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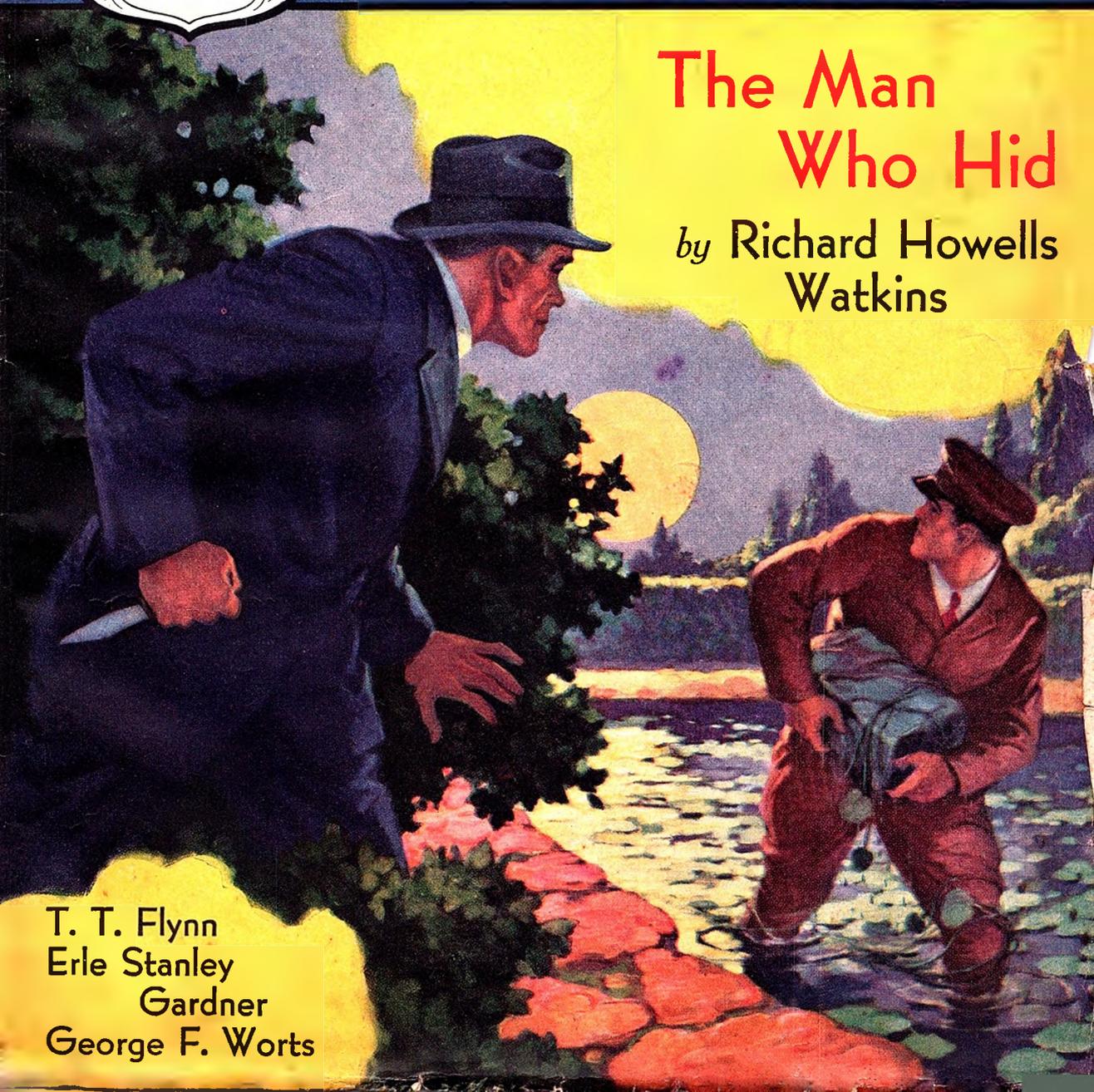
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by Richard Howells
Watkins



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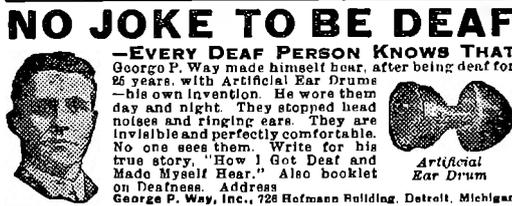
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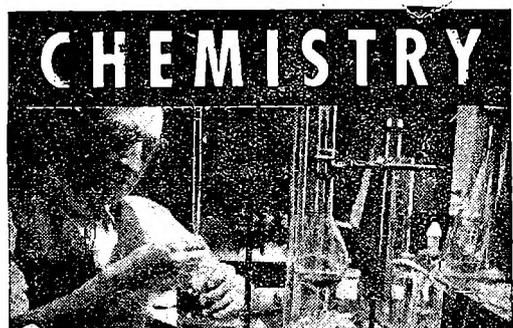
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VOLUME LXXV

Saturday, April 15, 1933

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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXXV

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 1933

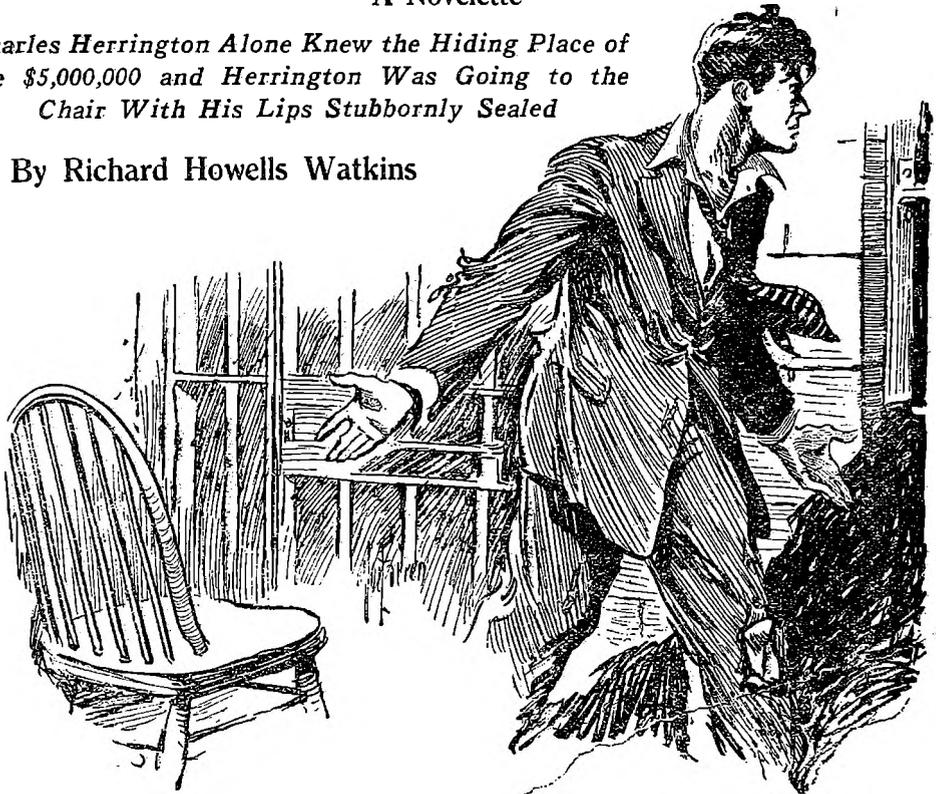
NUMBER 4

The Man Who Hid

A Novelette

Charles Herrington Alone Knew the Hiding Place of the \$5,000,000 and Herrington Was Going to the Chair With His Lips Stubbly Sealed

By Richard Howells Watkins



"Think, man! Think of what your silence means to others!"

THE old delivery truck, with one headlight glaring white and the other darker than the night, squealed to a halt in front of the penitentiary gate.

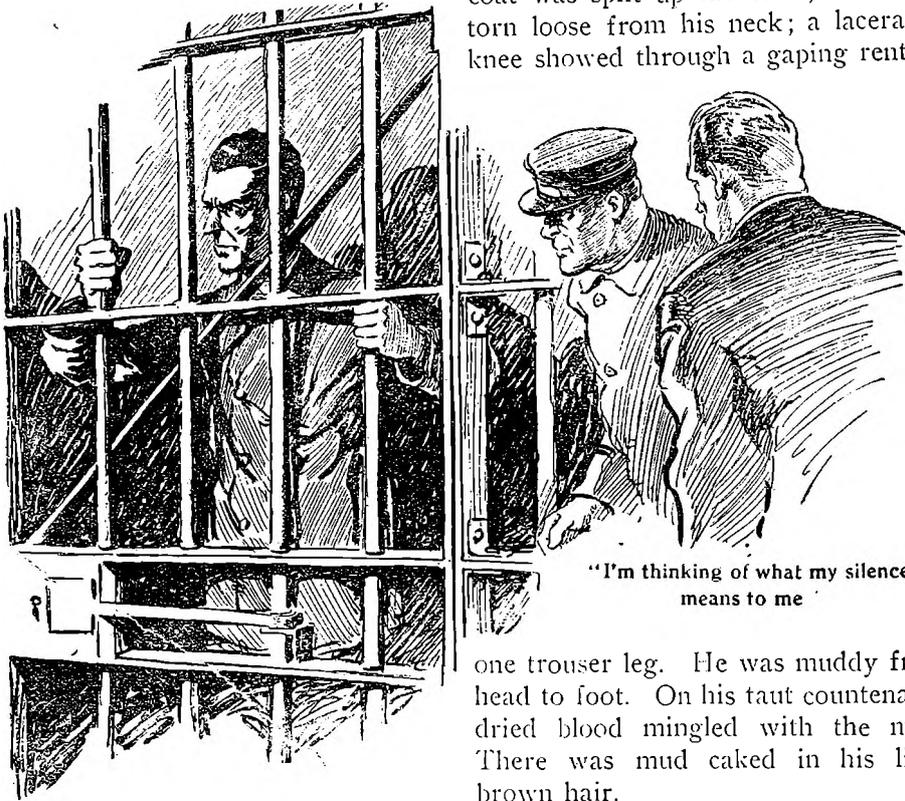
Before it had stopped rolling, a bruised, dishevelled young man was off the running board. The youthful driver's lower jaw had been sagging in astonishment ever since he had

picked up his strange, forceful passenger among the Westchester hills. Now his jaw dropped to the limit as he looked at a bill which had just been thrust into his hand.

Without a word the stranger limped rapidly toward the gate of the prison.

The keeper on duty looked him over with a flicker of interest as he approached.

"What you're looking for is the hos-



"I'm thinking of what my silence means to me"

pital, fellow," the guard declared, grinning. "This is the big house."

"Assistant District Attorney Mark Telfair of New York County to see Acting Warden Crawford," the visitor stated with crisp intensity. "Open that gate!"

The keeper thought of several witty retorts, but when he opened his mouth and the gate simultaneously, all he said

was, "Yes, sir." Cut, blood-stained and dirty though the tall young man's face might be, his blue eye punched a hole in the keeper.

In forty-five seconds Mark Telfair was in Deputy Warden Crawford's office. The gray-haired, mild-mannered acting head of the prison stood up in keen surprise at the condition of this young representative of New York's reform district attorney. His coat was split up the back; his collar torn loose from his neck; a lacerated knee showed through a gaping rent in

one trouser leg. He was muddy from head to foot. On his taut countenance dried blood mingled with the mud. There was mud caked in his light brown hair.

"What's the time?" Mark Telfair demanded. "My watch was broken in the spill."

"There's plenty of time—plenty," Warden Crawford assured him. "The execution is set for eleven-thirty; it is only ten twenty-five now. But you're hurt, man—I must call Doc—"

Telfair's injured leg buckled under him; he dropped into a chair with a

grunt of pain. But he sat bolt upright. "Forget the doctor, Warden. I bear a conditional reprieve from the governor for Charles Herrington."

"The governor's secretary telephoned that you were coming," Warden Crawford said. "A conditional reprieve, you say? What—"

"Herrington must speak!" Telfair replied.

"Herrington must speak!" Warden Crawford repeated. "What— But what happened to you, Telfair?"

"A roadhog in a heavy roadster crowded me off onto a steep slope. When my car stopped rolling and I came to I had to dig myself out from under."

He pulled out of his coat pocket a thin metal rod about four inches long with an onyx knob on one end. Scowling, he regarded it.

"That's my only clew to the fellow who wrecked me," he said. "When he jammed his fenders against mine this little guide, fastened to the outer edge of his front fender, was snapped off. I found it on the road."

"A roadhog!" murmured the warden. "Are you sure it was no one else?"

"Who'd profit by melodrama?" Mark Telfair demanded. "If my failure to get here meant life for Herrington there might be a reason. But it doesn't, necessarily."

"Nevertheless I would turn that thing over to the local detective force," Warden Crawford asserted. "It is a valuable clew. You say you bring a—"

"I bring Herrington a mere respite, if he wants to take it."

THE acting warden sighed. "I had hoped that until Warden Grant recovered from his pto-
mainc attack there would be no execu-

tions," he said plaintively. "I am a humanitarian, Mr. Telfair; I deeply appreciate your self-sacrificing effort to reach the prison in time to give Herrington at least one more chance of life—"

Mark Telfair snorted as he laid a document on the warden's desk. Crawford caught it up at once.

"I'm a humanitarian, too, Warden," Mark Telfair said curtly. "I might not sentence Herrington to the chair for killing Detective Mahon but I'd pull the switch on him with my own fingers if it would help us find that five million he stole from hundreds of poor devils of depositors. I know two of them. One's an old carpenter going blind slowly. The other's a scrub-woman crippled with rheumatism who figured that her three children would never go to institutions while she had her nest-egg. There have been three suicides."

He dragged himself to his feet again while the warden examined the governor's conditional reprieve. "Five million will buy a lot of bread and butter these days, Warden. Herrington's robbery wrecked that bank. If he'd give up his loot the bank could open again."

"I'm here to find out where that money is; Herrington may live or die and be damned to him!"

Warden Crawford, now standing with shoulders drooping, nodded disconsolately.

"I did not dare hope that he would be reprieved," he said. "A bank cashier who deliberately plans to put his crime upon an assistant's shoulders and shoots a police officer when his plans go wrong is not likely to win the clemency of our governor."

"His defense that he thought Detective Mahon was a crook was too

thin," Mark Telfair declared. "When Mahon stopped him at the 138th Street bridge he had the stuff in his car. Right then Herrington realized there'd been a slip-up and it was the pen for him. Coolly he killed Mahon, changed his plan to straight flight, and tried to get away."

