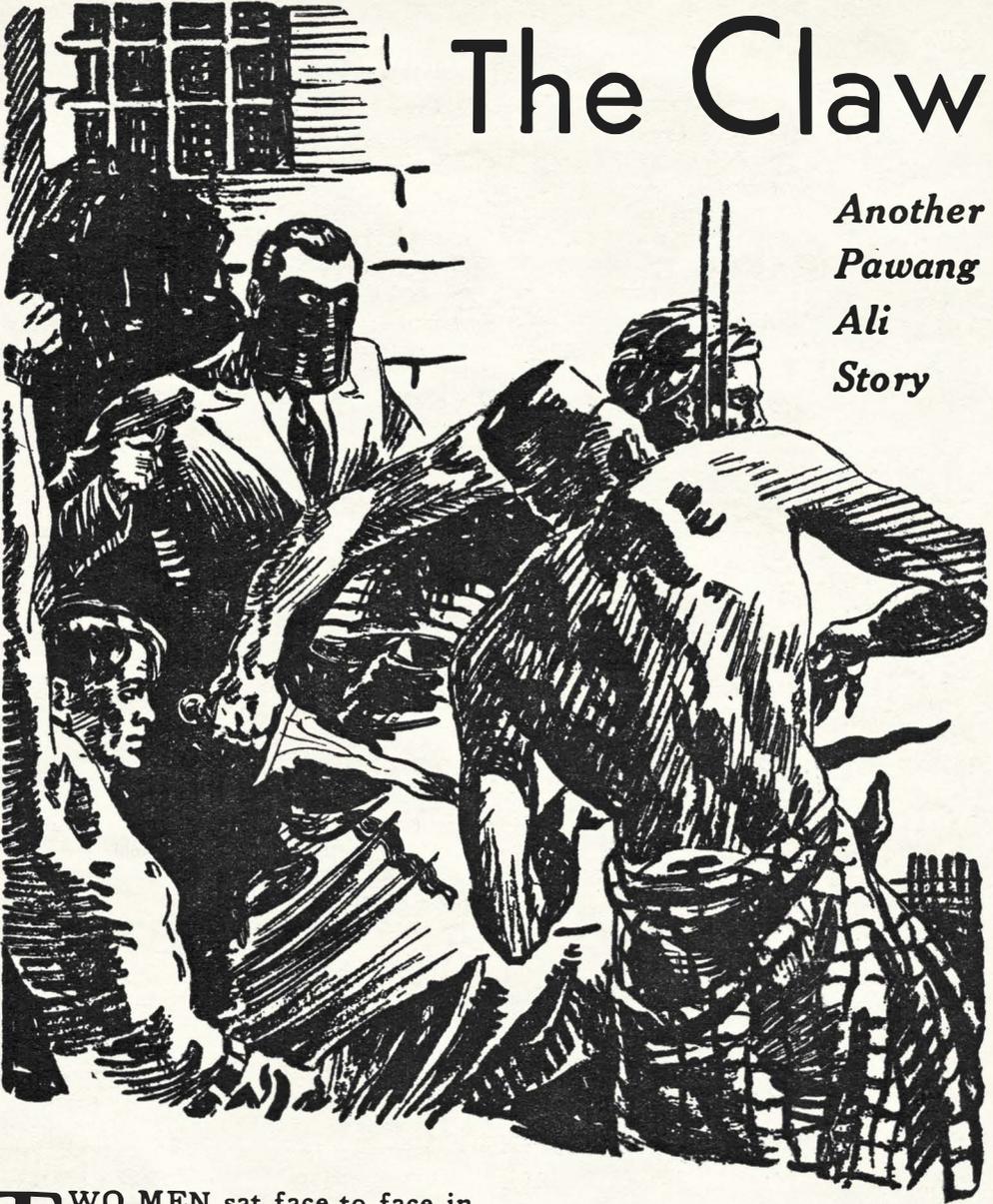


## CHELSEA HOUSE

79 SEVENTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y.

# The Claw

*Another  
Pawang  
Ali  
Story*



**T**WO MEN sat face to face in a second-floor room of a house in the native quarter of Singapore, not far from the mosque at the end of Jalan Penang. The European clothing they wore was outlandish in the sultry-red glow that brought smoldering highlights out of the Boukhara rugs and the brazen censers and burnished-copper coffee service that gleamed from wall niches.

But Pâwang Ali, the scourge of native criminals, was at home in the ruddy, half gloom that whispered of the lurid secrets of Asia. His handsome, aquiline face was placid and his faintly slanted eyes were dark pools shadowed by brows that rose in querying arches as he said, "It is some time since the inspector *sahib* has honored me. I regret that my esteemed friend is troubled."

# of Iblis

by E. Hoffmann Price



*The Pâwang hurled his human shield headlong into the cluster of Malays. The Claw fired again, but—*

Inspector Arnold Kemp's blue eyes widened. His leathery, sun-tanned face was habitually as somber as the droop of his straw-colored mustache. He wondered how his poker mask had betrayed his emotions.

"Wait a minute, Pâwang Ali!" He laughed. "Do I look that worried?"

"Not your looks, but your actions," the Arab explained. "The inspector *sahib* came unobtrusively in a ricksha instead of in an official car. Usually you telephone. This time you did not wish any one to know of your visit. And, finally, the shred of a severely mangled cigar adheres to your lip."

The inspector grimaced wryly, removed the betraying bit of tobacco and rumbled, "Damn it, yes! It's the Claw of Iblis. Piracy—smuggling—and a chain of murders to reach from here to Siam!"

The evil voice of hidden Asia was mocking Arnold Kemp. Slayings under his very nose, and followed by taunting messages. Somewhere in Singapore was a hidden menace that whispered in the darkness; assassinations in Trengganu, Pahang and Malacca were the echoes of that sinister murmuring.

It was high time for Pâwang Ali to close the case with his soft-voiced, inevitable report: "Killed while resisting arrest."

"The Claw of Iblis," admitted the Pâwang, "is an exceedingly clever person. But if I can assist with a suggestion——"

His quiet, almost melancholy voice trailed to an indefinite interrogation. Kemp's eyes blazed

wrathfully and his heavy fist pounded the solid, teak desk.

"Suggestion, my eye!" he exploded. "I want you to go out and—er—well, arrest him."

The Arab's smile was in his eyes rather than on his lips; but for an instant his quartering of Malay blood made his nostrils flare as at the scent of blood. Then he shrugged and said, "The wolf is more cunning than the hound. But he may finally turn to fight. And as you suggested, *sahib* inspector, it would be lawful to kill him in self-defense——"

The Pâwang, indolent as a sleepy tiger, began fingering the beads of the Moslem rosary that lay on his desk.

Kemp's eyes shifted from astrological charts—barely visible in the smoldering gloom—toward the huge crystal globe that glowed like a monstrous moonstone in a wall niche. There was no hope of prodding that imperturbable Arab into action, or probing the brazen mask that concealed his thoughts.

"Any time at all, Pâwang Ali," was his ironic comment as he reached for his hat.

"Haste is of Satan," deplored the Pâwang, gesturing to detain his guest. "Be pleased to allow my slow wits sufficient time to consider the——"

The jangle of the telephone interrupted his apology. As he reached for the instrument he remarked casually, "A message over this unlisted wire is usually interesting."

Kemp settled back in his chair. Odd news in strange dialects often made that secret line vibrate. The Pâwang waited only for a few

words, then handed the instrument to the inspector; but he listened and heard the speaker's voice filtering past Kemp's ear: "There will be news for you in five minutes, Mr. Inspector. Tune in on your friend's radio set. Six meters——"

Then a click and the line was dead. Kemp slammed the instrument back to its cradle.

Pâwang Ali stepped to the all-wave set that stood in a corner and spun the dials.

"Damn funny," muttered Kemp.

"Funnier than you realize," said the Pâwang. His voice was smooth, but his dark eyes were aflame with wrath. "Some one not only knows that you are calling on me, but he has used a private number which no one but you and my own assistants should know."

"I've used it only once," protested the inspector. "A few weeks ago. And no one could have overheard me. I was alone in my office——"

"Wisdom is with Allah," remarked the Arab, hinting that the inspector could not be too certain.

Kemp swore and glanced at his watch. At the expiration of the fifth minute there was a crackle and sputter and a shrill whine, then an arrogant voice from the short-wave set mocked them:

"Inspector Kemp, attention! Go to the Borneo Wharf and see what the Claw of Iblis has left for you near *Godown* Number Four. Hurry, inspector! You may find a clue or make an arrest if you lose no time."

The speech was in English. The Arab's eyes narrowed as he tried to identify the perceptible trace of accent. Then he observed, "No fish is caught until he opens his mouth.

I am surprised that our enemy does not know this. He pronounces the name of Satan the Stoned as one of my countrymen would."

He pressed a button, beckoned to the inspector, and stepped toward a staircase concealed by ornately embroidered tapestries. The descent took a moment at the most. Yet, when they reached the street level, Kemp saw a long, black car emerging from an archway not far from the door which had admitted him.

"Stay here, Hop Wang," said Pâwang Ali to the chauffeur who had piloted the car from the garage.

SINGAPORE goes to bed early. By ten in the evening the city is in a stupor from which it does not arouse until gray dawn. There was no traffic to block the car that shot out of a narrow alley, thundered across the river, and flashed out South Bridge Road.

"Wait a minute!" protested the inspector as the car swung to the right at the Kreta Ayer police station instead of continuing straight ahead. "You're going out of your way!"

Pâwang Ali fed the roaring monster more gas and whipped it around the curves of the Kampong Bahru Road. It was not until he approached the railway tracks that he throttled down to an easy pace and turned left. The inspector was perplexed at haste neutralized by needless detour. He wondered at the Pâwang's cryptic smile.

As they approached the Borneo Wharf a tall, turbaned Sikh policeman loomed up in the center of the dusty, red highway, full in the glare of the street light near the corner

of *Godown* Number Four. The bearded giant's upraised hand signaled them to halt. At his feet and somewhat to the left of the road lay the body of a man.

Pâwang Ali stepped on the brake. The Sikh, recognizing Kemp, took the whistle from his lips and saluted.

"There was no outcry, inspector *sahib*," he began, gesturing toward the corpse that lay sprawled in the dust. "I found him as you see, with his head as though it dangled from a rag and not a neck."

By the blistering glare of the headlights, Pâwang Ali saw the thin, pale, scholarly face of a middle-aged man staring sightlessly at the stars. The mouth seemed to be voicing a protest that had suddenly been cut short. Amazement and indignation had been the last emotions of the man in gray. It was hideous that a man could be facing skyward when he lay on his side.

"Broken neck."

"By Heaven!" the inspector wrathfully growled. "*Thaggee!*"

It was the work of an East Indian assassin. He stalks the victim from the rear, whips about his throat a scarf, one end of which is weighted with a few coins or other small, compact objects. As the heavy end whisks back over the victim's shoulder, the slayer's left hand catches it, and simultaneously, he applies all his weight to the end grasped by his right hand. The result is a broken neck.

The British had exterminated *thaggee*, but the Claw of Iblis had not yet been notified. Pâwang Ali's faintly slanting, steel-hard eyes had

a feral glitter as he advanced toward the corpse.

"Look at this man's hand," he said, kneeling beside the body.

Kemp looked, first at the lean, clutching hand of the dead man, then at the quizzical, brazen mask of his ally.

"Well?"

"He still clutches a scrap of paper." Then, as the Pâwang plucked the fragment from the clenched fingers, he added, "A blue print."

Kemp regarded the piece that had evidently been torn from a sheet which had been snatched from the grasp of the dead man. He saw in English lettering: "*Tûan Besar*."

The Malan words meant "Great Lord."

"His body is almost cold," observed Pâwang Ali, still squatting on his heels. "He was carried here. Footprints are lacking. The earth was disturbed by the impact of the body. See also how a car swerved so that he could be tossed not far from the center of the road."

"But why was he killed?" demanded Kemp. "Why——"

He was interrupted by the whine of a distant motor.

"A car from the detective station, *sahib* inspector," said the policeman. "I turned in the alarm according to instructions."

The headlights of the approaching machine speared the darkness of the railroad yards at the left. It was heading for the turn not far ahead. But before Kemp could comment, the Pâwang was dashing up the road. The headlights blazed from around the curve. He halted, drew a pistol. A crashing blast—a headlight winked out. Brakes

screamed as an answering jet of flame spurted from the approaching car. Pâwang Ali dropped to the roadside. A second shot from his gun blotted out the surviving headlight.

Inspector Kemp raced after him, weapon drawn. The Sikh kept his post as prescribed by the regulations. A khaki-clad figure emerged from the car.

"Hold it!" shouted Kemp, lowering his pistol as he recognized Assistant Inspector Bradley. "What's all this blasted idiocy? Stop that shooting——"

THERE WAS a low, mirthless laugh from the roadside, and Pâwang Ali bobbed up from the blackness of the ditch.

"I had to stop the assistant inspector," he apologized. "No time to explain. But allow me to demonstrate."

The assistant inspector eyed his superior. Kemp nodded. Pâwang Ali took the chauffeur's place at the wheel. He headed the car down the center of the road, stepped to the running board. Jerking the throttle lever down, he leaped clear. The abandoned machine roared down the highway toward the *Godown* and the corpse.

"Of all the double-damned idiotic——"

But the inspector's outburst was cut short. Before the car was halfway to the Sikh policeman, there was a concussion that hammered them breathless. The speeding machine was flung into the air. A sheet of flame billowed from the red earth; then a dense cloud of black, oily smoke obscured the demolition

of the ton of onrushing metal. Shattered glass and steel fragments rained down about their ears and into the crater in which the warped and twisted wreck had settled.

A bomb, planted in the center of the road, had been touched off by the passage of the police car. Inspector Kemp perplexedly regarded his ally.

"I say," he began when he could find words. "Most unusual—but what ever made you foresee that?"

"We were notified that a crime of unusual interest would be committed near the Borneo Wharf. Obviously, we should hurry out the Tanjong Pagar Road. Instead, I detoured, which was not what the enemy expected.

"We noted that the body had been hauled to this spot—an odd feature. And by the horizontal beams of my headlights, I detected a suspicious unevenness in the road over which we should reasonably have passed. A skillfully concealed furrow. I guessed what might be expected. And only a shot would check the assistant inspector *sahib* in time."

Inspector Kemp stroked his drooping mustache.

"Unusual," he muttered. Then he cursed roundly and resumed, "Another murder without a clue. Before we can find the scene of the killing, every trace will have been blotted out. These tire tracks alone are useless."

Pâwang Ali shook his head.

"If the inspector *sahib* will let me use my imagination, perhaps I can make this dead man talk." As he spoke, he probed the pockets and extracted a wallet. It contained no currency, but American express

checks amounting to a thousand dollars were untouched.

"This is Clarence Kendall," said Pâwang Ali, glancing at the signature. "It would seem that he was robbed. Yet these checks with impressive numerals engraved in the corners would seem like money to an ignorant slayer. He would take them and only later realize their uselessness. The absence of watch and cuff links contradicts rather than confirms the apparent robbery. One who was keen enough to abandon express checks would not have torn from a dead man's fingers a sheet of engineer's blue prints.

"This man was killed for the sake of something concerning *Tûan Besar*—the Great Lord!"

"*Tûan Besar*," muttered Kemp. "Sounds like a ship. Plans stolen by spies, eh what?"

"Allah is the knower," evaded the Arab. "It is possible that this man has not yet registered with the police. But you will look into that, *sahib*—while I make certain observations."

"Astrological?" asked the inspector; but there was no indignation in his voice.

"Ay, *wallah!*" affirmed Pâwang Ali. "But more particularly, I will study his wallet. The stars are against the Claw of Iblis. By striking at you, he has betrayed his own fear, and that fear will trap him."

"He's got something," muttered the inspector to himself as he watched the Pâwang's soundless, fluent stride take him toward his car. "But no white man could make sense of it."

He shivered and turned to the Sikh policeman. For all of Pâwang

Ali's suave, placid manner, he was at times uncannily like one of the tigers that not many years ago had infested Singapore Island.

## II

A FEW MINUTES later Pâwang Ali pulled up before the blank façade of his house in the native quarter. He pressed a button on the dashboard of the car. The radio-operated door slid open to admit the car.

He ascended the narrow staircase to the second-floor study. There he seated himself at his desk, reached for a volume of astrological tables and ascertained the positions of the planets at the time of the crime.

He studied the result. His lean, bronzed features became immobile as though he were in a trance. He was drawing into himself, retreating into the psychic realm of his personality. Each planet had a significance that was ancient when the bricks of Babylon were fresh from the maker's mold.

"Malefic Saturn, the lord of those who work underground, is in the twelfth house," he read aloud. "And Mars is in the eighth, presiding over violent death and strife over the property of a dead man."

The enumeration did not give him any clue, but each symbolic statement suggested a chain of human relationships and clashes which could motivate a crime.

At last he placed on the table the scrap of blue paper he had removed from the dead man's grasp, then turned his attention to Kendall's wallet. In addition to the express checks, it contained half a dozen

business cards scribbled with blurred and illegible penciling. One item, however, was promising: a fresh memorandum slip. Some one had phoned Kendall at his hotel not more than three hours previous, requesting him to call on E. V. Foster. A telephone number followed.

"The Claw of Iblis could not foresee that Kendall would pocket this memorandum."

Foster apparently was the next link; but until the Pâwang could question him, he had to consider the possibility that business with some person other than Foster had led Kendall to his death.

He jabbed a push button on his desk. The buzzer note had scarcely subsided when three Chinese, wearing shorts and toadstool-shaped hats filed into the room and lined up before the teakwood desk. Their wrinkled faces were devoid of any trace of expression as they listened to their master's orders: "Find out what *ghari* or ricksha took Clarence Kendall from his hotel. Learn his destination and what stops he made."

Without a word they filed out of the room. Pâwang Ali parted a curtain behind his desk and stepped into an inner apartment. When he emerged, he bore little semblance to the well-dressed, aquiline-featured Arab who had left the study. His Malay blood now predominated. He wore a yellow skull cap embroidered with texts from the Koran, an apple-green jacket, purple *sarong*, and a peacock-blue sash which concealed a dagger, a wavy-bladed *kris*, and a revolver. He walked with a perceptible limp, and as he emerged from a side door which opened into

an alley near the water front, he spat a red jet of *sri* juice that every well-ordered Malay chews during every waking moment.

A ricksha, drawn by one of his own men, awaited him. He doubled back, then headed west toward the residence section near Tanglin Road.

Pâwang Ali's occult methods camouflaged the spies who lounged about the dives of the native quarter and prowled in the outlying *kampongs* and along the water front. Like their master, their methods were far from orthodox. Astrological observations, however, distracted Arnold Kemp's attention from their existence—which was just as well for the inspector's peace of mind.

As he passed the Tank Road station, Pâwang Ali saw a ricksha emerge from a side street. The coolie who drew the vehicle was one of his own men, and so likewise was the passenger, a grim-faced Malay. The two rickshas remained abreast only long enough for a low-voiced exchange of words.

"*Tûan*, there's a man who has just come from Pahang. A large man with a wrathful face and very broad shoulders and a voice like thunder. He hailed a *ghari* and demanded to be taken to the house of a certain *Tûan* Foster at once. He had a small suitcase which he refused to intrust to the driver."

"Thou great blockhead!" reproached the Pâwang. "Why not follow him instead of waiting here to tell me?"

"It was not so ordered, *tûan*," declared the Malay. "Hop Wang sent word that we were to find out what

ricksha had carried a certain Kendall from his hotel to the house of E. V. Foster. We mention this other man only because he is on his way at an unseeming hour to call on one of similar name."

"Continue with your orders," said Pâwang Ali after an instant's thought. "I will myself observe this man from Pahang. He must be an American—any other white man would go to a hotel and wait to transact his business in the morning. His haste deserves notice."

Singapore municipality has a population of over half a million; but of that number not many more than eight thousand are white. There should not be a heavy duplication of Fosters.

A quarter of a mile from his destination Pâwang Ali decided to advance on foot.

"Mong Duck," he said to the coolie, "go to the office of the inspector *sahib* and inquire as to white men known to be in Pahang, particularly Americans."

THE POLICE keep a register of visitors to Singapore; and that city is the only practicable approach to Pahang, unless one comes down from Siam.

Thus far there was no connection between Kendall and the hasty American, but both were interested in persons named Foster.

Just short of Nassim Road Pâwang Ali headed down a narrow drive at the end of which loomed a bungalow surrounded by a palisade. He blended into the shadows, stealthily approaching the Foster house. A *ghari* was near the entrance. The driver lay sprawled in

the shadows cast by the rising moon. He was dead. The stroke of a *kris* had ripped him open.

From within the compound came a deep-voiced American oath, a shuffle of feet, and a sharp, popping report—not a pistol shot, but the impact of a hard fist. It was followed by the crashing of shrubbery, and a wrathful babel of Malay.

The gate slammed open. A glance sufficed to identify the man from Pahang as he leaped to the driveway. Despite his bulk, he was agile as a panther. He shifted, ducked the flashing sweep of a wavy-bladed *kris* and tackled low, plunging headlong into the crescent of slayers who had cropped up from the shadows. His lunge carried him through, but the split-second advantage was not enough. He regained his feet. He was gripping a *parang* which had dropped from the grasp of the enemy he had knocked breathless. He parried a cut that would have shorn his head from his shoulders. The gain was an instant of life, but he was hemmed in, with no chance to cut through.

He towered head and shoulders above the pack of brown men. His face was craggy and his eyes were as frosty as the blade with which he lashed out. The assassins who blocked his advance gave way, but before those in the rear could close in, they heard a yell whose savage fury checked them. Pâwang Ali, whipping a *kris* from his *sarong*, was bounding into action. His swift motion made him a blur of color framed in a whistling tracery of steel. One of the pack whirled. The silvery tongue of doom licked out and he dropped in a pool of his

own blood, yelling horribly and clutching his stomach.

Then for a few scant seconds it was a howling vortex of brown bodies and milling blades and flailing limbs. The red earth of Singapore became even redder as Pâwang Ali's *kris* flickered in and out, a shearing serpent of steel. The man from Pahang was desperately chopping and parrying with his blade, but his handling of the weapon was awkward. He was pitted against men who had cut their first teeth on the haft of a *kris* or *kampilan*.

When they saw that the Pâwang was alone, the pack divided to keep him at bay until they could overcome the white man. But the Arab bored in, light as a ballet dancer and deadly as a cobra. His audacity caught them flat-footed.

*Krisses* clanged and splintered, flying in dazzling arcs from nerveless hands into the moonlight. Pâwang Ali felt the bite of frosty steel lick his arms and head and ribs—and then he was in the circle to pluck the man from Pahang out of the clutch of doom.

The murderous, flailing *kris* drank blood at every stroke as he whittled them down. One more rush—

But it missed by a hair. A two-handed *kampilan* came darting between him and his goal. The man from Pahang ducked and parried, but he dropped in the midst of that bloodthirsty knot of Malay slayers. The move had been swifter than any eye could follow. Pâwang Ali knew that he would have only a dead man to question.

His brain exploded in a surge of murderous Malay wrath. The

deadly arcs of his red blade made the battle a massacre by moonlight. The assassins broke and fled into the darkness. Pâwang Ali was master of the field, but it promised little harvest.

He wrathfully kicked aside two who had fallen across the man from Pahang. The victim was stirring. He had not been beheaded! Near him lay the *parang* with which he had parried the stroke that would have sliced him in half.

"*Ya Allah! Alive—*"

For a moment the Pâwang regarded the massive, clenched fists, the grim, red mask, the blood-clotted shock of hair. Then he noted an egg-sized lump just above the ear and knew why the man from Pahang had not lost the top of his skull: the *kampilan* stroke, sizzling home like a thunderbolt, had driven the flat of his own parrying weapon crashing against his head.

Pâwang Ali shifted to drag the unconscious man out of the gory tangle that pinned him to the roadway. The man from Pahang muttered and stirred.

Then, without an instant's warning, his ponderous fist lashed out, rocking the Pâwang like the blow of a pile driver. Though he jerked his head with the punch, he was paralyzed by the impact; and that was but a sample of what was to come. As he staggered back from the revived victim, a kick planted squarely in the pit of his stomach sent him catapulting clear of the battlefield. He was conscious, but utterly helpless.

The deep-voiced, volcanic oaths the fellow growled as he shook his head identified him beyond all

doubt. And before Pâwang Ali could reach for his pistol and order him to halt, the man from Pahang was stretching long legs into the shadows.

### III

"I MIGHT have known better," observed Pâwang Ali as he recovered enough to move. "This is a night of treachery."

He wiped the blade of his *kris* and turned toward the entrance of the estate. Light filtered through the foliage that shrouded the rambling bungalow, but all was silent.

Just past the gate lay a small, leather suitcase, its brass fittings gleaming in the darkness. Blood, and fragments of a splintered tooth adhered to the heavy leather. It was impaled by a *kris*. The man from Pahang had used it as a buckler.

The case rattled as Pâwang Ali shook it. He struck the lock a sharp blow with the pommel of his *kris*. It snapped open. The paper-wrapped parcel it contained had broken open. Pieces of rock were scattered among the sparse array of underwear and shirts. By the light from the house the Pâwang examined a fragment. It had been chiseled from a ledge of calcareous rock and was unusually heavy for its size. The largest piece was labeled: "*Tûan Besar, Kuala Ayer.*"

Kuala Ayer was a backwoods village in the central gold belt of northern Pahang where the precious metal was found in volcanic rock and calcareous formations.

*Tûan Besar* must be a mine, fancifully named as anywhere else in the world.

He ascended the ten steps leading to the broad veranda of the bungalow and entered a living room, simply but expensively furnished in the European manner. The man who lay sprawled on the floor was dead. His head was a gory, gruesome pulp. Some one had struck him from the rear with a wrought-iron smoking stand that lay a yard from the body.

He was lean and gray-haired and his features were sharp rather than rugged. One arm was half bent as though he had tried to ward off the crushing blow.

The victim's wallet contained a card indicating that he was Edwin V. Foster, member in good standing of a fraternal organization. A thick roll of Straits currency showed that robbery had not been the motive.

The trail from Kendall's body had led to the man from Pahang, his Malay assailants and Edwin Foster. The Pâwang's problem was now to link them together and the *Tûan Besar* mine seemed the common bond.

Across the hall from the master's bedroom was one whose occupant evidently had left in considerable haste. The silver mounting of a parasol was engraved R. M. F. The monogram was repeated on a vanity case lying on the dressing table.

Pâwang Ali stepped to the living room, phoned the central station, then resumed his inspection of the house.

There was a safe in Edwin Foster's study, and a flat-topped desk on which was an extension phone. The inkwell weighted down a note penned in a feminine hand:

Dad, I'm dining at Tanjong Inn.  
Won't be back till late. Rita.

The signature matched the one on the photo that stood at one corner of the desk. A lovely, dark-eyed girl—Foster's daughter.

"The stars indicate strife over the property of a dead man. This woman must be the heiress. *Billahi*, it is she who is the next link in the chain."

DEATH might even now be stalking Rita Foster. The long arm of Iblis might at that moment be reaching for her. This was no time to wait for the police. Pâwang Ali called his house in the native quarter. A dozen words in Chinese completed his terse orders; then he headed for the entrance, picking up on the run the suitcase which the man from Pahang had abandoned. He cleared the veranda steps three at a bound and dashed down the lane toward town.

He did not check his speed until he met the car that had come to meet him. The powerful car crunched to a halt as he whistled. Hop Wang was at the wheel.

"Tanjong Katong!" he commanded, bounding to the running board. "To the Tanjong Inn."

"Can do," said Hop Wang, whipping the car about.

Pâwang Ali stripped off his gaudy Malay garb and donned the formal evening dress from the suitcase which Hop Wang had brought. As they rounded the gas works at Kalang Road he was patting into shape the voluminous turban which, with the decorations that now blazed from his shirt front, established him as an East Indian prince.

Tanjong Inn admitted only Euro-

peans, but a rajah would have ready entrée.

Hop Wang informed the management that Rajah Sir Ram Singh Bahadur was incognito and desired a table screened from the public. Pâwang Ali was privately ushered in through a side door of Tanjong Inn. Once in position, he drew a dagger to cut a loophole through the screen that concealed him.

He had no difficulty in picking Rita Foster from the crowd. Her eyes were darker than her hair. And she was lovelier than the photograph he had found in her father's study. She and her gray-haired, hatchet-faced companion were too deeply engrossed to dance; but it was certain that her interest in him was far from personal. He was Erskine Harper, president of the Sumatra Trading Corporation, long suspected of dealing in smuggled opium and munitions.

A Chinese waiter appeared in response to Pâwang Ali's summons.

"Stay here," he commanded. "And let my man take your place."

"Can do."

Presently Hop Wang was bustling about with a tray and solicitously hovering about the Foster heiress and Erskine Harper, seconding the Pâwang's sharp scrutiny from the loophole.

Harper, leaning across the table, emphasized his remarks with curt, jerky gestures. Rita Foster smiled wearily, shook her head. At last she arose from her chair. Harper shrugged and followed her.

Pâwang Ali tossed the waiter a bill. The rajah had urgent affairs elsewhere. As he stepped to the side door, Hop Wang overtook him

and whispered, "Girl get mad when Erskine say Kendall plenty fraud; can't make *Tûan Besar* mine pay expenses—my engineers can do—why not sell?"

Pâwang Ali, seeing Harper assist Rita into a waiting car, stepped to his car to follow and learn more about the trouble-making *Tûan Besar*; but a hired machine, braking to a crunching halt, changed every one's plans for the evening.

A man in gray tweeds leaped from the wheel. He headed toward the entrance of the Tanjong Inn, but hearing Harper's chauffeur step on the starter, he glanced to his left, checked his stride, and turned toward the departing guests.

It was the man from Pahang!

His craggy face was crisscrossed with adhesive tape and both hands were bandaged; but Rita and her companion recognized him. Harper's expression changed thrice in an instant: incredulity—apprehension—and then grim resolution.

"Oh, good heavens! Dan, whatever happened to you?" exclaimed the girl.

He ignored Rita's question and confronted Harper.

"You damned dirty skunk! The *Tûan Besar* won't pay? Certainly it won't—with the superintendent taking your pay and Foster's, too! It's rotten with gold. A fresh lode you knew about, and hoped Rita's father wouldn't hear of until the lease was forfeited."

Rita's dark eyes narrowed and her lovely face hardened as her glance shifted to Harper.

"I thought something was wrong," she said in a low, tense voice. "I

think Dan described you accurately enough."

"Slade," barked Harper, advancing a pace toward the man from Pahang, "you're a damn trouble maker. I'll run you out of Malay. I'll——"

The rest was unspoken. Harper recoiled, but he was not quick enough. Slade's bandaged fist darted out. The impact was muffled, but Harper landed in a heap.

"Dan—what in the world——" The girl caught his arm. "Do you mean—can you prove—does dad know?"

As Harper picked himself up, Slade exploded, "You dirty rat! You didn't figure I'd dodge that gang of cutthroats you sent to way-lay me before I could show Foster some samples of the new lode!"

"What did dad say, Dan?" interposed Rita.

Pâwang Ali, resplendent and glittering, drew a pace nearer. Here was strife about a dead man's property!

"What did he say?" she asked again.

"Not a word, Rita." Then he blurted out: "I found him dead."

A scarcely perceptible catch of her breath, a moment of pallor and wide-eyed query. Then she echoed, "Dead!"

"Murdered, and I came within an ace of being cut to pieces myself. So I came out here. I saw your note. I didn't want you to return and find him that way, without any warning."

"So you finally evened up the old score!" accused Harper. "Where are those samples of rich ore?"

Slade's sun-tanned face became sallow. Rita's expression changed at the mention of an old score. And before he could answer, there was a voice from the left: "Daniel Slade, in the name of the king I arrest you for the murder of Edwin Foster."

IN THE TENSITY of the moment, Inspector Kemp's arrival had not been noted. Pâwang Ali was the first to speak.

"Inspector *sahib*," he interposed, catching Kemp's hand before he could tap Slade on the shoulder. "There is more to this than shows on the surface."

Kemp, however, shook his head.

"The *syce* and Number One boy came tearing into headquarters saying Slade killed Foster and fought them off when they tried to stop him. An accomplice of Slade's blocked them and killed three other servants and Malay *pengamok* with yellow skull cap and a long *kris*. Better study the stars some more, Pâwang Ali."

"The ore samples that Slade brought from Pahang have a bearing on this, *sahib*," countered the Pâwang.

Slade eyed his advocate sharply and turned to the inspector. "They were in a small suitcase. I dropped it near the compound gate. That crew of assassins ganged up on me to be sure I'd not tell Foster about the rich *Tûan Besar* lode."

"I have them," asserted Pâwang Ali.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Harper.

The Pâwang shrugged, made a deprecatory gesture, and blandly

answered, "Just one of the inspector *sahib*'s native friends."

"You may have ore samples," scoffed Harper, "but you have only Slade's word as to their origin. They were bait to give Foster false hopes so he'd reject my offer and hang on until the lease is forfeited. Then the people Slade's working for will have their chance at the *Tûan Besar*—it's very simple."

"You will pardon me," apologized the Pâwang, "for intruding my ignorance. But why this competition for a mine so lean that the operator is about to forfeit his lease? And why approach Miss Foster instead of her father?"

The last query contained a trap, but Harper's answer was ready.

"Because her father and I did not have the utmost esteem for each other. I hoped to persuade her to use her influence with him. My engineers could make the *Tûan Besar* pay. We have a new process for working lean ores, and by buying the lease, we would have twelve months in which to get into operation. Whereas, Dr. Kendall, even if his method were practical, would not be able to keep the present owners of the *Tûan Besar* from forfeiting their leasehold."

"Inspector, there is more to this than the face of it," interposed the Pâwang.

Kemp, however, shook his head. His hand descended and he repeated the formula of arrest. Then he said to Pâwang Ali, "Eye witnesses—and Foster's servants are at headquarters awaiting his daughter's identification. There's really nothing else to be done—except clear up the death of Dr. Kendall."

## IV

RITA FOSTER and Erskine Harper accompanied Inspector Kemp and his prisoner to headquarters. Pâwang Ali followed. Once in his office, the inspector again warned the prisoner that whatever he said might be used against him.

"You could use some of it in my favor," retorted the American. "I am representing the minority stockholders of the *Tûan Besar* Co. They are convinced that something is wrong with the management of the mine. As you may know, Dr. Clarence Kendall was at the same time sent from the States to introduce a new process of handling the so-called low-grade ore.

"A while before his arrival, I left Negri Sembilan and went to Pahang to make some under-cover investigation. Carlyle Morton, the new superintendent of the *Tûan Besar* was——"

"New?" queried the Pâwang. His voice was soft, but his eyes narrowed.

"Yes. The former super died of acute indigestion—which is easy enough to arrange. And Morton is working hand in hand with Erskine Harper. When I finally did get into the mine, I found a vein of rich ore and took specimens to show to Foster before I reported to the minority stockholders."

"Unusual solicitude on your part, wasn't it?" Kemp cut in. "Particularly since Foster dismissed you from a position in the States."

"Giving him a break would not hurt the interests of other investors and might help me," retorted the man from Pahang. "Any one can

see with half an eye that Carlyle Morton had plenty motive to waylay me."

"I'll send for Morton," countered Kemp. "Though it's far from certain you were waylaid. Three of Foster's servants dead, and you and your Malay accomplice getting clear——"

"*Sahib* inspector," the Pâwang cut in, "I am the Malay accomplice. I hardly thought it worth mentioning." Then, grimacing wryly, he said to Slade: "But what was the idea of fairly knocking me out of the ring?"

"Good heavens! Was that you?" demanded Slade. "I was groggy from a clip across the head. I played possum till I could pull myself together—I didn't really know any one was on my side, so I figured—— Say, who the devil are you, anyway?"