"It may have been panic, not plan, that made him kill," the acting warden pointed out.

"His brain was working fine," the assistant D. A. said crisply. "Why? Because when he realized an hour later the cops were closing in on him he hid his loot somewhere among these Westchester hills."

Mark waved a hand toward the back country. "And he did that so he'd have a hold over the bank—over the state itself. His original plan had probably been to secrete it on his own place in Yorktown Heights and then play the innocent bystander while his assistant whom he had framed went to the pen."

"Well?"

"The governor will not bargain with Herrington. His attitude has been too defiant throughout; he is too confident that he will escape the chair. However, it might be possible to save hundreds of depositors from privation, if that million and a half in cash and three millions and a half in bonds is recovered."

The warden inclined his head in agreement.

"The governor's last word to Herrington, to be delivered by me tonight, is that he will grant a short reprieve if Herrington will disclose the whereabouts of the loot.

"The governor will then review the evidence in the case, and decide whether Herrington is to die *in* the chair or to have his sentence corn-

muted to life imprisonment. That's all. May I see him at once?"

CHAPTER II

Eyes on the Rod

WARDEN CRAWFORD pressed one of a dozen buttons on a bakelite plate on his desk. "First I must let him know that you are here. It does not do to spring things too suddenly upon a man under the tension of the death house—with the chair an hour away."

A keeper knocked and entered.

"Naylor, tell Herrington that Assistant District Attorney Telfair is here from the governor," the acting warden said. "Ask if Herrington will see him at once. Then come back and take Mr. Telfair over. How is Herrington standing up?"

"He's cheerful, sir," replied the gaunt death house guard. "Full of spirit."

When the door had closed on Keeper Naylor, Mark Telfair spoke. "I'll tell Martin Smythe the governor's decision. Herrington's entitled to have his counsel know what's going on. Where is Smythe?"

The warden picked up his hand phone. "Get me Martin P. H. Smythe's house—Ossining exchange," he directed.

"Isn't Smythe here?" Mark Telfair asked in surprise. "He wasn't making any last minute efforts in New York, where the governor conferred with the D. A."

For the first time a note of cynicism entered the mild voice of the warden. "I am compelled to deduce from the failing interest of Mr. Smythe that Herrington has not confided in him," he said. "Certainly Smythe doesn't seem to hope that he'll ever learn the

location of that fortune. Mr. Smythe is a resident of Ossining—he has a big place here—so he can get down in five minutes.”

The telephone tinkled and Warden Crawford conversed quietly for a minute.

“Mr. Smythe will be here as soon as possible, although he was not pleased at my request,” Crawford reported. “He said his client seemed defiantly determined to die; he saw no way in which he could be of further service.”

Mark Telfair nodded. “Smythe put up an infernally good show at the trial,” he said with reluctant praise. “Glad he knows when he is licked.”

He dragged his stiffening body to his feet and glanced at the clock on the warden’s desk. Ten thirty-nine! Fifty-one minutes remained. “Now if I may do a spot of washing and repair work to my face—” he suggested.

Crawford reached for a glistening silver vacuum bottle which stood upon a tray.

“Let me give you some hot coffee to fortify you for the ordeal,” he suggested. A glass clinked in his unsteady hand against the bottle as he poured out the steaming liquid. When Mark refused it the deputy warden gulped it down eagerly himself.

“An idea of Warden Grant’s,” he explained, as he set down the empty glass. “There are moments in this prison when a man needs a stimulant. I don’t know what I’d do without it—tonight.”

“I’ll have some later—if Herrington leaves us without a word,” Telfair replied grimly. “I’ll need it then.”

When Telfair returned from the lavatory a few moments later he found Naylor, the death house keeper, entering the warden’s office.

Naylor’s lined, unlovely face was a mask of apprehension and perplexity. He shook his head in sombre doubt before he spoke to Telfair.

“Sorry, sir,” he muttered. “I told Herrington—gave him your name, sir. He stopped pacing and he laughed in my face.

“‘Telfair, hey?’ he says. ‘Well, Naylor, you say to Mr. Telfair that I’m not at home. Not at home! Tell him that.’ And then he laughs in my face again.”

WARDEN Crawford snapped to his feet. His hands thumped down on his desk as he bent forward. His eyes blazed at the keeper. Mark Telfair stood still.

“Snow?” the warden demanded curtly. “Did you notice the pupils of his eyes?”

“No, sir,” said the keeper doggedly. “No snow. And the doctor’ll tell you the same. He don’t take it and he couldn’t get it if he wanted it. He’s no junky.”

“Bravado, perhaps,” the warden muttered.

“That’s not it, sir,” Naylor ventured. “Bravado—I know it. Some of ’em—mighty few—even carries it right to the chair. But this is different. He’s been talking to me today—melting, though I didn’t try to rope him. He’s happy, sir.”

“Happy? You mean reconciled to his fate?”

“Happy’s the word I mean,” Naylor asserted stubbornly.

“Remember any of this talk?” Mark Telfair inquired.

“Only this evening he laughs at me when I asks if he wants anything special for supper. ‘Don’t pull that old one on me, Naylor, you fool,’ he says. ‘I’m not checking out of this hotel to-

night. You'll be bringing me breakfast. And when I leave this place some day soon the door I go through won't be green. Is that clear?"

"And then he clenches his hands and raises one fist and shakes it. 'I've got 'em licked, Naylor, so quit pulling that glum face at me. But maybe you don't know anything about what's going on up above.'

"I'm used to queer talk, but that made me sort of creepy. 'Up above what?' I asked him, and he grins and shakes his head. 'No; I'm not talking about heaven,' he says. 'And I'm not figuring on escape, either, so don't get alarmed. It'll all be perfectly legal and natural. But just shut up about this, will you?'"

Warden Crawford shook his graying head. "'Hope springs eternal—' he murmured unhappily. "How horrible these executions—"

His voice faded.

Naylor waited; glanced from one to the other; then quietly withdrew.

"What do you make of it?" Crawford demanded suddenly.

"Nothing whatsoever," Mark Telfair replied. He sat down and, pulling out the broken metal rod from his pocket, fingered it absently, staring at the clock. "There isn't much time to save that five million. I'm going to take a turn outside the gate. Your establishment does not seem to be conducive of thought."

"Perhaps lack of thinking is just as well here," the warden replied slowly. "I'll wait for you."

Out on the sidewalk a few hundred feet from that unobtrusive entrance Telfair encountered a small squad of reporters hurrying, though without relish, up the slope toward the prison gate. He knew several of them but escaped recognition easily enough, for

they were immersed in unpleasant anticipation.

Mark Telfair paused when they had passed and looked up at the dark hills above him. In some secret place not many miles from here was concealed a fortune. Its whereabouts was known only to the man in the condemned cell. Within an hour now that man would be beyond earthly reward or punishment. And if he died without a word a host of unfortunate depositors would get no more good of that money—their money—than he had gotten. They would stand penniless, many of them, in the midst of a merciless depression.

Mark Telfair turned and walked toward the penitentiary gate. As he approached a glossy black limousine drew up before it. A small, round-shouldered fat man with a glowing cigar in his fingers alighted and hurriedly entered the prison. Martin P. H. Smythe, the learned counsel for the man about to die, had arrived. Telfair quickened his step.

As he reached the waiting car Mark Telfair glanced at it. The light over the portal was reflected from its polished surface as from a mirror.

"Counsellor Smythe does himself well," he muttered.

Suddenly his gaze switched briefly to the chauffeur. The flat, round face of the man, almost yellow in that light, was turned almost away from him. But the man's narrowed eyes, slightly aslant, was covertly regarding him and his torn trouser leg.

Telfair's own gaze returned to his feet. As if absently he pulled out of his pocket the broken fender guide rod and fingered it.

The flat-faced man standing by the car froze, with fingers glued to the doorhandle. His eyes focussed with

intensity upon the broken bit of metal in Telfair's hands.

CHAPTER III

The Enigma

FOR an imperceptible moment the chauffeur remained rigid, staring.

Then his eyes raised and flinched under Telfair's casual glance. He moved again; closed the door of the car, and climbed stolidly to his seat.

Mark Telfair entered the prison. The first man he saw beyond the guard at the gate was the keeper from the death house, Naylor.

The assistant district attorney, with a flick of his rod, summoned the man.

"Mr. Smythe's interested in helping ex-con's, isn't he?" Mark Telfair asked. "Gets them jobs—that sort of thing?"

Naylor nodded. "That's right." He peered toward the grille. "If Mr. Smythe's car's outside you can see a prize specimen at the wheel who did seven years for a payroll stick-up," he said. "Fellow with a face like a plate—Chink Mitchell. Mr. Smythe's giving him a chance. Good driver, but I'm betting that hard pan of his is no lie."

Mark Telfair looked down at his rod and grunted.

"Could you make another try at getting Herrington to see me voluntarily, Naylor?" he asked. "It's nothing to you, but seeing me is Herrington's last chance—his only chance—of living till dawn."

The keeper nodded his gaunt, ugly head. "I'm cold," he said. "That's why I'm on the death house trick. But if I can get a break for one of 'em I'll do it. They got enough against 'em without me bearing down. I'll try. Don't count on me succeedin'."

He walked away. Mark Telfair

carefully tucked his broken rod away in his inner breast pocket, knocked on the warden's door and entered.

Martin P. H. Smythe was distributing cigar ash impartially over every inch of the warden's carpet. Only a few shreds of his placid, confident courtroom manner remained. His pace was markedly agitated. He glanced at Mark and nodded; then looked more intently at the battered features.

"What happened to you?" he asked abruptly.

"Nothing — compared to what's going to happen to your client," Mark Telfair answered curtly.

"Done all I could," Smythe muttered, continuing his pacing. "The man's diamond adamant. I've cracked some in my time, but it's easier to get teeth out of Herrington's mouth than words. And that smile of his—that cunning, knowing leer when I asked him yesterday to try to save his life by giving up his loot— God!"

Mark Telfair crossed to look at the small electric clock on the warden's desk. It was ten fifty-two.

Acting Warden Crawford sighed. "I had hoped—even prayed—that during my brief tenure of office I would not have to face—this," he said, running a hand through his curly, grizzled hair. "Warden Grant is more—more robust in his feelings. But he is still far too ill—I am afraid—" His voice trailed off into disconsolate silence and he glanced longingly toward the vacuum bottle on the desk.

"How do you explain Herrington's attitude?" Mark Telfair inquired suddenly of the attorney.

"Explain it!" Martin P. H. Smythe glared at his legal opponent. "Explain it!" He thrust his cigar between his teeth and clamped them down on it. "Crazy," he said tersely.

"The doctor—" began Acting Warden Crawford. Then he shook his head and relapsed into silence.

"You're destroying five million dollars when you destroy this man!" Counsellor Smythe blazed suddenly. "You both know that!"

Mark Telfair, with another look at the clock, studied the wrathful attorney in silence.

"You are well aware, Mr. Smythe, that neither the law nor the governor gives us any option," the warden said. "If I—"

The weary voice died away as Telfair softly opened the door and left the office. He waited in the hall, staring at nothing, until Naylor came back from the death house. The keeper's face was glum; he shook his head.

"No luck, sir," he said. "He won't see you. That's flat."

"THANKS," said Telfair. He laid a hand on the handle of the warden's door, but the keeper stopped him and pointed his finger at a door across the hall.

"In that room is another fellow that's doing his damndest to see Herrington," he said. "His brother—David Herrington—is in there waiting—and he's wild—wild with greed and rage. He's been hopin' that Herrington would see him—slip him a word or two—before he went to the chair."

"Just to keep the money in the family?" Telfair commented.

Naylor nodded assent.

"But he won't see him, neither," he said. "He never would. Just me and Warden Crawford and the doctor is all Herrington would ever talk to—not even the chaplain. And Mr. Smythe, of course."

"Is he still cheerful?"

Naylor nodded. "Sort of hopped up—though not with snow," he replied.

"Still walking up and down?"

"No—sitting. And he had a pencil in his hand." Naylor lowered his voice. "He got up and came close to the bars and stared at me, sir. Sort of intense. His eyes kind of glittered. 'You wouldn't break your word of honor to me if I trusted you, would you, Naylor?' he asks, in a sort of high voice. 'Not if I gave it to you willingly,' I answers. It's funny how some of 'em talk. And he nodded and said, 'I believe you, Naylor. I want to make sure that if there's any— Come back a little later.' And then I came away."

"A pencil!" Mark Telfair muttered. He motioned toward the warden's door. "Knock and tell the warden he's wanted out here, Naylor," he instructed.

The keeper obeyed. In an instant John Crawford, somewhat mystified, stepped out and closed the door behind him.

"I wanted a private word with you, Warden," Mark Telfair explained quickly. "It's hopeless to get any results through Smythe. Time's getting on. I must ask you to conduct me yourself to Herrington's cell—to use your own influence to have him hear me."

Slowly the warden nodded his head. "I'll do anything, of course. You think—" he paused, seeking for words. "You think we might try this—ah—without his attorney?"

"Yes."

"Let us go, then," the warden said.

"One moment." Mark Telfair went as far as the barred entrance to look out into the street. Neither Martin P. H. Smythe's glossy limousine nor Chink Mitchell, its flat-faced driver, was in sight.

The warden asked no explanation of Telfair's movement. He led the way to the death house, received the salute of a keeper on duty, and walked down the corridor where no man slept that night. They ran the gauntlet of sullen eyes and came to the end, near a small door, where the cell of the penitentiary's most notorious prisoner was located.

Keeper Naylor was standing before the bars, but he moved away as they approached. Neither the warden nor Mark halted him.

In another moment they were looking through the grilled door at a man who rose alertly from his bed to face them.

"Glad to see you, Warden!" he exclaimed in a high, tense voice, and gestured jerkily toward the lock. "So sorry I can't invite you in."

Mark Telfair looked over the prisoner with a swift glance. Despite his prison garb, Charles H. Herrington contrived to appear almost jaunty as he met the gaze of Mark. Tall, erect, carefully shaven, his dark eyes glowed out of deep sockets. His thin lips were twisted into a smile. His whole expression conveyed a sense of sly superiority; even his voice betrayed it.

This condemned felon, about to die in the electric chair, encouraged by some secret source of strength, displayed a sort of sneaking contempt for the governor's emissary.

Warden Crawford leaned against the iron bars and spoke solemnly:

"Mr. Herrington, I've brought Assistant District Attorney Telfair to talk to you. He comes from the governor. For your own sake listen to him."

The warden stepped away a few steps, but watched anxiously.

The ex-bank cashier had folded his arms and now swayed forward and

backward on his toes, burning black eyes upon Mark.

"I have nothing to say to young Mr. Telfair," he declared. "Am I to be put through a third degree in the very shadow of the chair?"

"You're too intelligent a man to believe we would do that," Mark Telfair said steadily. "I don't know what you're counting on, but I tell you that a frank talk with me is your one chance to receive a reprieve."

"And what does a reprieve mean?" Herrington retorted. "Simply time for me to make my revered bank a present of five million—and then execution or life imprisonment."

"The governor is not bargaining," Mark Telfair stated. "Your case will be reviewed, proper notice taken of your new attitude. That is all I can say."

"All right; you've said it," Herrington snapped. "Good-by!"

"Think — man — think!" Telfair blazed. "Think of what your silence means to others!"

Herrington laughed mockingly. "I'm thinking of what my silence will mean to me!"

He turned his back on Telfair and sat down on his bunk.

CHAPTER IV

The Blue Snake Strikes

MARK TELFAIR walked away. Warden Crawford followed.

Keeper Naylor, standing by near the door with the other keeper on duty, shook his head at Telfair, guessing that he had failed.

"What's the time?" Mark Telfair muttered as they left the death house.

"Six minutes past eleven," answered the warden soberly. "Less than half an hour now."

"The governor told me to inform you that once Herrington left his cell to enter the execution chamber his chance of a reprieve was over," Telfair said crisply. He wiped the perspiration off his forehead. "For the good of the State there is to be no indication of last minute uncertainty. The execution chamber is not to be used as a torture chamber or for purposes of third degree."

"I understand," Warden Crawford replied. He halted. "The governor is wise. I must warn Herrington of this. Will you wait for me in my office?"

Mark Telfair assented at once. He moved on with quicker steps toward the warden's office as Crawford walked back to the death house.

Counsellor Smythe had ceased to pace. His cigar was discarded in an ashtray and he was sitting down, with his small eyes on the face of the warden's clock. He looked up quickly at Telfair.

Mark stepped in and crossed the room. He drew out of his pocket the broken metal rod and laid it on the desk under Smythe's eyes.

"Do you know what that is?" he demanded.

Herrington's attorney did not pick up the rod but bent forward to study it closely.

"It looks like one of those guides they put on fenders to show you how close to things you can drive without scratching your paint," he said at last in a level voice. "The knob sticks up into sight to indicate the edge of the fender. Why ask me that?"

He paused, nodding his head. "I have two on my own roadster," he added. "Mitchell put them on so I wouldn't scrape the side of my garage. This one's been broken off."

"That's right," Mark agreed. "It was broken off when some roadhog swung his fenders against mine and shoved my light car clear off the road."

Martin P. H. Smythe muttered a word of sympathy. "They'll do anything, some of these drivers," he conceded. "On our roads a man's life—"

He stopped suddenly and stared at the clock.

"Going to see Herrington?" Mark Telfair inquired. He picked up the bit of metal and put it carefully in his pocket.

"Herrington knows I'm here," Smythe said. His eyes were held by the red second hand of the electric clock. It moved in an unending series of tiny jerks around the dial. "If he wants me he'll ask for me. I can't harrow myself any more about this case—unless to some purpose."

"Herrington is taking that five million with him," Mark said.

"I wish that five million was in hell!" Smythe burst out. He caught up his cigar.

"You'll feel better—after it's over," Mark suggested. "I hope you will."

The stout, round-shouldered lawyer closed his teeth on his cigar. He did not reply.

Soundlessly the little red hand moved on. They waited. The warden did not come. Several minutes passed by. Herrington's sands were growing swiftly fewer. Mark Telfair inclined his head.

SUDDENLY the door opened. Both men started. Warden Crawford slowly entered the room. His eyes, too, sought the clock; then he poured himself a glass of coffee and drank it in silence.

"Everything is about ready," he

said in a curt low voice. "In fifteen minutes— Mr. Smythe, I'm sorry to have brought you down here. There is no reason for you to stay longer. And you, Mr. Telfair?"

Mark Telfair turned toward the door.

"May I telephone?" he asked.

Warden Crawford led him to a smaller office, in which was a sound-proof booth.

Mark Telfair called a New York hotel, waited, said a few words and waited again. Then to the man who answered he rapidly outlined the events of the evening. Tersely he concluded:

"Herrington will not speak, Governor. But there is something wrong—something queer back of his stubborn silence. I have a feeling that he thinks he has an ace in the hole. And he hasn't. Let me find out what this means, Governor! If you will grant him a reprieve of twenty-four hours I may be able to uncover something about that five million."

He was silent for a moment; then spoke again slowly, with great earnestness. "I have nothing definite to go on. Yes, sir; Herrington is guilty of Detective Mahon's murder. Under the law he should die. But I feel that—that there is some sinister force in action here tonight that decrees Herrington's execution by the state. The state itself is being used as a tool. Sir, I am not asking you to save Herrington; I am trying, as you instructed me, to save many innocent people from distress and misery. Give Herrington twenty-four hours, Governor; give me twenty-four hours to locate that five million."

Again he listened, and his face grew grim.

"I am sorry that you think me fan-

ciful or sentimental, sir," he said with stiff formality. "I understand that the law must be enforced. Yes, sir, I have my orders."

He replaced the telephone instrument and left the booth.

Two pairs of eyes bore upon him as he entered the warden's office.

"I have orders to attend the execution, Warden," he said curtly to the prison official. "I am to follow Herrington to the brink of the grave to seize on any hint he may let fall concerning the hiding place of his loot."

"It is time to go over to the—house," Warden Crawford announced. He touched his forehead with a handkerchief.

Counselloer Smythe followed them into the hall; then stopped. "I'll wait," he muttered in a hoarse voice. "Might as well see it through—but not—there."

For the second time that night Warden Crawford led Mark Telfair toward the death house. They encountered a distracted prison chaplain. He confronted them with the face of one in torment.

"No reprieve?" he implored. "And he will not see me? He will not make his peace?"

"I am sorry," said the warden gently, and they left him.

In another minute they were inside a small chamber. There was no unusual stir; no hurry, no last minute details being completed within. The witnesses were in their places; several keepers attending to no apparent duties were in waiting.

The chair, a plain bit of furniture to which no one would give a second glance elsewhere, occupied its prominent place. The door in the wall that led to the condemned cells was no different from any other door.

But over this matter-of-fact room there hung an atmosphere so awfully oppressive that it was like a physical burden. The feeling it gave was that this chamber and the people in it were under some terrible pressure. It was a pressure which tortured the bodies and souls of all. And though there was a determined attempt at ordinary composure the faces of men were metal masks—brazen shells stamped down on the human flesh and blood beneath.

"Since Naylor was more friendly with Herrington than the other keepers I've let him off this job," the warden muttered in Mark Telfair's ear. "Sent him downtown to get me some aspirin—I want to sleep tonight."

He passed a hand over his forehead. Telfair nodded. His eyes were fixed upon the door in the wall—the portal to eternity for a murderer who was an enigma to him.

The door in the wall opened. Several men entered slowly, as if walking were an unendurable exertion. For an instant Charles Herrington was inconspicuous among them. Then, of a sudden, the eyes in the death chamber picked him out. They raked him from his wooden face to the bottom of his trouser legs, slit to make the fastening of the electrodes more rapid and sure.

Like a well rehearsed actor, Herrington walked toward the chair. But his head turned; his hot, gleaming eyes searched the chamber. Men nervously avoided those eyes that hunted for something—for someone.

Herrington sat down in the chair. With visible haste straps were buckled, the copper instruments fitted to his legs. The keepers stepped back. An inconspicuous sign was made.

Suddenly Charles Herrington sat bolt upright; eyes terribly alive, face

no longer wooden. He strained against the straps.

"This has gone far enough!" he snapped. "I warn you—"

Suddenly his body was flung against the bonds about him with a convulsive strength that was far beyond human power. A dynamo was whining near by. The hiss and audible flash of high tension current—the blue snake that strikes with blasting, deathly power—crackled in the chamber.

CHAPTER V

Telfair Goes for a Ride

WHILE flinching men were still listening for Herrington's words the man uttering them was a corpse.

Charles Herrington was dead—with his lips still parted. There was more to be gone through—another shock to be given—but that was mere precaution.

Mark Telfair and the warden left the chamber; sought the open air.

"Perhaps if the signal had not been given he might have spoken," Warden Crawford muttered.

"The governor's orders were explicit," Mark Telfair replied bitterly. "Once he left his cell—but I still hoped, Warden. Horrible as that scene was, it is nothing compared to what the people he robbed will go through, some perhaps for the rest of their lives. Three suicides so far. And he might have saved them with a few words about the hiding place."

"They'll say anything at that last moment—when hope flickers out—when they feel the chill of death," Crawford replied solemnly. "But he waited too long. You heard him try to stop us."

He quoted solemnly:

“ ‘This has gone far enough. I warn you—’ Do you suppose he thought we were bluffing, Telfair? Did he feel that we would never execute him while he held the secret of his huge booty?”

“That’s one of the things I’m going to find out,” Mark Telfair replied doggedly. “Herrington’s finished—but I’m not!”

Warden Crawford glanced obliquely at the tall young man.

“You sense a mystery,” he said. “So do I. If I can help—”

“I’d like a look at the things in his cell.”

“I’ll arrange it as soon as—”

“I understand,” said Mark Telfair. “Meanwhile, we have news for Smythe.”

The dead man’s attorney was slumped in a chair in the warden’s office. He had a cigar in his mouth; the tip just glowing. He did not speak as they entered.

“It’s all over,” said the warden.

Smythe’s fat right hand took the cigar from his mouth. “I’m glad it’s all over!” he muttered with a gusty sigh.

“Over!” repeated Telfair sharply. “Where’s the five million?”

Neither man answered.

Approaching the desk, Crawford motioned toward the vacuum bottle. No one moved. The warden searched among the papers lying on the desk top.

“Didn’t Naylor leave a packet here for me?” he asked petulantly. “I sent him for some aspirin—and I do need it!”

“Nobody’s come in while I’ve been here,” Martin P. H. Smythe answered slowly. He heaved himself up out of the chair. “I’m going home. I hope you gentlemen on the state’s side are now satisfied.”

“He should be back by this time,” the warden muttered, ignoring the remark. “Naylor’s a reliable man. I hope he hasn’t gone off on a drunk. They do sometimes.”

He looked up at the lawyer. “Has your chauffeur reported his return?” he inquired. “I took the liberty of asking him to drive Naylor to town—I wanted that stuff rather badly, you see.”

“Mitchell should be outside,” Smythe replied. “I’m going now. Come out and ask him about Naylor if you wish.”

In the corridor a small group of silent newspaper men were being passed out of the prison. They vanished as they had come, hurriedly, in the direction of the town.

The three men approached the grille and the keeper swung the door open.

Smythe’s limousine was just drawing up at the curb. Chink Mitchell sprang out, saluting the warden rather than his master. His flat face was expressionless.

“Didn’t you bring Naylor back?” Warden Crawford asked.

“No, sir; he said he’d hoof—walk back,” the ex-convict replied. “And he lammed before I could give him an argument. I hung around—I waited for him all this time, sir—but I didn’t see him.”

“Huh!” muttered Crawford. “Did he say anything about wanting a drink?”

Mitchell’s eyes blinked.

“He didn’t talk to me, sir—except to say he was walking back,” he replied with dogged emphasis. “I dropped him at a drug store he pointed out.”

Warden Crawford turned away. “I’ll get some aspirin from the doctor, though I dislike to bother him,” he said

irritably. "It's extraordinary that a man like Naylor should take advantage of my decency in letting him off that job tonight. Good night, Mr. Smythe. Coming inside, Telfair?"

Mark's eyes were upon the hand of the chauffeur, which held open the car door. There was a smudge of black paint upon one finger.

MARK searched for his cigarette case. "I'll join you in a few moments, Warden," he replied, and then added in a lower voice: "And I'll be much obliged if in the meantime you'll arrange that I may see all Herrington's effects."

"I'll have them ready for you," Crawford promised, and with a nod to the lawyer turned in at the gate.

"Night!" muttered Martin P. H. Smythe. The springs of the limousine creaked as he stepped on the running board. Chink Mitchell closed the door on him, s a l u t e d Mark Telfair meticulously, and mounted his seat. The motor leaped into action.

Mark Telfair stood at the curb, cigarette case in hand, near the rear fender of the car. And then, as the car moved, he swung his pain-racked body into swift action. With a thrust of his hands he gripped the big spare tire in its holder at the back of the car. The machine lunged ahead. In another instant his feet were planted solidly on the projecting fuel tank and he was crouching below the level of the rear window.

The car hummed up the grade, accelerating in second speed. Mark Telfair turned his head to stare backward at the prison entrance. There was no one in sight behind him.

It was, as Warden Crawford had said, no more than five minutes' run from the mass misery of the peniten-

tiary to the quiet luxury of the estate of Martin P. H. Smythe. To Mark Telfair, riding the gas tank, it seemed longer. Every instant he expected a car to come up behind the limousine and with blazing headlights expose him. But Chink Mitchell kept the glossy black machine flying, and no car appeared, even in the distance.

A moon was rising over the Westchester hills, but it was still too near the horizon and too yellow to cast much radiance on the car.

Once, taking care to keep out of range of the rear vision mirror, Mark Telfair raised his head to glance slantingly inside. Smythe had turned on the domelight to find something; Mark saw that it was a silver flask, and the lawyer tilted it to his lips even as he snapped off the light.

The car purred on, climbing and working its way in a zigzag course back from the river. Suddenly it swerved sharply to the right and swept smoothly up a driveway. Gravel crunched under the whirling tires; then momentum thrust Mark against the polished body as the brakes soundlessly slowed the car. A house, dimly lighted, showed suddenly in his limited vision. He had barely time to drop off and scramble into some bushes beside the drive before the opening front door sent a flood of light over the car.

A man-servant hurried down the steps. Mitchell slid hastily out of his seat to release his master. Martin H. P. Smythe alighted with dignity, his flask well concealed. He paused before the front door, waved the man-servant into the house, and spoke to his chauffeur in a low voice.