"Only an Arab who has prospered under the noble British government," the Pâwang answered, cutting short Slade's apologies. "And sometimes the police allow me to take a hand in minor affairs." Then, turning to Kemp, Pâwang Ali salaamed and said, "With your permission, *sahib* inspector, I will leave you and Mr. Harper to confer."

He did not wait to witness Rita Foster's identification of the servants who had tried to prevent Slade's escape. The Pâwang was more interested in the astrological aspects of the case. He was far from convinced of Slade's guilt, but this was no time to try to upset the inspector's case.

The Kendall affair, so closely linked to the death of Foster, would

best await further developments. The Pâwang, guided more by intuition than by tangible clues or logic, as the occidental mind understands the word, sensed that the two major threads of murder were converging to a single focus of deadly menace.

"Haste is of Satan," he said to himself as he took his place at the teak desk in his study. "And wisdom is with Allah. Neither should green fruit be plucked."

All of which would have bewildered the inspector; hence the Pâwang's discreet retirement. But when, shortly before sunrise, he at last set aside his astrological tables and assembled the bits of gossip blank-faced Chinese and hard-bitten Malays had brought him from time to time during the night, Pâwang Ali smiled like a well-fed tiger, and spent half an hour religiously honing the blade of a *kris* that was already razor-sharp. Then he laid out a small, silken rug, faced toward Mecca, and made his customary four *rukka* prayer.

The Pâwang spent the following day prowling about the Foster bungalow. He had, in the meanwhile, learned that the natives who had accused Slade of killing Foster were indeed bona fide servants. Nevertheless, a query loomed large in his mind as he listened to Rita's remarks.

Slade had quarreled with her father several years ago and, as a result, had been dismissed from his position in a mine in the States.

"But I asked Dan to follow us to Malaya," she concluded. "Thinking he and dad might at last be reconciled, and he'd get a position in the *Tûan Besar*, and then——"

She shook her head, and her dark eyes became somber.

"You may yet go on with your plans." The Pâwang smiled. "When grief is no longer so intense."

And then he drove to police headquarters for news of Carlyle Morton and a look at the report submitted by the assistant warden of mines concerning the *Tûan Besar* and its allegedly rich lode.

There was a report. Inspector Kemp had just received it.

"Look at this!" he stormed, thrusting a telegram before the Pâwang's eyes. Illegally-stored explosives had half demolished the shafts and tunnels, killing a dozen or more miners. The explosion had originated in the drift in which Slade claimed the rich lode cropped out. Months would elapse before the débris could be cleared and the truth revealed.

"But what of the new superintendent?" Pâwang Ali asked.

"That's the worst of it!" grumbled Kemp. "He's either buried in the wreckage or else he's taken to his heels to avoid charges of criminal negligence in handling explosives. It'll be easy for Slade to accuse him of conspiracy with Harper. But with direct and circumstantial evidence against him, our foxy American won't get very far."

"Give me a little more time, *sahib* inspector," requested the Pâwang. "In due course I will show that Slade is guiltless, *inshallah!*"

"Due course, hell! Do it now," challenged Kemp. "If you know anything, it's your duty to reveal it at once."

"Haste is of Satan. If I were a

wizard—as my enemies call me—I could oblige you. As it is, I am forced to let the Claw of Iblis ensnare himself—which he will presently do. Therefore, be pleased to bring Erskine Harper and the man from Pahang to my house. Let Assistant Inspector Bradley come as a witness, also the girl.”

“I’ll do it,” Kemp agreed. “But no tricks. And you’d better prove your point.”

“Not I but the masters of destiny,” corrected the Pâwang.

THAT NIGHT, six blank-faced Chinese coolies stood three and three at the door jamb of Pâwang Ali’s country estate, a few miles north of Singapore municipality. The Pâwang, resplendent in a silken *kaftan* and white turban was in the courtyard to receive his midnight callers.

Kemp was there, grim and skeptical. Assistant Inspector Bradley had charge of Slade, whose face seemed to reflect the iron on his wrists. Rita Foster’s dark eyes flashed a somber glance at Erskine as she edged toward the man from Pahang.

Pâwang Ali ushered them into a room that was utterly bare and ablaze with an eye-torturing blue-white incandescence that came from cunningly concealed cornice lamps. Not a hanging, not a piece of furniture relieved the stark emptiness of tiled blankness broken only by a single door and a single window opening out into the blackness of Malayan night.

Pâwang Ali gestured. The lights winked out. Simultaneously the abysmal blackness was populated

with silent presences. And before an exclamation could be voiced, the five callers were locked in the iron grasp of the invisible, panther-silent henchmen who had invaded the darkness. Silken cords were whisked by deft hands about the wrists and ankles of the quintet.

“Of all the infernal insolence!” sputtered Kemp, the first to find his tongue.

“Peace upon you, brethren,” intoned the Pâwang’s solemn voice. “Your lives are on my head. Neither I nor any one serving me shall harm you.”

The surprise capture was completed with scarcely a struggle; and in another moment the merciless glare again assailed their eyes.

“You might explain this idiocy,” growled Kemp. Bradley echoed the demand. Harper was disdainfully calm. Rita eyed the Pâwang, caught his reassuring nod, and shot a side-long glance at Slade.

“I am deeply grieved at the necessity that compels this move,” apologized the Pâwang, “but it is for your own good.”

He clapped his hands. Five coolies filed in from the vestibule. Each carried a sturdy chair which he placed on the exact spot the master designated. That done, they seated the prisoners at their appointed places. Rita, the inspector, and his assistant were in a corner to the right of the arched window that pierced the eastern wall. Slade and Harper remained near the center of the room.

The investigator then took a piece of chalk and on the tiles marked two circles in which he inscribed astrological symbols.

"You who have accused each other of fraud and crime and conspiracy will each sit in the circle of his destiny," explained the Pâwang. "And I shall call for justice. Then everything will be clear."

His placid face had become as solemn as a brooding doom. But the peculiar glow in his faintly slanted eyes made him as sinister as the hidden menace he proposed to unveil.

"Get it over!" snapped Harper. "Inspector, I'm amazed at your allowing this foolishness!"

Pâwang Ali spoke a few words in Cantonese. The coolies bound Harper and Slade to their chairs and lifted them to the center of their cabalistical circles so that they faced the single window that opened into the outer blackness.

The inspector was now perplexed rather than wrathful. He had long since abandoned his attempts to fathom the cryptic methods of his unofficial ally. He watched the Pâwang face the two men who sat in their circles.

The Arab's eyes had become fierce points of black fire. He gestured and murmured in a guttural language. Slade and Harper became rigid and their eyes glazed, staring sightlessly—

A minute passed. The longest minute in the inspector's life. He began to feel the backlash of the psychic blast that was centering on the men in the occult circles. Both were now in a hypnotic trance!

"Speak!" Pâwang Ali at last commanded. He now blocked Kemp's view of Slade and Harper; but the inspector recognized the

answering voice, despite its mechanical inflection and colorlessness.

"This web of murder is spreading too far," said Harper. "I am afraid but I dare not tell the truth."

"Who dynamited the *Tûan Besar* mine?"

Pâwang Ali's question was followed by a strangled gurgling and a gasp. Then there was an answer. Harper's voice was strained and trembling.

"The mine was blown up by my order, to prevent the proof of Slade's story."

Inspector Kemp muttered an oath. Pâwang Ali turned and whispered, "Inspector Kemp, this man is hypnotized, but I will have to batter his secret out of him with psychic torture just as sure as though I applied the thumbscrew or rack. Look at his face. See the reflection of the torments he thinks are being inflicted on him. And listen carefully to what he says."

Harper's eyes stared sightlessly toward the window that opened into the outer blackness. His body jerked and twitched. He was dripping with sweat and his face was wrenched with agony. He was beginning to groan and mutter inarticulately.

"Good Lord, man!" the inspector cried. "What are you doing to him? Damn it, that's diabolical. Stop it! Stop it, or I'll—"

"I deplore this, Kemp *sahib*, but there is no other way. This man serves an oriental master—and through the servant I am striking at the Claw of Iblis, the father of evil."

He salaamed and turned his back toward the inspector.

Harper's muttering became a low, half-human wailing, the outcry of a dumb beast in the uttermost agony. But at Pâwang Ali's gesture the sounds ceased, and Inspector Kemp exhaled a long, quivering sigh.

A moment of brooding silence. The inquisitor blocked the view so that Inspector Kemp could not see the victim's face; but Kemp heard the Pâwang's low, venomous murmuring. That sweltering room had become a hell of blue-white light. Kemp's flesh crawled in sympathy with the futile writhings of that which quivered and moaned just beyond Pâwang Ali.

And then Harper began to laugh. Awful laughter——

"Speak!" commanded Pâwang Ali. His voice rang like a cavalry bugle.

The laughter ceased. There was only hoarse, labored breathing and the inspector's cursing in a low, endless monotone. Torture by remote control was worse than any physical barbarity he had witnessed.

Silence.

The Pâwang gèstured as though summoning invisible forces to aid him in renewing the psychic torture. The sturdy chair creaked from Harper's sudden muscular contraction.

"For Heaven's sake, don't!" he shrieked. "I'll tell—— Stop——"

Harper choked, tried to pronounce a name, but could not quite shape the syllables.

"Try again," Pâwang Ali suggested.

Another attempt. Almost a revelation——

And then a rifle crackled. A bluish-black spot blossomed on Harper's sweat-beaded forehead. The wall behind him wore a gruesome spattering of red. Harper's revelation was blocked by the bullet of an unseen marksman.

PAWANG ALI turned toward the white-faced inspector.

"The Claw of Iblis has killed the servant who would have betrayed him."

"You damned fool!" stormed Kemp. "Why did you place him in front of that window? You might have known—and now we'll get nothing!"

"Inspector *sahib*," said the Pâwang, "the sharpshooter who fired that shot could reach Harper from one and only one position. Some one is even now following him back to his master. We have gained contact with the Claw of Iblis. It is what I wanted."

"But why—you grinning idiot! Now you can't question Harper and——"

"We could have proved nothing. Please pardon my deception, *sahib*, but it was necessary. During the much-regretted unceremonious reception, Slade and Harper both received an injection of a hypnotic drug. Hence my seeming quickness of control.

"Harper's groans were effective, but he did not actually speak. I spoke with his voice, blocking your view so that you could not see that his lips did not move. But the sniper, who could see only Harper's



*"Speak!" commanded the Pâwang, and his voice rang like a cavalry bugle.*

head and shoulders, concluded that my Chinese servants were applying tortures. So he fired.

"From rumors spread in the market place—though wisdom is with Allah—the Claw thought that I had a trick to make Harper talk—not knowing that the noble British government prohibits torture. And in the—ah—confession by proxy, I said only what I myself suspected. The Claw confirmed it."

"Do you mean to say that you deliberately sacrificed a man's life to test the truth of your suspicions?"

Pâwang Ali smiled, and for a moment he seemed more sinister than the Claw of Iblis; then he said in a regretful, almost melancholy voice, "It was his own evil, and not I, that struck him. Mr. Slade will recover in a moment. Inspector *sahib*, while my servants release you and your companions in bondage, I once more apologize for my unceremonious reception."

Slade soon responded to the ministrations of the Pâwang.

"Mmmm—well, it does seem that some one feared Harper's impending revelations," conceded Kemp after a few minutes of pondering. "But how about Slade? You've just complicated things, not cleared them."

The American blinked and gazed perplexedly about him; but before he could accept the challenge, the Pâwang intervened.

"Upon his arrival in Pahang, he called a *ghari* and in a loud voice announced his destination, which he would not have done if he had had murder in his heart."

"But the testimony of three of the servants!" countered the inspector.

"They gave you an accurate description of the man from Pahang. Not one contradicted the others in a single detail. Such perfection is unheard of, particularly among men who have just fled from a mortal battle.

"And, finally, Slade gets the remainder of his luggage, goes to a hotel to put on fresh clothing and sets out for Tanjong Katong to find Miss Foster, making every move so openly you were able to follow on his heels."

Kemp conceded those points, but he persisted, "First we'll have to investigate those servants and settle with——"

"That is only fair, *sahib*," admitted the Pâwang, smiling cryptically. He salaamed to his callers and added, "Thank you for your company—and with your permission, I shall return to my studies."

## V

LESS THAN AN HOUR after the departure of Pâwang Ali's callers, Tsang Ah Fong, his Chinese assistant, entered the study.

"Prior born, I followed the slayer of that foreign devil to a Malay *kampong*. I overheard talk of a masked lord who is behind a guarded door. To see him a token must be offered."

"A password?"

"No, honorable master, a silver *rupee*. The man I followed came out presently. He was a Ghurka."

The Chinaman produced a silver coin and a broad-bladed *kukri*.

Pâwang Ali examined the coin and saw that two of the four date numerals had been cut away, leaving only a one and a nine.

"This Ghurka will miss his token," objected the Pâwang.

"No, exalted lord. He will miss nothing."

Pâwang Ali had anticipated the answer, but not the head which the Chinaman unwrapped from a Malay *sarong*.

"Why do you bring this, Tsang Ah Fong?"

"So that the prior born may copy the face and thus enter the presence of the masked lord.

To follow Tsang Ah Fong's unexpected lead was a play as good as it was perilous.

"Thou hast done well, little brother," Pâwang Ali acknowledged. "If by this time the man from Pahang be released from jail, see that neither he nor the white girl makes any move without your knowledge."

The Chinaman bowed and left the room. Tsang Ah Fong was over-optimistic in expecting his master to impersonate a man whose very name he did not know. Pâwang Ali for a long time sat frowning.

At last he set the head on a table in a mirrored alcove, removed his turban and began applying scarcely perceptible touches of make-up which would falsify the contour of his face. He plucked his brows, and with deft applications of gum, distorted the eyelids to give the illusion of a Mongoloid slant. He accentuated his cheek bones, squared off the chin and gave his nostrils the semblance of an increased flare.

Then he glanced at his own reflection in the mirror.

His own personality had to a degree been submerged; but he did not yet duplicate that particular Ghurka whose bullet had caught Erskine Harper between the eyes.

And then it came to him. Pâwang Ali's sudden smile was a flash of ivory as he stepped into his wardrobe. In a few moments he emerged, arrayed in a costume appropriate to a wandering Ghurka. He thrust the broad-bladed *kukri* into his belt. Then with the severed head under his arm, he entered a passageway which opened into an alley several blocks from the house.

Presently the Pâwang stalked into a rendezvous of smugglers and part-time pirates who still evaded the law.

A group of Chinese were playing *main po*. Predatory Malays lifted reddened eyes from their glasses of *arrack* and muttered as the synthetic Ghurka strode into the smoke-thickened air which dimmed the flickering kerosene lanterns to a murky glow. In a corner sat a burly Afghan who mumbled in his red beard and pulled noisily at a flask. Yet for all the semblance of loafing, Pâwang Ali did not miss the sudden tension as he crossed the threshold.

Though the place was public, the majority of the hangers-on must be henchmen of the masked lord. He glanced about as though seeking a familiar face.

Ahead of him was a door—the only door that opened into rooms beyond. Beyond it must be the masked lord—the Claw of Iblis.

"Ho, thou, Red Beard!" he hailed, striding toward the Afghan. Then, in mangled Pushtu he continued, "I am looking for vengeance."

That is a topic which fascinates Afghans from childhood to burial.

"I have come all the way from Khatmandu to see my brother," declared Pâwang Ali. "I found him dead. On the Kampong Bahru Road."

"Your brother?" A dozen eyes speared him. Then some one demanded, "Who the devil is your brother, anyway?"

Which was one question the Pâwang could not answer. Yet answer it he must, or the game was over.

"And who are you?" asked the Afghan, narrowly eying him.

That was as bad as the original question; but the Pâwang, lacking words, replied with a gesture. He unwrapped the *sarong* and held the severed head by the hair so that all could see. And even in that nest of cutthroats, the gory exhibit made them forget their questions.

They stared, open-mouthed.

A mutter of amazement. Some one exclaimed, "Bhím Sén Thápá! He left here less than an hour ago."

"Who was his enemy?" demanded the Pâwang, facing the speaker. "I, Matabar Singh Thápá, will carry this head until I have taken the head of the slayer!"

He fumbled in his sash and found the mutilated silver *rupee*. He laid it on the table, then drew forth a crumpled letter with a Straits Settlement stamp. The address was illegible except for "*Khatmandu*." It had ostensibly been written by a

public scribe. Actually, postmarks and all, it had cost the Pâwang a good fifteen minutes of writing.

"Read!" he commanded.

Blank looks. Scholars were no more plentiful in Singapore than in Khatmandu.

"He spoke of buried gold," continued Pâwang Ali. "But as soon as the scribe read me that line, I took it from him, lest he remember and follow me. Some one slew my brother for the sake of treasure."

A dozen hands clutched for the letter.

"We know a scribe—my uncle can read. *Ay, wallah*, a certain *tûan* not—"

But the self-appointed Matabar Singh shook his head.

"I do not trust these scribes. Nor *sahibs*. Is there no one here who can read?"

As he spoke, he fingered the mutilated *rupee*. At his left the muttered colloquy became a tense whispering. The speakers hardly thought that a simple mountaineer from Khatmandu would understand Chinese and mongrel Arabic.

"Nay, by Heaven, take not this lout to the great lord. We will slay him and keep his letter—"

"Better take him to the masked lord," decided the Afghan, dominating the huddle.

"This great *tûan*," diffidently interposed the Ghurka, "perchance he can read?"

"*Ay, wallah!*" affirmed "Red Beard," his long arm sweeping aside the other advisers. "I, Ibrahim Khan, will make it easy for vengeance. Come with me, Matabar Singh!"

IBRAHIM gestured toward the door that opened to the rear. "Offer the sentry that coin, younger brother, and say, 'nineteen.' And after you have seen the masked lord, we two will dig up the treasure under his protection. Thy excellent brother—*aie*, *aie*—he was even as a brother to me."

The Afghan's grief was heart-moving, but it failed to mask the none-too-clever legerdemain whereby the stout fellow slipped the letter from its cover and handed Pâwang Ali the empty envelope.

A Tamil received the token and password. He gestured down a narrow passageway and called "Nineteen—Bhím Sén Thápá!"

"Yes, by Allah! Nineteen—Bhím Sén Thápá!" echoed a voice in guttural Arabic as the call was passed along. In the darkness, the Tamil's error was not surprising.

And in a moment an Arab in a grimy *djellab* was escorting him into a room, the front of which was a simmering blaze of light. In an alcove just beyond the edge of the glow, half buried in shadows, sat a man in European dress. His face was masked but his hands were visible: lean, muscular and bronzed.

One stroke of the heavy *kukri*, and then a report, "Killed while resisting arrest." But the Pâwang did not know whether this man was the Claw of Iblis or merely an assistant. He must first trick him into some expression of identity.

"I seek vengeance, *túan!*" began Pâwang Ali, mangling his Malay to accord with his rôle.

"You couldn't have come to a bet-

ter place," said an ironic voice from behind the mask. "So you're Bhím Sén Thápá's brother, eh?"

The mask muffled the voice, so that he could not compare it with the one that had mocked Inspector Kemp over the radio; and the use of Malay instead of English was a further handicap. The situation was too precious to waste on small game.

"Verily, *túan*. I am the brother of that man who was treacherously slain."

A moment of silence. Pâwang Ali felt as well as saw the stare that searched his face. Something had gone wrong. There was a basic flaw in his imposture. The room was becoming a vortex of menace. Silent mockery radiated from behind that black mask. Yet the languid ease of the lean brown fingers told him that the masked lord could not know that Pâwang Ali stood before him.

"It is very odd, Matabar Singh," said that ironic voice, "that your brother returned from an errand that should have ended in his capture or death."

In following the sniper Pâwang Ali had walked into a trap.

"I have been waiting for some one to follow Bhím Sén."

As he spoke, the masked lord's hand darted toward the arch of the alcove; but Pâwang Ali was in motion before the enemy. His lithe body moved with the eye-deceiving swiftness of a cobra. He lunged, drawing his *kukri*. The broad blade licked out, a shearing blaze of steel, but rebounded as from an anvil.

The Pâwang's advance was checked in mid-lunge. He was hurled back as though he had plunged headlong against a stone wall. The masked lord's fingers reached the push button at the jamb of the arch.

The treacherous light had concealed a barrier! Shatter-proof glass protected the master of the show from knife or bullet.

A low, mocking laugh. The rustle of silken hangings. The faint shuffle of bare feet and the glint of steel from the shadows at the left. Retreat was cut off. The Pâwang, recovering from the paralyzing impact, regained his feet and retrieved his *kukri*, ready to cut his way to the door.

All in an instant. Then he saw that his fighting instinct had functioned faster than his senses; those vague, tigerish figures were only his own reflection in a bank of mirrors! The deception lasted no more than a split second, yet the delay was disastrous. A bolt slipped into place. The exit was barred. There was an ominous sighing and whistling. Sweetish, pungent fumes were thickening the air. His head was already reeling, and his legs seemed to be flexible as ribbons. He scarcely felt the impact of his blade against the solid teak door.

He held his breath and repeated the assault, but he had already inhaled too much of the narcotic gas. Gray mists swirled in ever-thickening eddies, obscuring the relentless blaze of the overhead light. The masked lord was speaking from beyond the protecting screen.

"—you most stupid of flat-nosed

fools, did you really think this was Bhim Sên's brother? Tie him up! He'll talk—he'll tell us all about——"

About what?

The final words eluded the Pâwang, but lingering shreds of his blotted wits assured him that the question would be repeated in fire and steel.

## VI

RITA FOSTER in her father's limousine, followed the inspector from Pâwang Ali's country residence to police headquarters. When, after a long wait, she was at last admitted to the inspector's office, she was for a moment quite beyond words. Slade was not under guard. And as he flung aside his half-smoked, hopelessly-shredded cigar, he leaped to his feet, caught her in his arms, and said, "You tell her, inspector! I'm busy, as you can easily see."

Kemp presently broke in to explain, "I kept you waiting, Miss Foster, until I could be certain of the significance of the death of your three servants during our séance at Pâwang Ali's house."

"Death?"

"Yes. The surgeon has just informed me that they had been poisoned by the delicacies that some alleged relatives had brought them to supplement jail rations. In view of Pâwang Ali's startling revelations, this poisoning is a move to protect the Claw of Iblis."

That reminded Rita of the long reach of the master criminal.

"Then Dan's next!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Kemp, maybe you'd

better keep him here until Pâwang Ali has caught the Claw."

"I wouldn't be a bit more worried about Mr. Slade." He laughed. "Now that his story is common property there would be no reason for silencing him. My friend the Pâwang is the one who is in real danger."

"The devil you say!" flared Slade. "If there's any danger, I'm teaming up with him. After the way he went to bat for——"

Kemp shook his head.

"Commendable. But most unnecessary. And the Pâwang's methods are so—ah—unorthodox, I might say, that I prefer to let him—er—work things out himself, if you get what I mean."

"Uhuh. I get plenty," chuckled Slade. "But what do you mean, 'the' Pâwang?"

"Native criminals gave him that title," explained Kemp. "It means wizard or something of the sort. Which, of course, is perfect rot. His real name is Shaykh el Saiyed Nureddin Ali bin Ayyub al Saoudi el Idrisi, and he's a Mohammedan saint. Half Arab, and the nephew of a former Malay rajah. Some title, eh?"

"Holy smoke!" marveled Slade. "He's certainly unassuming about it!"

And after acknowledging Kemp's expressions of regret at his unfortunate detention, Slade accompanied Rita to her car. Neither of them observed the Chinaman who lurked in the shadows, watching and listening.

"Dan, come out and help me pack up. I'm moving to a hotel. I was

so worried about you last night I didn't notice it, but now that it's over, the thought of staying in that house gives me shivers!"

Slade headed the car up South Bridge Street. He was quite unaware of the dark form that clung to the spare-tire rack. Once or twice he eyed the lovely girl at his side, but his thoughts kept him grim and inarticulate. At last he said, "Listen, darling—the more I think of this mess, the more certain I am that by putting two and two together we can get to the bottom of things.

"Dr. Kendall was killed to keep him from getting into the *Túan Besar* to make a preliminary survey for his process of smelting—he'd have tumbled to the rich lode right away. Harper was some big crook's 'yes man.' And by going through your father's files, we could turn up some others of the ring, which would give the police something to work on."

Slade's approach was fresh, since the police investigation had until an hour ago been based on the assumption that he was the criminal. Instead of assisting Rita with her packing, he explained his views.

Together they went through Foster's files, listing every business associate. Then they added the names of acquaintances, club members, and casual callers.

"Dan, there simply can't be a criminal in the whole catalogue!"

"Who would have suspected Harper?" countered Slade. "Now who on this list was connected with him?"

"We need more than that, Dan,"

said Rita, smiling wearily. "He would have to be some one who could give warning of your leaving Pahang, so you'd be taken care of when you got to Singapore."

"That's the kink! Let's call the inspector. He can check up on every white man in the Pahang district—there aren't over five hundred."

He stepped to the telephone and outlined his plan.

"Not half bad, Slade," approved Kemp. "Fact is, I was considering something of the sort when you called. Suppose you bring me your list and all of Mr. Foster's files. In the meantime I'll raid Harper's office on Battery Road."

"Check!" Slade slammed the receiver and reached for his hat. "Pack up your toothbrush, gorgeous! I'll clean out the desk and cabinets."

Before Slade completed his task, Rita had packed a suitcase. As he emerged with the first filing drawer, she was backing the car into the drive.

"Open the door!" he called; but he had scarcely set foot on the walk leading to the driveway when he yelled a warning.

AS Rita leaned from the wheel to fling open the rear door, a slant-eyed face appeared from the darkness beyond the car. A Chinaman leaped to the running board, jerked the door open, and throttled her cry of alarm.

Simultaneously, there was a stirring and a rustling on every side of Slade. Instead of dropping the filing drawer, his arms shot out, hurled

it at a lurker who cropped up from the shrubbery between him and the car. The heavy missile caught the Malay full in the chest, sent him crashing backward.

Steel gleamed; but the leader of the raid growled a guttural command and a club crashed down on Slade's shoulders. He lunged toward the voice, his fist ploughing home. The impact lifted the Malay and sent him rocketing to the hood of the car, but before Slade could follow up, he was overwhelmed by half a dozen natives. Despite the crashing, destructive punches he jabbed home, they bore him to the ground.

He heard a yell, a curse, and a shrill scream from the car. Glass splattered. Slade, struggling to his knees, saw that Rita had snatched a wrench and sliced it across a swarthy face.

"Sock 'em one!" roared Slade. He lunged forward like a wolf breaking from a pack of hounds. In his hand he clutched a rock he had torn from the border of the walk. He hurled it as he charged. Another man down, jaw shattered by the missile.

Rita was free for the moment.

"Grab the wheel and clear out!" roared Slade, ploughing another yard through the pack. There was something odd about the attack; despite the destruction he had spread, the enemy had discarded their *krisses*. Clubs probed the confusion, battering and numbing him, driving him to his knees, paralyzing him as he fought odds that his weight could not quite overcome.

Rita, instead of taking advantage

of her momentary respite, had seized a jack handle. One vicious, slashing blow——

"Clear out!" repeated Slade as he again sank to the walk, still slugging and kicking. "Beat it—I'll hold 'em!"

They were holding him, but Slade could not see it that way. His head was a battered confusion and red spots danced before his eyes, but his lacerated fists pounded like hammers. A final, nerve-tearing heave lifted him up through the squirming heap.

"Get out!" he roared. "Get those papers to the police! That's what they want."

Then Rita understood. The jack handle crashed down on a red skull-cap. But as she retreated to the car, Slade was submerged and the wave of Chinese and Malay thugs swept forward. Strong hands snatched the weapon from her hands. A club laid Slade flat at her feet.

"Dump them into my car!" commanded a voice in English. Before Rita could see the speaker, her head was enveloped by a greasy *sarong*; but she caught a fleeting glimpse of dark figures swarming into the house.

## VII

WHEN PAWANG ALI recovered from the narcotic gas that had blotted out his wits, he was in a small cell with masonry walls and an iron-barred door. The air was dense, and moisture oozed from the stones. He was underground.

Presently he heard a scuffling in the corridor and a wrathful voice

cursing in Pushtu. A squad of Chinese halted at the door of the cell. Their captive was Ibrahim, the red-bearded Afghan. He had been beaten until he was beyond anything but threats of vengeance. The jailer opened the Pâwang's cell. The guards flung the Afghan headlong into a corner.

"Aie, the dog! The devil!" exclaimed Pâwang Ali. "So he buries us both while he digs up the treasure."

"Treasure!" The Afghan spat the word, wiped the blood from his lips. "He had me flogged for admitting you—Pâwang Ali's spy. He will skin you alive and crucify you, O eater of carrion! Otherwise I would kill you with my empty hands!"

The welts that seamed Ibrahim's back and face were genuine; yet the Pâwang suspected a snare.

"We will be crucified together, Red Beard," mocked Pâwang Ali. "I spoke of certain buried loot before the masked lord tripped me up with his exceeding cunning. He is convinced that the letter you stole from me was a bribe to let me seek him with a knife."

Ibrahim's face lengthened for a moment; but his next words were no surprise: "*Billah*, thou art right, Matabar Singh. Instead of quarreling, let us use our wits and both escape."

Ibrahim explained his strategy. It was simple, eminently practicable, and at once put into effect.

A blow, a curse, and a shuffling of feet opened the show. Then grunts and gasps, and the clatter of the iron grille as Pâwang Ali crashed against

it, hurled bodily by the burly Afghan. From the left came the jailer's voice, a cackling of profane abuse. The trick was working! Their wrathful growls and grunts did not subside; but the sound of strife did not mask the silvery tinkle of a handful of coins that dropped to the floor.

The Chinese jailer came dashing down the corridor. A Straits dollar rolled out to meet him. Ibrahim and Matabar Singh continued their vigorous battle. A greasy kerchief, knotted about a handful of coins, lodged between the bars as the combatants again crashed the grille. The jailer swooped like a falcon. His talons closed about the parcel of silver. Ibrahim's heavy hands darted through the bars, gripped him by the throat and jammed the Chinaman's head against the grille. In an instant the wiry Ghurka had the jailer's keys. Three quick trails sufficed to open the door.

The Afghan flung the jailer into the cell, but before Pâwang Ali could batter his brains out against the masonry, his companion caught his arm.

"Nay, Matabar Singh, do not kill Wo Hung. For a yellow ape, he is a good fellow and somewhat a friend of mine. I will tie and gag him."

They trussed the jailer and locked him in the cell. Oddly enough, he was not armed. Pâwang Ali was now certain that Ibrahim had faked a break in order to accompany the dull-witted Ghurka back to his master; but as they rounded the corner, he saw that the trick was far from transparent: none of the keys fitted the lock that blocked their escape!

The Afghan cursed in a low, wrathful voice. At last he muttered, "By Allah, it is simple! Follow me, O Matabar Singh. And thy master will reward me richly."

"By Allah, he will!" the masquerader solemnly swore.

They retraced their steps to the jailer's room at the other end of the corridor. In addition to the door through which they had entered was another that opened into a cross passage; but Ibrahim's plan called for a halt.

"It is useless to advance," he whispered. "It is guarded. But look—here is a telephone. Call Pâwang Ali, thy master. *Wallah!* He will raid this place and slay every man in it, as is his custom."

That would lead the Pâwang's men into a fatal trap. Matabar Singh had been spared in order to snare Pâwang Ali. There was no way of warning his men. Some enemy would be listening in on an extension to hear how the Ghurka's appeal was received. Yet the message had to go through.

"Excellent!" applauded Matabar Singh. "But where are we? I must give Pâwang Ali the address."

Ibrahim gave him explicit instructions. The Ghurka lifted the receiver and poured his troubles into the wire. What the Afghan failed to note was that Matabar Singh had kept the hook down and had talked to a dead line.

As Pâwang Ali replaced the receiver, Ibrahim's ponderous bulk flashed forward, caught him from the rear and sent him crashing into a corner. His powerful hands closed about the Pâwang's throat.

"Father of a pig!" growled the Afghan. "Meet your master in hell!"

The crushing impact and the throttling grip left the Pâwang limp and stunned. But before blackness entirely engulfed him, wrath lashed his lagging muscles into action. He wrenched clear of those deadly hands that would in another moment tear him limb from limb. The Afghan whirled to pin him down again. The Pâwang's leg shot out, caught Ibrahim in the stomach, sent him snapping backward. During that scant sliver of time Pâwang caught the end of his unwound turban. The Afghan recovered and closed in to tear the stupid Ghurka apart.

Ibrahim, failing to allow for his adversary's agility, missed by a hair. He plunged past his quarry. The turban cloth whipped about his neck. The constricting loop closed like a python's coil. What followed was a blur of deadly motion. The Afghan's neck was broken as the slayer and the slain crashed into a corner.

Pâwang Ali, however, was living on borrowed time. His failure to use the telephone would make the Claw of Iblis wonder what was delaying Ibrahim's strategy; nor was there any use in trying to get a message through to the police. The directions the Afghan had given him would lead to an ambush far from the den of Iblis. One resource remained: the short-wave radio which had been used to announce the death of Dr. Kendall. He slipped through the gloom of the passage that led from the jailer's rooms, but his search was interrupted by a

woman's outcry and a masculine voice that rumbled searing oaths.

Then he heard the jangle of metal, a wheezing, and a squeaking.

He turned to his left. At the end of the passageway was a room that no longer needed its single, drop light. The glare of the brazier of charcoal, drowned that sickly glow. Sparks showered as a kneeling Malay pumped wheezing bellows. Two others stood by, awaiting orders from a masked man.

RITA FOSTER and Slade were shackled to the wall. The latter was stripped to the waist, and his bare feet were drawn toward the ceiling by cords, so that he rested on his shoulders.

"Miss Foster, now that you know I am the Claw of Iblis," said the masked man, "you may listen to reason. Your late father's stubborn refusal to sell out to Erskine Harper caused me considerable annoyance. I removed your father's stock certificates from his safe. All you have to do is indorse them to me."

"You can't get away with million-dollar extortion," growled Slade. "Even if Rita did transfer the stock, how do you expect to keep it?"

"The disappearance of the Foster heiress, and the transfer of the controlling interest in the mine would cause disastrous comment," explained the Claw of Iblis. "So she will sign an irrevocable power of attorney and then be released. But you, Mr. Slade, will stay here as a hostage to insure her discretion until the estate is settled and the transfer recorded. Simple, isn't it?"

Once the stock of the *Túan Besar*

was transferred, it could be put on the market and bought back again through a score of camouflaged accounts. And Slade's burial place would remain a secret—

"Don't sign!" barked Slade as the Claw offered Rita a pen.

The Claw shrugged and murmured a few words to the Malays.

Pâwang Ali, lurking in the shadows, appraised the odds. The Malays bristled with *krisses*. Too much for empty hands. And though Slade's iron stubbornness might carry him far, the girl would in the end surrender to put an end to his torment.

"Hang on! I can take it!" growled Slade as the glowing iron drew smoke from his bare chest. "Once you sign, we're through!"

"Oh, good Lord, Dan—we're through anyway—"

"Hang on!" he groaned. The clank of his fetters muffled his words. The torturers were giving him free play of his chains so that he would wear himself out in a futile struggle to evade the searing brands of gleaming metal. They knew better than to apply the uttermost torment. The shock would blot out his senses. And that Rita was spared the hot iron hinted at what would be her ultimate end.

Pâwang Ali gathered himself for an empty-handed charge. Slade was his protégé. He could not now abandon him. Rita was sick with horror and could not hold out much longer. It was insane, but the honor of an Arab demanded it.

And then it came to him. There was one play left. As the hot iron again tainted the air with the reek of scorching flesh, the Pâwang

wheeled and dashed swiftly back to the corridor from which he had started. He seized the keys of his cell, unlocked the door and caught the jailer by the throat. Even if the fellow had not been gagged, that relentless grip would have allowed him not a gurgle. When the Pâwang's fingers finally relaxed, he shouldered his throttled burden.