Mark Telfair moved deeper into the bushes, traveling in a circuitous course among the elaborate shrubberies of the estate. Well behind the car, which still

stood before the door, with headlights glaring, he crossed the driveway. Then, rapidly, he turned the corner of the house and in a wide swing worked around the building. He had no difficulty in finding his way. The moon was already beginning to dispel the darkest shadows of the night.

He came at last to the driveway that led from the house to a low garage set a good hundred yards behind it. The driveway passed several greenhouses and skirted a pond perhaps fifty feet wide which was almost covered with the broad flat leaves of water lilies. Around its paths of stone were inlaid in moss, and a high thick privet hedge offered good cover.

The garage was dark and silent. Telfair approached the square building with great caution, keeping in the shadow of a hedge. His ears were alert for the crunch of gravel and the hum of a motor behind him.

Where the hedge ended he paused. The garage had a double set of doors. These were closed, as was a smaller door beside them.

Telfair scrutinized the windows on the low second floor of the building. Apparently the chauffeur's quarters were up there. The windows were unlighted.

He crossed the apron in front of the garage and laid hold of the knob of the small door. It was locked. In quick succession, ears strained for any sound from the direction of the house, he tried the larger doors. Locked, too.

"Chink Mitchell doesn't trust anybody," Telfair muttered. "Well, where he came from they specialize on locks. He may be right."

He retreated to the hedge and waited, taking note of the lay of the land by the waxing light of the moon. The driveway did not end at the ga-

rage; it vanished in the direction of the road. Apparently Mr. Smythe's estate sported a service entrance.

Soon he heard the limousine approaching from the house. It halted directly in front of one of the double doors. Chink Mitchell climbed quietly down from behind the wheel. He came around to the rear of the car and stood there a moment, looking across the lily pond toward the house and the greenhouses. It was no idle glance; there was intense effort in that scrutiny. Then his head turned as his gaze swept over lawns and bushes, and down the driveway.

At last the ex-convict swung around to the garage doors, fumbling in his pocket. Keys tinkled; he opened the doors and pushed them back. Hastily he climbed to the driver's seat.

Mark Telfair was back in his place on the gas tank before Mitchell slid the car into gear. And he was off the tank inside the garage before the flat-faced chauffeur ratched up his emergency brake.

CHAPTER VI

Murder!

THE headlights revealed to Mark the interior of the building before Mitchell snapped them off. It had a floor space broad and deep enough to accommodate four cars comfortably. There were within only two cars beside the limousine. One of these, in the corner, in front of the limousine, was swathed in a linen dust cover.

The other, behind which Mark Telfair took refuge in two noiseless bounds, was a heavy, powerful roadster. Crouching low, Mark Telfair kept still, awaiting the blazing radiance of the garage lights.

But Chink Mitchell did not snap on the lights. Instead he remained in his seat for an instant. The slight noise of his fumbling hands reached Mark's ears. He seemed to be trying to find something.

Mark Telfair reached out in the darkness. He groped for the left forward fender of the roadster behind which he was hiding. His fingers encountered the smooth, curving sheet of steel. It seemed as solid to his fingers as the plates of a battleship. This expensive, low-slung car had been designed with a view to safeguarding its occupants from hazards of the highway. Those fenders would stand the gaff.

His fingers moved on inquiringly to the top of the sweeping curve. Here, if anywhere, a fender guide would be attached. He felt painstakingly for the thin rod or the stump of such a rod. Suddenly he touched something quite different—a small patch of wet, sticky paint.

Mark's lips tightened in a brief, grim smile. This tiny area of new paint was at the extreme outer edge of the fender—exactly where a guide rod would be bolted to the sheet of steel. But now there was no rod—no marks of the bolts—nothing but a square of fresh paint. And the evidence it mutely gave would be gone in an hour or two, as the paint dried.

"Not quite smart enough," he muttered.

His fingers confirmed what he already suspected—that these heavy steel fenders had swept his light car off the road with no great damage to themselves. All he found was another drying area of paint—this time covering a long scratch on the forward surface of the fender.

Suddenly he stiffened at the sound

of a closing door. Chink Mitchell was out of the driver's seat of the limousine. A flashlight, partly screened by one hand, moved toward the open doors. Mitchell shut them and shot the bolt, locking himself inside. Then, with his flashlight even more carefully screened, he turned toward the car with the linen dust cover.

Telfair shifted cautiously to watch.

Chink Mitchell lifted up the dust cover. Underneath was a sedan. He opened the rear door. The beam of his light played directly upon something on the floor of the car.

Mark Telfair stood up on the running board of the roadster to see what it was. The flashlight disclosed it plainly to him. His face stiffened.

Chink Mitchell was bending over the body of Keeper Naylor. Every feature of Naylor's white, gaunt face was vividly revealed. But the back of the prison guard's head had been crushed in by a terrible blow. Murdered!

Here was reason enough why Warden Crawford had never received his aspirin. And here was reason, too, why the ex-convict who drove Martin H. P. Smythe was careful about locking the garage doors. But why had Naylor been killed—Naylor, the inoffensive death house guard—the only man for whom Herrington had shown a liking.

Chink Mitchell fastened back the dust sheet and crept into the sedan. What followed was a grotesque, moving chiaroscuro to Mark Telfair, for the beam of Mitchell's flashlight was never still; and at close range never revealed more than a part of the keeper's relaxed corpse.

But what Mitchell was doing was plain enough. He was searching Naylor—searching him with painstaking thoroughness. Once the flashlight's

beam, misdirected for the instant, revealed the chauffeur's flat face. It was drawn up into a mask of apprehensive intensity; his yellow teeth showing in an involuntary snarl; his eyes deep sunken and small under the contraction of his brows.

Mitchell did his job thoroughly. Suddenly he gave vent to a soft yet exultant ejaculation. He pulled a small wad of paper out of the top of Naylor's shoe, where it had been rammed in between his instep and the leather tongue. Kneeling over the dead man, he ripped open an envelope, and unfolded the sheet within. He read it slowly, with both hands clutching it. Then, again he muttered an expletive.

Suddenly, with a gasp, he flung himself from the car, sprawling over Naylor's body in his terror-stricken haste. The light in his hand flicked out.

Mark Telfair, too, was startled by the sound that had so frightened Chink Mitchell. It was very plainly a tap on the closed door of the garage.

In the darkness Mark heard for an instant a faint crumpling as Mitchell disposed of the paper he had taken from Naylor's body. Then all was utterly still within the garage.

Listening intently, Mark Telfair heard the noise outside the door again. This time it was more like a scratch than a tap, and it was followed by the loud sniff of an animal. Then, distinctly, a persistent scratching and a whine.

"**T**HAT blasted mutt!" Mitchell's whispering voice was tremulous with rage. He crept to the door, unlocked it and softly called in a dog. Telfair heard the pad of feet; then a heavy blow. With the blow was mingled a sound of crunching bone—and then from the dog no sound at all.

The door closed; the flashlight snapped on again, revealing the hand of Mitchell as it caught by the scruff of the neck a limp mongrel, plainly dead.

Mitchell dragged the dog to the sedan and threw him in on the floor beside the murdered man. Then he lifted Naylor's body further into the sedan, and closed the door. He pulled down the dust sheet over the car and switched off the flashlight.

The silence that followed was hard on Mark Telfair. He dropped down behind the roadster again and waited alertly. He heard nothing, saw nothing, of Chink Mitchell. The man was standing in the darkness, motionless. For several minutes he made no sound, betrayed himself by no motion.

At last Mitchell's feet tapped softly on the concrete floor. He approached the door; pushed back the bolt softly, and swung open each side. He no longer used the flashlight. The moon's ray, filtering in through the open doors, gave him enough light to move about in these accustomed surroundings.

He put a spade and a pick into the limousine. Then he unlatched the emergency brake of the car. Straining against it, he rolled the heavy car out onto the cement apron in front of the garage. Working the steering wheel with one hand, he turned the car until it was pointing down the driveway to the service entrance. He opened the rear door. Then he moved some paces down the road and stood for a long moment, looking about him and listening.

Mark Telfair, choosing his opportunity, glided out of the garage. He crept around the corner of the building and flattened himself out against the rough stucco. His foot touched something on the soil at his feet. He

picked it up. It was a smooth round stone.

Not until Chink Mitchell turned toward the garage did he move again.

With three long, noiseless strides he came up behind the man. All at once Mitchell whirled around, startled.

Mark Telfair's right fist, fingers wrapped around the stone, shot toward Mitchell's head with all the force of his tall pivoting body behind it. The bruised knuckles thudded heavily upon Chink's broad flat chin.

The ex-convict's head snapped back on his shoulders. He wavered on his feet, a moment, stepping widely in an automatic effort to balance himself. Then he sagged to the concrete.

Telfair dropped the stone. He bent beside Chink and frisked him as rapidly as his inexperience would permit. He took the flashlight from one pocket and from a shoulder holster pulled out a small, flat automatic. He made sure that the safety was not in position on this diminutive weapon before he thrust it into his pocket.

With a glance around at the dark night he gripped Mitchell by the shoulders and dragged him into the garage. He closed the doors as soundlessly as the ex-convict had done. His flashlight fell upon a scrap of paper on the floor. He caught it up. It was the envelope that Naylor had carried, but it was empty. On it was pencilled: "To be opened only in the event of my death. Charles Hall Herrington."

Mark Telfair trained the flashlight on the man and settled down to a more minute and methodical search of his body. But though he emptied every pocket, ran his hands along every seam, and inspected shoe tops, trouser cuffs, coat collar and every other possible hiding place, he found no crumpled wad of paper.

Suddenly he realized that Chink Mitchell was stirring. His fist doubled up to deliver another knockout; then he loosened his fist as he frowned thoughtfully down at the round, flattened face of his captive.

Mitchell's eyes opened—blinked—opened again. With pinpoint pupils he stared into the flashlight that Mark kept levelled at him. His lips formed a word; then he clamped them together and waited.

"Cautious, aren't you, Chink?" Mark Telfair remarked. "Not saying anything about anything?"

"I don't know who you are, fellow, but you ain't got nothin' on me," Chink Mitchell retorted thickly.

For a brief moment Mark Telfair played the flashlight upon his own bruised countenance. He caught a flicker of alarm on the ex-convict's sullen face.

"Now do you know what I've got on you?" Mark demanded. "You're too rough with your fenders, Chink—or not rough enough."

Over Mitchell's blunt, unpleasing features there settled an expression neither apprehensive nor resentful—it was more an absence of feeling than anything else. The look hardened upon his face, like a drying, rigid mask of clay, until it became the expression of a wary, wise convict, betraying nothing, threatening nothing. It was the prison face.

CHAPTER VII

Double Deception

MITCHELL did not even repeat his claim of innocence; he was now deliberately a voiceless, feelingless creature who would not awaken into life without a lawyer.

Mark Telfair wasted no more time

on questions. He marched Mitchell at the point of a pistol to the rear of the garage. As they passed the covered sedan, Chink Mitchell's eyes shifted almost imperceptibly to survey the dust cloth. It hung smoothly, a blank innocent-appearing curtain over the car in which lay concealed a murdered man and a dead dog. Mark glanced at it, too. Though alert enough to forestall any move of Mitchell, his eyes roved here and there in the garage to detect a possible hiding place for the wad of paper that was not on Mitchell's person.

There was an elaborate work bench laden with tools at the rear of the garage, and on it Mark found a coil of stranded copper wire. He halted his captive, chest to the wall to prevent any sudden movement, and wound turn after turn around him, binding his arms to his sides. As he worked he detected a quiet, almost imperceptible effort on the convict's part to get some looseness in the wire. His arm muscles were taut; his stomach expanded.

As surreptitiously as Chink Mitchell attempted to get slack in his bonds, Mark Telfair assisted him in his effort. At the same time he broke into a running patter of threats and self-congratulatory remarks.

"You'll find, Mitchell, that the state doesn't like to have its prosecuting attorneys crowded off roads," he assured the silent ex-convict jubilantly, while he bound Chink's feet as slackly as he had fastened his arms. "And you aren't smart enough to get away with it, either. We'll have to find out why you did it, too, Mitchell."

Chink Mitchell stood like a statue, giving no indication that he heard.

"Undoubtedly you have no liking for district attorneys. But I feel that that would hardly drive you to lie in

wait on some side road until I went past. Besides, how would you know that I was ordered up to the pen? No, Mitchell, I'm reluctantly compelled to believe that there's somebody behind you. Don't you want to tell me who it is or what you know about that five million dollars?"

Mitchell did not even part his lips.

"Mr. Smythe's a nice kind employer, isn't he, Mitchell? Fancy his giving you a job, with your record, the minute you lost your employment inside. Kind-hearted isn't the word for it. It must have wounded his sensibilities to have his client, Herrington, go to the chair, don't you think? Mr. Smythe didn't say anything about five million to you, did he? Well, perhaps he wouldn't want to spoil you. I think I'll have to take up that five million with Mr. Smythe very soon. Perhaps I can drag something out of him about it. Do you think I can?"

Silence. Mitchell waited, flat face to the wall; thick lips tightly compressed.

"Lie down, Mitchell," Mark commanded genially. He stepped back as he finished the job. "You'll get flat-footed, standing there like that. And then they'll take you for a policeman. You wouldn't like that, would you? And maybe the police wouldn't, either. Lie down flat while I do a bit of telephoning."

Mitchell obeyed the command, although he took a step or two out from the wall before he did so. Mark Telfair noted that slight movement, which took his prisoner closer to the shelter of the covered sedan. He did not object.

"Be patient," he advised, and with the flashlight showing the way, took a dozen steps toward the telephone that rested on a wooden shelf against one side of the building. Here he turned

the light back toward his captive. The bulk of the sedan prevented him from seeing Mitchell's outstretched form. He made no comment upon this fact.

He picked up the receiver and gave a number—the number of the penitentiary. Deputy Warden Crawford was still in his office, and answered at once, somewhat querulously.

"**W**HERE did you go?" the warden inquired. "First Naylor—then you! Gone without a word!"

"I'm still looking for that five million, and I'm making progress," Mark Telfair replied. He made no effort to speak so softly that Chink Mitchell could not hear; neither did he raise his voice above a confidential murmur. "I've got Mitchell tied up in Smythe's garage, Warden."

"Smythe's garage! Mitchell? You think he—"

"The car that shoved me off the road is here, too, with the fender newly painted. That's all I've discovered so far, Warden, but I'll get search warrants out in the morning and comb this whole place over for more evidence. I wanted to tell you so you wouldn't give the game away. I was afraid you'd call up Smythe and ask him if he'd seen me. I want everything kept quiet until I can act."

"It's incredible!" John Crawford exclaimed. His voice revealed plainly his bewilderment. "You're telling me, by inference, at least, that a reputable lawyer deliberately attempted to hold up and injure an assistant district attorney, proceeding on a mission of life and death for the governor himself. It's—"

Mark Telfair ceased to listen to the voice on the telephone. He lowered the

receiver from his ear and listened instead to the stealthiest of sounds from in front of the linen-covered sedan. But he did not turn his light that way; nor did he speak to Mitchell. For a moment a fleeting grin swept over his face; then he turned to the telephone again.

"Five million is a lot of money—and it's handy to have, especially when a man has a big estate to keep up," he said. "Warden, could you lend me a trustworthy keeper to watch Mitchell until morning? I know it isn't strictly legal. But if I call in the police now it will leak out as sure as fate—and I want Smythe to have a good night's sleep."

"You mean that Smythe knows where that five million is located—that if he got an inkling he was suspected he might—ah—take steps before dawn to hide it beyond all hope of finding?"

"Something like that. It would be the correct procedure for Smythe, would it not?"

"I suppose so—if you're right," Warden Crawford replied unwillingly. "Well—I'll send you a man."

"Fine! I need only one. No hurry about it. We're quite comfortable—both—"

From the rear of the garage he heard a sudden movement; then a splintering crash. Looking up, he had a momentary glimpse of a tire vanishing out of the window above the work bench. A shower of glass fell tinkling to the ground. Then absolute silence within the garage. Mark grinned.

"He's got away!" Mark roared dramatically through the telephone. "Escaped through a window!"

Stamping loudly, he rushed out the door and around the corner of the building. Then he stopped abruptly and flattened himself out against the

side of the building, as he had done once before that night.

Hardly had he taken cover when Chink Mitchell came dashing out of the door. He was unencumbered by wire and was barefoot, with his shoes in his hands. He darted across the driveway in front of the garage. His naked feet made no sound. He flung himself headlong through a gap in the privet hedge around the pond; then dropped into a flower bed beyond and lay still. In the vague light of the moon his body seemed to merge into the ground.

Only the fact that Mark, himself in the deep shadow of the garage, had followed Mitchell's course intently made it possible for him to identify that blur in the garden as a man's prone body. Mark did not move. Mitchell was in a position to watch the garage and everything that went on around the front and one side.

A minute dragged by, and then another. No sound or abrupt lighting of the house indicated that the sound of breaking glass had roused anyone there.

The stubborn deadlock of watcher and watched continued in utter immobility. And then, abruptly, Mark Telfair broke the spell.

He walked boldly around the corner to the front of the garage, in plain sight of Mitchell. He moved slowly, like a man spent from running. He stepped close to the limousine, still standing outside, and entered the black recesses of the garage.

The moment he walked into the shadows within he swung around alertly. He could still see the blotch made in the flower bed by Mitchell's body. The man did not move.

Mark Telfair picked up the telephone. He spoke into it loudly, but there was no one on the other end. He

spoke again, as if concluding his conversation, and then hung up.

He left the garage. With never a turn of his head toward Mitchell's hiding place he hurried purposefully down the driveway in the direction of the service entrance. He walked not on the gravel, but along the grassy margin, where his feet made little sound. And he kept moving steadily along until he reached the point where the driveway curved. Past this curve he stopped abruptly and looked around. He could see no sign of Chink Mitchell.

With the greatest caution he eased his long body through the hedge that bordered the driveway. Then, on hands and knees, he crept along toward the margin of the pond. He was now almost opposite Mitchell's place of refuge. Sinking down onto his chest near a lower hedge alongside a gravel path, he stared intently across the pond.

He had lost the exact position where Mitchell lay. He could see nothing that indicated a man's body lying in the long flower bed on the other side of the water. He rose on his elbows a bit, staring intently. The profusion of hedges and flower beds around the sunken lily pond made his search more difficult. And then, suddenly, he caught sight of Mitchell.

CHAPTER VIII

The Man With the Knife

THE man had not changed his location. Now he was rising cautiously to his feet. He stood upright, listened, then slipped through the gap in the hedge to peer down the driveway in the direction in which Mark Telfair had vanished. In a moment he slunk through the hedge again. He approached the edge of the

pond and stopped to look intently toward the house.

There was no sign of life in that direction. He sat down and slipped on his shoes. Then he began to walk around the grassy margin of the pond in the direction of the prostrate Mark. But he was not looking in Mark's direction; his vigilance was expended upon the service driveway and the house.

Mark Telfair hastily wormed himself across the grass, wriggling back from the edge of the water. It was his only chance to avoid discovery. He reached the low hedge by the path and crawled along beside it until he came to an opening where the path divided. Then he slipped around to the other side of the hedge and lay flat on the ground, edging his body in close to the stems of the endless row of privet bushes. He could see through the hedge under the leafy screen. But there was also a chance that the man he had captured and then assisted to escape would see him.

Chink Mitchell came soundlessly on around the verge of the pond. He drew abreast of Mark's long body; then passed within three strides of it. He walked on, perhaps twenty feet further, and then stopped.

Where he halted was the only place around the rim of the pond where there was a stone retaining wall. Elsewhere the banks were natural grassy slopes; here a small dam had been constructed to raise the level of the pond.

The ex-convict stood upon this stone embankment a moment, once more reconnoitering with unflinching stealth. Then he busied himself in a manner that Mark, flattened out on the ground, was unable to make out. But suddenly Mark's ears answered the question that his eyes had failed to solve.

He heard the clink of metal; the faint jingle of a chain. Then, plainly, he made out the soft murmur and splash of running water.

"A sluice gate!" he breathed. "He's opened a gate! He's draining the pond!"

With sudden abandonment of the extreme caution that he had used so far he worked his way closer to the stone dam.

Chink Mitchell was kneeling by the gate he had opened, staring down at the surface of the pond. The water was slipping out through the sluice at a rapid rate, but the pond was broad and long. It would take some time to drain.

As the minutes passed by Chink Mitchell's attitude of attention grew more tense. He crouched at the edge of the dam, poised like a puma on a branch above a rabbit. The water lilies were sinking on their stems; a shelving strip of black mud was already showing around the rim of the pond.

Mitchell stood up. He wrenched at the mechanism of the sluice gate with feverish impatience; the murmur of the outrushing water deepened to a subdued roar. He came back to the wall a few feet away from the sluice gate and slid his legs over the edge. In a moment he was standing upright in two feet of water. Slashing through the lily pads he waded this way and that. His head turned constantly, scanning every inch of water. As the area of the pond diminished, the water fell more rapidly. Mark Telfair watched it drop, using the impatient legs of the chauffeur as his gauge.

Suddenly Chink Mitchell uttered a low cry and floundered through the lilies.

A few feet from the pond's edge, where the lilies were thickest, the pads had not dropped flat upon the level bed

of mud. They were raised; the broad pads, bending, outlined a sort of rough oblong upon which they rested.

CHINK MITCHELL flung himself toward that outlined object.

He tore aside the lilies; groped in the mud and suddenly lifted up something that, mud-coated and swathed in wrappings though it was, vaguely suggested a large dispatch box in shape. With this clutched in his hands he waded rapidly toward the wall.

Mark Telfair was on his knees, now, with Mitchell's automatic clutched in his hand.

Mitchell reached the low dam. He rested his burden on the stone top.

Mark Telfair's breath went out of his body as suddenly as if his chest had been caved in. A man's figure had appeared on the dam, just over Chink Mitchell. Mark started up; then crouched again.

The ex-convict uttered an audible gasp. His clutching hands released his hold on the wall. He stared upward in dumfounded silence.

"So you figured out where Herrington hid it at last, did you?" the man above him said in a mild tone of voice, "I never gave you credit for such brains, Chink."

That smooth voice, the voice of Deputy Warden John Crawford, did not startle Telfair as the warden's sudden appearance had done. He remained stock still, listening intently to catch the words above the decreasing murmur of the drained pond.

"I—I was gettin' it for us both, Crawford," Chink Mitchell said with an effort. Then his words flooded out: "That damn D. A. is nearly on to us; with that keeper you killed lyin' in the garage it wasn't safe to leave—"

"You've saved me some trouble—

thanks!" Warden Crawford said in his quiet voice. He bent as he spoke, and faintly accentuated the last word. And as he voiced his thanks his right hand slid in a swift, easy movement along the side of Mitchell's neck. Something he held gleamed briefly in the moonlight as he made that sure, unhurried gesture.

The ex-convict emitted a bubbling cry. He staggered backward, both muddy hands at his neck. For a moment he balanced, swaying. The smooth surface of the water at his feet was disturbed by something that pattered down upon it from his neck in drops like heavy rain; that continued to fall despite those clutching hands.

Mark Telfair was already leaping toward the wall. He was on it when the acting warden saw him and recognized his tall figure even in the feeble light.

"Telfair!" he cried, instantly, and waved a hand that still held a knife toward the box at his feet. "I've found it— He attacked me and I had to— look at this—look here! Open it! It's the—"

Mark did not answer. Neither did he bend toward the box. He leaped in. The knife hand suddenly ceased to indicate the muddy thing at Crawford's feet and swept upward in a sudden, lightning-like thrust. But Telfair's left arm was rising to knock it aside even before the blade shot toward him. And his right hand, still clutching Mitchell's automatic, came down like a mallet on the head of the warden. The man dropped to the ground as if drilled by a bullet.

Mark sprang into the pond and caught Chink Mitchell as he collapsed in the mud. He dragged the gasping man to the wall and heaved him up on top beside the prostrate warden. Then

he raised Mitchell's pistol and fired shot after shot into the air.

CHAPTER IX

Not Evidence!

THE residence of Martin P. H. Smythe blazed with lights. In the lawyer's small study four men sat around a table.

One of these was Mr. Smythe himself, who kept shifting his unlit cigar from hand to mouth as rapidly as if it were red hot. His forehead bore furrows of perplexity. Beside him sat the chief of police of the town of Ossining, hastily and carelessly dressed, but now wide awake. The chief was unhappy.

Mark Telfair was the third man. He was talking on the telephone and staring with unwinking attention at the fourth, Deputy Warden John Crawford. The deputy, despite a bump on his head as big as a walnut, seemed quite at ease.

On the table was a big steel box, from which a heavy casing of rubber had been removed. It had been pried open. Its contents, eight thick stacks of bills and several piles of bonds, not even damp after their long immersion, lay beside it on the polished mahogany.

Mark Telfair finished his conversation and hung up the receiver. "Warden Grant is returning tonight to take command of the prison," he stated succinctly. "His doctor thinks now that he is recovering, not from an attack of ptomaine, but from a light dose of some poison like arsenic, which might have been slipped into a vacuum bottle of coffee."

Deputy Warden Crawford smiled wearily. "Perfect!" he said. "One more crime of which I can be accused!"

He turned to the police chief, a glum, silent man with a heavy jaw who, like

Smythe, was looking with incredulous eyes at Mark Telfair.

"Doubtless you are meditating my arrest, Chief, but I advise you to meditate a long time," Crawford said softly. "Fortunately for me proof is required as well as accusation. Why he should suspect me—"

"Why?" repeated Mark Telfair. "Before I'd been in your office two minutes you instructed Keeper Naylor to ask Herrington if he will see me at once—me, the only man standing between him and death. *If!* A damned queer question, Warden, and I got back a queerer answer. Suspect you? I—"

Chief Hardwick muttered, "Why should a man like Deputy Warden Crawford—"

"Five million dollars is the answer!" Mark broke in. "I accuse Deputy Warden John Crawford of the deliberate murder of Herrington in the electric chair. His motive was to prevent Herrington from revealing to the authorities the hiding place of his loot, the approximate location which was already known to Crawford and his accomplice Mitchell. And I accuse him, too, of the deliberate murder of Keeper Naylor because he suspected too much.

"Here's something Warden Crawford may wish to answer," Mark went on dryly, and unfolded a dirty, crumpled sheet of paper. "I found it in the sweat band of Chink Mitchell's cap. No, Warden, I'd rather read it to you."

"Shoot!" said Chief Hardwick.

"It is signed by the late Charles Hall Herrington," Mark explained. "It was contained in this sealed envelope marked, 'To be opened only in the event of my death.' It reads as follows:

"This is written in my cell less than an hour from the time at which I am to enter the death house. I am harassed by doubts. If there is treachery afoot this

statement probably will help avenge me. Of all who have talked to me in the death house only Deputy Warden Crawford talked sense. 'You have five million reasons why you should not be executed,' he assured me a week ago. 'But if you're clever you'll buy not only escape from execution, but also a lighter sentence than life imprisonment. To do so you must drive a hard bargain for your secret.'

"Three days ago he told me that tremendous political pressure had been brought to bear upon the governor by influential members of the board of the bank. They wanted their five million returned at any cost. He himself, Crawford explained, had been selected by the governor to approach me.

"Crawford told me the governor had consented to reduce my sentence to ten years if I maintained publicly that I would rather die with my secret than drag out the rest of my life in prison. Crawford showed me a most confidential document which bore the governor's signature, agreeing to commute my sentence to ten years if I revealed the hiding place of the money. But the governor had specified that only if I entered the execution chamber still steadfastly declining to speak was this reduction to be offered to me. The governor was most reluctant to exercise such clemency, Crawford said, because of the public's prejudice against me. It had to appear that commutation was given me only as a last recourse. Naturally I expressed my gratitude to Warden Crawford for engineering this.

"But why are you so interested in driving this bargain for me, Mr. Crawford?" I asked him. He replied promptly, 'Because, Mr. Herrington, the State is a niggardly paymaster and I am in desperate need of ten thousand dollars.'

"He added immediately, 'Payable only after your term has been reduced to ten years.'

"That answer explained Crawford. If he had said one word about my revealing to him where the bank money was hidden I would have had no dealings with him. But he wanted a small rake-off, that was all.

"While I appeared to hesitate he told me that his superior, Warden Grant, would report sick that very day and that

he himself would be placed in charge of the prison.

"I agreed then that I would do just as he said, refusing all vague offers of reprieve and even entering the death chamber and approaching the chair with closed lips. At the last moment Crawford is to halt the execution on the authority of the governor. A maximum of ten years' imprisonment, with time off for good behavior, is to be my lowest price for revealing my secret, and Crawford is to receive his money after the governor has openly commuted the sentence.