The Cantonese are lightweights. This one would be a shield.

He returned to the torture room with but a second to spare. Rita's nerve had cracked. She was reaching for a pen. The Malays had laid their tongs aside. The one with the bellows still squatted by the fire, fanning it to incandescence so that the glare and the showers of sparks would quench any lingering stubbornness.

A woman was signing away a fortune and two lives; and their eyes could not help but follow the gesture. The moment arrived. Holding the dead jailer before him, the Pâwang bounded forward. One—two—three long leaps. The quartet sensed rather than heard his pantherlike approach.

There was a blur of steel as a *kris* flashed from a *sarong*. A warning yell. The Claw reached to his hip. A bullet *chunked* into the jailer. The Pâwang hurled his human shield headlong into the cluster of Malays. The Claw fired again, but the Pâwang's swift advance carried him wide of the shot. A drawn *kris* clanged to the floor as the human projectile broke the Malay's charge.

Another pistol blasted. Pâwang Ali felt the draft of the passing bullet, but before the weapon could be jammed against his body, he was

in the midst of the tangle. His fingers closed on the haft of a *kris*. The blade slashed upward, biting flesh, but the Pâwang was submerged in the dog fight. Another thrust. The weapon was struck from his grasp. They had him pinned to the floor, and the Claw was advancing, pistol ready.

It seemed like a clean sweep for the archcriminal; but as he came within arm's reach of the Pâwang, there was a howl of agony, a stench of burning flesh and scorching cloth. A shower of white-hot coals rained over the struggling group. Pâwang Ali, released by the fiery distraction, erupted from the mill of threshing limbs.

As he snatched one of the torturers' implements, he saw what had happened. In the struggle, a pair of tongs had been kicked toward the wall. Slade, by dint of straining, had seized the implement, reached for the brazier, and hurled the bed of white-hot coals at the enemy.

All in a glance. The Pâwang lashed out with the iron bar which had branded Slade. It smashed home through a yellow skullcap, parried the stroke of a *kris*, swept savagely across a brown face. He shifted, ducked a hissing blade, and whirled to cut down the Claw. The blow fell short of its mark, but struck the pistol from the enemy's hand.

The survivors broke for cover. Pâwang Ali, bounding forward, tripped and measured his length on the blood-splashed floor. The Claw and his henchmen wheeled; but from the passageway came the roar of voices and the pounding of feet.

A file of Chinese and Malay ruffians came pouring into the room.

The Pâwang snatched a *kris* from the floor, kicked the Claw's abandoned pistol across the floor toward Slade and shouted his challenge:

"I am Pâwang Ali, and I die slaying!"

AS HE SPOKE, he dashed aside his Ghurka turban. Despite his cunning make-up, the expression of his features changed. They recognized the terror of the Malay coast and knew that he was about to run amuck, slashing with inhuman fury until literally hacked limb from limb.

The file fanned out. No one wanted to be the first to meet a *pengamok*.

Pâwang Ali's eyes flashed toward the wall. Slade, straining against his fetters, was about to reach the half-emptied pistol.

"Shoot out the light!" roared the Pâwang. Darkness would give him a chance to cut through while the enemy maimed each other in the confusion. His audacious challenge had won him a split second to give Slade the signals. He bounded forward, *kris* hissing as its wavy blade whirled in a bloodthirsty moulinet.

A pistol cracked at the left. Slade had fired, but the overhead globe still cast its murky light over the crescent of steel that was closing in on the Pâwang. He charged straight for the center; then in mid-air his body seemed to change direction, flashing sidewise. His incredible shift caught the right flank off guard. His whirling blade bored through like a snow plow. The survivors wheeled. Slade's pistol

again crackled. The light winked out.

A howl of fury drowned the Pâwang's savage laugh as his blade lashed into the gloom. He was hacking his way to the door; but he did not attain his mark. Jets of flame spurted from the passageway, and lead raked the battlefield. Shouts. Tramping feet. Long, white tongues of light probed the howling confusion. Bearded and turbaned Sikhs in khaki tunics swept everything before them as they clubbed and shot like grim automatons. In their midst was Inspector Kemp. At his side was Tsang Ah Fong, unperturbed and beaming—Tsang Ah Fong, who had been detailed to follow Slade.

"Inspector *sahib*," shouted Pâwang Ali as he plunged into the confusion, "where is the Claw of Iblis—by Allah, if he escaped—"

"Don't worry," growled a grim voice from the left wall. "Come over here with a light."

As the Sikhs herded the survivors down the passageway, Inspector Kemp handed Slade the flashlight.

He played the beam toward the doorway. A masked man lay huddled in a heap. Pâwang Ali's kick in the ribs evoked not a sign of life. He jerked aside the mask, revealing a bronzed, predatory face with a hard mouth and a commanding beak of a nose.

"Strike me blind!" exclaimed the inspector. "Mahmud Abdullah—Datu Abdullah, the smuggler the gunboat commander reported killed in action off the coast of Acheen last year—"

Pâwang Ali shrugged and murmured, "The commander *sahib* was in error when he failed to bring in Mahmud's head. And when crime broke out anew, I began to wonder as I recognized the familiar touch of Mahmud—"

"I couldn't resist the temptation to plug him first before I popped the light," apologized Slade. "Now for hell's sweet sake, get a blacksmith. It'll soon be morning, and Rita and I have an awful lot of important business to—"

"It is written that haste is of Satan," interrupted the Pâwang."

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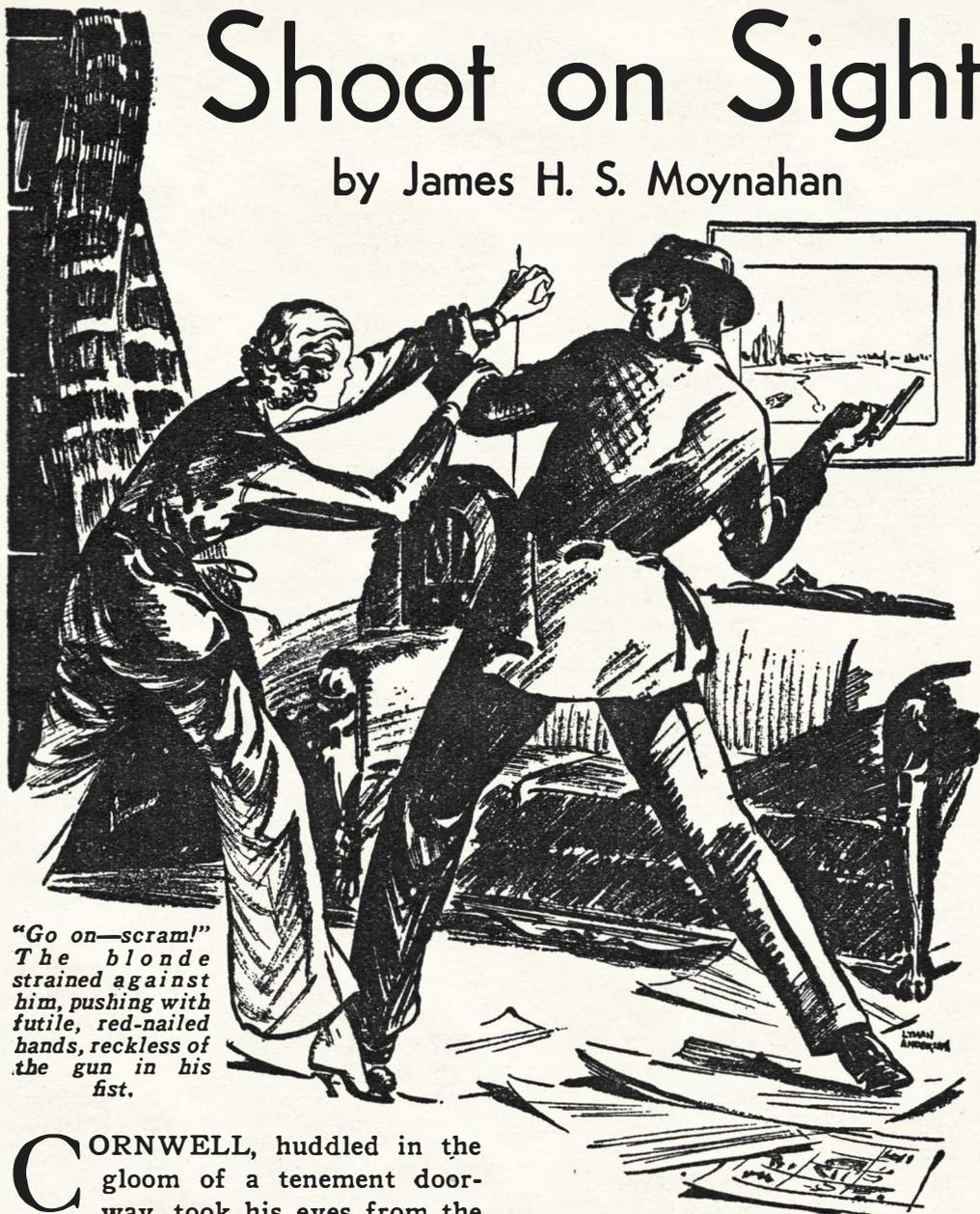
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# Shoot on Sight

by James H. S. Moynahan



*"Go on—scram!"  
The blonde  
strained against  
him, pushing with  
futile, red-nailed  
hands, reckless of  
the gun in his  
fist.*

**C**ORNWELL, huddled in the gloom of a tenement doorway, took his eyes from the yellow-lighted window of the brick building across the street.

The uniformed patrolman at his shoulder looked at the homicide man with eyes dark with surmise. "You going to try it, Frank?"

The patrolman's whisper was husky with excitement, and Cornwell, looking up and down the

shabby, ill-lighted street, said without turning: "Might as well get it over with."

"You think it's him, all right?"

"I couldn't miss! I've been looking at that mug on circulars, police dodgers, and in the back of the department magazine till I see it in my sleep. 'Shoot on Sight!' Why,

they've even christened him 'Shoot-on-sight' Freeman."

Horgan, the patrolman, looked at the tenement opposite where the shade was down in the lighted window on the second floor. He muttered fervently: "Not bad advice, either! That's one baby I'd never give an even break! Huh?" He looked questioningly at the homicide man.

Cornwell, staring out into the street, was frowning. "Yeah—only it don't happen to be so simple."

"How do you mean? It can always be 'killed while resisting arrest,' can't it? Don't tell me you're going to walk in on that killer and try to argue him into coming along!"

Cornwell's scowl was pained now. "All right, tell me how I'm going to keep him alive long enough to get a confession out of him, then. Shoot him down and what happens to the Evans kid? They'll burn him for the Barrows Machine job——"

Horgan's eyes were wider. "You mean Freeman turned that job?"

"Turned the job, shot down the two express guards, and went south with the pay roll—all by himself."

"Hell, Frank, I didn't know that!" Horgan's eyes were dark with amazement. "Why—the buzzard must be crazy to take on a lay like that without a helper!"

"Crazy? Of course he's crazy. That's what makes jobs like that possible. Can you picture any ordinary hood—screwy as they are—tackling a set-up like that? Of course not. That's what Freeman counts on. The guards think they're safe and they relax. Freeman doesn't waste time sticking

'em up or taking their pistols away. He'll tell you that's the kind of soft-hearted stuff that gets lots of the boys a reserved seat—with straps to hold 'em in. Well, this isn't getting it done." He stirred his thick shoulders, looked grimly across the street.

Horgan said hesitantly: "You're not just being sentimental about that Evans kid, are you, Frank? 'Course, I know Peg Evans is a swell kid, and you like her a lot, but that doesn't say her brother can't pull a fast one, does it?"

"Only that I know the kid and he's the last one in the world to turn a job like that one! Hell, there aren't many men—even the real bad ones—who'll walk up to two guys just minding their own business and let 'em have it—bang, bang!—just like that. A hood's got to be pretty low for that—and a natural killer to boot. This Evans kid ain't made that way. That's all I need to know. To hell with the witnesses!"

Horgan said doubtfully: "Well—I sure hope you're right." His eyes got sober. "For Heaven's sake, now, be careful, Frank. Don't be a fool. The kid's not worth it."

Horgan caught only the muttered word "sister," as Cornwell started across the street. The patrolman shook his head sadly. He took out his service revolver, spun the cylinder, looked up at the lighted window across the street and settled down to wait. Cornwell, in the dark doorway opposite, took out his own pistol and looked up at the head of the flight, the dimly-lighted outlines disappearing into gloom above.

A BABY was fretting somewhere in the house. The air in the halls was stale, heavy. He climbed the steep, creaking stairway, with its runner of cheap oilcloth worn through to the wood beneath. On the second floor he paused, listened. A woman snarled something in a screaming voice and the baby's cry stopped abruptly. Cornwell went down the hall on tiptoe. Outside the two doors at the end he hesitated. No light showed beneath the door on the left. He crossed to the other door, put an ear to the panel, and a board creaked sharply under his weight.

He drew back, quivering.

The room beyond the door became absolutely still, the murmur of sound breaking off sharply to a tense silence. Cornwell stood stiff, not breathing. The line of light under the door went out.

Cornwell went downstairs, found an unused mail box stuffed with circulars. He pulled out a pink throw-away of a furniture sale, went up the stairs and poked the paper noisily under the door.

Making no attempt to walk silently, he crossed to the stairs and started up. On the landing, four steps up, he waited in the corner, hidden from the apartment door by the edge of the dumb-waiter wall.

A door opened above, letting out a blur of voices. A man and a girl came down the stairs. The man glanced at Cornwell, met the detective's level gaze, and looked away self-consciously. The girl, bolder, measured him with hard, agate eyes that had questions in them.

The couple, not talking now,

filed down past Cornwell. The man took the girl's elbow. They walked intimately to the end of the hall and the sound of their disappearing feet grew fainter on the creaking stair.

Cornwell glanced around the corner. The paper was still under the door, and the strip between door and sill still dark. He kept his eyes on the paper. The dumb-waiter rumbled in the shaft behind the wall.

The paper below the door stirred, was pulled in out of sight. Cornwell tensed. The light went on.

When the door opened Cornwell shot across the hall. The yellow-haired girl who had opened it cautiously smothered a startled little cry, tried to slam it shut. His foot in the jamb held it open. "Just a second, miss."

The girl, seeing she could not shut him out, backed slowly into a living room heavy with cigar smoke. Newspapers were scattered on the overstuffed velour suit, and about a pink-shaded floor lamp smoke eddied from a lighted cigarette burning on a cigar stand. A wall-paper screen half hid a bedroom beyond.

The girl herself was perhaps twenty. The blue satin pajamas she wore were expensive, and went well with her yellow hair. She wore it in a loose, rippling mop. Ear pendants twinkled at her small lobes. Mascara and blue shadow made her eyes a startling, black contrast. Her nose was straight, her lips large, carefully rouged to a vivid, tomato-red. She was slender, lithe-limbed, and worldly-wise in the very poise of her retreating figure.

Her retreat had been mechanical—

sheer surprise, perhaps. Control returned; she stopped, barring his path stubbornly. "Hey! Where do you think you're going?"

Cornwell took out his pistol. His big hand on her silken shoulder pushed her aside. "Take it easy, sister. I'm law. Where's Freeman?"

She flung off his hand savagely. "Take your hands off me! You get out of here! Who do you think you are, crashing in here trying to get fresh with me? You ain't shown me no plaster. Go on—scram!" She strained against him, pushing with futile, red-nailed hands, reckless of the gun in his fist.

Cornwell held the pistol back out of her reach and tried to shove her aside with his left arm. She fought him, striking at his face with sharp, curving fingers. Her strength was a girl's strength, but she was white with fury. She had two hands to Cornwell's one free hand, and she did not have to keep one eye on the regions beyond the screen that hid the bedroom.

A **SHOVE** sent her spinning. Her knees struck the divan and she fell onto it backward. Before she could twist free, Cornwell was sitting on her legs, a hand gripping her straining wrists. She bit him. He rubbed his knuckles in her panting face. She reared up. He let go her wrists and held her chin up, pushing against it with the heel of his palm, his finger tips nipping her nostrils, shutting off breath.

"Cut it out, sister," he growled, between heavy breaths. "I saw him come in. I'm taking him along any-

way, and this way I'm only apt to hurt you. If I let you loose, will you act nice? Don't say it if you don't mean it. I won't fool with you next time."

Her face was dark-red, her eyes white and bulging. She tried to nod her head. Cornwell took his hand away from her face and her sobbing lungs sucked in air. He stood up.

"Remember, I can't afford to fool with you. You know it." His eyes darted to the bedroom, returned to her face. The lipstick was smeared on her sullen mouth. Her eyes were resentful, but rebellion had gone out of them.

"Get up out of there," Cornwell said.

"What for?"

Cornwell waved his gun at the bedroom. "I don't want to shoot your boy friend if I can help it. I'm taking him anyway, whether I have to shoot him or not. But you can do him a favor by telling him to get smart and not try to start anything. In the first place, you're walking in there ahead of me, and it'll be a lot nicer for you that way. And in the second place, if I do shoot him I'm going to wing him. There's a kid in stir due to burn for a job your boy friend turned. You wouldn't want to play with Freeman if you knew he was letting this kid burn for his rap, would you?"

"Nuts!" she sneered. "You're so damn smart—go ahead. Let's see you find him." She stood up, put a hand to her hair and looked at him from under her lashes. "And if you don't find him, we'll talk about what's going to happen to you for busting your way in here and

trying to slip over a fast one." She blew out breath in a sharp laugh. "Come on, smart head."

Her tone was overly confident. Cornwell glanced sharply at her face. Doubt flashed across his eyes, faded to impassivity as she looked up.

"Go on, move," he ordered coldly.

She gave him a tantalizing glance and walked deliberately to the screen that hid the bedroom. Cornwell's gun lifted the faintest trace, tilted. He tensed, started forward.

"Oh, don't be afraid!" she cooed sweetly. "There's nothing here to hurt you!" She was shoving the screen back boisterously. "Don't mind the bed. It's not made up. I wasn't expecting company." She added under her breath, for him to overhear: "What company!"

Cornwell, looking not too comfortable, was right behind her as she flung open the door leading to the next bedroom—directly behind the first and in line with the other two rooms. The room was dark, and his searching eyes could make out nothing in the confused shadows before him.

"Where's the light?" he growled.

"Little boy afraid of the dark? Never mind, mamma fix." She stepped boldly inside the room, tugged an invisible cord. The room sprang into light. Another bedroom. Also empty.

"Take a good look, nosey boy. Here——" She flung open the built-in clothes closet. "Nothing up the sleeve—no mirrors—just what you see."

Cornwell looked dispiritedly into the closet which was filled with dresses redolent of the heavy scent

she favored. She waited at the next door, opened it with a pressure of lean silken hip and invited: "Come along, papa. I want you to be sure he's not hiding in the washtubs."

She jerked on the light, said in a stilted, sarcastic tone: "And this is the kitchen. Electric ice box, brand-new gas stove, new plumbing." She lifted the cover of the tubs. "And that's the bathroom. Maybe I'd better show you that, too."

Cornwell, peering out the closed window through the fire escape, said dryly: "Your kitchen's cold, though. How's the heat, here? I won't take it if the janitor service is bad."

She darted a sharp glance at him. As if she resented his encroachment on her humorous rôle, she said simply: "And that's the bathroom. Take it or leave it." He poked his head inside, saw that it was empty, and nodded.

"And now," she said, facing him, her figure slouched arrogantly on one hip, "let's see your shield number."

Cornwell, red in the face, his lips tight, took out the badge and held it, cupped in his palm, for her to see. She noted the number, her lips moving, vindictively purposeful.

"O. K.!" she said. "Now if you've seen everything you wanted, suppose you chase yourself out of here—fast." She stood scowling at him, her upper lip curved bitterly.

Cornwell looked at the venomous mask that was her face and took an uncertain step backward. "Made the sneak, huh?" He nodded. "Out the window and down the fire escape. That's why the kitchen's cold. O. K., sister, see how far——"

"Heist 'em." The voice behind him was low, hoarse, deliberate.

CORNWELL whirled, shot—and the girl was tearing at his bucking pistol. The slug ripped a brief, white furrow in the painted floor. Cornwell, unable to lift his pistol with the girl jerking at it, looked into the round, black hole of Freeman's pistol, pointed at his face. He held his breath.

The girl lifted the pistol from his nerveless hand. "No, Howie, no!" she screamed. "Not here!"

Freeman, not moving the pistol, said in the same flat voice, his eyes burning into Cornwell's: "Not here—but somewhere."

The woman's hat was grotesque on his too-large head. The leg-of-mutton sleeves of the woman's coat bulged ridiculously with his beefy shoulders. The bright rouge on his thin lips was smeared absurdly where his wrist had brushed his mouth. But there was nothing grotesque, ridiculous, or absurd about the look with which he fixed the detective.

"Get moving, copper. It's all in the game."

Cornwell looked at him a second without speaking. Then he shrugged. "You got the bulge on me, Howie. I'm not crying. I'd have given it to you if I'd had to. Only before I go along I want to know one thing: What about that kid they're going to burn for the Barrows Machine job? You turned that, Howie; you know you did. What's one more rap to you? Are you going to let me see that straightened out before I go—or are you going to let the kid stand

a rap for you that won't make any difference to you if you're picked up? I'll stand up and take mine like a man. What about you, Howie?"

The girl, crouched against the ice box, was staring at them. Freeman did not look at her.

"Aa-ah!" he said flatly. "The hell with that stuff! What do I want to go messing with trouble for when I didn't pull the caper. Is it my fault the kid's got a bum rap? I suppose I never stood any bum raps—that you bulls tried to hang on me! And you come around asking me to take the fall for this kid I never seen in my life. What the hell—he'll beat the fall. Look at the falls I beat. If I'd turned the caper, it'd be different, but I was miles from the damn joint when it was pulled. Wasn't I, Rita?"

The girl said, "Yeah," dully. Her eyes did not meet his.

Cornwell looked levelly at him. "You pulled that job, Howie, and you know it, and she knows it, and I know it. If you want to be like that, and she wants to be like that about it, come on, let me get it over with. It won't be so bad—getting off the same earth with a couple of people that're so——" He swallowed.

Freeman protested, with a bluntness that he tried hard to make sound convincing: "What the hell! You got me wrong. I got an alibi. I was on the train to Buffalo that very afternoon." He swung righteously on the girl. "Wasn't I, kid?"

She nodded, but did not speak.

"I suppose you got somebody that can swear you were there," Cornwell said.

"Why—uh—she"—he indicated the girl—"was with me." He scowled. "And—uh—let's see. Ah—I got a slip, come to think of it. We ate in the diner and I got a slip. Dunno why I saved it—" His voice dwindled off.

Cornwell looked interested. "You mean—it's got the date on it?"

"Sure. May 17th. When that Barrows joint was knocked over I said to myself right away: 'I bet they try to hang that one on me.' So I sat down and figured where I was that day, and I remembered about the slip, and sure enough I hadn't thrown it away, so I was aces. You don't believe me, do you?"

"The slip shouldn't lie," Cornwell said. "You got it here?"

"I think I could find it. Rita, go look in my stuff—in the second drawer. See if you can find that slip; you know the one I mean?"

She slid past him, went through the door. The pistol dangled loosely in her right hand.

CORNWELL looked at the man with the gun. "I suppose there's no use my telling you you're a sucker to go through with this, Howie?"

Freeman said nothing.

"A heist guy's one thing, Howie. A cop killer's something else. Go through with this and you've slept your last good night's sleep."

"That flatfoot on plant across the street wasn't so smart. I walked right out past him in this rig and he didn't give me a tumble."

"We'll get you in the end, though, Howie. You just tough it up for yourself by knocking me off. There's a—"

The girl came back into the kitchen. She was walking swiftly, and her face was curiously white and stiff. She put the slip into Freeman's hand. She did not say anything.

"Give it to him," Freeman said, not taking his eyes off the man in front of him.

Cornwell, taking the slip, glanced at her face, saw the indrawn nostrils, the tight lips. He glanced at the slip, looked up swiftly to catch the girl's eyes locked with Freeman's. Freeman's neck was a dark-red. His eyes left the girl's steady gaze, shifted to Cornwell.

A sharp gleam woke in Cornwell's eyes. To cover it he lifted the slip to the light over head.

It was the usual dining-car cashier's receipt, a sales slip listing the items ordered, the amount, the number of portions—a carbon duplicate. Opposite the serial number Cornwell's eye scrutinized the date. He seemed stunned.

"But—" He faltered. "This can't be right. You—"

Freeman snorted. "Can't, but it is."

Cornwell shook his head dazedly. He examined the date again. "Hasn't been erased—that date and your signature would be smudged some if you'd erased on that paper." His hands dropped. "I guess I—"

"All right," Freeman said harshly. "Now get—"

Cornwell was examining the slip again. He said in a mild voice, turning to the girl: "Only those two cigars aren't going to look so good when you try to tell the judge you were with him."

A startled look leaped into the

girl's eyes. She flung on her companion. "See? A smart monkey you are! I told you!" She glared at him. Her fury seemed out of proportion to its cause.

Freeman did not look at her. "What the hell," he told Cornwell. "I just thought it'd look better if I said it was a girl I had with me. So what if it was a guy?"

Cornwell's eyes, dark and searching, darted from the girl's face to Freeman's, back to the girl's sullen mouth again. He said thoughtfully, watching Freeman: "Why—uh—nothing." And suddenly, with apparent irrelevance: "If anybody says you were cheating, at least you can't blame the cops for it, Howie."

Freeman's eyes were wide. "What the hell're you talking about?"

The girl was staring at Cornwell. He went on, not looking at her: "I don't know what you told her, but can I help it if it comes out you were lying?" He turned to the girl, sneered: "Didn't you find something back there just now when you went through his stuff? Because I don't want to be the first one to smart you up." He tapped the slip in his hand. "Or did you really believe this dream yourself?"

Her twisting body knocked the broom over. She caught it, shoved it back in the corner beside the refrigerator and came forward, shoving the pistol at him. Her eyes were slitted, mad. "What are you trying to make out?" she said between her teeth. "Do you know something, or are you just talking blind?"

"Now, Rita," Freeman began.

Cornwell's grin, stiff and mirthless as it was, stayed on his face.

"If Howie hasn't told you," he said, "you're not going to get it out of me. Anyway, it'll all come out by and by—when he tries to bamboozle the boys in the detective division with that phony slip! I always thought he was half smart and now I know it. Pass it in," he told Freeman, "and see what happens to your alibi."

The girl, holding the pistol out of reach, pushed her face at Cornwell. "You mean—you know the slip isn't real? What makes you say so?"

Cornwell looked incredulously at her. "You don't mean to tell me you fell for it?"

She said sulkily: "Never mind that. Tell me how you know."

"Hey!" Cornwell said. "Look out how you push that gun around!" He backed against the refrigerator. "Maybe Howie'd like to know, too. Save him making a sap of himself when they take him. All right. I won't tell you how I know it's phony, but I'll tell you how they'll know down at headquarters it's a phony. Why? Didn't anybody tell you he was with her? You didn't really think he was on that train? Hell, sister, look at his face. Hey! what're you——"

FREEMAN'S eyes jerked irresistibly to the girl's face, back to Cornwell. He shot past her, the gun roaring in the small room.

Cornwell was in motion the instant Freeman's eyes had left his face. Freeman's first slug raked the wall behind him. The second shot skidded off the refrigerator. Cornwell, behind it, swung up the broom and shoved the bristled end into the

girl's back, crowding her into Freeman and spoiling his third shot.

The girl staggered forward from the force of the blow, and Cornwell rushed forward, swung the bristled end of the broom. It slammed against Freeman's head, knocked him down. The girl twisted, shot once.

Cornwell could not stop. His heavy body slammed into her, threw her against the wall, the wind knocked out of her. He twisted at her pistol.

Freeman, on the floor, half reared up, lined his pistol hurriedly and shot hastily at Cornwell. Afraid of hitting the girl, he missed. Cornwell jerked the pistol from the spitting, biting girl. He shoved it at Freeman, took careful aim, squeezed.

The bullet shattered Freeman's right shoulder. He went over backward, his head struck the tiling under the gas stove, and he lay thrashing and twitching like a dying hen.

Cornwell, panting, combed hair out of his eyes with a shaking hand. He crossed to the wounded man, lifted his pistol and pocketed it. He turned to the screaming girl.

"Pipe down, sister. He's not worth it."

"You killed him!" she bawled. "You've killed him now!"

"Not much I killed him. That's all I was afraid of. I thought I'd never hear that old Betsy speak. I couldn't afford to kill him, though. That's why I took so long. I wanted to save him to speak his little piece. Winged him nice. He'll be O. K. They can patch him up long enough to fry. And will he fry when they see that slip!"

"Once and for all," she said, "what's wrong with that slip? I'm ready to believe it's a phony, because somebody swears they saw him in town here with this Jane that same night. Like a sucker, I believed him, though. What's wrong with it? How can you tell he wasn't on that train?"

"I can't tell yet. But if my hunch is good, it won't take long to find out. He probably swiped the slip or had it dated ahead. I told you he was a sap. What good is a phony date with the serial number still on the slip to prove when it was *really* used!"

P A B S T B L U E R I B B O N

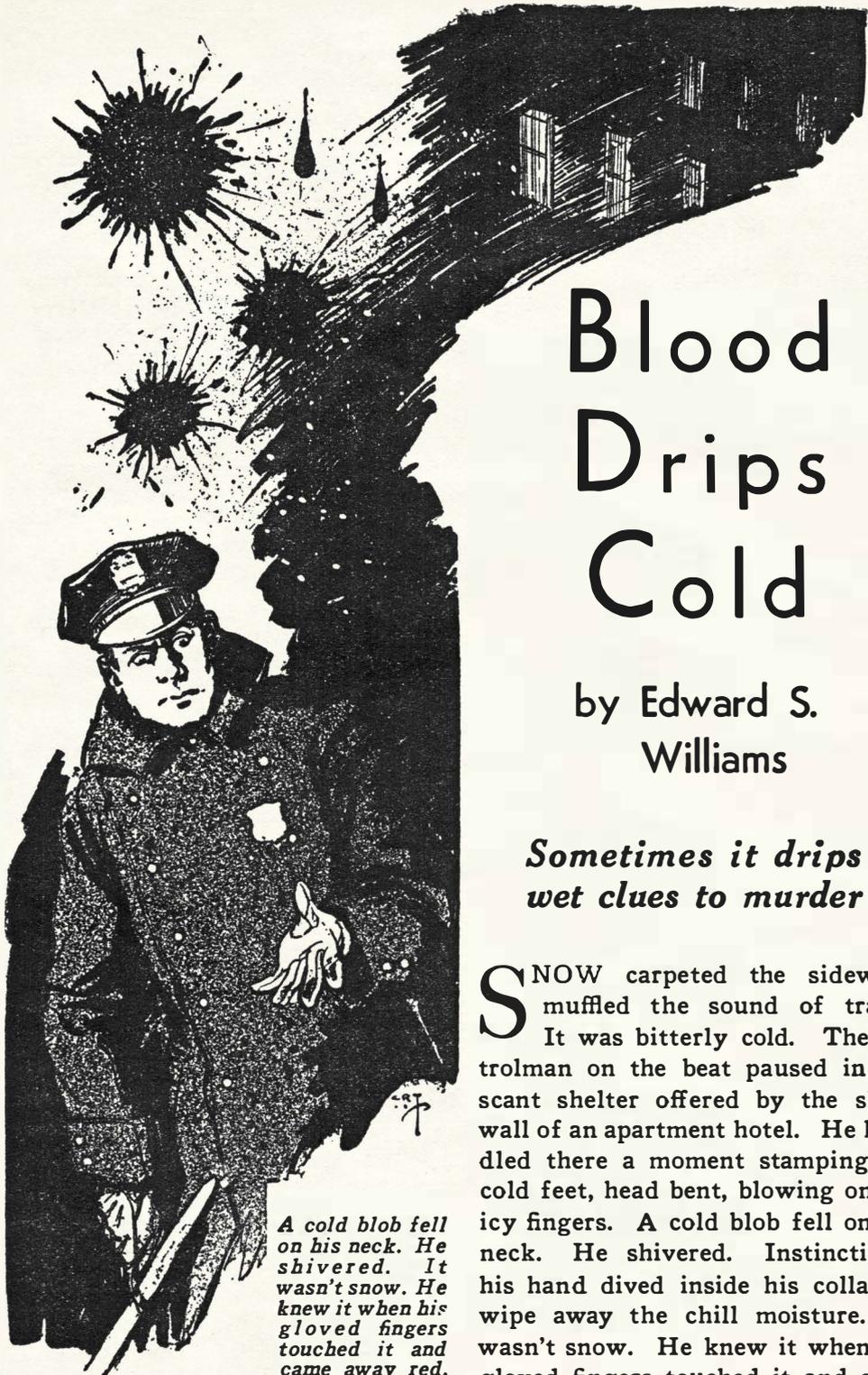
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# Blood Drips Cold

by Edward S.  
Williams

*Sometimes it drips  
wet clues to murder*

*A cold blob fell  
on his neck. He  
shivered. It  
wasn't snow. He  
knew it when his  
gloved fingers  
touched it and  
came away red.  
It was—blood!*

**S**NOW carpeted the sidewalk, muffled the sound of traffic. It was bitterly cold. The patrolman on the beat paused in the scant shelter offered by the sheer wall of an apartment hotel. He huddled there a moment stamping his cold feet, head bent, blowing on his icy fingers. A cold blob fell on his neck. He shivered. Instinctively his hand dived inside his collar to wipe away the chill moisture. It wasn't snow. He knew it when his gloved fingers touched it and came away red. It was—

Blood!

Other drops fell on his cap, shoulder. He moved, glanced at the snow. No mistake about it. The snow reddened and froze slowly, drop by drop. The copper's eyes shot upward. He saw it—a white blur—a woman's body, or a man in white pajamas, hanging half out of a window. He counted—twenty floors up. He could make out no more than that. He rushed the door and—

It was a girl. She had a knife in her back. The white sheen of her rumpled evening dress was splashed with crimson. There was blood on the Persian rug and a scarlet trail to the window. Her head and shoulders drooped over the window sill. Life had drained slowly, hurling its red drops into the snow of the street. Her wide-open eyes were violet and staring. Her hair was a wild tumult of black. She was young—beautiful. And she was dead! Hanson, the patrolman, phoned headquarters.

"Murder," he reported grimly. "A girl." He described her briefly and gave the address.

Before Hanson hung up, Clive Collins was out of his office. His unusually soft drawl took on an overtone of metallic harshness. He snapped orders. Short-wave radios came to life. Motors were pushed the limit. One radio car cracked up on a skidding turn. But others reached the Falcon Arms apartment. The radio man at headquarters directed a blocking out of all streets for a radius of a quarter mile, the closing of main highways out of the city, the covering of all terminals. The picked detail of men who al-

ways worked with Clive Collins sat in the two swaying sedans that rushed up Broadway and across town. Inspector Collins stared impersonally ahead. Saxe and Blucher, who rode with him, exchanged terse comments.

"What'll y'bet it's her, Blu?"

"Dollars to doughnuts, kid. What d'you say, chief?"

Collins slanted steely eyes. His lean face, shadowed by his hat brim, was like a sword blade. The hand that took the cigarette from his thin lips was lean, the fingers long, sensitive, powerful. He said: "What'll I bet it's who?"

"Lillian Lord!" Saxe answered eagerly. He was young, keen. Blucher was ugly, apelike, analytical.

"Nothing." And the way Clive Collins said it made the word an expletive.

Silence. The other two looked ahead, stiffly. They knew Collins. He was like a cobra sometimes, dangerous and quiet, almost inhuman. He spoke again. His voice was the razor edge of a human scalpel.

"I know it's Lillian Lord," he said.

Brakes shrieked—a siren—the sickening drive of a sideway skid! The sedan behind blared wildly. Only Collins remained impassive. He didn't raise a hand or flick an eyelid. Saxe swore, then laughed. Blucher's jaws clicked and he grabbed for the robe rail.

"Close!" Collins commented as their car straightened out of the near collision and hurtled onward. Then he forgot it and went back to his thinking of a dead girl—

Close was what he had been to the kidnapers of Lillian Lord. A solu-

tion almost within his grasp. The papers yowling for his blood. Federal men swarming all over the place. Good men—but so was he! Close—then this! Damn the papers. Damn politics. If everybody hadn't been so cocksure he was cock-eyed there would have been no murder. Clive Collins didn't believe in rushing things. Well, he'd been rushed. Ransom paid, girl killed, just as he'd thought she would be once money had been passed. And the hope that it might not be Lillian Lord never entered his mind. An hour ago he'd been tipped off that she was still in the city. Close! Hell—

He got out of the car and led his five men inside to the lift. His eyes somberly inscrutable, he led them down a long corridor to Suite 2012. Photographer, fingerprint man, and medical examiner followed Blucher, criminal analyst, and Saxe, gunman. "The Battalion of Death," they were called at headquarters. And Inspector Clive Collins could outdo each at his own job. That was why he was assigned to cases of widely different nature. Clive Collins was no departmental hack.

HE RIPPED open the door, said nothing. His eyes were everywhere. He knew at a glance how many men were already in the room—how many cops, how many civilians. He saw the rumpled bed, the overturned chairs, the blood—the girl. He strode to the window and leaned over her. Then he spoke!

"All right. Get her in." They did. Collins gave orders to a radio cop: "Cover the building. Put a man at the switchboard. Nobody in

or out. Arrest any one on the faintest suspicion. Telephone for more cars. We're going to crack this case—now!"

"Right, inspector."

Collins' harsh voice grated on. He addressed the taller of the two pale civilians. "Who're you?"

"I'm the manager of this building, officer. Baldwin is my name. This—this is awful! I want it solved immediately. I'll do all I can to help, but—no publicity!"

A faintly sardonic tone in Collins' voice was his only indication that he heard. "Get out," he said, and to the waiting patrolman, "What's your name?"

"Hanson, sir."

"You the one phoned?"

"Right, sir."

"Outside—with Mr. Baldwin. Move!"

Save for Collins and his Battalion of Death, the room was empty. Without being told, each man went to work at his appointed job. Inspector Collins tapped a cigarette meditatively on his thumb nail. His slitlike, glittering eyes brooded over the dead girl. He watched Saunders, his medical examiner, work.

"This the girl, chief?" Saunders grunted. He was grim-faced.

"You ought to know!" Collins said. "Her picture's been broadcast."

"She—she was good to look at, chief. Heaven! Why's it got to be a swell dame like her—"

Queer kid, Saunders, Collins thought behind his basilisk mask. Not callous yet. Young. Impressionable. Well—he'd harden up

some. And Collins felt the same crawling sickness in his own stomach that he knew Saunders was feeling. He felt the same raging anger at so brutal a piece of bungling as this murder. Killers were all alike. They lacked imagination. A hundred grand, the girl's father had paid. And they'd done her in! Who'd tell her parents—

Saunders stiffened as he worked. He forgot the girl's dead, waxen beauty. The knife was ordinary. Plain. Undistinguished. It had a six-inch blade. Saunders got it out without touching it with his hands. He measured, calculated position, handed the weapon to MacKay, fingerprint man. Collins sat on the edge of the bed. He took one of the girl's hands in his. Her hands had been carefully manicured and polished a week ago—when she'd been kidnaped. They looked different now. Collins scrutinized them.

"Set up your microscope, son," he said.

Collins talked as Saunders got out the case which contained his small but powerful microscope and its accompanying glass slides and stains. Collins said, "She took it hard—fought all the way. That's important, son. That's indicated. The room's a wreck. Her dress is torn. She's got bruises on her arms and throat and the marks of a gag on her mouth. The position of the knife—length of blade—all say she died instantly. Heart pierced as well as lungs. Blood on the floor tells where she fell. Yet she was hanging half out the window—"

"Right, chief!" Saunders said. He squinted down into the microscope, moved it into better light, shifted

the mirror of the instrument. "O. K. here."

Collins took a penknife from his vest pocket and busied himself with the girl's hands. Saunders prepared slides. Collins finished his job, closed the knife and crossed to the window. He stared down. On the floor below, jutting from the window ledge directly underneath, was a small ornamental, railed balcony. It projected barely a foot from the wall of the apartment—not enough to catch the blood that had dripped downward. It was dark twenty floors up. No one would have noticed from below—if blood hadn't dripped. The girl might have been found in the street. The blood-stained rug might have been removed—all traces of violence erased from this room. But blood had dripped downward! Blood had dripped on the bent, cold neck of a half-frozen patrolman—

Collins didn't believe that was the answer!

He left the window. The photographer had finished. Saxe and Blucher had ransacked the suite—found absolutely nothing save furniture. There were no personal belongings whatever. MacKay shook his head glumly. There wasn't a fingerprint in the place except the girl's.

But Saunders looked up tensely. "C'mere, inspector. Look!"

Collins squinted into the microscope. He examined slide after slide—ten of them. His face was inscrutable when he finished. "How long has she been dead?" he snapped.

"Not long——" Saunders hesitated. "Less than an hour." He in-

licated the microscope eagerly. "What d'you think of that? Marked, eh?"

"How old are these?" Collins pointed to the glass slides.

Saunders' face clouded. "Hadn't thought of that," he said. "Older. Much older."

Collins nodded impassively. The phone in the room rang. He snapped it up.

"Inspector Collins," he said.

"Lieutenant Wellman, inspector. Is this an extension we're on?"

"Go ahead," Collins rapped out. "I've got a man on the switchboard. We won't be listened in on."

"All right. I've got another murder for you. Maybe some connection. Man—medium height—red hair. Harbor patrol picked him out of the river. Been dead a week. Face and head battered to a pulp. Fingers mutilated. Only possible clue to identity is a tattoo mark on the chest. We've made out what seems to be an E and an H or N. Can't be sure. The body's in bad shape. Want to see it?"

Collins' eyes smoldered. He flicked a glance at the microscope. "Red hair," he thought aloud. "Face battered. No identification possible?"

"Absolutely not, inspector. Bashed up brutally. A week in the water."

"Face bashed in," Collins repeated; then he snapped: "Put him on ice, lieutenant. I'll see him later. Work on him meanwhile." And he hung up.

Again Collins stared fixedly into the microscope. Abruptly he rose and turned toward the door. At his nod, Saxe followed.

"MacKay," Collins ordered, "get that manager. Blucher and Saunders, make the rounds and see if anything has turned up anywhere in the building. Jackson"—he was the photographer—"you are through here. Beat it back to headquarters and develop your plates. Send that lad Hanson up to watch this room. Move!"

THE SUITE below was Baldwin's, the manager. He lived alone. He let them in, demanding action, protesting publicity. Collins was deadly quiet. There were three rooms, bedroom and a small dressing room. They were tastefully furnished. The living room had a large desk. There was also a clock—a huge one of the kind used in colonial times. It was a grandfather clock—a real antique in beautiful butt-walnut. Collins scrutinized it, opened the door. He was not surprised to find it empty. Works probably worn out years ago. Then he ordered every one out and sat down at Baldwin's desk.

He was alone for half an hour. When he rose, his face was more expressionless than ever, if that were possible. Again he looked at the clock. It did not have glass in the tall door. The door of Baldwin's clock was solid wood. Collins left the room. He went down to the lobby.

Five minutes later every policeman, every detective in the building was sent out. Only Saunders and Collins remained. The medical examiner went up with the two stretcher men from the waiting ambulance. Collins waited until they returned with their tragic burden.

He sent Saunders on ahead and spoke to Baldwin.

"We're through here," he said. "There'll be only one thing more. You'll be expected at headquarters to-morrow at nine—for questioning."

"Of course, officer," Baldwin said. "Anything I can do——"

Collins' smooth voice cut in: "We'll want the dope on all your tenants as well as on the ones who occupied 2012. Naturally we don't blame you. It might have happened anywhere."

Baldwin seemed eager. He blurted: "I can tell you now about 2012! I remember distinctly—a man and a girl—that girl! I thought at the time she acted strangely—maybe doped. But she was muffled in a fur coat. And I never suspected——"

"No," Collins said. "How could you? To-morrow morning, please."

"But the man, officer!" Baldwin was insistent. "He had reddish hair, brown suit, was of medium height. He——"

"Ah, really?" Collins breathed. "We are fortunate that you possess so retentive a memory! The police department will be grateful, Mr. Baldwin. To-morrow—at nine." And Collins strode to the revolving door.

He crossed the snow-piled sidewalk, stepped into the car.

Saxe spoke plaintively: "Chief! Ain't you even going to run in that Baldwin guy? Hell! He oughta know something."

"He does." Collins was sardonic, terse. "He'll tell us to-morrow—at nine."

"To-morrow——"

Blucher echoed, "To-morrow! The papers'll crucify us, Clive!"

"Let them," Collins said.

THEY WERE halfway to headquarters when Collins stopped the car. He said simply that he needed cigarettes and got out and went into the dismal little all-night lunch stand across the street. It was very late. The street was nearly deserted. Saxe and Blucher waited—and waited. Then they exchanged glances and followed their chief. The proprietor looked scared. He handed them the hastily scrawled note Collins had left. They read it together. Then Blucher grunted, "Ditched us, by Harry! In the front door and out the back. And we fell for it!" They sat down to wait.

Clive Collins waited——

There was a small park across from the Falcon Arms apartment. The wind howled across it. The powdery snow drifted, banked about his feet, cut his face. Insensible to physical discomfort, Collins waited. He stood in the shadow of a leafless, but bushlike cluster of shrubbery. He waited an hour. It was four a. m. Only three lights showed in the whole front of the building. One was in the lobby. Another was in Baldwin's suite. Four thirty—four forty-five. Baldwin's light blinked out. Collins' eyes smoldered——

The man who emerged from the building was unrecognizable in the storm. He was muffled to the ears—as any sensible man would be on such a night. The taxi that rolled to the curb almost at once had evidently been summoned by phone.

The man at the curb got in. Collins signaled the taxi he had left around the corner, out of sight of the Falcon Arms.

It was tough work, tailing a cab on deserted streets. Time after time Collins thought he'd lost his quarry. He had to stay far to the rear, had to chance turning off and cutting back. He had to use parallel streets as much as possible and trust to luck. But he was lucky.

From behind a trash can, four blocks away, he watched his man get out of his cab and vanish after a glance about him into a blank-looking warehouse. This was in the heart of the importing district, near docks and the river. So that was the out, Collins thought. He gave his driver a twenty-dollar bill, mentioned the address of the restaurant where his men waited, gave brief instructions. Then he moved with the stealth and speed of a shadow. The door through which the other had disappeared was ajar. Collins slipped through it.

He was in a storage room, piled high with bales and bags. There was no sound. A hundred men might lie hidden in that shadowy, odorous gloom. Collins' gun glinted dully in his hand. He crouched where he was, eyes darting. Then he moved swiftly. In the rear he heard cautious footsteps ascending stairs.

He reached the foot of those stairs and stopped, cursing silently. They were old and wooden. They creaked and groaned under the weight of the ascending man. The noise was startling in the vast, empty soundlessness of the warehouse. Collins knew it was suicide

for him to go up those stairs. Then he noticed the elevator. The stair well was square and open, forming the shaft in which the small freight lift ran. It was unprotected—little more than a moving platform with only the framework of sides. Collins' eyes gleamed thoughtfully. It did not occur to him to wait for Saxe and Blucher. He moved to the lift—stopped abruptly. There was some one behind him—

A stumbling footfall, a hoarse, tense oath—gunfire!

Instinctively Collins dropped—too late. Lead stabbed his right shoulder, the fleshy part, missing the bone. It was like Clive Collins that he held his gun. He went down hard, rolling over rapidly. Rough boards scraped the skin from his face. Holding the gun was like clasping a red-hot iron. But he held it until he lay still behind a packing case and changed hands.

Utter silence. He held his breath and listened for the other man's breathing. It came, barely audible, off to the right. Collins faced that way. Thirty seconds lapsed into eternity. Then Collins deliberately stood up—laughed aloud. It was satanic, lashing. His voice was like a rasp.

"Get up, you mangy devil!" Collins said. "Get up and shoot!" Simultaneously he struck a match with his numbed right hand.

A pistol cracked. Flame streaked. Collins' arm jerked and the match went out. His right arm was done now. Hit again—bone smashed. But his own gun merged with the other's roar. Once—twice—again. He walked forward, shooting!

Collins stood over a prone body. His lips were a straight, gray slit. Pain was unconsciously admitted in his eyes. But Collins thought sardonically: "He shot at the match, poor fool. Killers are all alike—no imagination!" He held his gun pressed against his palm with his thumb. His probing fingers touched the other's face—came away warm and sticky.

"Right between the eyes!" Collins muttered aloud. Then his gaze slanted upward. It was ominously silent above, a silence broken by a sudden, tense voice.

"Jack! What's the shooting for?"

Collins said: "Come down and find out! Or shall I come up? It's a pinch!"

Another silence. Collins lifted the body of the man he had just shot. As quietly as possible he placed the corpse on the elevator. He heard one word more from above.

"Cops!"

"Right!" Collins said. He pulled the lever that started the lift.

He stayed off it himself. His luck held. The elevator was old and slow. It was noisy. He gave it a ten-foot start. Just under the level of its platform Collins started up the stairs that circled the shaft. There were three floors above him. There was one man, he knew; more, he reasoned. How many, he didn't even guess, or what floor they were on. He went up—with a fresh clip in his gun—an extra one in his teeth—

Second floor—

Collins tensed, paused, then leaped to the flight leading on. The lift rattled monotonously upward, drowning out the noise he made.

Third floor coming. Four creaky steps more—three—two— Nothing happened. Fourth—

Guns roared! Collins saw two flame streaks in the darkness. They were shooting down into the shaft—pumping lead at the shadowy form of the dead man on the lift. Fourth floor it was, then! Collins went up crouching.

His eyes were level with the floor. The lift stopped automatically. Firing became a fusillade. Shots merged together into a staccato din. Collins heard a police whistle shrilling in the street. He heard lead thudding into wood—into flesh—the body of that dead one on the lift! He himself was hit again. He knew it subconsciously, but he felt no pain now. Deliberately, carefully, he put a slug right, left, center on one gun flash—then the other. The darting flame and smacking lead ceased abruptly. The silence was terrific. Collins felt himself swaying, slipping down. He fought to stand. He was aware of the rush on the stairs, of Saxe's metallic yell. Saxe burst past him. Blucher stopped.

Blu said: "You're hit, Clive!"

"Some," Collins grunted. "Let's have light here. Move!"

Saxe's flashlight cut the darkness, swept rapidly and centered. One man lay gasping faintly. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. His hands clutched at his chest. The other sat on the floor, staring stupidly at the crimson stream that gushed from a severed artery in his wrist—

"Baldwin!" Saxe grated.

Collins asked sardonically,

"Who'd you expect to find—Santa Claus?" Then he slumped in Blucher's arms.

EVEN in the hospital they couldn't keep Clive Collins down. The papers crucified the police—as Blucher had said they would. But promptly at nine o'clock that morning, Baldwin confessed to the kidnaping, as Collins had said. That was merely a coincidence. And the fact that Baldwin refused to add any details of the crime did not disturb Inspector Collins or his shrewd first assistant, Blucher. Collins dictated a telegram and went to sleep until they awakened him with the answer. Blu brought it to him, followed by Saunders and Saxe. Collins read with his customary lack of expression the Canadian police's wire.

FENTON IN CUSTODY STOP  
CONNECTION ESTABLISHED  
AND WE WILL HOLD FOR  
EXTRADITION STOP WHEN  
ARRESTED HIS PLANE WAS  
READY TO TAKE OFF WITH  
RANSOM MONEY ABOARD STOP  
ENTIRE RANSOM RECOVERED

Only then did Collins smile faintly. Saxe jumped him with questions. "What's it mean, chief? Who's Fenton?"

Collins' voice was soft again, drawling. He said: "Fenton's the contact man—a Canadian. The girl's father flew to Montreal three days ago. We wondered why. And I found the answer yesterday. The ransom was paid by depositing \$100,000 in a Canadian bank—in the name of Fenton. He came in, was perfectly identified, open-faced and businesslike, and took ten cashier's checks—payable to bearer—for ten grand apiece. We finally wormed

that much out of Lord. He himself had to stay in Canada until that part was complete. Then Fenton vanished. He cashed the checks in ten different banks—in different towns. We couldn't stop him, or trace him until he'd cashed his checks. Because we didn't know until yesterday how the ransom was paid——"

"Sounds complicated," Saunders said, "top-heavy——"

"Maybe," Collins answered. "But it worked. He had the way cleared under pretense of a legitimate business deal. What he accomplished was to get cash—from ten different banks—with hardly any chance of it being marked or the serial numbers noted. Blu doped that out for us. But we were too late. Behind Fenton at every move—thanks to the girl's father!"

Then Saxe cut in eagerly: "I get it!" he snapped. "Fenton had the dough and wired—they knifed the girl. Tried to get her out the window so she'd be found in the street. Blood dripped on Hanson's neck. They saw him, dropped everything—even left the knife. Right?"

Blucher shook his head. "Too simple, Saxe. Too easy. What about the stiff in the river? Why'd Baldwin hang around? Why not just leave the body in the room and take a powder?"

"That's it!" Collins nodded. "That's why we couldn't just run Baldwin in and call it a day. Baldwin had to wait for the pay-off. There were the others, also waiting for Fenton. There was the red-haired corpse—face beaten in—fingers mutilated. We weren't sup-

posed to find that body. Baldwin didn't know we'd found it when he told me about a red-haired man—with the girl. But he told the truth! Lillian Lord was snatched by a man with red hair. She fought him like a tigress—scratched his face with both hands—marked him! See? Saunders found bits of human skin under the girl's finger nails. Imbedded under one nail was a short, red hair!"

Saxe stared. Collins grinned and said: "You tell him, Saunders. Draw him a picture."

"Hell, chief," Saxe protested, "I'm right with you. Red kidnaped the girl. She marked him with her finger nails. He was then a walking sign post. They got rid of him. But go ahead. Why throw her out the window? Even if she was found in the street, there'd still be the knife wound——"

"They didn't want her in the street!" Collins said slowly. "They wanted her in Baldwin's rooms, just below. Baldwin wasn't anxious to run out. He had a good, soft job—plenty of time and opportunity to enjoy money. Remember the railed balcony on Baldwin's window? Easy to lower her down to that, pull her through and into his living room. It was a thousand to one that nobody'd notice. An open park across the street—late—no traffic—snow—and dark twenty floors up! But it was an even chance they'd be seen if they brought her down through the hall or brought up the clock——"

"Clock!" Saxe blurted.

"Yeah." Collins smiled grimly. "A grandfather clock—a hell of a big one—empty. No works in it. Built like a—coffin!"

Saxe leaned back in his chair. He rasped: "Coffin! They'd have taken out the clock in broad daylight—with her in it! Lord!"

"One of those perfect crimes you read about!" Blue grunted sarcastically.

"And never see," Collins added. "They always slip up on detail! Blood dripped. They rubbed out the red-haired man. They beat his face to a pulp—practically told us something was wrong with it—invited us to find out what. They forgot to clean the girl's finger nails. And I found a canceled check in Baldwin's desk—drawn to cash and indorsed by E. Nash. Get it? The tattoo on the dead man's chest looked like E. N." Collins paused, then shrugged. "But, hell, none of that is evidence. All those points were only leads—clues. And you can't hang a clue for murder!"

Blucher's ugly face split in an appalling grin. He said: "So you ran out on us and went glory hunting."

"Publicity grabbing!" Saxe suggested wickedly.

Collins scowled. "It was a one-man job. Tell it to the papers—but I'll fire the man who mentions my name. And get the hell out. Only place I can ever get a vacation is in some hospital. You punks are ruining even that!" And Collins rang for his nurse, who was a blonde and exceedingly easy on the eyes.

# Shrinking Violet

*In which Violet McDade butts  
into somebody else's business*

by Cleve F. Adams

**V**IOLET McDADE was throwing a party. And, like most of Violet's parties, this one boded ill for my peace of mind. We were due to dock at San Pedro in the morning. This was the last night of the cruise—the night traditionally set aside for the captain's ball—the night of all nights that Violet would pick to embarrass me.

There were times when she infuriated me so that I could quite cheerfully have emptied my little .32 into her fat middle. But I never did. Cold logic always came to my rescue. As her partner I was making more money than any dick, male or female, would risk losing. Besides, I liked the creature. There was a third reason, one that perhaps bore more weight than the other two combined: She was faster than a rattlesnake with those two sleeve guns of hers.

And now she was sitting, enthroned like an overstuffed Buddha, in a corner of the main saloon, recounting to a delighted audience tales from her none too savory past.

Captain Lowe was annoyed. Some of the snootier passengers were annoyed. But in view of the fact that Violet was a valuable patron of the

line there wasn't much that he—or they—could do about it.

She was looking a little seedy as she often did after one of her periodic voyages. She took to the sea as some fat women do to a diet. Violet couldn't—or wouldn't—diet. But when her weight became oppressive she climbed aboard a boat and stoically reduced by the sea-sick method. It never failed to take off fifty pounds or so. You've heard the old gag about falling away to a ton? Well, Violet was down to her normal three fifty, but the strenuous reducing process had left her skin a little loose around the edges.

I looked at her and wished she'd get sick again. She had finished her circus career amid loud cheers from her listeners and was beginning an uncouth discourse on the ramifications of her detective agency when the girl edged into the group.

It was as if she—the girl—were drawn there by some magnetic force; almost against her will. Studying her with some curiosity I knew she was unused to this sort of thing. Violet herself didn't drink. Or smoke either. But she was seeing that every one else did. Violet had a propensity for entertaining lavishly. Stewards scurried



*"Lefevre came!" She gasped. "I—I woke up with him choking me. And then—then Violet shot him."*

about with trays, dispensing the best the bar afforded, and my partner airily signed the checks.

The girl refused everything offered her, but still stayed on to drink in the great goof's words. After a time Violet noticed her, pantomimed to me that something must be wrong. Her lips framed what I construed to be, "Bring the dame over!"

Inwardly seething I did as directed. The girl's name was Joan Lefevre and she had come aboard at Papeete, 'way down in Tahiti. I remembered seeing her when she engaged passage, but ever since then she had kept to herself. She was evidently traveling alone and for the first time.

"What's the matter?" asked Violet. "Ain't them stewards got what you want? Hell's bells, this line's supposed to be famous for its—now—*cuisine!*"

"I—I just don't care for anything," said the girl. Her smile was a little forced. Nice-looking thing she was. Tiny hands and feet, hair the color of cornsilk, face tanned a rich, golden brown. Her English was good but slightly flavored with some accent—French, I presumed, seeing that Papeete is fifty per cent French. But it was her eyes that got me—sad, they were, infinitely sad. And yet there was something else in their depths; something that spoke of indomitable will power, a fixed purpose I couldn't fathom. Bashful she might be; unaccustomed to meeting strangers, but she was going somewhere and she meant to get there.

I sickened of Violet's careless probing into the girl's affairs and

went on deck for a breath of air. It was pretty late and we had run into a coastal fog. The ship's horn blasted the stillness of the night at frequent intervals; her giant searchlight strove ineffectually to pierce the murk, but she still plowed on at full speed ahead. I hoped the officers on the bridge could see better than I could.

The rail was wet, cold to my touch. Drifting fingers of fog curled about me as I stood there, but these things were fresh and clean after the stuffiness of the saloon.

Violet found me after an hour or so. She had the girl, Joan Lefevre, with her and the three of us lingered there in the darkness, listening to the dreary moaning of the foghorn and the swish of water far below.

Joan said, breathing deep: "It is nice, eh? So much nicer than—than than——"

Violet chuckled that great, booming chuckle that was so characteristic of her. "So you don't like my parties, huh? Well, I'm not so hot about 'em myself—after I get 'em started. I get to feeling kinda coltish and that's one way of relieving the strain." She sighed, and suddenly I was very sorry for her. A woman cast in a man's mold. She sighed again. "'S'like getting drunk, I guess."

A man's hoarse shout shattered the night: "Sneer off, you fool!" There followed a prolonged blast from the foghorn. Bells clanged. A tremendous shudder shook the whole ship. I waited, stark with paralyzing fear, for the impact that didn't come. Instead, voices from

the bridge hurled imprecations at some one I could not see.

And out of the fog, muffled yet quite distinct, came an answering hail. This new voice was powerful, blasphemous. It was flavored strongly with the same peculiar accent as Joan Lefevre's. It said—I can't repeat its most colorful phrases—but the meaning was clear. One of the last things it said was: "Go to hell!" A vague, blurred shape as of some ghostly ship of yesteryear floated by as we picked up speed.

VIOLET ROARED with Gargantuan mirth. She loved anything in the line of profanity. And then we saw the girl!

She was slumped forward against the rail, pale as a sheet. And she was unconscious.

"Fainted dead away," Violet grunted. "Damned if I know why, though. She was all right till that crazy frog began cussing! You s'pose she——"

I said, "I've no idea. But speaking of ideas it might be a good one to do something for her!"

Without a word, without seeming effort, Violet picked the child up, tucked her under an arm and made for the nearest companionway. Did I say she was a child? I was wrong there. It was the girl's apparent helplessness, her total lack of sophistication that made her seem so. In reality she was probably nearly as old as I.

She was still out when we reached our suite. We laid her on the bed and I applied smelling salts, started to chafe her wrists. Violet disappeared in search of the ship's doc-

tor, I thought. She could have phoned; and why she didn't was beyond me—until later.

Joan Lefevre opened her eyes, stared at me uncomprehendingly for an instant. The fright in those eyes was unmistakable though she tried to veil it with a wan smile.

"There was no—no collision?"

I reassured her. Again I got the impression that it wasn't the impending accident which had caused her to faint. This was strengthened by her next query: "Do they—do you know who it was out there in the fog?"

"No, my dear; only that it was some one with a rich vocabulary. Some one aboard a sailing ship, I believe." Which innocent remark set her to trembling all over again. I soothed her as best I could, forced a little brandy between her lips. I wondered what the devil was keeping Violet, had just about made up my mind to call the doctor myself when she waddled in.

"Doc's in your stateroom waiting for you, honey," she said. "So let's go by-by again." Once more she picked the girl up, looking strangely awkward as she did so, and yet uncommonly tender, too—for her. She rolled out of the room with her burden.

When she came back a few moments later she informed me that Joan was resting easily, that the doctor had administered a sedative.

"Took you a long time to find him," I grumbled.

She looked surprised. "Hell," she said, "I wasn't looking for the doc. I was searching her room."

"What in the world for? I never saw such a creature—snooping in

the girl's business! Haven't you a spark of decency?"

"Nope," said Violet placidly, "but I sure do find things out. Looks like the kid has located some of this hidden treasure you hear about. Or maybe she's just a plain thief. Anyway she's got the craziest collection of money you ever saw—French, English and good old U. S. A. Old stuff, most of it. Smells like it'd been hidden away for years. And she's got a gun!"

"What of it? So have we!"

"O. K.," said Violet. She spread her fat, beringed hands in a gesture of resignation. "O. K.; there ain't no mystery about her. And like you say, I guess it's none of my business anyway." She sank into a chair, raised thick ankles to the chaise longue. Weariness showed in every line of her broad face; her little green eyes, imbedded in rolls of fat, mirrored something that brought a lump to my throat. She should have been a man. But she wasn't. And as a woman—

"I know what you're gonna say." She sighed. "Go on, tell me what an ass I made of myself."

"Nothing of the kind!" I snapped. "I'm glad you had a good time!" Surprising the way I flopped around where Violet McDade was concerned, but something about her always got me. I wasn't looking at her. I couldn't. I pretended to be very busy brushing my hair.

WE WARPED into the slip at exactly seven the next morning. Joan Lefevre hadn't appeared for breakfast but she was among the first at the gangplank. Having come aboard in the middle of the

cruise and from a foreign port she had to go through certain formalities which the rest of us were spared.

Violet helped her wherever possible. This partner of mine seemed able to pull strings almost anywhere, so it wasn't long before the three of us were climbing into the great limousine which Violet called her chariot.

The girl was still uncommunicative about her destination. During the ride into Los Angeles she evinced little interest in what—to her—must have been a new world. A question or two about hotels, the facilities for finding people; that was all.

Until we dropped her at the Grayson. "You are detectives," she said suddenly. "Los Angeles is your home. Do you by chance know of"—she hesitated—"of a Jonathan Quarles?"

"Yeah," said Violet, "but I don't know any good of him. Mealy-mouthed old scout—supposed to be very wealthy. From things I've heard he ain't always been too ethical about how he got his dough. He's got it, though, which is what counts. I hear he's reformed in the last few years. Belongs to a church and everything. Why do you ask?"

The girl seemed disposed not to answer. Violet's chauffeur had deposited the child's pitiful array of luggage on the sidewalk and there was a porter hovering near. Joan put out her hand to me, blinked back sudden tears as she looked at Violet.

"You have been so good to me," she murmured. "So very kind. I

do hate to leave you like this, but I——”

“O. K., O. K.,” said Violet. “Don’t tell us nothing you don’t want to. You can find this Jonathan Quarles in the phone book. And me, too, if you ever need me. Let’s go, McCloskey!” she bawled at the chauffeur, and we rolled away leaving the girl staring after us.

We spent the rest of the morning at the house, unpacking, straightening out the petty tangles occasioned by a three months’ absence. Violet’s lunch was enormous, certain to restore at least five pounds of the fifty she had lost. But after it was over she seemed her old self again. She could hardly wait to get down to the office.

Busy there with accumulated work—our office doors carried the names of a score of insurance companies and department stores—it wasn’t till well after three o’clock that she paused to send out for what she calls a snack.

“Just a bite to keep body and soul together till dinner time,” she told the boy. “Say a couple of sandwiches, a piece of chocolate pie and some coffee. And bring the papers back with you,” she added.

The boy winked, went out grinning. Violet’s help was a sore spot with me but she was adamant whenever I suggested firing some of them. I never saw a slangier, more disrespectful lot in my life. But, as she pointed out, every last one of them would have died for her. Indeed, some of them had!

There was an extra in the batch of papers the boy brought back. Violet, between gulps of scalding coffee, read the headlines aloud.

“Jonathan Quarles attacked!” she snorted. “Well, what d’you know about that?” She munched on a sandwich, seeming to masticate the boxed account of the affair at the same time.

I read over her shoulder. A madman, according to the extra, had invaded the sanctum sanctorum of one of the city’s greatest financiers. There were several versions of the tale, the most lucid being that of Anne Stimson, the great man’s private secretary. This Miss Stimson seemed to be a pretty level-headed young woman.

The invader, she said, had really not acted like a madman until nearly the close of his interview with Mr. Quarles. True, he had brushed aside all opposition to his entrance in the first place; voices from within the library had been raised to a frightful pitch, but the actual attack hadn’t occurred until the very last.

Jonathan Quarles had sustained various cuts and bruises; was the possessor of a beautiful black eye; but, strangely, was unable to give any reason for the attack. He didn’t know the man, had never seen him before. Mr. Quarles’ own description was peculiarly vague.

Not so Miss Stimson’s. She—the paper hinted that this was against her employer’s wishes—described the man in detail. His voice she particularly remembered. It was rough, uncouth. His words were a garbled mixture of bad English and worse French.

Did she know the man’s name? No, she did not. And, most unfortunately, he had made good his escape before reënforcements arrived.

"BALONEY!" said Violet inelegantly. "Quarles knows more'n he's telling!" She paused, struck by a sudden thought. "I wonder," she mused, "if our little friend Joan Lefevre was mixed up in this. Remember the voice of the guy on that schooner?"

I hadn't known it was a schooner but I remembered the voice. And I remembered what the voice—at least I presumed it was the voice—had done to Joan Lefevre. And she had asked us about Jonathan Quarles!"

Violet nodded her great head as if she had read my mind. She flicked the switch of the interoffice annunciator, grunted, "Get me Miss Joan Lefevre at the Grayson."

"Miss Joan Lefevre at the Grayson," a voice from the box parroted. After a moment the same voice announced: "Miss Joan Lefevre is not registered at the Grayson."

Violet cursed. "Find out if a dame answering this description is registered under any other name." She rattled off a word picture of the girl that astonished even me.

But it did no good. Joan Lefevre had vanished. Violet was disposed to admire the girl's ability to lose herself. To my amazement I found myself annoyed. Why, I asked myself, should I care if a chance acquaintance chose to avoid me?

But I did. Violet did, too. "I told you," she grumbled. "I told you there was something funny about the kid! Just the same," she went on, "I'm betting we hear from her."

Well, as usual, my elephantine partner was right. We did hear from the girl we knew as Joan Le-

fevre. But it wasn't until noon the next day. Not until the late morning editions had blazoned the news of Jonathan Quarles' murder!

He had been shot during the night; the coroner's physician placed the time of death at about twelve. The servants sleeping in the house had not been disturbed by the shot; had only discovered the body upon arising in the morning. Jonathan's son, Jimmy Quarles, had been out until three o'clock, had seen a light in his father's study when he came in, but had assumed the older man to be working and had gone directly to bed. Jimmy—according to the papers—was unable to account for the atrocious crime and was—still according to the papers—prostrated with grief.

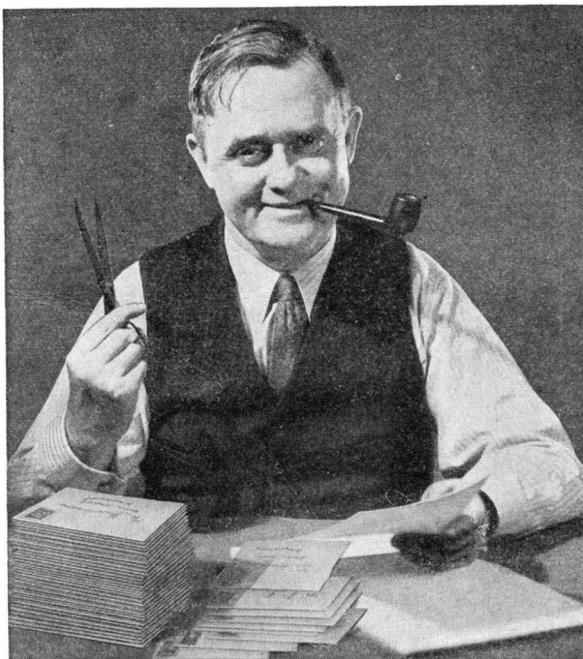
"Which," said Violet, "is some more baloney. Nobody'd be prostrated with grief over that old curmudgeon's death!"

I asked her why she disliked Quarles so. She didn't know. She just didn't like hypocrites. I assumed from this that he must have fallen in that category, but I didn't know why.

"The son is offering a reward for the killer," I suggested tentatively. "And I see the erudite secretary, Miss Anne Stimson, has advanced the theory that yesterday's so-called madman is the murderer."