"Crawford has just told me that I have already won. But of course the farce in the death chamber must be gone through. If I open my mouth to this young fool Telfair they will give me life imprisonment for my fortune, which is as safely hidden as if at the bottom of the Atlantic. I must not show the slightest weakness.

"But, in spite of Crawford's assurances, I cannot help feeling a strange terror at the thought of entering the death chamber. Crawford will, of course, halt the execution. He has nothing to gain by not doing so. But still I have decided to write this statement as a precaution, seal it, and give it to my friend Naylor to hold. He has sworn by God himself that he will give it back unopened when I return to my cell after the horrible moments in the presence of the death chair.

"CHARLES HALL HERRINGTON."

CHAPTER X

"One More Execution"

THERE was a moment of silence as Mark Telfair finished.

"Huh!" muttered Chief Hardwick.

"Ingenious!" murmured Crawford. "A tissue of lies. I deny it in toto. Let's see; this adds forgery of the governor's name to my other accomplishments, doesn't it, Telfair?"

"Yes. You killed Herrington. He'd have had his reprieve if you hadn't kept him silent. And you killed Naylor, who received this statement from

Herrington. Perhaps some other keeper saw Herrington pass the paper to Naylor and told you. You had to get it, whatever it was, and silence Naylor, who knew too much. You brought Naylor out of the gate to Smythe's car on the ground that you wanted him to go to town to get you some aspirin tablets.

"In spite of that ugly gash in his neck, Mitchell was able to tell me as he waited for the ambulance before he fainted, what happened to Naylor. As Naylor bent his head to enter Smythe's limousine you crushed in his skull with a single blow of a blackjack. Then you pushed him in, told Mitchell to drive away, search the body, and get rid of it."

The telephone tinkled. Smythe answered it; then thrust the instrument toward Mark Telfair. "The hospital."

"Yes... Yes... I see," said Telfair, on the telephone. "Tell me about it."

There was not a sound in the room save for the faint, unintelligible voice issuing faintly from the receiver. Telfair listened at length. "Yes," he said. "Thanks."

He hung up, looked across the table at the unworried Warden Crawford, and spoke to Chief Hardwick.

"Mitchell has amplified his statement," he said. "It seems that Mitchell caught a glimpse of Herrington, who was then unknown to him, inside the wall of Mr. Smythe's estate. Herrington was carrying something bulky and heavy.

"Mitchell was meeting a train and had only a glimpse of the man. At that time police cars were closing in on Herrington from all sides. He was arrested near Croton half an hour later in a coupé he had just stolen from in

front of a grocery store. But by then he had hidden his loot."

"I assure you I didn't know the stuff was hidden in my lily pond!" Martin P. H. Smythe broke in earnestly. "It is true that Herrington was an acquaintance of mine—but—"

Mark Telfair nodded. "It was a case of any port in a storm. Herrington knew that he could not reach his own five-acre farm up in Yorktown Heights with his loot. He had prepared the box in New York for submersion—his place is on a lake—and when he realized that the police were sure to get him he remembered your lily pond was close by. It worked. Nobody but Mitchell knew he had been on your place."

I CERTAINLY didn't know!" Smythe bleated. He was perspiring profusely. "Mitchell isn't the first ex-convict I've helped because—"

Mark Telfair's voice broke in. "I can't say I found your actions suspicious at any time, Mr. Smythe. I exonerated you completely when I rode home with you on your gas tank and you never spoke a word to your chauffeur. If he had been your accomplice you had plenty of things to talk about and, as far as you knew, absolute privacy.

"But Mitchell, Mr. Smythe, has been combing this estate for months to find that loot. Until he read in Herrington's statement that involuntary hint, 'as safely hidden as if at the bottom of the Atlantic,' it never occurred to him that paper money and bonds might be hidden at the bottom of a pond. But ten days ago, when he heard rumors that Herrington might reveal the hiding place to save himself from the chair, he got desperate and

confided in Warden Crawford here, thinking the warden might work out some way of getting a tip from Herrington.

"Mitchell says that Warden Crawford told him to keep on searching—that he would see to it that Herrington did not reveal his secret to the authorities. And Crawford did see to it—in his own murderous way."

"Positively fiendish, I am," the deputy warden commented in his mild voice. "With your talent you should be on the stage, Telfair. Did I also command Mitchell to run you off the road when I was notified by telephone that you were headed this way—possibly with an unconditional reprieve for Herrington from the governor?"

"You did," Mark Telfair said.

Warden Crawford waved it all away with a gesture. "Guess, surmise, hope, thought, theory, ex-convict's words, and so on—all as light as air and just as menacing."

He laughed gently, deep in his chest, with his eyes fastened in mild mockery upon Telfair's face.

"You're a lawyer, Mr. Telfair," he said. "You can guess just how much a jury would believe when Chink Mitchell, with his crook's face and his shifty eyes, took the witness stand. His unsupported word is all the tangible evidence you have against me—"

Mark Telfair shook his head.

"Mitchell will not take the witness stand. The blood transfusion at the hospital was not a success. Mitchell is dead. But before he died Mitchell made this brief ante-mortem statement—and that is admissible evidence, Warden. I need not tell you what weight such a statement, made by one who knows he is at the very threshold of eternity, carries with a jury."

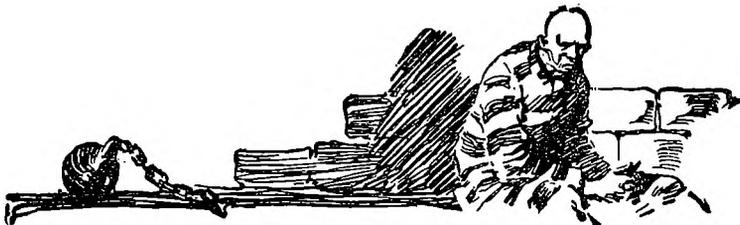
He leaned forward, returning with steady eyes the mockery that was slowly fading from John Crawford's face.

"I am not an ex-convict, Warden Crawford. My word is as good as yours. I will be in the witness chair, testifying to your *third* murder this night, if they try you for that—first, Mitchell is dead, Warden, murdered by you—and I saw you make the thrust that killed him."

"That's evidence!" grunted Chief Hardwick. "We can take him on that."

"Don't be a fool, Hardwick!" the deputy warden said in a high voice. "I deny—I didn't—"

"Though you said you wanted to save a man from the chair tonight you wanted to see him die, Warden," Mark Telfair stated with quiet certainty. "You, not the state, forced that execution. You're going to be present at one more execution, Warden, but this time you're not going to see the man die."



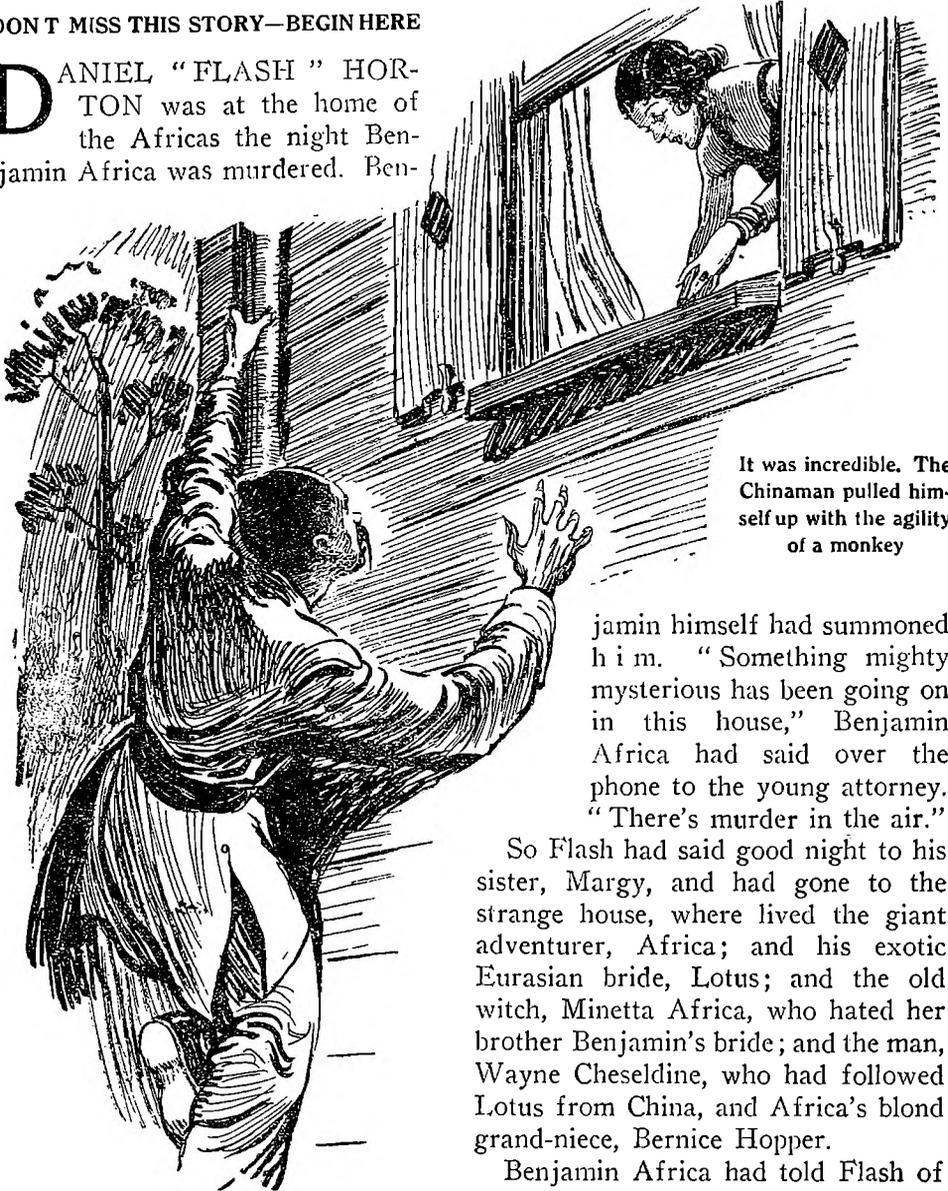
The House of Creeping Horror

By George F. Worts

Out of the Shadows Steals a Strange Figure in a Red Sash and into the Africa Mystery Comes an Incredible New Development

DON'T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE

DANIEL "FLASH" HORTON was at the home of the Africas the night Benjamin Africa was murdered. Ben-



It was incredible. The Chinaman pulled himself up with the agility of a monkey

jamin himself had summoned him. "Something mighty mysterious has been going on in this house," Benjamin Africa had said over the phone to the young attorney. "There's murder in the air."

So Flash had said good night to his sister, Margy, and had gone to the strange house, where lived the giant adventurer, Africa; and his exotic Eurasian bride, Lotus; and the old witch, Minetta Africa, who hated her brother Benjamin's bride; and the man, Wayne Cheseldine, who had followed Lotus from China, and Africa's blond grand-niece, Bernice Hopper.

Benjamin Africa had told Flash of

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for April 8

the beating he had given Cheseldine when the latter tried to persuade Lotus to run away from him. Benjamin also told Flash of the superstition that when a spot of blood appeared under the huge portrait of the first Benjamin Africa, and when the clock in the hall stopped, an Africa always died.

And the spot appeared, and the clock stopped, and Benjamin Africa was murdered, garroted with a piece of wire. There were few clues, but they all pointed to Lotus.

Flash notified Sheriff Alonzo Hegg. It was while he was waiting for the sheriff to arrive that he saw a man fleeing across the Africa lawn, caught him, and after a struggle brought him back to the house. Minetta Africa said to Flash, "That man came this morning to see my brother on some kind of secret business. He says his name is Harry Muroc."

CHAPTER VIII

Muroc's Alibi

THE sheriff's whole air was one of brusque self-importance. His small blue eyes looked quickly about the room. His manner was that of a man of decision, of authority. This was, of course, Flash reflected, the opportunity of a lifetime to a man of Alonzo Hegg's pompous character.

Having swiftly scrutinized the room, he looked for several seconds at the wire about the dead man's neck, then said, in his somewhat booming voice, "Got any idea who did this, Dan?"

"Not yet."

"Any clues?"

"Three," Flash said. "Look here. This scratch across the desk may or may not be important. This paper may or may not have been dropped by the murderer. I think it was."

"What's that you've got in your hand?"

"A hairpin. It dropped out of his collar just now as I rolled him over. He was lying face down."

Sheriff Hegg took the hairpin from Flash's hand and held it close to the candles.

He grunted and said, "I guess this doesn't leave much doubt about who did it, Dan. Have you questioned them?"

"Not yet."

"Where's that yaller girl?"

"In her room. She didn't do this."

"Don't agree with you," Sheriff Hegg said flatly. "There's been plenty of rumors about that girl and this fellow from China who followed her here. It's as clear as crystal to me without going a step farther. She killed him so she and that fellow from Hongkong could skip out together. We'll just see about that!"

Flash saw the long, horselike face of the butler in the doorway.

"Tell Mrs. Africa to come to the sitting room," Flash said. "And the servants, too."

"Yes, sir."

When the butler had gone, the sheriff said, "Where does this door go?"

"The sitting room. Miss Minetta, the man from Hongkong, and a suspicious character who says his name is Muroc are in there. I found Muroc hanging around outside on the terrace there a few minutes ago. He ran when I called. I grabbed him. He won't talk."

Sheriff Hegg was looking at him queerly. "I'll make him talk. You say his name's Muroc?"

"Yes."

The sheriff opened the door and called into the room, "Hey! Is your

name Muroc?" And to Flash, "Where can I talk to this fellow in private?"

"The music room across the hall."

The sheriff strode into the sitting room and said to Mr. Muroc, "Come with me."

Harry Muroc arose and followed him out into the hall. Flash remained in the study. He had no faith in Alonzo Hegg's hair-trigger methods. Unless he was mistaken, Alonzo Hegg would promptly arrest Lotus Africa, and perhaps Cheseldine, as an accomplice.

Left alone, Flash resumed his investigation of the dead man. He came upon another puzzling discovery. Benjamin Africa's fingernails were black. Less than an hour previously, Flash had particularly noticed how clean and well-cared for these nails were.

Flash took out and opened his pocket knife. His first supposition was that the black under the nails was dried blood. The point of the knife proved that it was not dried blood, but soot.

Benjamin Africa had left Flash in the north drawing room to get a gold necklace which he had bought as a gift for his wife. In the subsequent few minutes, he had been murdered. How had he acquired this soot under his fingernails?

Flash went through his pockets. The necklace was not upon the person of the dead man. Perhaps he had not had time to secure the necklace. Perhaps it was still in the desk. Flash went through the desk drawers carefully, thoroughly. The necklace was not there.

HE next examined the fireplace, on the supposition that Benjamin Africa, in his death struggles, had scraped the soot under his fingernails there.

The side walls of the fireplace were free of soot—burned clean and bright by flames. Only the back wall was sooted. Flash searched it carefully, but found no evidences of scratches of any kind.

Sheriff Hegg had brusquely ordered Mr. Muroc across the hall and into the music room. But when the door was closed behind them, and when the sheriff had made sure that they had the room to themselves, his air of official brusqueness vanished.

He said, belligerently, "Muroc, what the hell's been going on here?"

And the gentleman from New York answered lightly, "There seems to have been a murder, Sheriff."

"What do you know about it?"

"Not a thing."

"Now, look here," the sheriff blustered. "This is murder. This man Africa was a prominent citizen—a millionaire. Important old family. The papers are going to raise a stink about it. And you're going to get involved. If you have anything to say, you'd better say it."

"What shall I say?" Muroc asked with his sardonic smile.

"Did you kill him?"

"Suppose I said yes?"

"Then you're on one hell of a spot."

"I disagree with you, Sheriff. I have a perfect alibi. Have you forgotten that I have a perfect alibi?"

"You can't get away with that, Muroc," the sheriff said angrily. "And it's a lie. You were here in plenty of time to kill Benjamin Africa!"

"If it comes to an issue, however," Muroc said coldly, "you'll furnish me with an alibi. And you're overlooking a point. It's up to you to see that I'm not involved. If a charge of murder was pressed against me, you would lose an income that would make you inde-

pendently wealthy in a very few years. I'm going to help you, but you'll have to do as I say."

"You're admitting that you murdered him!"

The small black eyes studied him. "Sheriff, let's not be emotional. Let's use the brains God gave us. Let's ask ourselves," he said sarcastically, as if he were addressing a very young, very stupid child, "who is the most likely suspect? Lotus Africa!"

"Yeah," the sheriff growled. "You planted that hairpin of hers on the old man!"

Muroc raised his thin black brows into twin arches. "The public," he said, "is going to think she killed the old man so that she and this poor slob Cheseldine could run off—and spend the Africa millions. That's what Miss Minetta thinks. Whatever you think, or whatever I think, the Chink girl is going to be the fall guy. You found the hairpin. You've got your story. Stick to it!"

The sheriff was pacing up and down, clasping and unclasping his hands. He looked worried.

"Okay, okay!" he exploded at last. "But what about Horton? He's dangerous!"

Muroc's hard mouth spread in a wolfish grin. A deep, strange light appeared in his little eyes.

"Don't you worry about Mr. Horton," he said softly.

CHAPTER IX

"I Know She Killed Him"

FLASH had finished his inspection of the fireplace when he heard the sheriff's voice from the sitting room.

"Dan, we're all ready. Let's get down to business."

Flash got up from his knees and went into the sitting room.

Lotus Africa had not yet come in, but everyone else was there. Cheseldine stood with his back to the window. Miss Minetta still sat in the rocking chair, with hands folded, staring implacably at the opposite wall. Bernice Hopper, pale and big-eyed, now stood behind her aunt's chair with her hands on the back of it.

Harry Muroc was seated nearby, cleaning his fingernails with a gold-backed pocketknife.

Near the door, in a small, nervous group, were the servants: a horse-faced butler, an enormously fat, tall black woman, and a young woman dressed in black with a tiny white apron.

Sheriff Hegg looked importantly about the room. He said impatiently, "Where's Mrs. Africa?"

There was a gleam of living red at the door and the Eurasian girl came in. Flash studied her sharply. There were no tears or trace of recent tears in her beautiful gem-like eyes. Once again, he was impressed by the unfathomable mystery, the bizarre, slender beauty of this girl.

She entered the room and walked to where Flash was standing. She stopped beside him and waited.

Sheriff Hegg clasped his hands behind him and jutted out his lower lip.

"You Mrs. Africa?" he barked.

"Yes."

He looked at her shrewdly. He ran his little piggy eyes slowly from her face down the slim, graceful lines of her slender figure.

He said, in an oratorical voice, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, there is absolutely no question that right here in this very room is the man or the woman who killed Benjamin Africa."

First of all, I'll hear from any of you who have an opinion. How about you, Miss Minetta?"

Flash observed that Minetta Africa, thin-lipped, with spots of hectic color burning on her cheekbones, was sending malignant glances at the Eurasian girl.

"My brother," the spinster said slowly, "knew that he was going to be killed. You've doubtless heard about the Africa tradition. When a man of our family is about to die, blood is always seen under the portrait of our ancestor. My brother saw a ghostly figure there last night—and found fresh blood!"

The Eurasian said softly, "My husband said nothing about it to me."

"There were a great many things," her sister-in-law coldly stated, "that he didn't tell you."

The Eurasian's large, brilliant dark eyes studied Minetta Africa a moment, then she said, quietly, "I do not believe that a ghost killed my husband."

The spinster licked her lips. She shot a look of venomous hatred at the girl in red. In her harsh, frigid voice, she said, slowly, "Sheriff, that woman standing there killed my brother!"

MISS HOPPER uttered a small shriek. Flash watched Lotus Africa. And once again he was amazed at her poise, her perfect calm. Not a muscle in her face twitched.

The sheriff strode toward Minetta. "Have you any proof of it?"

"I don't need proof. I know she killed him!"

"We want proof," the sheriff said gruffly. "Did you see her go into the room where he died? Did you see her come out?"

"No," Minetta said thinly. "But she did it. She did it to get his money,

so she could run off with this man—this Cheseldine."

"That's a lie," Cheseldine said.

The sheriff made an impatient gesture with his hand. "Now look here, folks. I won't have arguments or wrangling. We're gathered together here to find out who killed Benjamin Africa. One of you did it. If anybody knows anything about it, speak up—or I'll have the whole kit and kaboodle of you taken down to jail."

He turned almost savagely on the Eurasian girl. "What have you got to say for yourself?" he boomed.

"Take it easy," Flash said.

The sheriff sent him a hot blue glance. "My boy, this is no time to take it easy. There's been a murder committed. And I'm going to find out who did it. I asked you a question, Mrs. Africa. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I know nothing about it."

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

"No," she said softly. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Where were you when it happened?"

"I have been in my room all evening except twice," the girl answered in her musical, slurring voice. "Once I came to the foot of the stairs to speak to Mr. Horton when he came in. The second time I came when I heard all the noise—and found that my husband had been killed."

"So that's your story, is it?" Sheriff Hegg snapped.

"It is the truth."

The sheriff came a little closer to her, thrusting out his red, wet underlip. In a menacingly low voice, he said, "Got anybody who can prove what you're saying?"

"I was alone in my room all the time."

The sheriff took a backward step. He plunged his hand into his coat pocket, but did not at once withdraw it.

"Mrs. Africa," he said, "let me see one of your hairpins."

Her large, dark eyes gazed at him, as if with bewilderment.

"My hairpins?" she whispered.

"Yes! A hairpin! One of the gadgets you hold your hair up with. Pull one of them out."

The girl raised her slim white hands to her head. She took out a hairpin, and her blue-black hair came tumbling down about her shoulders, gleaming and glowing in the candlelight. It was lustrous, long, beautiful hair.

She held out in her hand a hairpin fashioned from some dark wood, the two tines joined by a golden mounting in which a little triangular fragment of jade was set.

The sheriff looked at it with an inverted smile. And Flash realized with finality that the mills of the gods were preparing to grind the Eurasian girl very fine indeed. He was watching her.

Not a vestige of her calm had deserted her. She was as poised, as imperturbable as ever. Or so she seemed to any searching eye. But it chanced that the elbow of the arm she was extending toward the sheriff was lightly touching Flash's elbow. He was aware of the faintest of vibrations. The girl was shivering. And he knew that, despite her look of calm, she was terrified.

Convinced of her innocence, he suddenly felt coldly furious. He knew that the cards were being stacked against this girl. She, too, was aware of it. And she was like a bewildered and terrified young animal. It was as if these faces about her represented a circle of doom which was closing in

on her, from which there was no escape.

Sheriff Hegg looked at the hairpin in her hand and said, "Is this the kind of hairpin you always use?"

She slightly inclined her head.

"Never use any other kind?" he asked, almost triumphantly.

"No."

"Where do you get these hairpins?" he asked, his intention obviously being to prolong her agony and his own moment of triumph.

"They were given to me by a mandarin in Hongkong when I was a little girl."

"You mean, they're rare?"

"Yes."

"Ever give any of them away?"

"No."

Flash glanced at Minetta Africa, and he wondered how much she knew of where this was leading, for she was looking at the Eurasian girl with cold hatred, with a kind of awful greed.

The sheriff removed his hand from his pocket.

"This yours?" he softly asked, and produced the hairpin Flash had found.

The girl looked at it and nodded her lovely head.

"Where did you find it?" she asked.

"Where it dropped out of your hair," Sheriff Hegg said triumphantly. "On the body of Benjamin Africa, after you killed him!"

CHAPTER X

The Net of Suspicion

MISS MINETTA uttered a thin, harsh exclamation of satisfaction. Flash glanced quickly about the room. Wayne Cheseldine was staring at the girl from his puffed purple eyes. Harry Muroc was looking up from his chair with a sardonic

twinkle at the corner of his mouth. At the end of the room the servants were staring with large eyes. Flash noticed particularly the colored woman, presumably the cook. Her bulging eyes showed grotesque areas of white.

The young widow of Benjamin Africa was slowly shaking her head.

"That could not be," she said. "I did not kill him."

"Just a moment," Flash said, and forced his voice to be judicially calm. "You're wrong, Sheriff. Your assumption is wrong. I'm absolutely convinced this girl is innocent."

"Yeah? Then explain this hairpin!"

"She dropped it when she came into the study and bent down to look at her dead husband. I was there. She was horrified. She gave a little scream and sprang up. It dropped then."

The sheriff said peevishly, "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"We weren't discussing the hairpin before."

The sheriff looked at him. He did not say that Flash's preposterous lie was a preposterous lie, but his eyes said that. He must have realized that Flash was determined to protect Lotus Africa. For Flash was determined to protect Lotus Africa. Flash was sure that the person who had killed her husband had placed that hairpin under his collar deliberately to attach suspicion to her. He was more than ever certain that she had not killed her husband.

"That," the sheriff growled, "puts us just where we were before. Dan, you can help us. You're Mr. Africa's lawyer. Who stood to gain the most by his death?"

Reluctantly, Flash admitted, "Mrs. Africa."

Minetta sharply spoke. "That isn't true. His will leaves everything he owns, half to her and half to me!"

"No," Flash said quietly. "It did, previous to about a month ago. He had me change it. The new will leaves two-thirds to Mrs. Africa and one-third to you, after a bequest for one hundred and fifty thousand is paid to Miss Hopper here, and some small bequests to servants."

The old maid uttered a gasp of angry surprise.

"Wait a minute!" the sheriff snapped. "Mrs. Africa, did you know about that change?"

The beautiful girl in red nodded. "Yes. My husband told me."

"So that you knew that if he died, if you killed him and weren't caught, you would receive two-thirds of his estate!"

Flash said curtly, "Don't phrase it like that. You have absolutely no proof that this girl killed him. Why not get on with your questioning of these other people?"

Wayne Cheseldine said, "Two people here certainly had a good enough motive for killing him—Miss Hopper and Miss Minetta!"

The sheriff wheeled on him. "Sure! And now that he's dead, what are you and Mrs. Africa planning to do?"

The man from Hongkong answered stiffly, "I am going away."

"I want to check these other people," Flash said grimly. "Miss Minetta, where were you when your brother was killed?"

"In my room," she snapped.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

The sheriff broke in, "Where was this blonde?"

"In the north drawing room with me," Flash answered.

"I was in the music room," Cheseldine said.

"Can any of you," Sheriff Hegg asked, "prove that you were where you say you were?"

There was no answer to this.

"In other words," he said, "not one of you except Miss Hopper has an alibi. And every one of you had a motive." He walked over to Cheseldine. "Tell me, who was it beat you up?"

"Mr. Africa."

"What for?"

The man from Hongkong answered angrily, "It's none of your damned business."

Flash said, "Mr. Africa sent for me tonight in connection with it. Mr. Cheseldine was writing notes to Mrs. Africa, begging her to elope with him. Mr. Africa found one of these notes—and beat him up." And as he said this, he remembered Cheseldine's words, "Tell him, if we ever meet again, to watch out . . . I'll kill him!"

SHERIFF HEGG had folded his long thin arms on his chest and was glaring at the man from Hongkong.

"So you were in the music room, eh?"

"I was."

"Who discovered the murder?" Miss Hopper burst out. "Ask him that!"

"I did," Cheseldine said. "I heard a terrific thumping and banging across the hall. I ran out just before it stopped. It had seemed to come from the study. I went in there—and found him dead."

"And you broke down and cried like a baby," the sheriff said, sarcastically.

Miss Minetta broke in, "Maybe he

helped plan it, but he didn't do it. It was that woman who did it!"

"That's my opinion," Sheriff Hegg emphatically agreed. "Now, Mrs. Africa—"

"Just a moment," Flash interrupted. "I'm sure that if Mr. Africa could say anything about it—"

Miss Minetta screamed, "If Benjamin could say anything about it, he'd say she killed him!"

"That's enough of that," Flash said sternly. "I know that Mr. Africa would want me to see that his wife's interests were protected. They're not being protected. You're overlooking every angle of this case except hers. I'd like to hear from this mystery man I found skulking on the terrace."

"Muroc's the name," said Mr. Muroc. He was trying to put a broken cigar together. The cigar had evidently been broken in halves when Flash had tackled him. But the jagged ends fitted. Mr. Muroc licked them with his tongue, and placed the re-fashioned cigar together with firm pressure, then inserted it in his mouth.

He said, "I've explained myself. I was taking a walk. When I came back to the house, I saw the light in Mr. Africa's study and started to walk in through the window. I saw he was dead. Just then someone yelled, and I ran, thinking it was the murderer."

Flash, watching him, saw intelligence flick from his little black eyes to Sheriff Hegg's little blue eyes, and was conscious of mysterious undercurrents.

"That's my story," Muroc said, "and I'm going to stick to it."

His insolence made Flash wonder, but not for long. It was instantly evident that the net was going to close about Lotus Africa, or Sheriff Hegg would know the reason why.