"Yeah," said Violet, "and he might be, at that. Now, assuming that we could use the ten grand and that the guy with the mixed accent is the same one we heard in the middle of the ocean and assuming that his voice is what scared hell out of Joan Lefevre——"

*"I Know  
Why  
They Like  
Picobac"*



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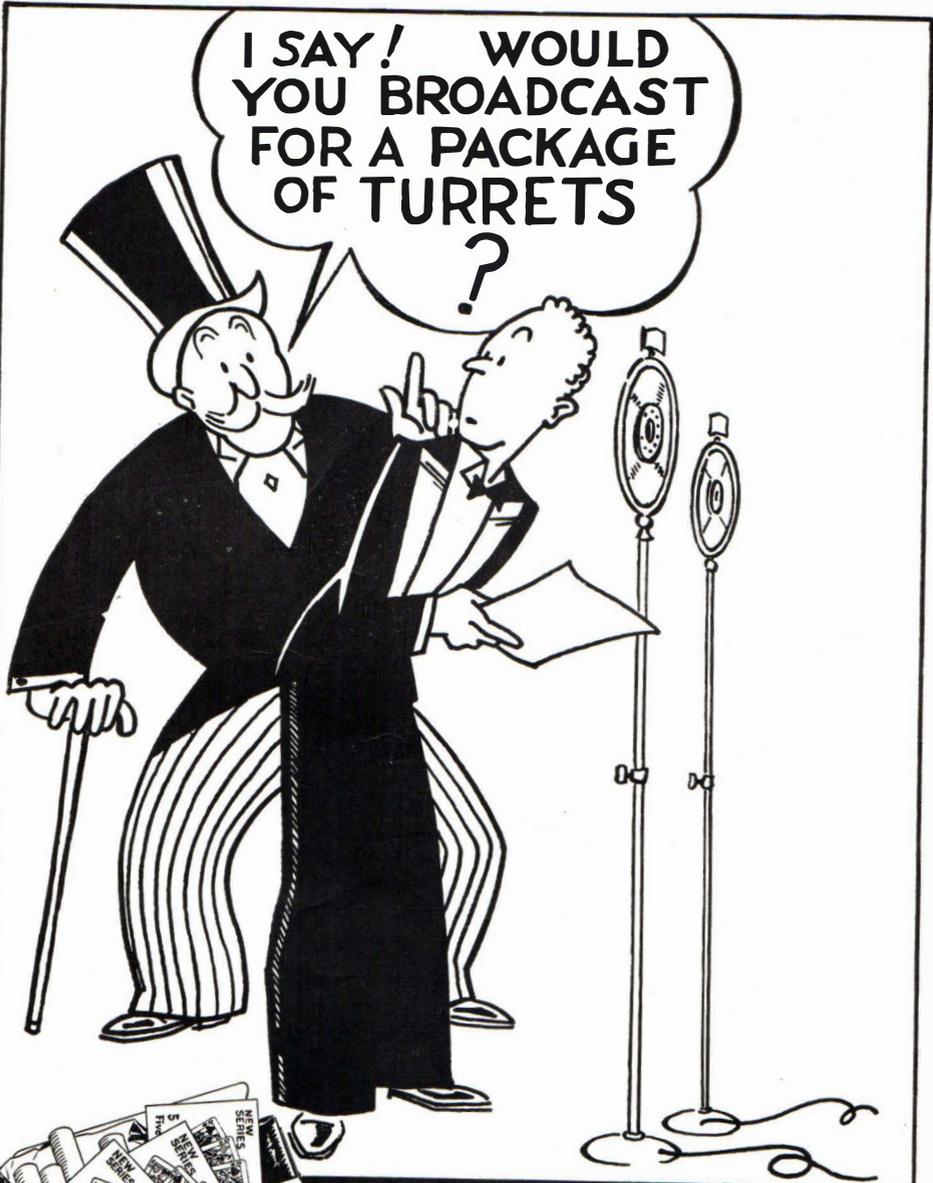


**"IT DOES TASTE GOOD IN A PIPE"!**

# Picobac

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Quality and Mildness  
**Turret**  
CIGARETTES  
SAVE THE POKER HANDS

"We had better look for little Joan!"

"Right," said Violet. And it was then that Joan Lefevre was announced.

SHE CAME IN quietly, stood before Violet's great desk looking like an embarrassed child. Her dark eyes were still the saddest I had ever seen, but there was no longer that other thing peeping out at me. Her purpose, whatever it may have been, had either been accomplished or abandoned.

"I have come," she said, "because that which I planned, that which I wished to do is no longer possible. You, of all those aboard that great ship, have befriended me. Therefore, having it in my power to repay you in some slight degree, I have come to do that which I may before—before I go."

"Go where?" Violet growled. "You ain't going nowhere. You're gonna stick around and let McDade & Alvarado show you the sights, ain't she, Nevada?"

I said, "Yes. Yes, of course." That damnable lump was in my throat again. The girl was so little, so forlorn. And Violet, the big lummoX, was so very human at times that—

"Why don't you sit down?" I snapped. "Don't stand there like a fool! Sit down!"

Joan sat down meekly and Violet guffawed. "Don't take it to heart, kid," she said, waggling a huge fist in my direction. "Nevada is just talking that way to keep from crying, she's so glad to see you. What's the guy's name that bumped old moneybags off?"

"Pierre Lefevre," said Joan. Then, startled at Violet's seeming omnipotence, "How did you know why I came?"

"Just a trick of the trade," said Violet. "I can tell you lots of things about yourself. You probably ran away from home, though Heaven only knows why anybody'd want to live in Papeete in the first place. And you copped some dough. And you were lugging a gun. So why did you kill Jonathan Quarles?"

"I didn't!" There was nothing meek about Joan Lefevre now. She was out of her chair and stamping a tiny foot to emphasize her words. "How can you say such a thing? Pierre Lefevre killed him, I tell you!"

"O. K., I believe you. Can't a guy ask a civil question without you having a tantrum?"

Joan sat down quite as suddenly as she'd got up.

"This bozo that scared you stiff out there in the fog—he's this Pierre you're talking about? Well, who is he—your brother, your father or what?"

A deep flush crept up beneath the girl's tan. "My—my stepfather," she answered, very low. "He is the master of the auxiliary schooner *Papeete*. I did not know he was coming north when he sailed from home. I hoped I would never see him, hear of him again. And then—then when I heard his terrible voice coming out of the night—"

"You passed out," said Violet sympathetically. "O. K."—noting the tears in the girl's eyes—"you don't have to tell me why you hate him. Not now, anyway. I wouldn't have much trouble hating him my-

self. But Jupiter, he had a peach of a—now—vocabulary!"

So the man's name was Pierre Lefevre and he was master of the schooner *Papeete*. But how could we be sure he was the same man who had attacked Quarles? Did Joan know of a motive? And why had she inquired about Quarles herself?"

"I—I had heard the name," she said, becoming rather vague at this point. "I thought possibly I might look him up."

"And did you?"

Joan hesitated, evidently decided on at least a certain amount of frankness. "I didn't see him, if that is what you mean. I went to his home but his secretary said he was too busy to see me. So I went away."

"But while you were there you heard—or maybe saw your stepfather, this Pierre Lefevre?"

No, it was merely that she knew he must have reached port. And, later, the secretary's description in the papers had tallied closely enough to coincide. And then Quarles had been murdered. There was the reward. Joan would like to see us get that.

Violet didn't press her. The story had a lot of loopholes, was weak in spots. For instance, why hadn't she stayed at the Grayson which we had recommended? And what was the real motive for her call on Jonathan Quarles? Or for coming to the United States, for that matter? There was no doubt she hated this Pierre Lefevre enough to turn him up. And perhaps she had visions of splitting the reward.

I said: "Let's all go over and

check up with the admirable secretary, Miss Stimson." I don't know why this Stimson woman bothered me. I didn't know her from Adam's ox. It was just that the newspapers had played her up as such a model of efficiency, I guess—a paragon of all the virtues.

"Between her and Joan we ought to be pretty sure whether or not Lefevre is the man we want."

Violet conceded this to be a swell idea. "But just in case," she added, "I think I'll shoot a couple of the boys down to San Pedro to look the *Papeete* over." Which she did.

JONATHAN QUARLES' mansion was one of those that seem to go on regardless of a little thing like murder. One got the impression that even the millennium wouldn't interfere with the regular routine. Everything was very quiet and sedate, of course, but the wheels were still humming. The butler didn't know if Miss Stimson could see us. She was very busy with young Mr. Quarles and the family lawyer.

Violet said: "She'll see me. Tell her I think I know who killed her boss."

Startled, the man went away, came back in a moment to usher us into the middle of what looked like a scene. Having known whom to expect I easily placed the three occupants of the great room.

The lawyer—one could never mistake him for anything else—was well past middle age; important with the assured importance of success, but not in the least pompous. His spatulate fingers toyed idly with a jeweled paper knife, part of

the ornate desk set before him. Otherwise he was motionless.

Not so young Jimmy Quarles. He was pacing the floor nervously, though I wouldn't have said he was bowed down with grief. Rather, he seemed nettled and just a little stubborn over something that was being discussed when we came in. There were certain telltale marks of dissipation on his good-looking, slightly immature face, but he appeared a harmless sort. One thing I was sure of: He was in love with the beautiful Anne Stimson! Don't ask me how a woman knows those things. She just does.

Miss Stimson took charge of the interview. Not that she was officious. Merely efficient. She was very lovely and I could readily see why Jimmy Quarles was that way about her, but—well, I guess I was already prejudiced. She was too self-possessed; her eyes when she looked at Jimmy lacked warmth. And when she turned to Violet I sensed an unspoken antagonism.

"You have a clue to the murderer?"

Violet said: "Yeah—in a way." She had moved to the desk, was admiring the glittering dagger in the lawyer's hands. Anything gaudy was sure to attract Violet. "About the reward, now. You folks ready to pay it?"

Miss Stimson and Biggsby, the lawyer, exchanged glances.

Biggsby hummed and hawed a little. "Well—ah—you see, Miss McDade, certain matters have come to light that make the amount stated somewhat—ah—prohibitive. In fact, we were intending to withdraw the offer entirely."

"I wasn't," said Jimmy Quarles. "Not the sporting thing to do. Course, I didn't know dad was practically on the rocks, but I made the offer and it stands."

At this, Miss Stimson's eyes couldn't be said to lack warmth. They positively shot sparks. "You're a fool, Jimmy Quarles! Do you realize what that will leave us—leave *you*—under the ridiculous terms of the new will? Do you think I'd—"

You could see Jimmy was in one of those well-known quandaries. If he didn't pay the reward he was bound to lose face. And if he did he stood to lose—well, her threat was pretty obvious to me. The lady didn't intend to live on love alone.

She whirled on Violet: "But you are not sure! You haven't caught the man yet, have you?"

"Nope, and if the reward's all that's worrying you I won't even try. I'll turn my information over to the cops and forget the whole works." Pure bluff. Violet never parted with information free of charge.

"Your information is pretty conclusive then?"

"Well," said Violet, "there're points that need a little clearing up. I kind of thought maybe you and Miss Lefevre could—"

"Miss *who*?" I thought Biggsby, the lawyer, was going to have a stroke. But he didn't. It did take him a minute or two, however, to regain his composure. "Surely you don't mean that—that this young woman is Joan Lefevre!"

"'Fraid she is," said Violet. "So what?"

"Of Tahiti?"

"Of Tahiti. To be exact, she's from Papeete, Tahiti."

"Well—well, bless my soul!" Mr. Biggsby seemed immensely pleased. He trotted around the desk, extending both hands to the astonished Joan. "Congratulations, my dear girl, congratulations! You will share equally with your—"

Suddenly embarrassed, he flushed hotly, dropped her hands. "I—ah—mean to say that your—ah—that Jonathan Quarles has bequeathed you half of the—ah—residue." He mopped his pink forehead with a very large handkerchief. "Unfortunately we find that his affairs were—ah—slightly involved. However," he brightened considerably, "you should realize at the very least something like fifty thousand dollars!"

JOAN'S FACE was very white. She swayed on her feet like a punch-drunk fighter. Violet's mouth hung agape till I thought she would never close it. And I? Well, I'll confess I was a little shaky.

But not too far gone to note Miss Stimson's reactions. If ever a face depicted demoniacal fury, hers did. She caught my eye on her, skillfully masked her emotions. "So this is the illegitimate child of Jonathan Quarles!" Suddenly she was staring at the girl with a new expression. "You were here yesterday! That—that man was— You sent him to kill your father!"

Joan fainted. Dropping to her side I worked on her, conscious of Violet's booming voice beating down the puny arguments of the others.

Some one handed me a glass of water. It was Jimmy Quarles.

Staring down at the girl in my arms he muttered, "Poor kid," and turned away. I got part of the water down her throat, slapped her once or twice and finally brought her around.

Things had quieted down considerably by the time she was able to sit up. Anne Stimson was once more her regal self. Biggsby, it turned out, was more than pleased that he didn't have to search the South Seas for a missing heiress. Of course, he pointed out, substantiating proof of Joan's identity would have to be forthcoming. Violet agreed to produce it.

Jimmy Quarles took little part in the conversation, confined himself to a covert appraisal of Joan. I couldn't tell whether he was pleased with her or not. Probably not, I thought cynically. I knew I wouldn't be overly fond of some one who was getting half of what I'd always considered rightfully mine.

Then there was the love angle. If Anne Stimson gave him the air because he wasn't inheriting enough to— But would she? She was being pretty sweet to him again. Maybe she'd decided that half a loaf was better than none.

Biggsby said: "Well, that's all settled then. Where can we get in touch with you, Miss—ah—Lefevre?"

"Miss Quarles!" Jimmy corrected. "Regardless of this and that, she's my half sister. She can stay here with us if she likes."

And—imagine our surprise—Anne Stimson seconded the motion!

Joan said, "Oh—oh, I couldn't!

*I caught the woman's wrist, flipped up my gun and jammed it at her—hard. "Open your hand," I said, "or I'll put a slug right through your girdle."*



Not yet. I have enough money to keep me at the hotel for a while."

"Yeah," said Violet brutally, "but whose money is it? You better come home with Nevada and me till we get things straightened out. Which reminds me: How's about catching the murderer?"

The murderer had somehow slipped our minds. And, strangely enough, no one seemed to care whether he was caught or not. No one, that is, but Violet.

Miss Stimson suggested that perhaps the police would solve the crime without our help. Violet

doubted it. While they argued the point Joan and I quietly departed. We picked up her luggage at a third-rate hotel, left the car for Violet, and took a taxi home.

No one cared about the murderer? How silly of me! I had forgotten the dear public. Violet didn't come home for dinner. In fact it was nearly midnight before she arrived. But we had news of her activities through the evening papers.

Under the scarehead: "QUARLES KILLER KNOWN!" I read of how McDade & Alvarado, cooperating with the police, had practically cornered Pierre Lefevre. His schooner, the *Papeete*, was being kept under surveillance—as if the ninny, reading this, would go back to it—and his arrest was momentarily expected.

That wasn't all. Violet had unburdened her soul to the papers. Joan Lefevre, horrified at her stepfather's crime, had come forward to point the first accusing finger. "Girl Positive of Father's Guilt!" screamed a subhead. And to cap the climax: "Fears Revenge. Under protection of McDade & Alvarado!" It even gave our home address.

Joan didn't enjoy the rest of her meal. "Do—do you suppose he will try to—"

"I wouldn't be surprised!" I snapped. "Not after that!"

I resolved that now would be a good time to fill in some of the gaps in the girl's story. "See here, Joan," I said. "I like you. And Violet likes you. But, after all, you haven't played exactly fair with us. We've got to know, for one thing, why you wanted to see Jonathan Quarles? Did you know he

was your father? Did you know he'd mentioned you in his will?"

"I knew he was my—father," she said hesitantly, "but I didn't know about the money. And if I had it wouldn't have made any difference. I hated him—hated him for what he did to my mother; for what he made of me. Illegitimate child?" She smiled crookedly. "That isn't what they call you in Tahiti!"

"Now, now," I soothed her. "Times have changed. Things like that are soon forgotten here in the States. I suppose you intended to kill him? Melodramatic vengeance from the South Seas and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes," she said, so quietly that there was no melodrama about it. "I stole one of Lefevre's guns. I stole some of his money. After all, part of it belonged to my mother. Hadn't she lived with the beast for years?"

"They were really married?"

"Oh, yes," she said. There was infinite bitterness in her tone. "Yes, he was her legal husband. I suppose I should have been grateful because he let me—the nameless one—use his name. But there was never any doubt in Papeete as to what I really was!"

BUT PIERRE LEFEVRE had never known who she was. The mother had taken care of that. Even the girl hadn't known until after her mother's death. And then, sorting through the pitifully meager store of things that were left, Joan had discovered the truth.

Pierre, coming home drunk, had surprised her in the act of running away, had beaten her until she con-

fessed the reason for her going. A few days later he had sailed; she hadn't known where until his hated voice crashed out of the fog somewhere along the California coast.

I surmised Lefevre had been intent on blackmail. Clever, in a way, he'd probably looked up Jonathan Quarles, found he was wealthy now and would doubtless pay well to keep his past a secret.

But Quarles hadn't paid—except with his life. Lefevre was an ugly customer, a man of violent temper when thwarted, according to Joan. She showed me bruises that hadn't healed yet from his last beating.

So, you see, Joan had a mighty good reason for hating both of these men. A funny idea occurred to me. I liked the girl, you understand, but just the same—couldn't she have read of Lefevre's attack the same as we had? Couldn't she have shot Quarles herself and, by blaming it on Lefevre, kill two birds with the one stone?

I studied her. In repose her face was curiously childlike. Her eyes, twin pools of sorrow, were without guile. Nevertheless, the idea in my mind persisted. Detectives, like the Chinese, are strange people.

Violet barged in, cheerful as usual, just as I was going to bed. "Well," she breezed, "how's every little thing?" Giving me no chance to tell her what I thought of her, she plowed on through to her own rooms and I could hear the shower going full blast.

Five minutes later she was back, attired in the rainbow effect she called her lounging pajamas. Through the sheer fabric of her sleeves I could see the bulge of her

guns. I don't believe she ever took them off, even under the shower.

"Just a little shrinking Violet," I said. "Always doing her best to avoid notoriety."

The irony was wasted. She plumped herself down on the bed, grinned at me, her little, greenish eyes alight with mischief. "Yeah," she said, "I know what you're gonna say. But, you see, our two dicks couldn't get a tumble at Pedro. They found the *Papeete* O. K., but there was nobody aboard but a couple of natives. Probably old man Lefevre read the papers yesterday, too, and the Stimson woman's description of him was so accurate he thought he'd better fade. Anyway, he hasn't showed up."

"He'll most likely show up here!" I snapped.

"That's what I'm hoping. That's why I spilled all—or nearly all—the details." She scowled at me. "Shrinking Violet! Nuts to you, Nevada! You don't get nowhere nowadays by shrinking!"

"Violet," I said, "did it ever occur to you that it might be Joan and not Pierre?"

"Sure, it occurred to me! Only I found out from Biggsby that Quarles didn't have her in his will till yesterday. Quarles called the lawyer in and changed the instrument right after Lefevre escaped. Something must've started the old devil's petrified conscience to working, but the kid couldn't have known that."

"No," I admitted, "but the money angle was out anyway. She hated him!" I repeated Joan's story, added some of my own theories.

Violet looked thoughtful. "Well,"

she said doubtfully, "maybe you're right. But guilty or innocent, Pierre Lefevre's gonna be sore as hell when he reads who's accusing him of the murder. Say, what d'you think of young Quarles and the Stimson dame?"

"He's a sucker," I said. "His face tells me he's been around but just the same he's a sucker—for her."

"Yeah, but is she for him? I got an idea she'd marry one of Lefevre's natives if he had money enough."

Which proves that Violet had at least one womanly attribute—intuition. She padded away presently, and I turned out the lights and tried to go to sleep. Eventually I did sleep.

I awoke with the sound of shots ringing in my ears. There may have been more but I heard only two. A swift pounding of feet echoed down the hall; a door slammed. It sounded like the front one. Fumbling for the light switch I wasted a few precious seconds, and by the time I had slipped on a robe and got out to the hall Violet was gone. So was her target. The front door stood open.

The sudden roar of a motor racing down the street was followed by another as Violet's big roadster flashed out of the drive. She went by me doing fifty, waved a pudgy fist as if she were just out for an airing.

**THERE WAS BLOOD** on the sidewalk at my feet; great splotches of it made a trail that led from somewhere inside the house to an indeterminate point down the street, probably to where that motor had come to life. I went in, traced the

sticky stuff to Joan Lefevre's room, found her huddled under the covers, shivering as with the ague.

But she was unharmed. Having ascertained this much I shook her into coherency. That blood might have been Violet's.

"Snap out of it!" I said sharply. "What happened?"

"Lefevre came!" she gasped. "I—I woke up with him choking me. I tried to scream but his fingers only crushed me tighter. His face in the moonlight—it was horrible! And then—then Violet shot him."

"Did he have a gun, too?"

"I don't know. Wait, I think he did! Yes, he shot at her and then she shot again and—and then he ran." She dissolved into hysterics once more.

Well, all I could do was hope for the best. I gave Joan a stiff shot of sleeping powder, finally got her quieted, closed the door and started out to mix myself a highball.

The hall was full of goggle-eyed neighbors. Bridget, our housekeeper, was regaling them with her version of the shooting—which she couldn't possibly have seen—and interspersing it now and then with tales of gorier affairs she had witnessed while in Violet's service.

I said, "Bridget, you look terrible. Better go back to bed before the cops come."

She flushed a bright scarlet, disappeared into her own quarters. But the neighbors, I found, were harder to get rid of. It must have been a full fifteen minutes before the last of them went. Locking the door behind them I went out to the kitchen for my postponed highball.

Again I was interrupted; this

time by the arrival of Detectives Lafferty and Bercowicz in a precinct car.

"Somebody phoned," said Lafferty. "Said there was a shooting."

"Yes," I sighed, "some one always does. But it's all over now, sergeant. You boys come in and have a drink?"

They came in. I led the way to the kitchen.

Bercowicz, a smallish, weasel-faced dick, downed three highballs, one right after the other, without batting an eye. But his mind was still on his work.

"What was all the ruckus about?" he wanted to know. "Lot of blood spattered around and we gotta make some kind of a report." Sudden cupidity shone in his eyes. "Say, you girls have got that Lefevre dame here! Was the shooting—"

"Oh, the shooting?" I hoped I was properly nonchalant. It wouldn't do to tell them too much and let them chisel in on the reward. "Why, it was really nothing much. Just a common prowler got in and Violet happened to be awake. She took a couple of shots at him but he escaped."

"Oh, yeah? Lemme talk to Mac!"

Violet McDade was "Mac" to every flatfoot in town. I told Bercowicz he should be different and try "Miss McDade" for a change.

He was not to be sidetracked. "O. K.," he said stubbornly, "Mac or Miss McDade, it's all one to me. I'm asking where she is!"

"So what?" And there was Violet herself standing in the doorway. She was breathing heavily as if laboring under great excitement. "Spill what you've got to say,

weasel, and then get to hell outa here. I'm tired."

Bercowicz, it appeared, had little more to say.

Violet admitted she had chased the wounded man but claimed to have lost him. And she positively had no clue to his identity. Catching Lafferty's admiring gaze on her pajama-clad figure she snatched one of Bridget's kitchen aprons and tied it around her middle. There were times when Violet was very modest.

"Go on, boys," she cajoled, "on your way. I'm practically dead on my feet." As a matter of fact she was as nervous as a wet hen. For some reason she considered it terribly important to get those two dicks out of the house—immediately. She finally succeeded.

AND THEN the storm broke. "For goodness' sake, get a doctor!" were her first words. "Joan's been stabbed!" And after that came a string of curses worthy of even that past master, Pierre Lefevre.

I was petrified. "How could Joan have been stabbed? Hadn't I locked the front door?"

"Sure, you dizzy idiot! And left the window open! Lefevre came through the window, you nut! Are you gonna get that doctor or are you gonna stand there all night with your mouth open?"

Well, I phoned for the nearest doctor. After that I kicked myself very thoroughly and went in to see Joan. She was unconscious. A gaping hole in her left side was still welling blood despite Violet's efforts.

The efforts, typical of Violet as a nurse, consisted of piling an arm-

load of towels around and on top of the wound as if she were building a dam.

I pushed her aside, managed to staunch the flow, took the girl's pulse and found it very weak. I hoped the doctor would hurry. And I hoped Violet wouldn't wring my neck for babbling with a couple of half-wit cops while Joan was being attacked the second time. Still, it wasn't entirely my fault. I resolved to strike first.

"You let Lefevre get away!" I accused. "Let him lose you and come back to finish the job!"

Violet turned from the open window, stared at me curiously. "There're times," she grunted, "when I wonder why in hell I ever took you in as a partner. As a dick you're the last word in fashion models. Here's this poor kid sleeping peaceful, depending on you to take care of her and what happens?" Her voice rose. "Three dicks in the house and what happens? Did I say three dicks? My mistake. Two dicks. And a—a——"

Mercifully the doctor came. The bell gave me a good excuse to leave, pretending I hadn't heard what she called me.

Dr. Gorham, after five long minutes with Joan, stood up, closed his bag briskly. He was brisk about everything. "She'll do," he said. "She'll do nicely. Lost a lot of blood, of course. Knife just missed her heart, but she'll pull through. Have to have a nurse, though, maybe two. I'll send one over from the hospital right away and to-morrow we'll see." He nodded briskly, took himself off.

Violet, still in her ridiculous pa-

jamias and Bridget's apron, was puttering about the window again. I heard her curse suddenly, looked up to see her squeezing through it.

"So that's how you got in," I said. "I knew I locked the door!"

Something about barn doors and stolen horses drifted up from the lawn below the window. Her tousled head popped into sight.

"Get me a flashlight or some matches, Mex."

I said, "Do not call me Mex!" But I got her the light.

She scrawled back a moment later, wheezing gustily. Between a fat thumb and forefinger was something that glowed redly; a ruby, I supposed, from one of her many rings. She was always losing something or other.

"How about getting some coffee, Mex? And a little snack? I gotta get dressed." She waddled through the connecting door into her rooms. "You better get dressed, too!" she bellowed. "Put the coffee on first, though. We gotta lot of work to do before the night's over."

I made coffee. And fried bacon and eggs. I could have got Bridget out of bed, but as long as Violet seemed willing to let bygones be bygones I thought I'd humor her.

She came out, sniffing greedily. "You're not such a bag egg, Nevada," she admitted. "Neither are these," she added, attacking the three on her plate. "So now look; I'm gonna tell you something. When that nurse gets here, you watch her plenty careful; see if she knows her business. And keep your eyes open in case anybody else shows up. Stay in Joan's room and keep your eyes open!"

"Don't worry, sweet Violet. Little Nevada took it on the chin once to-night. It won't happen again."

Again I caught that curious expression in her eyes. "Listen, Violet," I said, "have you definitely made up your mind it wasn't Joan who killed Quarles? After all, these attacks on her don't prove that she didn't kill him. You yourself said Lefevre would try to wreak vengeance, guilty or innocent."

"Joan did not kill Quarles," she stated flatly. "I'm surprised at you being so suspicious. I kinda thought you liked the kid. Besides, I checked with headquarters on the slug they took outa Quarles and it couldn't've come from that old horse pistol I found in her stateroom."

"But she could have got another gun!"

The great lummoX rose, wiped her mouth on a dish towel. "O. K.," she said. "You play it that way if you want to, and I'll play it mine. Which reminds me, I gotta beat it down to headquarters again. Remember, keep your eyes open."

She waddled down the hall and I helped her on with her coat. The night—morning, rather, for it was after two o'clock—had turned cold, and Violet evidently intended to use the roadster which she'd left at the curb. She went down the steps, was just easing behind the wheel when another car—a small coupé—pulled up beside her.

IT WAS the nurse. I could see the starched white uniform in the glow of the dashlight. Violet talked with her a moment, then gunned the

roadster into life and shot away down the street.

The nurse's name was Miss Hansen. I'd be willing to bet it is still Miss Hansen. A grimmer visage I never saw; and her manner was as starchy as her uniform. But I had to admit she was efficient. In an hour Joan's room looked like a first-class hospital ward. And, which was more important, Joan had roused from her coma and was able to talk a little.

She couldn't remember much of the second attack. The sleeping portion I'd given her had—mercifully or not, depending on the way you look at it—stupefied her so she was barely conscious of the knife thrust. And her assailant was but a vague, blurred shape. Joan thought she'd felt fingers clawing at her throat before the blade struck home; she wasn't sure.

"Anyway, I fainted again or something." She smiled wanly. "Seems like I'm always fainting, doesn't it, Miss Alvarado?"

"Nevada, to you," I said. I felt like—well, like what Violet had called me for thinking evil of the little devil. A murderer? Not Joan! Maybe she'd have killed Quarles, but if she had she'd have taken her medicine. Of that I was sure. Because she smiled at me so apologetically? Well, perhaps.

"Lefevre?" she asked. "Has he been caught?"

"I don't think so," I said. "But he will be, never fear. When Violet shoots anybody a doctor is indicated. He'll have to get medical attention; the doctor will report in, and then—"

The doorbell rang. Disregarding

Violet's silly admonition to watch the nurse I went to answer it. But before opening the door I removed my little gun from its holster just above the knee and held it ready—for what?

It was Jimmy Quarles and Anne Stimson! At three o'clock in the morning. Jimmy was carrying a florist's box and looking slightly flustered. Miss Stimson was, as usual, beautiful and completely at ease.

Well, I invited them in. There was nothing else to do.

"Miss—ah—McDade phoned me," Jimmy said, seeing my blank look. "Miss Le—my sister—is she conscious yet?"

"Yes," I said shortly. "I felt like adding, 'But you aren't!' Couldn't the fellow go anywhere without the Stimson woman tagging along? And suddenly I knew why I didn't like her. It was because I liked him! In other words and as idiotic as it sounds—I was jealous!"

"Do let me take your things!" I said cordially. "I'm sure Joan will be glad to see you both, if she's awake."

Anne Stimson kept her coat on, said they were only going to stay a moment. "Has the girl been able to talk much? Does she know who—who stabbed her?"

"Who could it have been but her stepfather, Pierre Lefevre? Not that she saw him the last time; I'd given her a sedative which practically drugged her into insensibility. But things may become clearer as she gets stronger."

"Let's hope so," said Jimmy.

Leading the way to Joan's room I wondered again if Jimmy Quarles

really liked his new-found sister. She was only his half sister at most; and a lot of our best people would have considered her—charitably, of course—something less than that. Maybe the flowers were a tribute to the fifty thousand dollars he wouldn't get, now that she was going to live.

At that, another curious thought took possession of my devious mind. What price Mr. Jimmy Quarles as the knife wielder? After all, we had no proof that Lefevre had returned. Jimmy stood to make fifty grand by the girl's death, and there was always the elusive Pierre to blame it on.

I found myself clutching the doorknob and staring at Jimmy's handsome, dissipated face as if—"Bosh!" I said, and opened the door.

Joan was asleep. The militant Miss Hansen held a cautioning finger to her lips, glared ferociously. We tiptoed in and gathered about the bedside. Jimmy rather awkwardly extended the box of flowers to the nurse who seemed disposed to refuse but finally changed her mind and went off down the hall with it.

And there I was, back thinking of him as a would-be murderer; chair-bait but for the will of Heaven and a certain inexpertness with a knife. Had Violet thought of him as the second assailant? Might she not be even now pinning the deed on his curly head? Hah! So that was why she'd notified him of his sister's condition! She wanted to get him out of his house so she could prowl it; had probably suggested that he bring Miss Stimson along.

THINKING of Violet, I thought of her last words: "Keep your eyes open!" Well, they'd been open but they'd damned near missed something that was taking place. Anne Stimson was just turning from the array of bottles on the bed table. It was the clink of one bottle against another that brought me to life.

I caught the woman's wrist, flipped up my gun and jammed it into her side—hard. "Open your hand," I said. "Open it—or I'll put a slug right through your girdle!"

Jimmy, the fool, grabbed me. "Oh, I say, now"—he must have thought I was clowning—"little girls mustn't play naughty. Papa spank!" He slapped my wrist playfully.

And that did the trick. My gun leaped in my hand. I saw Anne Stimson, at the door, stagger. Her right hand was in the pocket of her coat, and the pocket suddenly belched flame. She missed me. It seemed like her gun made an awful lot of noise. And then, as she started to fall, I saw Violet coming down the hall behind her. It had been Violet's gun, not Anne's, which made most of the noise.

Violet didn't bother to step over Miss Stimson. She stepped on her. "Dirty sneak!" she snarled.

Jimmy, his face a pasty white, came out of his daze. "Oh, no!" he protested. "Not Anne! You had no right to shoot her like that!" Sudden fury attacked him. "You lured us here! You deliberately trapped us! But why? In Heaven's name, why? What did we ever do to you?"

"Sh," Violet admonished him.

Ridiculously, you must admit, considering that she'd probably waked the whole neighborhood again with her cannons. "This is a sick room."

She strode forward, clutched him by the shoulders. "Listen to me, Jimmy boy; the woman had it coming to her. Nevada and I don't just go around shooting people for fun. Look at the bottle your innocent little Anne's got in her dead fist. See them skulls and crossbones? Know what they mean?"

"They mean she was doping your sister's medicine so she wouldn't be able to talk; to tell who really knifed her. And you know why she was afraid of what Joan would tell? Because I called you up and planted the idea!"

"But why? Why should Anne have——"

"Use your head, boy! Hasn't the woman been stalling you along because you were broke? Sure she has. And when this tough guy Lefevre comes along and makes a fuss don't she think it's a swell time to bump your old man? You're damn right she does!"

"She killed my father?"

"I'll bet my last dollar she used the same gun she's got right now. 'Cause why? 'Cause you never had one. I made it my business to find out. But when the new will pops up you're left with hardly chicken feed. So little Anne has to get rid of Joan to make marrying you worth while."

The nurse was dourly ministering to Joan; Bridget, horrible in a flannelette bathrobe, was gawking in the doorway. And the neighbors—I knew they'd be around—were

doing their best to tear the house apart. But the police hadn't arrived as yet.

Jimmy persisted in his unbelief. "But aside from the poison bottle, where is your proof?"

From one of her voluminous pockets Violet produced a dagger. A very fancy, jeweled dagger it was, and I recognized it as part of the ornate desk set in the Quarles library.

"This little sticker," she said, "belongs in your house. So what was one of the jewels doing outside Joan's window? I've gotta admit I wasn't sure the stone came out of your knife, but I thought I'd give the idea a whirl and that's another reason why I wanted you here—so I could prowls your dump."

"But Lefevre!" I gasped. I remembered quite suddenly the curious way Violet had stared at me. "Before you found the stone you knew it wasn't Lefevre!"

"Sure," she said. "He was plumb

dead when I caught up to him. He was in one of those rent cars and the upholstery was sure a mess. No wonder their rates are high!"

"And I suppose you left him right where you found him?"

"Nope, I stuffed him in my rumble seat. I was gonna take him down to the morgue, but I had to get some clothes on first. And then, finding the kid stabbed and all, and the house fulla dicks I kinda forgot him."

Joan was holding one of Jimmy's roses. Goodness only knows where he'd got them at that time of night but there they were. He looked pretty sick. "Disillusioned" is too weak a word but it'll have to do. He came to the foot of her bed, smiled a rather cynical little smile. "Well, sis," he said, "I guess that leaves just you and me, eh?"

And Violet said, "Hell's bells, Bridget, ain't we got nothing to eat in the house? Nevada claims I'm shrinking!"

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Ivy Frost  
Comes Back in

# DEATH DESCENDING

*A bizarre, compelling, mystery*

By DONALD WANDREI

In the August  
Clues-Detective

CLU-5

# The BRAIN KILLER

*A diabolical plan  
of undetectable  
murder by suicide*

by Paul Ernst

**D**ETEKTIVE HARMON sat in the reception room of Dr. Whiteside, the dentist.

Harmon had an ulcerated tooth. He had one of the damnedest ulcerated teeth you ever saw, in fact. It swelled out his jaw till that jaw looked as though it had been punched by a combination of Tunney, Dempsey and Baer.

But it was not of his tooth—painful as it was—that Harmon was thinking. He was thinking of the suicide of Junius Kolar.

There was something, that suicide! Sergeant-Detective Fellows had told him about it.

"I was walking along upper Broadway. I heard some guy screaming. It was terrible—like the guy was being tortured by red-hot irons. I looked around and couldn't see anything but a bunch of people gawping and trying to

**CLU-6**



*Then I looked up and I saw the guy.  
He was screaming "I can't stand it!"*

make out where the yells were coming from. Then I looked up and I saw the guy.

"He was standing on the ledge of a window eight stories up in an office building. Standing there, hugging back against the half-opened window while this awful screaming was coming from his lips.

"I could see his face, all twisted up, and I could hear some of his words. 'I can't stand it! I can't stand it any more!'

"Then the guy jumped. I wasn't twenty feet from where he landed. You wouldn't believe the way a body could flatten out when it hits concrete from an eight-story height!"

Those words came to Harmon now as he sat waiting for an ulcerated tooth to be yanked. Those words—and a remembrance of police investigation.

They'd looked into the thing and found the dead man was Junius R. Kolar, middle-aged, fairly wealthy, a cousin of the great Andrew Kolar—which made the affair real news, for old Andrew Kolar was worth a dozen million dollars.

Junius R. Kolar was a man who had plenty of money, no domestic worries as far as any one could tell. A happy, fat man. And day before yesterday he had stood on a window ledge screaming like a lunatic—to plunge eight stories down to death a moment later!

~~There was no sense to it! But,~~ nevertheless, he had done it.

Harmon stood up. He was a big man, heavy in the shoulders, with cold-blue eyes and grizzled hair. He walked toward the girl in white at the reception desk—walked with

the heavy tread of a man who has spent most of his life on his feet.

"Will the doc be able to see me pretty soon?" he asked.

"Pretty soon." The girl nodded, smiled. "Another ten minutes at the most——"

And then it happened.

Another man was waiting in the reception room. Harmon had glanced at him only casually. He had noted that the man was fairly young, thin, dried-looking, dressed in rough tweeds.

Now this man suddenly stood up. A scream came from his lips—a ghastly shriek that echoed and re-echoed in the little room.

"Oh, Lord," he screamed. "I can't stand it! The pain! The pain!"

Harmon could only gape at him, it was so sudden. At one moment the man had sat in a chair glancing at a back number of a magazine. At the next he was on his feet screaming like this.

"Oh, my Lord!" he shrieked, his face a twisted mask of horror and agony. "The pain! The pain of it! I can't stand it!"

And then he was leaping toward the windows of the reception room.

It was a hot, spring day. The middle of the three bay windows was wide open. The man leaped to the sill.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

With a shout, Harmon was leaping toward him, covering the distance in great bounds. But he was too late.

Still shrieking, with his screams trailing back from him like actual plumes of sound streaming in a gale, he leaped out and down.

"Another!" whispered Harmon.

The man's body spread-eagled in thin air, turning over and over like the body of a great, wingless bat. It seemed to float—but it was not floating. It was rushing down with terrific speed at the sidewalk, twelve stories below.

There was a last scream, snapped off in the middle like a breaking piano wire. And the body landed.

Harmon could hear the thud clear up to the window where he leaned out. Then silence. Vast, utter silence, broken at length by the shouts and screams of people below as they huddled around the broken mass that had been a human being.

Harmon turned from the window.

The girl at the desk was cowering in her chair, face white as a sheet, trembling and whimpering.

Harmon became all cop. He sprang to her desk.

"That man—what was his name?"

"Oh, oh——" moaned the girl.

"Shut up. Answer me!" snapped Harmon, shaking her shoulder.

"His name—is—was—Harry Moulton."

"And he was waiting in here with a bad tooth—and the pain of it drove him mad so he jumped from the window," Harmon summed up swiftly, turning toward the door to go downstairs.

But the girl's words halted him.

"He didn't have a bad tooth. There was nothing wrong with his teeth. He was just waiting here to see the doctor personally. He was the doctor's half brother."

At that moment the door of Dr. Whiteside's inner office jerked open. The doctor himself, a small man with side whiskers and timid, brown

eyes, in the white coat of a dentist, ran out.

"I heard shouts out here—and from the street. What on earth has happened?"

Harmon told him in a few swift words. The doctor covered his face, hands shaking, then looked up.

"Harry—my brother——"

Harmon shook Whiteside's shoulders as he had the girl's.

"Why'd he kill himself? What was wrong? Financial troubles? Marriage troubles? What?"

"There was nothing wrong that I know of. Harry was in good health. He was coming to-day to lend me a little money—he had plenty. And now he has killed himself——"

Harmon ran from the office and went down the elevator to the street to add his official presence to the hasty examination being performed by the patrolman on the sidewalk.

AN HOUR LATER, Jake Harmon trudged out of headquarters. His jaw was swollen more than ever, and in the back of his mind was the knowledge that his ulcerated tooth hurt like hell. But less than ever was he thinking about it.

He was too engrossed in the insane peculiarities of the thing he'd just seen—and the way it tied in with the suicide of Junius Kolar two days ago.

Kolar and Moulton had both been fortunately fixed in this world, with no apparent reason for suicide. Both had leaped from windows screaming the same thing: "I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

What had they been unable to stand? What dreadful agony had sent them to their deaths?

And another thing Harmon was thinking as he walked along the street: Both Kolar and Moulton had been related to old Andrew Kolar, the multimillionaire. Both were nephews.

Still another thing narrowed Harmon's cold blue eyes. And this was something that he felt somehow was very important—though he simply could not place the significance of it at the moment.

While he'd stood by the girl's desk in the doctor's reception room—just before the man had leaped from his chair and run, screaming, toward the open window—Harmon had heard something. A curious hum. An odd sort of sound like the hum of a little electric motor.

He'd tried to tell himself that the hum was caused by the dentist's drill, working on the tooth of the patient in his chair. But he'd had to dismiss that thought. The hum had not sounded like a dentist's drill. It had sounded like—well, like nothing at all with which he could exactly compare it.

Two men, related to a very wealthy old man, neither in trouble, both leaped out of windows yelling that they couldn't stand it.

"And Moulton had said: 'The pain! The pain of it!'" Harmon muttered to himself. "The pain of *what*? He didn't seem to be in pain a minute before—"

And then he saw the police ambulance dart up the street with its bell sounding like mad. It paused before headquarters and a cop jumped out and dashed into the building.

Harmon jerked around and hurried back. In his breast a dismal

hunch was stirring. Trouble comes in threes.

The hunch was confirmed.

"A dentist by the name of Dr. Whiteside just killed himself," the cop was saying. "Jumped from his own office window—twelve floors up. Good night, what a mess! We were all there investigating the suicide of the guy, Moulton, who'd just jumped out. Whiteside ran to the window under our very noses, and took the dive."

Harmon grabbed the man's arm. "Did the doctor yell out anything?"

"I'll say he did. He yelled fit to burst your eardrums. He was yelling when he left the window sill and yelled all the way down to the sidewalk. Two guys out of the same set of windows in half an hour—"

"Yeah, but what did he yell?" demanded Harmon.

"He said something about pain. The pain of it! He couldn't stand it! I don't get it, because he seemed to be all right a minute before when we were asking him questions."

"Did you hear anything else in that office? A kind of low humming, for instance?"

The cop wrinkled his forehead. "Yeah, I think I did. But I didn't say anything about it or remember it, till now. A sort of hum like an electric fan might make—"

Harmon left him then. And he left him on the run.

Three men dead. Three men suicides—

But these weren't suicides! They were murders!

Harmon didn't yet have the faintest notion of how they'd been committed, but he was as sure of it as he was of his own deep-boiling

wrath beginning to surge in his thick chest.

Murder! Three men sent to their deaths in a manner that could never be traced to a murderer! Apparent suicides!

And the latest dead man was half brother to Harry Moulton—which made him also related to old Andrew Kolar the millionaire!

Three men killing themselves, and all relatives of an extremely wealthy man who could not live much longer because he was so old.

On the heels of that thought, Harmon knew his next move. He hopped a cab and drove to the home of Andrew Kolar as though pursued by the furies.

KOLAR had a fourteen-room apartment on the eleventh floor of a sleek building on Park Avenue. Harmon leaped from his cab before the building and started toward the entrance.

Then he stopped. And listened.

A voice was coming to him from somewhere.

"Don't get your nose in this, detective. Get back in that taxi and get away from here—or *you'll be committing suicide, too!*"

With his jaw thrust out pugnaciously, Harmon whirled left, right.

There were a dozen pedestrians on the Fifth Avenue sidewalk within forty yards of him, but over half of them were women. And this had been a man's voice, and no man was near enough to have spoken in that low tone.

"I've warned you, detective. Now watch your step!"

Harmon gritted his teeth. Here was proof that the three "suicides"

had not been suicides after all! Here was an arrogant message from the murderer himself—telling him to keep out of the business!

Then that murderer must be near him! But where was he?

Harmon ran up to the nearest man, a dapper chap of about forty with yellow gloves and a cane as thick as a man's wrist.

"Did you just say something to me?" Harmon snarled.

"Me?" protested the man in a squeaky voice. "No. Why should I? I never saw you before in my life."

Harmon hesitated, then turned back to the building entrance. There was nothing else to do. He knew in his copper's soul that the man he'd accosted had not spoken to him. And there was no one else around to grill.

With his mouth set in a grim line, he went on into the building.

The man at the desk in the lobby stared curiously at the detective's swollen jaw.

"Yes, Mr. Kolar is in," he said. "But I don't know whether he'll see you——"

"He'll see me," said Harmon, striding toward the elevators. "This is police business. You just tell him I'm on my way up."

ANDREW KOLAR looked like a mummy rather than a man. He was ninety-three. His face was as wrinkled as a parchment-colored prune. He tottered a little as he walked toward Harmon, clad in an ancient dressing gown and looking peevish and curious at the same time. An old man—but a remarkably husky one at that. He'd live

for another ten years, barring accidents, Harmon mused.

"You are from the police?" Kolar quavered. "What do you want to see me about?"

"Your relatives," Harmon said bluntly.

"Eh?" Kolar cupped his hand to his ear.

"I said I wanted to see you about your relatives. Junius Kolar, Harry Moulton, Dr. Whiteside—and any others you may have. Particularly the others!"

"Why do you want to——"

"Because Kolar, Moulton and Whiteside are dead!" Harmon let him have it bluntly.

Andrew Kolar staggered a little, and sank into an armchair.

"Harry—and young Whiteside," he whispered. "When——"

"An hour ago. They jumped out of windows, just as Junius Kolar did."

"No! But why? Not one of them had any reason to kill himself. It certainly couldn't be for financial reasons. Because I stood ready to help them in any way they wanted—and when I die they'll all be wealthy men! They're all mentioned in my will."

Harmon edged forward. "Uh-huh, I thought so. And who else is mentioned in your will?"

"Nobody," said Kolar.

"What?" exclaimed Harmon.

"I said, nobody! Can't you hear, young man? Those three men were to share my estate. None of them was very close to me, but they're the only blood relatives I have, and I don't believe in willing my money to a home for cats."

"They're *all* the relatives you

have? There's no one else?" probed Harmon.

"Well, there is one other man—a sort of second cousin to Junius Kolar. But he'll never get a dollar of my money."

The old man's voice had risen to a shrill petulance as he spoke—and Harmon felt vistas open before him again.

"Who is he? What does he do for a living? Where does he live?" he shot out.

"His name is Anthony Farwell. He lives somewhere down in Greenwich Village and he pretends to be an inventor. But I don't know why you'd be interested in him because he isn't even mentioned in my will and never will be——"

Harmon bent over the old man, speaking urgently, eyes flaming.

"Listen," he said. "From now on till you hear from me again, don't let any one into this apartment! Understand? No one! I get the picture now—and your life is in danger. Danger? I wouldn't give a nickel for it right this minute! Remember—not one soul is to come near you except your most trusted servants!"

He wheeled and left.

ON THE STREET again, Harmon fairly ran toward the curb to flag a taxi he saw cruising near him. But once more he stopped in mid-flight, as he had stopped before entering the place.

For once more he heard a voice. *The voice!*

"I've told you to keep out of this! I've warned you! And you've paid no attention!"

Harmon cursed softly as he looked around—and saw no one near enough to have addressed him like this.

“You are thinking of taking that cab to go down to Greenwich Village. Don’t! If you touch the running board of that cab, you die by your own hand!”

Harmon’s fists clenched and his jaw set till the muscles ridged white in his cheeks.

Then he waved to the taxi. It came to the curb.

“Washington Square,” said Harmon. “I’ll tell you more exactly where I want to go in the Village when I’ve looked in a directory down there——”

He put his foot on the cab’s running board—and stopped there, paralyzed, unable to move a muscle.

Pain!

Such pain as he’d never dreamed a man could endure, and live through it, burst within his brain as though an explosive had been set off within his skull. He rocked and moaned with the agony of it.

And through that agony he dimly heard a voice.

“Turn around, walk back toward the building next to the one you just left and I’ll release you from the pain.”

Harmon held out for a second or two longer while screams sought to force their way through his lips. Then he turned from the cab and started walking away. He could do nothing else. That awful agony in his head! Another few seconds of it would have driven him mad. And ~~he was hearing~~ again that faint humming——

“Hey,” yelled the cabman. “Don’t

you want to go to Washington Square?”

Harmon only shook his head. The pain had let up, but its violence had been such that he could not talk, could scarcely think.

“Are you sick?” persisted the cab driver. “What’s wrong——”

Harmon only shook his head again and walked toward the building next to the one in which old Kolar lived.

“Go through the lobby to the stairs in the rear,” the deadly voice rang in his ears. “And don’t look back!”

Harmon entered the lobby. He heard steps behind him, as some one followed closely.

The pain was mostly gone by now. He started to jerk his head rebelliously around to see who was behind him.

Instantly the pain clamped down again. Waves of intolerable agony beat at his brain. A strangled curse that was like a sob came from his lips.

He faced front again, and walked on.

The lobby of this building was ornate, but there was no desk in it as there was in Kolar’s building. There was no one in the lobby at all. Harmon walked through the pompous emptiness to a door marked “Stairs,” next to the elevator shafts.

He opened the door. He heard the steps right behind him, sensed the other’s presence as the door clanged behind them both, leaving them in the stair well.

“Up,” said the voice. “All the way up.”

Again Harmon started to rebel. He whirled half around to grapple

with the fiend behind him—and the pain caught him.

The agony of it! As though hot lead were being poured in his ears against his naked brain. A half scream ripped from his writhing mouth. He clapped his hands over his ears and pressed in a blind effort to shut out the torture of it.

His left hand pressed the swollen jaw in which was the ulcerated tooth, and actually, the torment of that contact was so much less than the agony of his reeling brain, that it was almost a solace.

Then the pain lifted, leaving him weak as a kitten and clutching to the stair rail for support.

"Up," the inexorable voice behind him said. "To the roof."

Harmon started up the stairs. Like a steer driven to slaughter. Like a horse guided by reins of pain and whips of hellish agony to the brink of a cliff.

For the detective knew well enough what was coming.

"All the way up. To the roof."

THERE WAS to be a fourth suicide. A fourth man was to hurtle down through thin air to splatter on rock-hard cement many floors below.

"Good old Harmon! But why did he bump himself off?"

That's what they'd be saying on the force. For it would be a straight suicide to them. He'd been in too much of a hurry to linger and tell others of his initial suspicions. Now there was no trail for them to follow after justice.

Straight suicide to them. But actually murder of the most diabolical and ghastly sort.

Like a man moving in a nightmare on lead-weighted feet, Harmon climbed the stairs. Ten flights of them. With the inexorable footsteps sounding right behind him and the deadly voice exhorting him icily when he slowed.

Driven to his death by reins of pain and whips of agony.

For Harmon simply could not drive himself to fight against the torture. He was a strong man, used to hardship—but a man of steel could not have fought against the bursting horror that seemed to fill his skull at the will of the cold-blooded murderer just behind him.

They came to the roof stairs, went up them. Harmon opened a steel door and stepped out onto the grveled surface of the fireproof roof.

He stopped an instant.

It was early afternoon. The sky was blue as sapphire, and the sun was shedding spring warmth to thrill a man's veins and utterly intoxicate him.

A rotten day to pass out of! A horrible way to die!

As though reading his thought, the voice behind him said: "You'll die, all right. In a minute you'll be flattened on the sidewalk downstairs. If you live a few seconds after hitting, it won't matter—you can't describe me because I've kept you from looking back and seeing me. But you won't live. You'll die at once."

A satanic laugh sounded.

"You! To pit your wits against me, the greatest inventor of the age!"

Harmon wiped the cold sweat of agony from his forehead. His eyes,

sick with the recent pain, yet narrowed shrewdly.

"Inventor?" he said, his voice shaking. "Then it's some invention you have that can make me feel like the inside of my skull is being churned up by red-hot pokers?"

The chuckle sounded again. "It is, my stubborn detective friend. A little vibrator, run by a flashlight battery, housed in a cylinder like the barrel of a revolver. It's tuned to the vibration rate of the substance which composes the human brain. When it is turned on, the person at whom the apparatus is pointed feels as if every fiber of his brain was about to burst.

"I killed Moulton and Whiteside from the hall door of Whiteside's reception room. I can talk along the vibratory wave, too. I was a hundred yards away when I spoke to you in front of the building next door."

A hand thrust against Harmon's back, shoving him toward the nearest roof parapet.

"That's only one of my inventions," came the chill, deadly voice. "I have others, nearly completed. But I need money for them, and that old fool, Andrew Kolar—who will not be long on this earth—wouldn't help me financially as he helped the others."

"So you killed Moulton, Junius Kolar and Whiteside, to fix it so the other man would die without beneficiaries," Harmon said thickly. "And then, when he dies intestate, you'll get the fortune."

"Right," came the voice behind him. "Keep going—toward that parapet."

Harmon halted once more, the life instinct surging in him in wild revolt. Throw himself over that parapet—to thud against the sidewalk far below as he had heard the body of Harry Moulton thud? Never! He simply wouldn't—

The pain hit him again, like the impact of a mailed fist.

His head was a ball of fire. It seemed as though it must burst—but it didn't—it just kept on experiencing an agony a thousand times greater than any which could have been inflicted by old-time rack or thumbscrew.

"Oh" he whispered. Then, in a shriek: "Oh, stop it! Stop it! Stop it! I can't stand it."

Some far corner of his mind caught the words with horror.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it!"

So had the other three victims of this infernal genius shrieked before they leaped to their deaths.

But the far corner of his mind was overwhelmed.

He began to scream, wildly, insanely, the sound ripping through the calm afternoon air like knives.

And then he began running toward the parapet.

Death—

It had no sting in the face of such awful, unendurable agony. It was a sweet rest, to be longed for. Anything to be quit of the liquid fire which bathed his naked brain. He couldn't stand it.

He swung one leg up to the parapet, halted there.

The footsteps of the fiend who was driving him to his doom with ribbons of pain, sounded right be-

hind him as he brought the infernal vibrating thing closer to Harmon's skull again. Its tiny hum seemed a great roar, dominating the world.

"Over!" the icy voice commanded. "Over——"

Harmon half stood on the parapet. Down below him, looking like ants in the sun, people walked. Cars streamed, buglike, along Fifth Avenue.

"Over!"

HARMON'S BRAIN scarcely heard the command. Dimly he wondered that he had not been driven stark, staring mad by the pain in his skull. But he had not been—quite.

He straightened a little on the parapet—whirled and launched himself straight at the figure of the man standing a yard from him with a thing in his hand that looked like a small revolver with a particularly bulky cylinder.

He caught a glimpse of the man's amazed face, of deep-set, black eyes glinting with surprise, of a thin, weedy body whose every line expressed incredulity.

Then he struck, and the man smashed backward to the roof under his bulk. The deadly little mechanism in his hand flew a dozen feet away and landed slantingly against the parapet.

With its fall the pain stopped, but Harmon was as weak as a child.

The man slipped out from under him like an eel. He leaped for the

little metal cylinder lying against the parapet——

Wearily, grunting with the exertion of moving his hand and arm, Harmon got out his gun.

The man scooped up the cylinder, turned——

And Harmon let him have it.

Dazed, stupefied, he heard two shots ring out from his gun, saw the man reel back against the parapet with blood spurting from his chest, and then slump down beside the parapet and lie with glazing eyes.

Harmon walked over to him.

"—got me," the man whispered, with a grimace of anguish. "—the pain—didn't do the trick—with you ——" He coughed, and blood flecked his lips.

"Not possible—the pain wasn't enough—yet it was—not possible ——" His glazing eyes stared at Harmon's swollen jaw. "Oh—that's it—that's the reason—an ulcerated tooth——"

The man laughed, horribly.

"An ulcerated tooth—beats Anthony Farwell, genius," he whispered. "—infection—deadened nerve cells, just enough to keep you from being completely under sway of pain——"

His eyes closed and his voice stopped. He was dead.

Harmon looked at him for a moment, running fingers through his hair—which was to be snow-white on the morrow. Then he turned and walked on numbed legs toward the roof door.



*The girl screamed again. Jeff sprang backward just in time to miss Maw's hardwood canel*



## 3 Mistakes

by William Merriam Rouse

**I**F the whole soul of Jeff Clifford had not been centered upon his burning purpose he would have enjoyed a smile at himself. Clothed in gray flannels which had been tailored in London he plunged

through dense, mountain undergrowth with the speed and skill of a born woodsman.

His long arms parted branches with a mere rustle; his fine bench-made shoes instinctively found good

footing; his head and broad shoulders ducked and sideslipped among low-growing limbs of trees. He covered rapidly rising ground with unhurried breath, although every muscle was driven by haste.

A spot of red, sharpened by contrast with the lush of green, caught his eye. The red was not of the forest and for an instant Clifford hesitated. Then he drove on, no longer trying to make his feet feather-light. He crackled over a drift of twigs and dead leaves and came out into a little, natural glade.

A young man about his own age stood there, motionless, with a rifle lying across his arm. The stranger wore a lightweight, red-and-black checked shirt, and corduroys tucked into half-length, laced boots. There was, in his steady eyes, a look of suspicious inquiry. One hand rested on the grip of the rifle at the trigger guard.

They looked each other up and down. Clifford pushed back his damp, wavy hair and tried his best smile, which he knew very well would put humorous wrinkles around his eyes and show a good set of teeth. It usually worked when he wanted to make friends.

"Which way," he asked, in a pleasant voice, "is Stovepipe City?"

At the mention of that name something like a shadow cast by a sailing summer cloud passed across the face of the other man.

"Bear a little south of the way you were going," he replied. "South and uphill. You'll fetch it in a couple of hours if you keep moving right along."

"Thanks," said Clifford. "Now I've got a proposition to make to

you. We're about the same size—six feet and a hundred and seventy. Is that right?"

The man in the checked shirt nodded.

"I'd like to trade clothes with you. I'll give you my clothes and shoes and a hundred dollars in cash for yours, and your rifle. What about it?"

"I don't calculate I want to trade."

"Two hundred in cash?"

"What's to hinder you from taking the money back after I give you my rifle?"

"If you won't take my word for it I'll prove good intentions. Do you notice that I'm holding my chest as though I were short of breath? Well, my hand is just three inches away from an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. I could draw it and shoot you before you could swing that rifle around, if I wanted to use that kind of an argument. I don't. But I want to trade."

The stranger's eyes flickered. "You act to me as though you were in a powerful hurry to get away from something, mister!"

"I'm in a hurry," agreed Jeff, "and I don't want to argue any longer. Will you trade?"

"Listen," said the man in the checked shirt. "It ain't often a man comes crashing through the woods with store clothes on that must have cost a heap and asks for a place like Stovepipe City. You're going to be a lot easier to find in them clothes you got on! No, I ain't going to trade!"

"You're wrong," contradicted Jeff. With a scarcely perceptible movement his hand brought a flat automatic into sight. "Drop that rifle!"

The woodsman's lips tightened grimly but he let the rifle drop to the grass-padded earth. Clifford threw down his pistol.

"Now I'm going to make you trade," he said, and he stepped forward.

If every nerve and muscle had not been alert Clifford would have been in serious trouble. For the mountaineer lowered his head and charged with a rush that made of him a human battering-ram. Clifford swung forward to meet the attack and launched an uppercut with his weight under it. His left hand followed his right. On his toes and off balance, the charge carried him over backward and they fell together, with the checked shirt on top.

But Clifford rolled him off easily. The man's eyes were glazed and his jaw hung slack. Clifford had made the change of clothing, from shoes to shirt, before he began to revive. He sat up, shaking his head.

"Here," said Jeff, "is the two hundred I offered. Sorry to be so rude but I needed your clothes in a hurry. You're getting much the better end of the bargain."

JEFF CLIFFORD lay on his stomach on a flat, sun-warmed rock and watched events in a little valley that lay before him. The valley might once have been the crater of a volcano, when the mountains rose from the primordial sea, but now it was grass-grown and lightly wooded, a dimple in the top of an Adirondack peak. It held a collection of shanties known as Stovepipe City because of the extemporized chimneys which rose through the nonde-

script roofs of the buildings. Most of them were rusty stovepipe held in place by wires.

Stovepipe City had grown in the shape of a frying pan, with the handle running toward marshy ground at one side of the crater, where subterranean springs came to the surface. This little line of shacks was known as Frog Alley, and there, if there were any such thing as caste in this ingrown mountain hamlet, lived the lower stratum of the local society.

This much Clifford had learned by inquiry in the valley towns, for this was his first glimpse of this handful of human dwellings where dogs and children tumbled on the hard-packed earth about the shanties; where men whittled in the shade and women gossiped or hung out washing.

All of Clifford's attention, after the first searching survey, centered on a shack at the extreme end of Frog Alley. He watched patiently, making himself as comfortable as possible, until he had tabulated the inhabitants of that building. A man appeared and ambled off with a dog at his heels. He went into another shack and came out with a gun. That had been a visitor.

Next, from the dwelling under observation came a figure in voluminous skirts, leaning on a cane. White hair, uncombed, straggled over bent shoulders. The cane lifted and beat the air while a torrent of abuse, not understandable at the distance, was directed at the shack.

One of the biggest men Clifford had ever seen came tumbling out. His hair gleamed yellow in the sunlight as he shrank away from the

waving stick. His voice, a deep bass, boomed loud enough for Clifford to distinguish the words.

"Now, Maw, don't take on! I'll get the wood split right off."

He sprang back into the house and appeared an instant later dragging a girl by the wrist. With a whirl he sent her spinning toward a small pile of wood and a chopping block.

"Ain't you heard what Maw said?" he boomed. "Get to work!"

Clifford was already going rapidly down the hill. What he had seen checked with his information. The home of "Maw" Dooby was inhabited by one young giant, her youngest, and one good-looking, brown-haired girl of about eighteen. This was the place where he had been in such a hurry to arrive.

He approached the end of Frog Alley through some alders that grew thickly along the edge of the marsh. At last, thirty feet away from the woodpile where the girl was working, he halted and peered out. Slowly his chest swelled and his hands closed on his rifle until the nails were white.

Good-looking? The girl was a beauty; fit, so far as appearance went, to adorn a palace. Her hair rippled in shining waves to her waist—a rich, golden-brown that Clifford had never seen equaled. Her arms, perfectly molded, smooth, milk-white, swung the ax and brought it down on the stick she was splitting in a movement of singing grace.

Her skin was milk and rose. The legs which were only half concealed by her ragged skirt had been cast in such a mold as the gods use when

they desire perfection. Clifford looked for the lantern jaw that he had seen on so many mountain girls and found a rounded chin and a dimpled cheek above it.

"BUB" came out of the shack again and stood with his hands in his pockets of his overalls, a leering grin on his somewhat vacuous face. He towered head and shoulders above the girl. The muscles of his corded neck twitched. He sent a stream of tobacco juice at a grasshopper and shifted his chew from cheek to cheek.

"Well, Floss," he said, "how you like it?"

The girl let the ax head rest on the block and looked up at him. Now Clifford had a square look into her face. He saw blazing, hazel eyes, and a face suddenly stricken white by mingled fear and contempt.

"I'd rather do this than let you paw me," she said, in a low and naturally musical voice. "It's better exercise than the city folks get playing golf."

"I was just fooling with you, gal," announced the giant. "When I get good and ready I'll take that knife you tried to stick into my ribs away from you and you won't amount to no more than a skeeter with me! You'd ought to be glad Maw and me took you in."

"You! And Maw! You're a bunch of crooks! If I had known what I do now I'd never have come up here. You lied to me!"

"They ain't no chance of you fooling time away any more with book learning. You're going to be my girl, Floss!"

"Bub!" exclaimed the girl. Her voice had sunk to a whisper that sent a chill through Clifford. His body swung a little forward as her hands left the ax helve. "If you ever lay a hand on me again I'll cut your heart out!"

The enormous young man laughed. His lips curled away from yellow teeth and he hitched up his overalls, swaggering toward her.

"You draw blood on me and I'll sell you to Bull Gowan!" he promised. "Bull wants you!"

Bub's long arm shot out. A knife flashed, and the cry of the man and the scream of the girl mingled as Clifford released himself like a coiled spring. He saw one second-long tableau as Bub twisted the girl's wrist. Her voice was shaped by utter despair and the young man, bending above her, looked with a promise of the worst he could do to her in his pale eyes.

Then Jeff rapped the back of his skull sharply with the butt of his pistol.

"Turn around, you!"

Bub whirled. Jeff's left hand slapped at his eyes; Jeff's fist sank to the wrist into the front of Dooby's greasy shirt. Bub Dooby slowly pitched forward and lay among the chips.

The girl screamed again. Jeff sprang backward just in time to miss the hardwood cane of Maw as it came sweeping down toward his head. He looked into a brown face, seamed and wrinkled, radiating evil. The cane was swinging again in knotty hands. Clifford snapped up his pistol and fired. The stick went whirling into the air and slowly the legs of Maw let that beskirted form

down to the chopping block. Pain twisted the bony face.

"You nigh busted my fingers!"

The girl stood motionless, wonder and admiration lighting her face. Bub sat up, holding his stomach with both hands.

"What call you got——"

"Shut up!" croaked Maw. "Go get Bull Gowan!"

"I'll break an arm for him if he starts," promised Jeff. "Get up, you old hag, and go into the house. You, too, lummo. I want to talk to both of you. Move!"

With a look of deadly hatred Maw rose and started for the doorway of their shack. Bub put a hand to the ground and sprang up quickly for such a big man. He stood nearly six feet and a half tall, Jeff realized now, and he could not have weighed less than two hundred and thirty or forty.

The girl advanced a step toward Clifford, and hesitated. Her lips parted and her eyes were shining. She was going to thank him.

"Will you bring my rifle, please?" asked Jeff. "I left it there in the alders. And watch in the doorway while I'm inside. Can you shoot?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "I can and I will!"

Clifford moved toward the shanty only to halt as a broad, squat man appeared around a corner. No introduction was needed to tell him that this was "Bull" Gowan. His big, animal eyes had the peculiar stare of a bull, at the same time cunning and inhumanly vicious. His shoulders were like ledges; his forehead a mere strip between eyebrows and hair.

"What's going on here?" he de-

manded. "Who be you and what you shooting at?"

"Gowan," said Clifford, in a low voice, "are you boss of Stovepipe City?"

"I be. Want me to prove it, hey?"

"Go ahead and boss it," Clifford told him, "but leave me alone. I've got business with Maw Dooby and Bub, and that's all the business I have in Stovepipe City. Is it a bargain, or have I got to do some shooting?"

Clifford made a fast draw from his shoulder holster and it seemed to him that he caught a hint of surprise in the bovine face.

"What you want of Maw and Bub?"

"I'm going to ask them some questions."

"You one of the sheriff's men?"

"No."

"Go ahead and ask questions. Only don't try no funny business. They's enough of the boys here to take that popgun away from you, even if one or two of 'em does get plugged."

Bull Gowan stared at the girl standing beside Jeff with the rifle. He swung his head in an invitation to her to go with him.

"Bub and Maw don't want me to leave here," she said, in a low voice.

"Bub'll get something he don't want, maybe!" growled Gowan. He turned away with slow steps and Clifford knew that he would be watching the shack.

"I wish you'd take me away!" whispered the girl.

"I will if I live to get away myself," answered Clifford, and then he advanced toward the shack.

He glimpsed Bub inside, with a

double-barreled shotgun lying across his knees. Jeff fired. His bullet slapped the stock of the gun and flung it to the floor with a clatter.

"You and Maw stand up where I can see you," he called. "Then I'll come in. One more trick like that and you'll both wake up shoveling coal!"

JEFF stepped over the threshold with his pistol in his hand. He saw a squalid interior, with a broken stove and two or three wooden chairs. There was a bed in the room, and a table, and through a doorless opening he glimpsed another bed and a battered chest of drawers.

"Sit down!" he ordered.

Maw sank down, with yards and yards of musty-looking cloth spreading out on each side of the chair. Bub doubled up like a jackknife on a wooden box.

"What you come picking on us for?" he demanded. "I bet you see Floss somewhere and want her."

"He can't have her!" barked Maw. "She ain't to trade. Not for any price."

"Not if I got anything to say!" flared the young man.

"Who's boss in this shack?"

Maw's face became suffused with blood. Bub wriggled and looked down at the floor.

"I'm going to take her anyway," Jeff told them. "But I didn't come for her. I came to ask a question. Where is your husband, Maw? Where's Stub Dooby?"

There was an almost imperceptible quiver in the bodies of the two Doobys. A glance flashed between them. Maw's face took a darker

shade and the mounting blood throbbed up through the skinny neck that rose from the collar of a ragged sweater.

"I ain't seen that worthless, no-account, thieving critter I married for a good twenty year! I don't want to see him or ever hear of him! If you didn't have a gun on me I'd—I'd put some finger marks on that grinning mug of yours."

"It won't do," Jeff told her. "Ezra Dooby, known as Stub locally, was in Valeboro yesterday and he headed for here. He's either in Stovepipe City now or he's gone down to the lake to cross over into the Vermont mountains. He can't go north or south because the troopers have got the roads and trains watched."

Maw and Bub again exchanged glances.

"What you want to see him for?" asked Bub.

"I've got something to tell him."

"What is it?" asked Maw.

"I'll tell Stub himself."

"We don't know nothing about the old man," answered Bub, sulkily, with a glance at the doorway where the girl stood with the rifle in her hands. She had turned and was looking at him steadily.

"Mister," she said to Jeff, "they had somebody here last night, I'm pretty sure. Maw was a cousin of my father's. She sent word down to Valeboro when my mother died last week and said she had a farm up here and I could come and stay on it for a rest before I went to work. Bub came after me yesterday. He said Maw was sick in that room there. There was somebody in there, all right. I heard voices.

And moving around. In the night they took somebody out. This morning Maw showed up."

"He's dead and buried, if you got to know, you snooping, mis'able skunk!" cried Maw. The hoarse voice cracked and broke. "Want to dig him up?"

"Maybe," answered Clifford, calmly. "Anyhow, you two are going to take me to the grave——"

"Mister!" Floss, white to the lips, turned from the doorway where she had just looked out again. "Mister, Bull Gowan is spreading out a lot of men both sides of the swamp. I'm afraid he's coming—coming to——"

"He won't get you!" snarled Bub. "Him nor nobody else!"

Clifford sprang to one of the grimy windows. Frog Alley was surrounded. At one end lay the main part of Stovepipe City. At the other was the swamp where a fleeing man would be trapped. To the right and left denizens of the hamlet were taking stations about twenty feet apart. Every one of them was armed, with shotgun, rifle, club, pitchfork.

Jeff's heart beat faster. Gowan was coming for the girl and Jeff would have to shoot his way out, if he could. He looked at Floss and made up his mind that she was going with him. Better a bullet than the things which would happen to her if she were held in Stovepipe City.

"Hold the rifle on Maw and Bub," he said, as he took a little roll of surgeon's tape from his pocket. "And shoot if either of them makes a move that looks like trouble."

With a choice cursing ringing in

his ears he taped Maw's hands, crossed the wrists and bound them firmly together. He did the same for Bub, and told them to stand up.

"You're coming along," he said, "for a windshield." If Gowan wants to knock you off that will be just too bad for you!"

"Bull would like to put a slug into me, mister!" pleaded Bub. "Don't make me go! I'll tell——"

"You'll get your mouth slit around to the back of your head if you start talking!" screamed Maw.

Floss cried out and sprang inside the room. The opening was darkened by the form of Bull Gowan. For an instant he stood outlined against the brilliant sunlight.

Jeff leaped like a panther; the butt of his pistol cracked against the matted hair that grew low over Gowan's eyes. Another man would have fallen. Bull Gowan merely reeled away. Clifford went after him, pivoted on one foot and drove the toe of one of the heavy boots he had got from the stranger into Gowan's stomach.

BULL sat down with a grunt, but he was a long way from being knocked out, and Jeff made a mistake. He ran in too close. A hand thick as a plank gripped his ankle. He soared into the air, struck with a breath-taking thud among some loose sticks of firewood, and thought quickly that the end had come.

For he could not rise. One of those sticks had been driven against a nerve center, or the shock had paralyzed him, or something as bad had happened. For his legs and arms were water. They refused to obey his will.

Gowan came on a dog trot, with his bull-like head lowered. He swung back a heavy leg and Jeff watched that copper-tipped toe as it aimed for his face. But it did not strike. For from somewhere came the crack of a rifle and a little spurt of dust sprang up in front of Gowan. At almost the same time another rifle shot sounded and Gowan clutched his arm, swinging around unsteadily.

Jeff got up to his hands. Then he pushed himself erect and lunged for his pistol, which lay mocking him from the chip dirt. He saw Floss standing in the doorway, with a little wisp of smoke curling up from the rifle. He heard scattered shots all around him. Then somebody yelled:

"Drop that pistol!"

The man who had worn the red-and-black shirt was standing in front of Jeff, with the muzzle of a rifle only a foot away. The graceful flannels which Clifford had put on him were much the worse for wear. Out of the corner of his eye Jeff saw that half a dozen men were crowding around the Dooby woodpile.

"All right," said Jeff. The pistol fell to the ground. "Don't get excited! Don't you like your trade? And who are you, anyway!"

"I'm the sheriff of this county! John Barnaby's my name! And I'm looking for a fugitive from justice. I brought a posse up here to get you, for you act to me mighty like a fugitive."

Floss cried out. The smack of flesh on flesh came from the doorway and one of the sheriff's men

staggered back with a hand to his cheek. The girl plunged for Jeff and took a defiant stand beside him.

"Don't you dare hurt him!" she cried to the muzzle of the sheriff's gun. "He's going to take me away from this awful place. And, besides—he's—he's a gentleman!"

A roar of laughter went up from the posse. Jeff, very careful to keep his hand still, looked into the sheriff's eyes and spoke.

"I forced a trade on you because if I'd come here in the clothes you've got on I'd have been taken for a detective. I haven't had ten minutes to spare between New York and here. If you'll look in the breast pocket of my coat you'll find that I'm a Federal man—Department of Justice. I have a warrant for one Dooby, known here as Stub. He's wanted on a counterfeiting charge. You'll get a circular in a few days."

"All right." The sheriff grinned, after he had cautiously verified what Clifford said. "Do you want your money back?"

"A trade's a trade! I'm satisfied!"

Jeff walked over to Bull Gowan, held by two of the sheriff's deputies.

"Bull," said Clifford, "do you want to finish what we started? If you do I'll agree to come back when that arm of yours is all right again."

The big, animal eyes did not change expression. But Gowan waited a moment before he spoke.

"You keep off my pastures and I'll keep off yours!" he rumbled.

"Then that's settled!" Jeff turned to Sheriff Barnaby. "Let's go inside. Clear everybody out except

my two prisoners and then come in with Miss Floss—I don't know her last name."

Clifford stood in front of Maw and looked down into the bloodshot eyes that glared balefully up at him.

"So Stub is buried, is he?"

"Buried where you can't get at him, you damned gumshoe!"

Jeff's hand flashed out and his fingers wound themselves into Maw's long, stringy hair. He lifted. The hair came up and revealed a close-cropped, pepper-and-salt scalp. And suddenly that lined and wrinkled face became the face of a man.

"You must have had to shave and put on your make-up three times a day, Stub," said Jeff. "It was Maw you buried, wasn't it?"

Dooby, panting, heaved against the tape on his wrists. Then he evidently realized the folly of anything but resignation—for the present, at least.

"The old woman died the night I got here," he said. "I knowed the Feds were after me. I figgered I had the best hide-out in the world in Maw's clothes. How—how did you know?"

"You made three mistakes, Stub!" Jeff told him. "Once you started to put your hand into a trouser pocket and there wasn't one there. Once you tried to hitch up your belt. But I was certain before I saw those things. You wouldn't take any price for Floss! Another woman would have sold her, glad to have her out of the way. But not a man. There isn't a man in the world who'd take a hundred million for a girl like her!"

# The Man Smiled

*Another case in which "Crusher" O'Shea becomes deeply and hopelessly involved.*

by Hal Murray Bonnett

**T**HE EYES of Roberta Stanley appeared deep and pleading as she looked at "Crusher" O'Shea.

Crusher slouched back in the only chair in the girl's dressing room and returned her gaze from under lowered lids. His face was in the shadow of a cloth screen, so the girl could not see the faintly amused expression that was there.

"You see how it is," Roberta Stanley said. "Here I am, a decent, respectable girl, and now—" A tear glistened in one of her eyes, trickled down through the heavy mascara, at last came to a standstill on a rouged cheek. "And now this!" she finished. "You—you've just got to do something to help me."

Crusher O'Shea shifted his big body slightly, began picking at his teeth with a match. The amused expression was still on his face.

"Not," he said to the girl, "that I want to be too personal, but how could any picture of you bring your spotlessly pure career any closer to scandal than could the dance you do out there every night in the floor show?"

Roberta Stanley dabbed at the tear on her cheek with a bit of a handkerchief. Her tone was hurt.

"My dancing is art."

Crusher grinned. "I don't doubt it," he said.

"With this picture which you must get, it's different," Roberta Stanley went on. "After I finished my act last night, before I had a chance to dress, a man followed me to my dressing room here. He stopped me just outside the door and attempted to start a conversation. Right then, while I stood there beside him, practically without clothing, another man stepped around the corner of the corridor and took a picture of us."

"What happened then?"

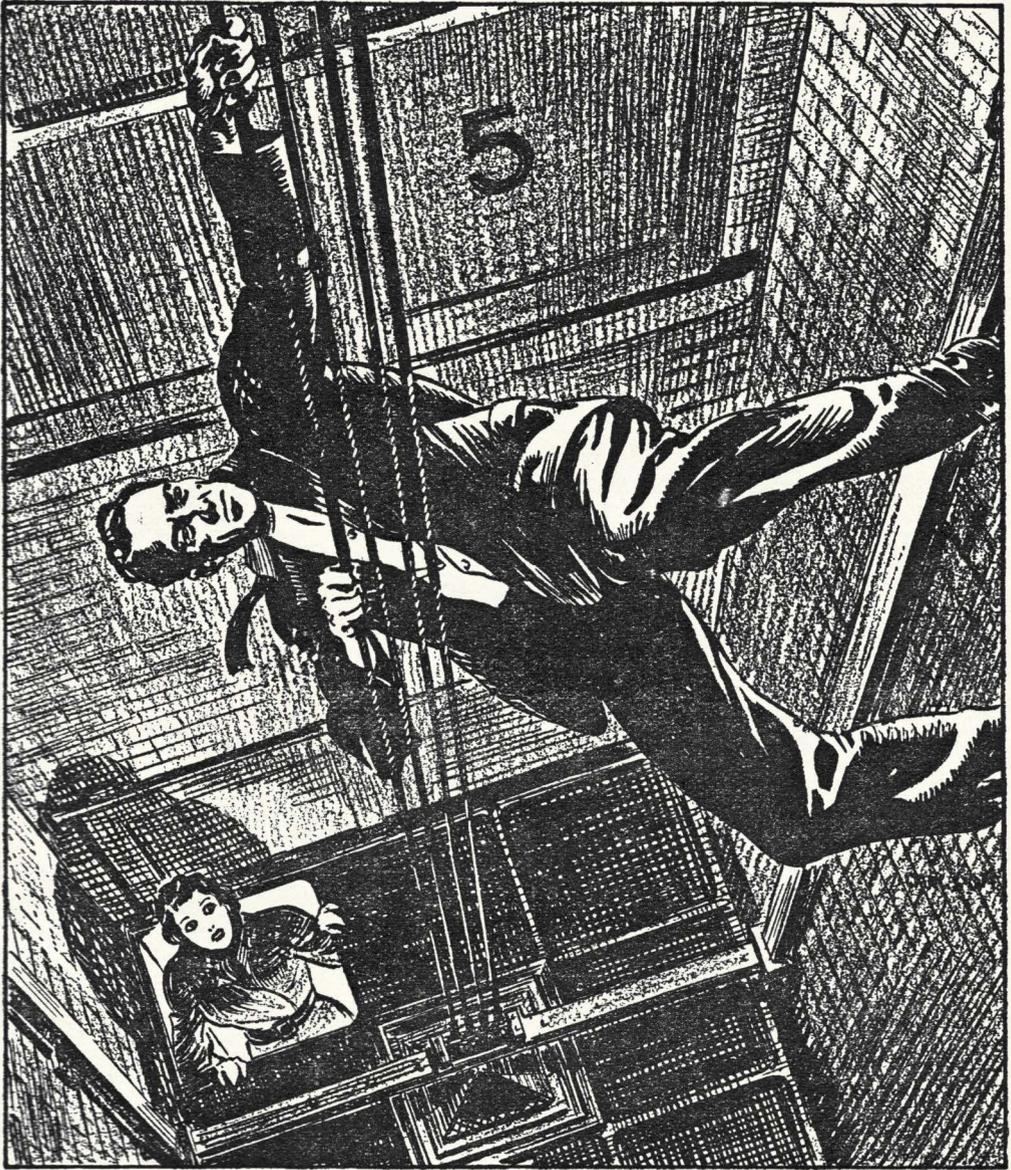
"The man who had stopped me ran after the man who had taken the picture. He chased him out the side exit. That's the last I saw of him."

"And this morning," Crusher asked, "you were sent a copy of the picture?"

"Yes. It was sent here to the club, addressed to me."

"And who was the man in the picture with you?"

Roberta Stanley took a deep breath. She rose from her chair in front of the dressing table and walked swiftly across the room, ap-



*"I'll try and get to the top," Crusher told the girl, softly. "If I can reach the switch——"*

parently unmindful of the fact that she was in costume.

She took a small photograph from a chest of drawers, took it to Crusher O'Shea, extended it.

"The man," she said, "was Robert Gruport, a wealthy merchant from St. Louis. He was found dead in his furnished apartment early this

morning. The police are looking for a woman who was seen with him as he entered the apartment building in the wee hours. Gruport was knifed. The police say this woman did it."

Crusher raised his brows, moved his head a little out of the shadow. The amused expression had de-

parted from his face, to be replaced by an expression of intent seriousness.

"You," he asked, "are that woman?"

"No. But if the police get hold of a copy of that picture, they'll connect me with it—with the murder. And I haven't any alibi for last night after I left here. I went to my room and straight to bed, but I can't prove it."

"What makes you think the police will get a copy of this picture?"

"Because," Roberta Stanley said, "there was a note with the picture, and it said the picture would be sent to headquarters, unless I came personally and got the negative. That's what the note said. I've thrown it away already."

"Why don't you go after it then?" Crusher wanted to know.

"I'm afraid to go where it tells me to."

"Where's that?"

"A warehouse down on the water front. A place called the Warner Storage Co. I'm supposed to go in through an alley door which will be open, then take the stairs to the top floor—the fifth. A man is to be there with the negative of this picture and whatever prints there are."

Crusher handed back the photograph.

"Why," he asked, "would anybody want you to come there?"

"I—I don't know. That's why I'm afraid to go."

Crusher stood up, looked at his watch. "What time are you on?"

"The last floor show has already started," Roberta Stanley said. "My

specialty will be at about a quarter to one."

Crusher nodded. "It's twenty-five to, now. I'll go out and take a table. After your dance, I'll meet you here and see that you get home O. K. After I'm sure you're safe, I'll go after the picture myself."

The girl extended her hand. "You're all right, Crusher. And thanks. I'll be dressed and ready to go by five to one. My dance only lasts three minutes."

CRUSHER left Roberta Stanley's dressing room and went down the corridor toward a short flight of steps which led up to the main floor of the Black Raven supper club. He walked with the effortless grace that can come only to a man who has powerful muscles trained to the highest point of efficiency.

Crusher O'Shea was trained to this perfection. He had been a wrestler in the old days when wrestling matches had not been merely wrestling exhibitions. He had been in the game when the best man won on the sole merits of being the best man. Crusher had ascended to a championship, and then, because he hadn't liked the trend the game was beginning to take, had retired from it. As a private detective, he hadn't made so much money as he had at wrestling, but in the detective business, there were no powers that be to say if a case was to be won or lost.

Because Crusher had been schooled in the ranks of professional wrestlers, he had brought to the detective profession methods of getting results which were effective, to say the least. They were methods

which left little doubt as to their origin.

The orchestra was playing softly from behind a screen of artificial palms. To its accompaniment, a girl and an effeminate-looking man were going through the motions of an Apache dance. A brilliant spot followed their movements, and the rest of the dance floor was practically in darkness.

Crusher threaded his way carefully between the crowded tables toward a more or less secluded corner. As he pulled out a chair to sit down at the one vacant table in evidence, a hand touched his arm. A man's voice said: "Hello, Crusher."

Crusher O'Shea turned his head swiftly, stepped to the side so that the hand fell away from his arm. In the dim light, the man who stood beside him showed vaguely like a gigantic kewpie doll. He was short, thickset and bald-headed. His face was round and cherubic, and it was only his deep-set, narrow eyes that kept him from appearing artless and innocent.

"Hello, Tiesto," Crusher said evenly. "Nice crowd you've got."

Sam Tiesto smiled. He lighted a cigarette, nodded over the flame of his automatic lighter. "Thanks." He took his cigarette from his mouth, gazed critically at the end of it. "Back in the dressing rooms, weren't you, Crusher?"

"For a few minutes."

"Somebody in particular you wanted to see?"

"Yes," Crusher said. "A friend."

"Any special friend?"

Crusher O'Shea took a deep breath. "I went back there," he said impatiently, "to see Roberta Stan-

ley. What difference does it make?"

The owner of the Black Raven shrugged his heavy shoulders. "None, Crusher, except we've got a rule that doesn't permit visitors in the dressing rooms while a show's going on. It'd be better if you observed the rule after this. Sorry, but if I'd start making exceptions, it'd have to be kept up. No hard feelings. Have a good time."

Tiesto moved on through the maze of tables, nodding here and there to a friend.

Crusher sat down and gave an order automatically to a waiter who had appeared on soundless feet. His eyes still followed Sam Tiesto. There was a frown on his big, square-featured face,

Tiesto had reached the other side of the room. Beside the orchestra platform was a small door, leading, Crusher knew, to another, more exclusive part of the club on the second floor—the gambling room. As Crusher watched, Tiesto disappeared through this door.

The orchestra blared louder, went into another piece. The Apache dancers were replaced by a group of chorus girls. The lights came on brighter.

A moment later, Sam Tiesto returned from upstairs. At his heels were two other men, both dressed faultlessly in evening attire. On occasion, Crusher O'Shea had frequented the upper room of the Black Raven, so the faces of the two men with Tiesto were not unfamiliar. The larger one, tall, solidly built, good-looking, was Eddie Croyden. The other, Crusher knew only by the name of Burt. He was

slightly smaller than Croyden, and his face was marred by a thin scar running from his right ear almost to his chin. About both men there was an unmistakable stamp of hardness. They were two of Sam Tiesto's trouble shooters—their business was to keep things under control in the gambling room.

The three men went from the room by way of another door. Crusher, still frowning slightly, settled back in his chair, took a drink of the beer that had been put on the table, and turned his attention to the floor show.

The chorus left, a blues singer appeared. While she was singing, perched atop a grand piano which had been pushed out to the middle of the floor, Crusher's eyes strayed again to the door beside the orchestra platform. The door had opened. A woman came out. She was an attractive woman, from that distance, refined-looking. Her dress was gray, well-fitted.

For an instant, she seemed to look across the room directly at Crusher O'Shea. Then she turned, walked swiftly along the edge of the dance floor and went out through the door leading to the dressing rooms.

Crusher raised a finger to a waiter. "Do you," he asked, "know the blonde who just came from upstairs? She was dressed in gray."

The waiter nodded. "I believe I know who you mean, sir. Her name is Miss Wagnor. Caroline Wagnor. She is working here as a sort of hostess."

Crusher raised his brows. "How long has she been here?"

"About two weeks, sir. I believe she came from Chicago."

Crusher glanced at his watch. It was five minutes to one. The blues singer finished. All of the lights came on bright, and the orchestra went into a dance tune. Couples got up from their tables, started to dance. The floor show was over—and Roberta Stanley's number had not been included!

Crusher O'Shea swore, jerked out of his chair and moved across the dance floor swiftly. He evaded the closely crowded couples expertly, without breaking the rhythm of his flowing stride. He swept open the door leading to the dressing rooms, ran down the steps and along the corridor. A girl stepped from one of the rooms, gave a short, startled cry as they almost collided. She darted back into the room.

"Sorry," Crusher said, without knowing or caring if she heard.

The door of Roberta Stanley's dressing room was closed. Crusher didn't knock. He slammed it open with one swift, hard motion.

A man was sitting on the bench in front of the dressing table. He whirled around, his hand clutching desperately beneath the lapel of his coat. He didn't have a chance.

Crusher leaped forward, hit him so hard that the impact knocked him completely off the bench. The man was Burt. His eyes glazed, became unseeing as he landed on the floor. His hand, still beneath the lapel of his coat, was unmoving. There was no one else in the rooms, Roberta Stanley was gone.

Crushed bent, fastened one hand on Burt's arm, lifted, half threw him through the doorway of a

closet. He closed the door and locked it. The man would be unconscious for several minutes, at least. By the time he recovered and succeeded in getting free, it would be too late to do any damage.

Crusher left the dressing room, ran swiftly down the corridor out an exit, into an alley. He ran toward the street. His roadster was parked less than a half block away. A moment later he shot it from the curb, sent it speeding down the almost-deserted thoroughfare.

IT WAS ten past one when Crusher turned the roadster into the street running parallel to the river. He drove two blocks, lights out. Then he turned to the curb and parked. It had been a breathless, crazy drive, full of the odor of burning rubber and the squealing of brakes at each turn or intersection. It had been a twenty-minute drive cut to thirteen minutes.

The street was dark, heavy with musty odors. Squat warehouses and storage buildings loomed eerily against the black of the sky. A few had lights burning from behind dirty windows.

The Warner Storage Co. was in the middle of the block, on the side of the street away from the river. It was five stories high, newer and larger than most of its neighbors. Crusher O'Shea went toward it, keeping close to the buildings.

Crusher was unarmed. When he had left his apartment that evening, he had been in search of entertainment. Business had been far from his mind. He had stopped at the Black Raven and had sat at a table close to the orchestra. It had been

during the early floor show that Roberta Stanley had seen him there and recognized him. A little later, one of the waiters had brought a note asking him to come to the girl's dressing room. Crusher had obliged.

Now, a few minutes ago, when he had returned to her dressing room to search for her, he had encountered the man who had obviously been planted there in anticipation of that visit. That man had had a gun. But so accustomed was Crusher to carrying his own weapon, that, for the moment, he had forgotten this time was the exception. He had reached his car before he remembered that his automatic was not in the pocket of his coat. For a brief instant he considered returning to the club for a gun. Then he decided that the time gained by not going would be more important than the weapon.

Crusher had never depended a great deal on a gun. He usually carried one, true—that much was necessary. But there was a thrill, a certain surging exultation that came from fighting with bare hands. And Crusher O'Shea was a master of that art.

An alley separated the storage building from the one beside it. Parked in the alley, outlined plainly against the light coming from the next street, was a large sedan. Empty.

Crusher reached it in a half dozen swift steps. He put a hand to the radiator, found it warm. The car was parked beside a loading platform. At the rear of the platform, doors opened into the building. A

dim light burned beyond the glass panels.

Crusher jumped lightly to the platform, stepped to the doors and tried them. They swung open noiselessly at his touch, and he was inside the building. Small bulbs cast faint light at several different points of the big room. Toward the front were entrances into various offices. Along the far wall were two elevator shafts. The steel safety door of one showed it to be the shaft of a small, passenger lift. The other shaft was larger, holding a ponderous, slow-moving elevator for freight use.

The freight elevator stood at the first floor level. The passenger lift was somewhere in the upper part of the building. Crusher moved across the room till he was close enough to read the indicator. It pointed to five, the top floor.

Beside the elevators were the stairs. Crusher swung to them, went up three steps at a time without a sound. His big shoulders were hunched slightly forward. His lips were parted in a smile. Crusher O'Shea had always smiled in the ring. It was a smile that had become famous with the followers of wrestling, for they had known and accepted it for what it was—an unconscious smile over which he had no control. A smile of sheer joy in battle.

Crusher was between the third and fourth floors when the sound reached his ears. It was a cry—a girl's cry that gurgled and choked off before it was fully uttered.

A man of action, never a person to deliberate on chances, Crusher increased his speed up the steps. He

was unarmed, and somewhere above him, only a floor away now, were at least several men who would have guns. They would shoot instantly and to kill. Crusher knew these things, but they passed fleetingly through his mind as he bounded up that last flight of steps. Still he went on—for he knew also that with those men there was a girl who had asked him, depended on him for protection and help.

Crusher reached the floor level with a last, swift burst of speed. Nor did he stop there. He kept on going—straight at the group of four men and the girl who were bunched close to a window at the top of the stairs. One of the men, Eddie Croyden, was working with the window, attempting to get it open. The noise he was making doing it drowned out the sound of Crusher O'Shea's swift charge.

They were all watching Croyden. Tiesto and a smaller man were holding Roberta Stanley between them, and Tiesto had one hand clamped over the girl's mouth. The fourth man, a tall, thin fellow, was standing beyond Tiesto. Apparently accepting it as a fact that they were safe from interruption, not one of them was holding a gun ready in his hand.

AS A WRESTLER, Crusher O'Shea had learned to make decisions in a split fraction of a second. His ability to do this had been a large factor toward his success in the ring. Now, as he charged forward, he knew what he had to do.

The passenger elevator was standing level with the floor, only a few feet away. If he could fight off

the men long enough for the girl to get into the elevator, she could escape. The steel safety door which was at each landing, could be operated only from inside the cage. Once the girl got inside, she could close that door, and no one could follow. She could shoot the car down to the ground level and escape long before anybody could make the same distance on the stairs.

Crusher's speeding body smashed into the little man who was helping to hold Roberta Stanley. The little man crashed against Eddie Croyden. Crusher brought up short, whirled and hit Tiesto with a fist that was like iron. Tiesto went down, his fat hands pawing the air.

It was the stunned surprise that swept the men which made Crusher O'Shea's plan possible of success. With a sweeping motion of one arm, Crusher grabbed Roberta Stanley and literally threw her into the elevator car. Then one of the men screamed a curse. So swift had been the action, it was the first sound any of them had uttered.

As Crusher leaped after the girl, he had a fleeting glimpse of the thin man tugging desperately at his pocket. The gun was coming free, when Crusher's hand found the controls, and he sent the steel door slamming shut with a sharp, metallic clang.

A light burned in the top of the cage, and by its rays, Crusher saw Roberta Stanley leaning against the side weakly, her face pale and drawn. The relief in her voice was almost pathetic.

"Oh, Lord, Crusher—but I'm glad you got here! They were going to throw me out of that window. They

wanted——" The girl's voice trailed off as Crusher located the proper lever and started the elevator down. It went swiftly for an instant, slowed, came to a stop.

Frantically, Crusher worked the control several times back and forth. Then he swore. When he turned to the girl, his face was white, set in hard lines.

"They've managed to pull a switch somewhere. The power's gone."

"What—what can we do?"

"We're stalled at the fourth floor," Crusher told her. "But they can't get the door open from the outside, and they can't shoot through it. We're safe enough for the moment, but they'll get something and batter the door down. After that——" Crusher shrugged his shoulders. "We're trapped. The minute they get a hole through that door, one of them will shoot me. I don't know what they'll do to you."

"They—they'll throw me out that window, so it will look like I jumped out—committed suicide. That's why they brought me here."

Faintly there came the sound of feet pounding on stairs. There was a murmur of voices outside the elevator.

Crusher's eyes darted desperately around the inclosure. Then his eyes narrowed. Little ridges of muscle stood out along his jaw. He was looking at the top of the elevator.

The top was of six metal panels, held in place by rivets.

Roberta Stanley's gaze followed Crusher's, and she must have defined his thoughts. She said, her voice hushed: "You—you couldn't do

that! Nobody could do that without tools!"

Crusher seemed not to have heard her. He spoke in a whisper: "Keep talking. Try to cover up the sounds I make. Scream—cry—do anything."

The sound of voices outside the elevator had ceased. Then, suddenly, Sam Tiesto said: "Open the door, O'Shea. If you do, we'll let you go. If you don't, we'll break it down—and we won't let you go. Take your choice. We've got an ax and a crowbar here, and we can get this door down in less than fifteen minutes if we have to. Take your choice."

"You can," Crusher O'Shea said, "go to hell. I know as well as you do that you don't dare let me go now. And even if you did intend to keep your word, you could still go to hell."

An operator's stool was in the corner of the elevator by the controls. Crusher drew it out a little from the wall and stood on it. "Why," he asked loudly, "did they bring you here?"

Roberta Stanley, taking his prompting, raised the tone of her own voice slightly. "I—I think I know why now. They were talking to each other in the machine while they brought me here. He——"

Crusher looked down at the girl. Her eyes were wide. She was staring at the edge of a crowbar which had been slipped beneath the door. Crusher gestured for her to go on. Then he reached up and placed his hands against one of the panels of the top of the cage. His back was slightly bent, his legs were braced.

Suddenly his body began to quiver from the strain.

"Eddie Croyden's girl, Caroline Wagnor, came here from Chicago several weeks ago," Roberta Stanley continued. "Tiesto put her to work at the club. Robert Gruport, a rich bachelor from St. Louis, was at the club one night and fell hard for Caroline Wagnor. He didn't know she was one of the employees. It got to a point where he wanted her to marry him.

"Tiesto had been ordering her to play Gruport along, and Tiesto talked Eddie Croyden into letting her marry Gruport. Then she could shake him down for several hundred thousand and give a big cut of it to Tiesto and Croyden.

"It went along all right for a while. Then Croyden changed his mind and wouldn't go through with it. He wanted to call the thing off, but Tiesto and the girl didn't. Last night Croyden went to Gruport's apartment, found Caroline Wagnor there, and he killed Gruport. Nobody had seen Croyden arrive, but the girl had been seen, so it was a girl who would be blamed for the murder.

"Since Gruport wasn't known particularly here, nobody would have paid much attention to any woman with him, so almost any girl could have the murder pinned on her. They were going to bring me here where nobody would see them and make it appear as though I committed suicide. Then the police would be told that I had had an affair with Gruport and had probably been the one who killed him. Then, in remorse, had killed myself.

"The police wouldn't look further,

and without their probing the matter, it wouldn't be uncovered that it had really been Caroline Wagnor who had been with Gruport. Tiesto came——”

THE VEINS were standing out on Crusher O'Shea's forehead in irregular, blue ridges. His clothing seemed too small, appeared ready to burst from the terrific surging of bunched muscles beneath. There was a harsh, rasping sound as the panel came loose. Crusher had tried to time that final upward heave with one of the heavy blows which were now being rained on the door. He had partially succeeded, but he whispered to the girl desperately:

“Keep on talking—loud enough for them to hear you. Make them think we've given up and are waiting for whatever's going to happen.” Aloud, he said: “Why was that picture taken?”

As the girl went on, Crusher began twisting at the loosened panel. Roberta Stanley said:

“Tiesto thought he saw a chance for blackmail. He tricked Gruport into being with me last night, and a man took our picture. He was going to threaten to show the picture to Gruport's fiancée, unless Gruport paid some cash for the picture. Before there was a chance to use it, Croyden killed Gruport. He confessed to Tiesto what he'd done, and Tiesto decided to make the best of things and try to save Croyden and Caroline Wagnor.

“I was the goat. They tried to trick me into coming here, then when they found I'd talked to you, they knew why, so they came to my dressing room, made me put on my

clothes and brought me here. They left a man in my dressing room to capture you when you came to look for me. They intended to get rid of you later.

“The little man out there who helped hold me is the watchman here. Tiesto hired him—bribed him. When my body was found, he wasn't to have seen me, but he'd remember he'd left a door unlocked, and I could've got in while he was making his rounds.

“As for why I picked this out-of-the-way building for my suicide, the police would probably decide I had been walking—walking aimlessly, trying to think what to do, then, on the spur of the moment, decided to kill myself. I was in this neighborhood, close to this building, and I simply entered, came to the top floor and jumped. I think that——”

With a final rasping sound, the panel came completely loose. Crusher turned it sideways and pulled it through the opening. The sweat was running down his face in great streams.

Roberta Stanley whispered: “You—you did it!” Mechanically, she reached up, helped to lower the sheet of metal noiselessly to the floor.

Crusher looked upward through the opening. The light from inside the cage reflected dimly from the cable stretching to the top of the shaft. A story and a half, up through what was almost darkness, the cable ended in the wheels and gears of the lifting apparatus.

Suddenly an extra hard blow struck the door. The entire cage quivered with the strain. The four men outside were speaking only oc-

asionally now. Sometimes a brief word of instruction. Sometimes a curse.

The steel door was beginning to weaken. The lower corner was bent out and upward almost an inch now, and the crowbar was being given more leverage at each attempt to pry with it. Whoever was using the ax was working on the upper part of the door. With each blow it seemed as though the thin metal must give away.

"I'll try and get to the top," Crusher told the girl softly. "If I can reach the switch and get some power into this thing again, you send it down and make your escape. I'll try and hold them off long enough for you to reach my car, half a block down the street. The ignition key's in it."

"You—you mean leave you here?"

"Don't worry about me," Crusher said.

He pulled himself through the opening, stood on what was left of the roof, and seized the cable. He realized with a breath of thanks that the shaft was narrow enough to allow him to swing out and get his feet on the sides, and, in effect, walk up the wall, for attempting to go hand over hand up the greasy cable would be impossible.

At times his progress was reasonably swift. At other times, there would be a portion of the cable oilier than the rest, making it slippery and treacherous. Knifelike particles cut through the skin of his hands until they were raw and bleeding. His muscles quivered with the strain. Sweat drenched Crusher's body, and the blood throbbed in his temples. It seemed

that the journey would never end.

Then, at last, he reached up and fastened his grip around the spoke of a huge gear wheel. He let go of the cable and fastened both hands on the spoke. After an instant, he was able to swing his body to the safety of the floor of the little loft which housed the mechanism of the elevators.

For a moment he lay full length on the floor, breathing hard, recovering his strength. From below there came dully the sound of the attack on the elevator door.

Here in the loft, Crusher was in darkness but for wan moonlight shining through a small, dirty window. He got to his feet, and by this faint light, found a small stairs leading down.

At the bottom of the steps he opened a door, stepped out on the top floor of the building. He was close beside the elevator shafts. To his left was the window from which the four men had attempted to throw Roberta Stanley. In front of him, a few feet away, were the stairs. This floor seemed to be used only for storage purposes. Large boxes, labeled crates were in stacks everywhere. The light was dim, coming from two small bulbs, one at the head of the stairs, the other farther back in the room.

The switch controlling the power of the elevator was in plain view in a box beside the shaft. Crusher shoved the switch into place. Then he whirled to the stairs, started down.

A SHOUT went up from below. From above him there came the metallic clang of an elevator door.

Puzzled, Crusher halted in mid-stride, only half-way down the stairs.

"Crusher! Here!" Roberta Stanley's voice came frantically.

Crusher O'Shea swore, whirled around and darted back up the steps. Mentally he damned the girl for being fool enough to send the car up for him, rather than escape by herself while she had the chance.

As Crusher reached the top step, feet pounded on the stairs behind him. There was another shout, then the roar of a gun. That shot was wild, and Crusher had twisted to the side, was out of sight of the men coming up the stairs before another shot could be fired.

Roberta Stanley was standing in the elevator, making frantic motions for him to hurry.

Crusher shook his head, whirled and stood poised at the top of the steps, hidden from the men coming up by a stack of wooden boxes. There was a smile on Crusher O'Shea's face. His eyes were shining.

That he would wait there like that, was the last thing the four men expected, so they reached the top of the stairs in a body, without slackening their speed.

Eddie Croyden was perhaps a foot in the lead. It was he who received the full-arm punch, with the weight of Crusher O'Shea behind it. The blow seemed to break him like a brittle stick. He screamed, pitched backward into the others, sweeping them with him in a confused tangle of arms and legs.

A gun exploded from some-

where in that mass of humanity. There was a scream. It sounded like Tiesto's voice.

Crusher turned, ran for the elevator. Roberta Stanley's hand was on the control lever. She sent the cage hurtling downward.

Her eyes were wide. "Why—why did you stop to do that?"

"If I hadn't," Crusher told her, "one of them would have managed to get to the switch again before we got down."

The elevator came to a cushioned stop. Crusher slammed open the door, took Roberta Stanley by the hand and led her at a run across the room to the door. A moment later they had reached Crusher's roadster.

The car shot away from the curb, moved swiftly down the street.

"Where are—where are we going now?" Roberta Stanley sat close beside Crusher, one hand rested on his arm.

Crusher reached for the girl's hand, gripped it for an instant. "Thanks," he said, "for bringing the elevator up for me—even if it was a damn fool trick. We're going to police headquarters now and tell our story. Tiesto, Croyden and the others will be picked up within an hour. As for you, I suppose you're out of a job now, but I've got a friend who runs a club farther uptown. I'll talk to him about you."

Roberta Stanley leaned forward suddenly. Her lips were moist, soft as she kissed Crusher. "My regards," she said softly, "to the only man I ever saw who smiled when he didn't know but what the next instant was going to be his last."

# The Clue of the RAGGED SHIRT

by Arden X. Pangborn

**T**HE PROFESSOR squinted through the gathering dusk at the somber pile of gray-ing stones and a gleam of excitement showed in his blue-gray eyes as he turned to his companion.

"More than a hundred men and women were massacred there," he said.

The pile rose on a small hillside. A roadway had once led directly to two great swinging doors of logs, but the doors had long since fallen, so that the courtyard behind was open to the outer world. The road had degenerated to a rooted pathway, overgrown with weeds and brush. The place was gloomy, silent and foreboding. But Professor Alexander Mead, dean of the School of History & Sciences at West Coast College, did not sense the dismal and depressing atmosphere.

"There's history in the raw," he exclaimed. "There's old Wamnamook Fort itself. Doesn't it give you a real thrill, Lewis?"

"Tubby" Lewis turned and surveyed the professor with something akin to alarm. Such enthusiasm was foreign to Professor Mead, whose self-restraint was a matter of campus tradition. It was said that he had not even lifted his voice when he had been drafted into command

of the bucket brigade the night the girls' dorm had burned down.

The professor, however, seemed normal, so Tubby Lewis sank to a rock and mopped his forehead.

"No," he said, "it doesn't give me a thrill. All it gives me is short breath and a wilted collar. I'd rather explore the inside of a long Tom Collins than an old Indian fort any day."

"My, my," muttered the professor, clucking his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "I'm afraid you haven't an intellectual soul, Lewis." He paused, peering ahead. "Shall we proceed?"

Lewis stowed his handkerchief back in his pocket with a sigh. "We shall proceed," he agreed.

The professor led the way. "You are missing a great deal, Lewis," he said. "The legendry of Fort Wamnamook is absorbing to no end." His pale eyes were bright behind the horn-rimmed glasses which perched inquisitively atop his high, thin nose. "Ghosts, gold——"

He halted abruptly, his breath catching in his throat. Tubby Lewis, struggling up the trail behind him, shivered involuntarily.

"What—what was that?" he gasped.

From somewhere ahead of them, a sound had risen with startling



*Opposite them, chained  
against the wall as in  
some medieval prison,  
was a man!*

suddenness. It was like no sound either had ever heard before—a long, wailing cry, hardly human, hardly animal; a cry that rose to a shriek of vibrant horror, then faded to a series of weird, inhuman moans.

Professor Mead was first to re-

cover. "A small beast, no doubt," he said, his voice still a bit shaky. "I have heard their cries are sometimes most fearsome." He hesitated.

"Still, I should feel at greater ease with a cudgel." He looked about.

But Tubby Lewis had already taken the cue. He had found a knife in one of his baggy pockets and was moving toward a clump of saplings in the thick underbrush at the side of the path.

The professor, watching as he waited, saw his assistant half stumble over something in the grass, saw him stoop, then recoil in horror.

"Good—good night!" Lewis gasped, his round face sickly white. "A dead man!"

The professor strode forward, stood staring at the object half concealed in the heavy undergrowth. He nodded. "You have grasped the situation with commendable perspicacity," he admitted.

"We've got to get the police."

The professor looked startled. "The police! I say now, we didn't come here to get involved with the police."

"But—but the man's dead!"

"Exactly. The man's dead. So it can't make the slightest difference to him whether we call the police or go ahead with our plans to inspect the fort."

Tubby Lewis had turned his face away from his gruesome discovery. "There's a law about such things," he protested.

"Besides," the professor went on, ignoring the other's remark, "it must be miles to the nearest telephone and it would be night before we could get back. He paused and considered the body again. "I should judge from the state of the cadaver that the man has been here for at least a week, in which case an hour more or less won't matter.

A most unfortunate occurrence, I admit, but hardly our fault, is it?"

LONG SHADOWS were creeping across the courtyard and the western sun had flung the tumbling mass of masonry into sharp relief as the two pushed through the fallen doors of the old fort. Tubby Lewis still looked a little sick from his recent experience, but the professor, in his rapture over the ancient structure, seemed to have forgotten entirely the body which lay in the tall grass.

"Marvelous, marvelous," he muttered as he surveyed the buttresses where a sturdy band of pioneers had fought a desperate, futile battle for their lives with the Indians. "An education in itself, Lewis! An education——"

The words died in a gulp. From somewhere, almost at their elbows, that strange, horrible cry they had heard on the path had risen again—a sharp crescendo, then a long-drawn wail of awful agony and a series of bitter moans. There was something sinister in that cry, something weird and menacing.

Tubby Lewis had started back. "Let's get out of here," he pleaded.

"Nonsense," the professor exclaimed, his breath coming back. "A sudden sound reacts upon the central nervous system, but sound in itself should have no terrors for the normal mind, once the instinctive reaction has passed. I am convinced there is nothing to cause us undue alarm. Perhaps we should investigate."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd just as soon go back to town and let some one else investigate."

"Come, come," admonished the professor.

The fort proper, set back toward the rear of the high, stone blockade, was divided into two large rooms. The roof, which had been of wood, had fallen many years before, leaving only the stone walls standing, so that even in the growing dimness of the dusk the two men had no difficulty in seeing all corners of the room into which they stepped.

They found nothing. Except for remnants of the rotting roof, the room was barren. Plain, stone walls, bare, earthen floor; that was all. They crossed, passed through the crumbling arch that once had been a doorway into the other room. As they did so, an exclamation leaped from Tubby Lewis' lips. Even the professor's blue-gray eyes widened behind their horn-rimmed spectacles.

Opposite them, chained against the wall as in some medieval prison, was a man!

Or was it a man? The creature, crouching like an animal, lips drawn back in a snarl, seemed hardly human. Long hair covered his face; black, matted hair that seemed to form a grisly setting for two brilliant, gleaming eyes. His head appeared enormous, his body starved and scrawny. His arms, bare to the shoulder, were like two moving sticks equipped with two great claws for hands. For several moments he stood there unmoving, his arms extended, his head thrown forward. No word came from his weedy throat.

It was the professor who finally broke the silence. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "This is most peculiar.

I say there, my good man, what are you doing here? What is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct, anyway?"

In answer, the creature leaped forward, his chain rattling, his eyes burning with inner emotion. Abruptly from his throat rose the horrible, wailing cry they had heard before; then it subsided suddenly and the creature fell to the earth sobbing.

The professor and his assistant had fallen backward at the charge. Now the professor advanced again. "I say now," he protested, "that's no kind of an answer to a civil question."

"The man's mad," Lewis said with a shudder. "I told you we should've got out of here."

"But we can't do that," the professor protested. "The man is obviously a captive. Besides, he is seriously in want of nourishment."

"Then the best thing we can do is to get to the police as quickly as we can and let them free him. We can't do anything with that chain."

The professor let out a sigh. "Yes, I guess you are right," he admitted. "We do owe a certain debt to society, don't we?" He looked about him regretfully, then brightened perceptibly. "Besides, our inspection can continue to-morrow, can't it?"

"Yeah," breathed Tubby Lewis to himself, "over my dead body!"

## II

"A MOST PECULIAR circumstance," Professor Mead mused as his ancient automobile, with Tubby Lewis at the wheel, rattled and

rocked over the highway back toward Redvale. "A most peculiar circumstance, indeed. Now, how do you suppose the man ever became chained up in that fashion?"

"If you ask me," ventured Lewis, "we stumbled into the middle of a murder. I've got a hunch some one killed that guy in the grass and I've got another hunch the same some one is killing that old guy tied up to the wall by starving him to death."

The professor's eyes widened. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "do such things actually happen? Outside of books, I mean?"

Tubby nodded.

"Well, what else? He didn't chain himself up and go on a hunger strike."

"No, I presume you are correct. It hadn't occurred to me in that light." He was thoughtful for a moment; then a new fire came into his eyes. "By Jove, it's fiendish, that's what it is. It's uncivilized. I should like to bring the perpetrators of such a deed to justice."

"That's what the police are for."

"Yes, yes, the police. Of course." But the interest did not die from the professor's eyes. He was still muttering occasionally to himself when Tubby finally twisted the paintless wheel of the dilapidated car and drew up to a squeaking halt before the two green lights that marked the entrance of Redvale's police station.

Chief Mackie was a short, stocky man with iron-gray hair that stood out in a shock beneath the blue bill of his uniform cap, and slate-colored eyes that could grow as hard as granite chips. It took him but moments to grasp the situation, to

order a car and assistants, and to get started back toward the fort.

"But it doesn't make sense," he declared as the car whizzed along the highway. "If some one wanted to kill him, why didn't they shoot him, or hit him over the head with a rock? Why tie him up and take a chance on some one discovering him? It doesn't make sense."

"If one were to judge from the deserted appearance of the fort," the professor suggested, "I should say that to the man's captors the chance of discovery might seem rather negligible."

"Yeah, that's true. The old place doesn't draw much of a crowd any more." The chief paused for some moments, his ruddy face thoughtful and his stubby fingers playing nervously with the bowl of an odorous brier. "There are a lot of funny legends about Wannamook. There used to be a lot of people who came out looking for gold. There was supposed to have been \$60,000 hidden there somewhere just before the Indians broke in and massacred the settlers."

"A sizable sum," the professor commented.

Darkness had fallen before their arrival, but Chief Mackie had been thoughtful enough to provide extra flashlights, and the professor was one of the group which bent over the body by the trail where Tubby Lewis had gone to cut a sapling earlier in the day.

"It appears that the missile penetrated his forehead," he began as they turned the body over, but his sentence was interrupted by the chief's exclamation:

"Milt Briggs! I know this one,

all right! Humph!" He rose, snapped an order at two white-coated orderlies who had followed the police car in an ambulance.

"Then maybe there will be some clues," the professor ventured. "I've never seen a clue."

"Don't know any one who'd take the trouble to kill him," the chief grunted. "Wasn't worth it, I'd say. He was always broke, always mooching. Never knew him to work, except once in a while he picked up a couple of dollars acting as guide for tourists hereabouts. Well, let's take a look at the other one."

They found the bearded man crouched in a corner of the roofless stone room, his eyes still burning madly, his lips still drawn back over his gleaming teeth. A low growl came from his scrawny throat, but he did not move as the flashlights dispelled the darkness.

"Captive, all right," the chief muttered aloud, "and he's cracked under it. Crazy as they make 'em."

He gave more orders. His two assistants went to work on the man's heavy chain with hammer and cold chisels. The captive made no effort to interfere.

Meanwhile, the beam of the professor's flash had swung across the opposite wall and had come to rest upon a small bench near one corner.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Look here. A pan of water and a loaf of bread." He crossed rapidly and touched the bread. His finger left a depression in the loaf. "It would appear," he said, "that our hasty conclusions are in need of readjustment. What do you make of that, Lewis?"

The latter had hung back, one eye on the bearded man, the other on the door. If he heard the question, he gave no sign. The professor, however, did not seem to mind.

"One would hardly expect a murderer to feed the victim he is trying to starve to death," he mused, "even with bread and water."

"And it looks like he's been doing his washing," the chief broke in as his flashlight picked out two light, wire lines forming a loop over a pulley attached to one wall. The wires ran across the room, through a window and into the blackness of the courtyard beyond. On the line was a shirt. Once it had been white. Now it was a dirty-gray. One sleeve was gone entirely and a three-cornered tear marred the other. The collar was ragged, the one cuff half ripped off.

Professor Mead made a little clucking sound with his tongue against the roof of his mouth. It was a sound of puzzlement. He sent the beam of his flash through the window tracing the lines. They ended around another pulley in one of the courtyard walls, forming a circular clothesline like those sometimes strung across alleyways from upstairs windows. There were no other garments upon it.

"Most peculiar," he muttered. "Most peculiar indeed."

### III

"THERE'S not a thing on him to tell who he is," Chief Mackie reported later to the professor, who, much against his assistant's will, had waited at police headquarters while the bearded man's clothes

were examined. "None of the boys ever saw him before. He doesn't answer a single 'missing person' description on file, and every bit of identification has been removed from his pockets."

"It would appear from known facts," the professor suggested, "that this Briggs person, the victim of the bullet, might have been acting as the unidentified person's guide when the tragedy occurred, would it not?"

"Yeah, that might be right. He might have been working for a change. But why should any one shoot him right off and then leave the bearded gent chained up with a loaf of bread and a pan of water?"

The chief filled the bowl of his short-stemmed pipe, tamped down the tobacco with one gnarled thumb and shoved the amber between his teeth. His face wore a worried frown. "If the man could only talk—but he's hopelessly mad. The doctor says he may never pull out of it."

"If any one should ask me," volunteered Tubby Lewis, "I'd say that guy in the beard looks like a college president alongside some people I know. If we don't get out of here and get some sleep pretty quick, I'll be as batty as he is. Here it is ten o'clock and a first-class, three-dollar bed going to waste in the Hotel Western, and me dying of fatigue. Listen, I climbed up the hill to that fort twice to-day. Look at me. I can't stand it——"

The jangle of the chief's telephone cut him off. A jumble of words came over the wire and the professor, watching idly, saw a look of astonishment spread over the chief's ruddy countenance.

"Western, did you say?" the latter snapped at Lewis as he slammed the receiver back on the hook and jabbed two buttons on his desk. "Then come along. A girl's just been murdered there!"

THE NEWS apparently had not spread at the Hotel Western. There was no buzz of excitement in the lobby, no gathering of little curious groups. Only the strained voice of the night manager, who met them at the entrance, disclosed that anything unusual had occurred.

"The door was ajar," the manager explained as he escorted them to a room on the third floor. "One of the bell boys passing down the hall saw something was wrong."

It was easy enough to see what had attracted the bell boy's attention. The place was in wild disorder. Dresser drawers were pulled out; clothes were strewn about the floor; baggage was dumped in one corner. An odd, sweetish odor lingered in the air.

The professor wrinkled his high, thin nose and his eyes sparkled behind their horn-rimmed glasses.

"Chloroform," he announced as he watched the stocky chief stoop over the body of the girl on the bed. "I had a biology lab once. A most pervasive odor."

The chief rose abruptly. "Hell! This girl ain't dead," he exclaimed. "She's only drugged. Here you, Anderson, get on the phone and get an ambulance. We've got to get her to a hospital. Then get Dr. Boley and tell him she's on the way."

He turned back, lifted the girl's right eyelid, nodded to himself.

A remarkably attractive girl, the

professor thought as he watched, even though her bobbed brown hair was tousled and the rouge on her cheeks was like a splash of scarlet against the deathly paleness of her skin. She was tall and lithe and there was an air of self-assurance about her even in unconsciousness. He found himself nodding in approval as his gaze took in her shapely face, her half-bared shoulders, her neat but feminine blue gown. Then he blushed slightly and looked away. He might have noticed that she had beautiful legs, but he did not; he was aware only of a slight sense of shock.

Presently he realized that the patrolman had finished his telephone calls, that Tubby Lewis had sunk into the room's one upholstered chair, his chubby countenance a picture of resignation, and that the chief was jotting down notes in a small leather book.

For a moment, as his eyes surveyed the disorder, he wondered if there were any clues in the room. He had still to discover one. His gaze traveled from the ransacked closet to the pile of baggage in the corner. The bags were of matched cowhide and the initials "A. B." were stamped in small gold letters on each piece. Apparently they had been opened and thoroughly searched. The dresser drawers had been searched, too. Some one had wanted something rather badly.

The professor's preoccupation was shattered by a sharp pounding on the door.

"It's the reporters," the night manager announced to Chief Mackie in a tone that he might have used to announce the black plague.

"Keep 'em out," the chief barked.

But he was too late. The two young men in the hall had pushed into the room.

"C'mon now," one of them pleaded, "the boys at the station gave us a tip. We're going to press in an hour. You've got to give us something——" He broke off suddenly and a light whistle came to his lips as he saw the girl on the bed. "Boy, what a babe!" A crumpled sheaf of copy paper appeared in his left hand and he started to scribble on it with the stub of a round, yellow pencil.

"All right," the chief sighed. "Now you're in, you can stay. But the gal ain't dead. She's only doped. She'll pull through, all right."

The professor studied the two reporters. Interesting but not quite normal, he decided. He turned back to watch the activity of Chief Mackie.

"Let's get this straight now," the latter was demanding of the little night manager, whose face was almost as pale as that of the girl. "Who is she; where's she from; how long's she been here?"

"She just registered to-day. Her name's Martin—Virginia Martin. She registered from North Forks, Iowa."

The chief licked the end of a pencil. "North Forks, Iowa," he repeated. The reporters continued to scribble.

"Know what she came here for? Know anything about her?"

The night manager shook his head. "Nothing like this ever happened in the Western before," he moaned, wringing his hands. "I

never saw her before. I don't know anything about her at all."

"Any one call her? Any one ask for her at the desk?"

Again the night manager's sleek head shook in negation.

The reporters interrupted with a couple of questions, glanced at their wrist watches and decamped hurriedly in an effort to make their editions. The ambulance men came in with a stretcher. Chief Mackie gave the newcomers instructions, watched them depart, then turned again to the night manager.

"I'll have to ask you to leave this room as it is for a day or two," he said. "Just in case the girl should take a turn for the worse." He stuffed his pencil and paper into a pocket beneath his tunic, glanced around and nodded his head.

"Well," he said to the professor. "I guess that's that."

"Now," ventured Tubby Lewis from the overstuffed chair, "maybe we can go to bed?"

THE PROFESSOR'S high forehead was wrinkled in thought and his blue-gray eyes were clouded behind their horn-rimmed spectacles as he mounted with Lewis to their rooms on the floor above.

"Have you ever read one of these volumes of light fiction called detective stories?" he demanded suddenly, coming out of his brown study.

Tubby Lewis looked at him a bit suspiciously. "Sure," he admitted. "Why?"

"Most fortunate," the professor said. "Most fortunate indeed. I feel my education was unnecessarily limited in that respect. I regret it

exceedingly at the moment. I feel that I should take certain steps, but at the same time I'm at somewhat of a loss to know just how to proceed."

"If you ask me," muttered Lewis, "I should say the best thing to do would be to proceed to bed."

"No." The professor shook his head thoughtfully. "No, I'm sure a detective wouldn't do that."

"And since when have we turned detective?"

"Merely a fancy, Lewis. Merely a fancy. Surely fate intended us to take some cognizance of the peculiar circumstances which have been thrown in our way, else why should it have been us and not some one else? Yes, I am convinced that the opinion is sound." He paused, thinking again, then appeared to make up his mind. "I shall require the use of a Postal Guide first of all," he said. "Will you obtain one for me as soon as possible?"

"You mean in the morning?"

"Come, come," protested the professor, "assuredly not. I am sure the detectives you read about in those books don't wait until morning."

Tubby Lewis sighed. "All right," he agreed. "All right, I'll find you a Postal Guide if I have to tear down the building."

The professor smiled. "A most commendable spirit," he approved. "Most commendable indeed."

Satisfaction beamed on the professor's thin face twenty minutes later as he pointed with one lean finger to a page of the Postal Guide.

"Just as I concluded," he told his yawning assistant. "There is no

such municipality as North Forks, Iowa."

Tubby Lewis seemed unimpressed. "What of it?" he wanted to know. "Right now it wouldn't bother me a bit to find out there wasn't even any State of Iowa."

"Hmm. I'm afraid you are lacking in the proper mental alertness, Lewis. Yes, I really am. Do you realize that this is a momentous discovery? It convinces me beyond doubt that we shall have to resort to burglary."

"We'll what?"

"We shall have to resort to burglary. I was very dubious about the name Virginia Martin when the initials on her luggage were 'A. B.' Now the incontrovertible fact that she was registered from a village which does not exist would tend to prove conclusively that the name Virginia Martin is a *nom de plume*."

"But what difference does it make what her name is? Even if it turned out to be John Smith——" Lewis flung up his hands.

For a second the professor looked at him sadly. "Coming upon the startling discoveries of the afternoon," he explained, as he would to some particularly dull student, "I cannot help but be inclined to the belief that there is some affinity between these mysterious events."

"So you are going to turn burglar?"

"Quite right. Quite right, indeed."

TURNING BURGLAR was considerably easier than the professor had anticipated. By chance, the room in which the girl had been chloroformed was at the end of a

hallway. The fire escape, upon which the hall window opened, extended beyond the girl's window. The latter was unlocked and it was no task at all to open it and slip across the sill.

The professor rifled rapidly through the ransacked drawers at first. Then, that effort apparently futile, he turned his attention to the contents of the luggage. It was nearly a quarter of an hour later that he rose, a smile of satisfaction tugging at the corners of his thin lips.

"By Jove," he exclaimed to himself, "most interesting. Hmm——"

Tubby Lewis was asleep in a chair when the professor returned to his room. His mouth was open and his cherubic countenance a picture of repose. The professor hesitated a second, then shook him by the shoulder.

"Come, come," he said. "It's time to retire."

Tubby Lewis came out of his doze, blinking his eyes.

"You might be interested to know," the professor went on, "that my conclusions were correct. The girl's name is Addie Benford and she lives in Chicago."

Lewis yawned. "And now that you know that," he said, "what of it?"

"In the morning," said the professor, his blue-gray eyes sparkling, "I shall confront her with the information."

The professor, however, was not destined to carry out his plan. When he appeared at the office of Chief Mackie early in the morning, his still-yawning assistant in his

wake, he found police headquarters in a turmoil.

"The chief's gone out to the fort," the captain in charge told him, recognizing him as the chief's visitor of the night before, "and hell popped loose around here. The girl's disappeared!"

The professor was taken aback. Even Tubby Lewis stopped yawning long enough to show interest.

"Right out of the hospital," the captain went on. "Nobody knows where she went. She hasn't been back to the hotel, and nobody's seen her."

"By Jove," the professor managed to exclaim, "a most startling circumstance, I must say."

The captain shot a quick glance at the professor, then, convinced the latter was serious, shook his head gloomily. "There wasn't anything to stop her from walking out," he admitted. "She was in a room in the right wing and there's a side entrance right across the hall. No one ever thought she'd recover enough to get away, even if she wanted to."

"Maybe some one helped her get away," the professor suggested, "by force."

The captain nodded and his gloom seemed to deepen.

"That leaves me only one course," the professor decided. He turned to Lewis. "Come. I shall have to send a telegram."

The answer came sooner than the professor expected. It was not yet noon when he broke into the room of his assistant, his right hand clutching a sheet of yellow paper and his eyes beaming behind their glasses.

"We've got something here," he announced. "Listen:

**"NAME OF INDIAN LEGEND  
AUTHORITY ERIC BENFORD  
STOP FATHER OF ADDIE BEN-  
FORD STOP HAS BEEN IN  
WEST SEVERAL WEEKS STOP  
DESTINATION SHROUDED IN  
MYSTERY"**

Tubby Lewis roused himself from his chair. "All this excitement is going to give you high blood pressure," he said. "What does it mean?"

"It means the man who was held captive in the fort is the father of the girl who was chloroformed in this hotel last night. It means that this man, an authority on Indian legends, has been in this territory for some weeks and that his daughter, probably becoming alarmed at his failure to communicate with her, and knowing the nature of his mysterious mission, set out to investigate."

"All of which makes it very clear who killed Briggs and who chained up the old man and what happened to Addie Benford, I suppose."

The professor sighed. "I am disappointed, Lewis," he said. "After all these years of our pleasant association, I am reluctantly forced to conclude that you lack a scholarly mind." He sighed again. "Well, I have no doubt that Chief Mackie will be more receptive. We shall see him at once."

At headquarters, however, the captain in charge informed them that the chief had not returned from the fort. The city had been scoured for some trace of Addie Benford, whom they still knew as Virginia

Martin, but she had vanished utterly.

The professor looked thoughtful for some moments, running one slender finger along the ridge of his high, thin nose as he considered the captain's information. Then he nodded abruptly. "We shall bring the mountain to Mohamet," he decided.

Tubby Lewis groaned audibly. "Do I have to climb that hill again?" he demanded.

"If the chief won't come back, we'll have to go to him."

#### IV

THE PROFESSOR saw him first.

He lay in the courtyard, one leg crumpled beneath him, his arms flung out grotesquely. His square face, ruddy the night before, was the ghastly color of unclean wax and his open eyes stared unblinkingly into the noon sun. Across his tunic, a great brown splotch had spread and dried. There was blood, too, in the dust beside the body, and footprints. There had been a struggle; signs were everywhere.

The professor could not repress a shudder as he looked upon the body. Briggs, the dead man in the grass, he had not known; nor had he known Benford. He had been able to think of them as objects, rather than as individuals. But Chief Mackie he had ridden with, had talked to, had seen as a breathing, moving, energetic human. It was different, disturbingly so.

For nearly a minute he stood motionless, his lean body tense. Then his long jaw took on an unaccustomed firmness.

"After all," he said, turning toward Lewis, who had lingered near the big gate, his round face sickly white, "after all, the human element can't be allowed to enter into a problem of this sort, can it? Not if we are to apprehend the criminals." He nodded decisively, crossed the courtyard and stooped over the body.

The captain had been shot more than once, he saw. The blue tunic over his heart was ripped and torn. Other than that, there was nothing the professor had not already seen. He rose, glanced about at the signs of the struggle. A ragged ball of white cloth near the captain's feet attracted his attention. It lay in the dust and was so near the color of the dust itself that it all but escaped his notice.

The professor recognized it at once. It was the dirty, white shirt that had hung on the clothesline in Benford's prison. Instinctively, the professor's eyes lifted. He nodded and his eyes narrowed in thought. The line passed over the spot where the captain's body lay. A tiny ribbon of cloth, fastened to the wire by a safety pin, still fluttered in the gently stirring breeze above his head. Some one had pulled the wire, moving the ragged shirt on the circular line from the captive's room into the courtyard; then had pulled the shirt down, crumpled it into a ball and thrown it into the dust.

"Most peculiar," the professor muttered to himself, making a little clucking sound of puzzlement with his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Most peculiar indeed."

"We'd better call the police,"

Tubby Lewis suggested. "We'd better do it right now."

For some seconds, the professor made no answer. He stood staring at the ball of cloth, one slender finger thoughtfully massaging the ridge of his nose. Then, abruptly, he crossed back to the gate. "Right," he agreed. "Call the police. I'll wait here." He spoke with a strange, new briskness. "And when you come back bring along ten yards of fishline, a six-foot stepladder and a good pair of binoculars."

"Bring what?"

"Ten yards of fishline, a six-foot stepladder and a good pair of binoculars."

Tubby Lewis stared uncertainly at the professor, then shrugged his shoulders and, muttering audibly to himself, started down the hill toward the highway and the professor's ancient car.

It was a silent, stern-eyed group of men in blue who returned with Tubby Lewis. The captain to whom the professor had talked earlier in the day took charge, giving orders quietly, almost grimly. The air of excitement that had pervaded headquarters over the minor tragedy of the morning was gone in the face of this greater, closer tragedy.

The patrolmen with the captain prowled about the crumbling structure, speaking in awed whispers and searching in vain for some indication of the identity of the killers. One of them picked up the crumpled shirt, but dropped it again, and the professor, looking on, said nothing.

It was nearly an hour later when the captain completed his preliminary investigation and, warning the

professor to hold himself in readiness to offer future evidence, ordered the body removed, and departed. As soon as his broad back had disappeared down the roadway, the professor turned to Lewis.

"You have the paraphernalia?"

Lewis fumbled in a side pocket of his coat. "Ten yards of fishline," he said, dragging it forth. "Also, one pair of binoculars. The ladder's in the car. And maybe you'll tell me what it's all about."

"Presently," said the professor. "Presently."

The professor helped erect the ladder over the spot where the captain's body had fallen. "Now, if you'll lend me your knife," he said. Calmly, he turned one trouser pocket inside out and slashed open the seam. Then he formed a loop in one end of the fishline, slipped the loop through the seam and pulled it down inside until it showed just under his trouser cuff. The other end of the line he shortened somewhat, then fastened to his belt, leaving the rest coiled in his pocket.

Lewis looked on questioningly, but the professor offered no explanation. When he had completed the task, he took the binoculars, climbed to the top of the stepladder, sat down on the flat top and began to scrutinize the landscape.

Lewis stood it as long as he could. "Am I crazy or are you?" he exploded at last. "If I hadn't known you so long——"

"Very educational," the professor broke in mildly. "You ought to try it some time." He finished a complete circuit of the ladder top. "Yes, very educational."

For nearly ten minutes he con-

tinued to peer through the powerful lenses. When he finally slipped them back into their leather case and moved down the ladder, a bright light gleamed in the depths of his blue-gray eyes.

"Come on," he said. "We have a visit to make."

## V

THE HOUSE before which the old car stopped was on a side road, half a mile from the highway and hidden in a cluster of scrubby oaks. It was a big, square, unpainted structure, its roof covered with moss, its porch sagging, its broken windowpanes stuffed with cloth. About it was an air of decay and gloomy desolation. Only the thin ribbon of bluish smoke that curled from the red-brick chimney spoke of human occupancy.

With Tubby Lewis at his heels, the professor crossed a yard overgrown with weeds and cluttered with rusted tin cans. They mounted the rickety steps to the porch. The door swung back before his knock. A tall man, hard-eyed, thin-lipped, stood in the narrow opening.

"What d'you want?"

There was no friendliness in the greeting. The professor, however, was not taken aback. He took in the other's sharp features, his hickory shirt, his overalls, his smooth, white hands. They didn't seem to go well together.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

The other grunted. "Too busy." He started to close the door.

"I want to talk to you," the professor repeated. Then his voice lowered. "About Eric Benford!"

The door stopped suddenly. The

man's eyes slitted. His right hand moved toward his left shoulder, then dropped.

"What about Eric Benford?"

"Perhaps you should invite us in."

The door swung back. The man led them across a wide hall into a square room at the right. It was a poorly furnished room. There was an old, brick fireplace, some chairs, a faded, red rug, an antique, overstuffed davenport with broken springs. The davenport stood before the dusty front windows and in one corner was an ornate, outmoded parlor lamp with a dingy-green shade and a base made of strips of steel curled into imitation flower petals.

The professor looked about the room. There was the hint of a smile on his face as he crossed, peered out the window up and down the road, his foot resting as he did so upon the base of the lamp. Apparently satisfied, he crossed back to the fireplace.

"About Benford," he began—

But the man in the hickory shirt had edged after him toward the window. "Wait a second," he ordered. He stared down the road, his thin lips drawn in a straight, hard line, his muscles tensed beneath the hickory shirt. He saw only the brown, dusty tracks and the yellowish grass moving in the breeze.

"All right," he said at last, turning back. "What about Benford?"

"Perhaps I should reconstruct the affair chronologically," the professor suggested. He rocked on the balls of his feet, his hands crossed behind him, his eyes squinting thoughtfully through their horn-

rimmed glasses at the rain streaks on the ceiling paper.

"Eric Benford, let us say, was a student of Indian lore. He was, in fact, an authority. This was widely known in his home city, Chicago. It was not so widely known, however, that he had—or believed he had—obtained a clue to the whereabouts of some \$60,000 in gold which was not found after the massacre of Fort Wannamook. Unfortunately, among the few who discovered the true nature of his project were certain unscrupulous individuals who would not halt at murder to obtain that much money.

"These individuals preceded Benford to Fort Wannamook, intending to rob him after the money was recovered. They were discovered and in the struggle that followed, Benford's guide, Briggs, was murdered and Benford was overpowered. The men realized they could gain nothing by killing Benford, for the secret of the hidden money would die with him. Therefore, they resorted to torture in an effort to pry the secret from him.

"The fort is isolated and seldom visited so they conceived the idea of chaining him to the wall of one of the rooms. This arrangement would give them the added safety of not having their captive near them in the event they should ever be questioned. They did not, however, foresee that their victim might go mad from their torture, nor did they realize after he had done so that their chances of obtaining the secret were gone.

"In the meantime, Benford's daughter, becoming worried, followed her father. The men, learn-

ing this, believed she might also have the key to the missing money. To look for this in her baggage and also to prevent her from starting a search for her father, the men made an attempt upon her life."

THE MAN in the hickory shirt had listened with gradually tautening muscles. His face was ugly, his eyes glittering. "And what's all this to me, stranger?" he wanted to know, his voice grating like a file on steel. "What's your racket?"

Tubby Lewis, in the background, felt perspiration coming out on his forehead. The air was tense, electric.

The professor, however, did not seem to sense the danger with which the room had become charged.

"I thought you'd be interested," he said mildly, "since you were one of the men who killed Briggs and tortured Benford."

The man in the hickory shirt took a step forward, his lips drawing back from his teeth. Then he paused.

"You have proof?" he grated.

The professor nodded calmly. "Of course. Since your headquarters were not at the fort, you had to have some signal from Benford in the event he capitulated. You constructed a circular clothesline and hung a ragged shirt on it. When Benford gave up, he was to pull the line so the shirt would emerge into the courtyard where you could see it through binoculars.

"Unfortunately, Chief Mackie, investigating the case, pulled the line so that the shirt came within your vision. You hurried to the fort, were surprised by the chief and, in

the struggle that followed, you murdered him. Then you tore the shirt off the line——”

The professor broke off suddenly and his eyes widened. “I say——”

The man in the hickory shirt had made a sudden movement. His right hand went toward the bulge beneath the shirt. A short, ugly-nosed automatic gleamed in his fist.

“I don’t know who you mugs are,” he growled, “nor what your racket is, but you know too much. You came butting in here where you weren’t wanted and you’ve talked yourself into a spot you’re not going to get out of.”

Tubby Lewis felt himself gulping. His throat was dry and hot, and his heart was pounding so loudly it seemed to him it must be audible outside the house.

The professor seemed calm, however. “But you haven’t heard all the story yet,” he objected. “After the newspapers came out last night, you discovered you hadn’t been successful in killing the girl. You were desperate. You couldn’t have her recover consciousness. At the same time you didn’t dare risk shooting her while she was in the hospital, and chloroform had failed you once, so you did the next best thing. You kidnaped her. She’s probably somewhere in this house now.”

The man in the hickory shirt emitted a snarl. His lips drew back over his teeth and he started forward, crouching beastlike, his finger tightening on the trigger of his automatic. The professor took a step back.

Suddenly there was a crash behind the gunman. The ornamental

lamp by the window lay on the floor, its two globes shattered to a thousand pieces. Involuntarily, the gunman’s head jerked to one side. In that instant, the professor leaped forward. All the weight of his skinny body went into the straight-arm blow that caught the gunman beside the jaw.

Caught off balance, the latter stumbled backward. The professor grabbed the automatic, twisted viciously. It went off with a roar, the bullet ricocheting along the wall and embedding itself in the lath behind the greasy wall paper.

Tubby Lewis, momentarily paralyzed by the turn of events, sprang into action. He caught the unbalanced gunman and carried him down to the floor by sheer weight while the professor dived after the fallen automatic.

From elsewhere in the house came shouts, then the sound of running footsteps. The professor took up a post beside the door, his face lighted with a strange, tense eagerness for battle. He had not long to wait. The door swung back and two men pushed through the opening. The professor’s long arm swung up and down and one of the men grunted, took a stumbling step forward and sprawled on his face. The other whirled, swinging the snout of his revolver.

Flame sputtered and the room was filled with the roar. The professor felt lead pluck at the shoulder padding of his worn serge suit as he tugged at the trigger of his own weapon.

He did not remember hearing the report when he tried to reconstruct

the scene afterward. All he remembered was the queer look that came over the face of the sharp-featured youth who had tried to shoot him. The youth dropped his revolver, clutched at his side and went down in a crumpled heap.

Tubby Lewis was still clinging tenaciously as a terrier to the man in the hickory shirt. They were rolling along the floor, cursing, gouging, biting, kicking.

For a moment the professor watched with approval. Then he leaned over, tapped the man in the hickory shirt lightly on the skull with his automatic. The struggle was over.

"Perhaps," he suggested as Lewis climbed to his feet gasping for breath, "perhaps we had better call in the constabulary."

**THEY FOUND** the girl, bound and gagged but otherwise unharmed, fastened to an iron bedstead in a room on the second floor. She was conscious, but still too ill to talk much. They reassured her, ordered her to remain quiet and went back downstairs to keep watch over the three gunmen until the police should arrive.

The girl and the most seriously injured of the hoodlums had been removed in an ambulance and the other two men were being marched to a police car surrounded by burly men in blue when the professor

finally broke away and headed toward his own decrepit car.

"I was sure this was the hide-out as soon as I scrutinized the landscape," he explained to Lewis as he climbed into the driver's seat. "You see, this was the only house in the line of vision from the spot where the shirt was hung in the courtyard."

Lewis let out a grunt. "Just the same," he said, "with all your fancy figuring, you were mighty lucky that big lamp took a notion to fall over when it did or we'd have been a couple of cooked geeses."

"Geese, Lewis—not geeses. Besides, I could say that luck didn't enter into it. I should say our turning of the tables was merely the result of a justifiable psychological assumption.

"When we entered the room, I picked out the most likely bit of furniture. It happened to be the lamp. When I looked out the window I rested my foot against the base long enough to drop that loop of fish line over one of the ornamental petals. Then I crossed back until the line was tight. Against the floor it was invisible.

"I assumed the man's attention would be distracted if the lamp should crash down behind him. All I had to do to make it crash was take a step backward. Yes, a justifiable psychological assumption, I should say."



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