"Whether or not she dropped that hairpin," he said, "is beside the point. Of everybody here, she had the most to gain by killing Mr. Africa. And here's another angle: Whoever killed Mr. Africa was someone the old man trusted, or he would have prevented them from slipping that wire around his neck."

Flash said immediately, "That's too general. There isn't a person in this house he wouldn't have permitted near him. Even Cheseldine. It's quite as likely he was taken by surprise. Anyone could have come up behind him through the window without his seeing them."

The sheriff made an impatient gesture with his bony hands. "All right. Then let's consider it from still another angle. If Mrs. Africa killed her husband, she must have come downstairs and gone into the study either by those casement windows or the hall doorway, or possibly through this connecting door right here. She might have gone in and out without being seen. On the other hand, someone might have seen her either going in or coming out."

"Unless," Flash said, "she stayed in her room, as she claims she did."

A voice at the end of the room said thickly, "Ah seen her go in and Ah seen her come out."

Flash and the sheriff simultaneously spun about. It was the cook who had spoken. They looked at the black woman as if they had never seen her before. She was a fat woman. A black woman. A very fat, very black woman. She was gigantic in a stiffly starched white dress. She dwarfed the butler and the chambermaid who stood beside her.

Sheriff Hegg walked rapidly down the room.

"You did?" he said, and almost purred.

"Yassuh."

"What's your name?"

"Blossom. Blossom Vickus."

"And you say you saw Mrs. Africa go into the study and come out of the study?"

"Yassuh."

"Where were you when this happened?"

In the interval before her reply, Flash heard Lotus Africa give a faint little sound, like a choked sob. He looked quickly at her. Her eyes were bright and clear. She was as poised, as calm as ever. Only her lips betrayed her feelings at this new development. They were slightly quivering.

He knew that, as before, she was trying to hold herself in. In an American girl, this repression would have aroused his suspicions. But he had realized that she was calm and composed by training, that composure was the law of the Orient. She was meeting this distressing situation as she had been taught to meet all emergencies, with poise and courage.

"In de do' under de stairs," the black woman said.

Flash said quickly, "Do you spend much of your time in that doorway?"

"Yassuh. Consid'ble. Ah was standin' there when Ah saw her come down de stair and go in de study. Den Ah heard all dat bangin' and thumpin'. Den Ah sees her come out ob dat room."

Flash turned to Lotus Africa. "How about this?"

"It's a lie," she said quietly. "That woman hates me. She's lying because she hates me."

"And jes' befo' dinner," the black woman was saying, "Ah see her go down into de cellar, and fool around

wid dat electric meter—jes' befo' all de lights went out—wham!"

CHAPTER XI

The Surprise at Milltown Pike

THE sheriff was smiling grimly. He sent a little triumphant glance at Flash, who promptly said, "Sheriff, that woman is lying. She has some kind of prejudice against Mrs. Africa and is taking this chance to get her into trouble."

Sheriff Hegg returned to Flash. "Son," he said, "you're just plain crazy. You're sorry for this girl, and you're out to defend her tooth and claw. It's time wasted, Dan." His voice was patronizing. "You don't know these Oriental women."

His tone indicated that he was a last-minute authority on the subject of Oriental women.

"There's nothing left for me to do but take this woman down to jail. I've found enough to turn over to the coroner."

"But you haven't found anything," Flash said. "This cook is lying. When I get her into court, I'll make her eat what she just said. You haven't anything on Mrs. Africa. You've rushed into this headlong. You've been prejudiced from the outset."

"Maybe you ain't prejudiced yourself!" the sheriff cried angrily.

"I'm not satisfied," Flash answered. "What about this fellow Muroc? What about the rest of them? There's not one person under suspicion who has a clean bill of health. Cheseldine admits he was alone. Miss Minetta admits she was alone." He said to the butler, "Where were you when Mr. Africa was murdered?"

"In the cellar, sir, trying to fix the lights. But I'm sure nothing is wrong

with the meter. If you'll pardon me, I too, think the cook is lying. She is the worst liar I ever knew."

"Yes," said Blossom Vickus belligerently. "And mebbly Ah'll wring yo' neck!"

Flash said to the chambermaid, "Where were you?"

"In my room on the third floor, sir, reading my Bible."

"And me," the cook said grimly, "Ah was standin' in dat doorway, jes' lak Ah said."

"Discounting that," Flash said, "not one person in this household, with the exception of Miss Hopper, has any kind of alibi. I want to know about this man Muroc. I want to know what was the nature of his business with Mr. Africa."

"And I'm not talking," said the mystery man.

"Miss Minetta?" Flash said.

"I know nothing about him, except that he has been here several times before," the spinster said in her glacial voice. "He's been here every two weeks since my brother returned from China with this woman."

Flash said grimly, "All right! Sheriff, I want you to lock this man up on a charge of first degree homicide!"

Sheriff Hegg shook his head.

"We haven't anything on him."

"Then arrest him on suspicion."

Once again, Flash encountered a stone wall. "Sorry, Dan, but it don't seem to me that circumstances warrant it. And, after all, I'm running this show."

"Very well," Flash said crisply. "Don't arrest anybody, but don't let anybody leave this house. I'm not satisfied that you're on the right track. I want to check up a few things. Did you bring any men along?"

"Yep. Six. They're scattered around now, outside the house."

"Give them orders to permit no one to leave this house."

Lotus Africa said in her low, beautiful voice, "May I go to my room now?"

While the sheriff hesitated, Flash said, "Certainly!" And then saw another flicker of intelligence pass between Muroc and Sheriff Hegg.

"I want to have a private talk with you, Muroc," said the sheriff.

The two men left the room. Cheseldine, with a shrug, went into the hall and up the stairs.

Once again in the privacy of the music room, Sheriff Hegg said to Muroc: "You're on a spot. And there's only one thing to do. You've got to slip out. If Horton asks questions, I'll cover you. I'll insist that you're of no importance to the case."

"No," Muroc said. "I've got something to do here."

"What is it?"

"Don't let it worry you. Just grind your axes and I'll grind mine."

The sheriff looked suspicious and alarmed. "But the coroner may make things uncomfortable for you!"

"Then you'll give me an alibi."

"You're forgetting that old trouble in Springfield a year ago. It may pop up somehow if you get in the limelight! We can't take the risk, Muroc. No. You've got to go."

There was a hard look in the shoe-button eyes. "Get this straight, Hegg. I'll go when I'm ready. Tonight, I won't be interfered with. Now run along and peddle your vegetables."

FLASH had left Minetta and her blond niece and returned to the study by way of the sitting room door. He closed that door and he

closed the hall door. He went to the casement windows and looked out into the night. In the distance he heard the faint rumbling of thunder, then silence fell again.

The question tormented him: For what purpose had Benjamin Africa been killed?

Flash sat down on the edge of the desk and arranged his thoughts. He was absolutely convinced that the Eurasian girl was innocent, and he was convinced that she was destined to be the victim of forces beyond his control. He was angrily puzzled by Muroc, he was puzzled by Cheseldine, by Miss Minetta, and the blond girl.

He had seen glances pass between Minetta and the blond girl. There were, he was aware, numerous mysterious undercurrents in this dark and sinister house. But he could only guess at what was going on.

Why was Sheriff Hegg behaving so mysteriously with the mysterious Harry Muroc? Somewhere here there was a mystery. Deliberately Sheriff Hegg seemed to be shielding Muroc from questioning. He had refused to arrest him. What mysterious link joined the sheriff and the mystery man in evening clothes?

Sitting on the edge of the desk, Flash looked at the dead man's mottled face, his staring, glassy eyes. Once again, he wondered about that soot he had found under the old man's fingernails. He shook himself, shivering a little. His gaze fell to the blue blotter, to the little irregularly round ink spot near the bronze clip in the corner.

Flash gave a surprised grunt. The ink spot had changed its shape! No longer irregularly round, it was now oval.

He got up and walked around the desk to examine it. And he was aston-

ished to discover that it was not an ink spot at all. It was a ball of some solid substance casting a shadow!

It was about the size of a pea. Flash carefully picked it up, and examined it in the light of the candles. It was of a black or a very dark brown substance. To his fingertips, it felt slightly sticky—the tackiness of varnish which has not quite set. He brought it close to his nostrils and sniffed.

It had an odor, and for some inexplicable reason, this odor sent a shiver through him. It was an odor that he had never before smelled. He took from his pocket the envelope on which Harry Muroc had written the number, dropped the little black ball inside, and quickly let himself out of the room.

At a half-run, he started down the hall for the front door. The sitting room, he observed, as he passed, was now occupied only by Miss Minetta and Bernice Hopper. Their heads were close together. They were whispering, and the spinster was making small, quick, decisive gestures with a clenched fist.

But he did not pause. He had suspected that they shared some mystery, and this merely confirmed his suspicions. He ran on to the door, not even pausing for his coat and hat. He opened the front door.

He started across the veranda, intending to secure his roadster which he had left parked under the pines across the turning circle.

His eyes, growing accustomed to the dark, discerned a dark figure hovering near the radiator of his roadster.

Flash leaped noiselessly down the steps, and started across the crushed stone, trying to make no sound. But it was impossible to prevent the stones from making a crunching sound.

He saw the dark figure flit away under the trees. Next he heard it stumble, then the impact of its sudden fall to the ground. He raced across the circle to the edge of the trees and listened.

He heard the neighing of a horse in a pasture. He heard, far away, the thin, somewhat mournful whistle of a train rocketing through the night. But there was no sound, no whisper of sound, from under the trees.

Flash jumped into the roadster, switched on the lights, and backed the car around so that the headlights flooded the area under the trees. But whoever had been loitering there in the darkness had completely vanished.

A spark of bright color, a bright red, on a low shrub suddenly attracted him. It was approximately the spot where the mysterious loiterer had stumbled and fallen.

He got out of the car again and went to the bush. The bright red spark proved to be a shred of flame-red silk. It had presumably been torn from some garment worn by the fugitive.

It made him feel a little ill. This shred of silk matched the red gown the Eurasian girl was wearing. She had said she was going to her room. Was she attempting to escape?

A man came out of the darkness toward him and growled, "Who's that?"

Flash recognized the voice as that of Jim Freeman, a deputy sheriff, and answered. "It's Dan Horton, Jim."

"Who killed Ben Africa?"

"We don't know—yet. Will you do me a favor? Run up to Mrs. Africa's room and find if she's there. That's all. Just make sure she's there."

"Okay." The deputy sheriff walked over to the veranda and entered the house.

In his absence, Flash turned the car about. Jim Freeman returned. His eyes had a dazzled look. It wasn't necessary for him to say that Lotus Africa was in her room. Flash could understand any man's looking dazzled for some time after gazing upon that exotically lovely face.

"She's there," he said.

"Thanks," Flash said, and started off, crowding the accelerator pedal to the floor boards. If the Eurasian girl had not left that shred of vivid red silk on that bush, who, then, had? It was evident that this shred of red silk was to add still another bright thread to the mystery.

What, he wondered, was taking place in that dark and sinister house?

He drove rapidly, trying to think. He was unprepared for the shocking surprise which awaited him where the winding bluestone driveway merged with the Milltown Pike. As he slowed for the sharp turn into the Pike, two tall, thin black figures like huge black apes jumped on the running board, one on either side. Flash had an instant's impression of a white handkerchief masking a face, and then a hand reached in like a striking snake. A black-sleeved arm was about his neck. A gloved palm was clamped down over his mouth. Another hand jerked the emergency brake. Still another hand flicked off the headlights.

In total darkness, the roadster swerved into the ditch and came to a grinding stop.

CHAPTER XII

Flight in the Darkness

THE roadster had hardly stopped when both doors were opened. Muscular arms pinned Flash Horton's elbows to his side. He was

roughly dragged out onto the road. The muzzle of a gun was pressed to his back. He was as helpless as if he were an insect imprisoned by the black arms of a tarantula.

The gun, prodding his back, started him walking.

Speculations milled in his brain. Who were these men? Old enemies? New ones? Where had they come from and what did they want? Where were they taking him?

His first conclusion was a rendezvous. They were taking him, by force, to meet someone.

But gradually the conviction was chillingly borne in upon him that this was no rendezvous. These grim, silent men were going to kill him.

They had by this time reached the pasture across from the entrance gates to Skull Knob. They were marching him across the pasture. There was no light. The sky was still overcast. And neither of these black-garbed, mysterious men carried lights of any kind.

The only sound was the soft, steady tramping of feet on the ground.

Flash said, with a sudden surge of helpless fury, "What the devil is this all about!"

There was no answer, no sound but the soft, heavy trampling of feet. His vision, now more adjusted to the darkness, could make out the scraggly arms of the apple orchard toward which they were taking him, and the greater blackness of their figures against the blackness of the night.

The muzzle of the gun pressed relentlessly, warningly, into his back.

He knew they meant to kill him. But why? Who were they? His heart was hammering on a crescendo of panic. He was thinking of Margy, left alone. And the thought of Margy made him suddenly faint and sick.

Flash, frantically searching his mind for the reason behind this hideous march through the night, suddenly sensed that some command had been given. A silent command. His two captors were proceeding more slowly.

Then Flash understood. This was not the spot where he was to be killed. They had reached the old rail fence which zig-zagged down the boundary between the pasture and the old orchard. They were merely pausing to negotiate this fence.

He was to be hoisted over the fence. The scene of death was farther beyond.

With hands firmly gripping each of his elbows, Flash was pushed to the fence. He was supposed to step over it.

He lifted his left foot. But he did not step over it. He brought his foot up and sharply backward and outward. The heel struck bone with a sharp crackling sound. A man hoarsely cursed and the tension of Flash's left arm was abruptly relaxed. With a wrench, he freed the other arm. In the same savage forward motion, he leaped up and over the fence. His right toe did not, however, clear the top rail. It caught.

He fell forward. He stiffened himself for the thump. He struck the ground, rolled over and sprang to his feet, unhurt. He was free!

BEHIND him he heard a quick whisper. He saw a flicker of light stab out, but there was only a mild report, softer than the clapping of a pair of hands. Someone had fired a gun equipped with a silencer.

The bullet went crackling among the branches of an apple tree.

Flash ran on. The ground, covered with rotting apples, was soft and

treacherous. He slipped, fell; picked himself up and then ran headlong into an apple tree.

A second bullet clipped over his head.

He heard his recent captors floundering about behind him. He plunged on now with his hands outstretched, to escape further collision with trees.

Presently he reached a second fence. Because of his frequent encounters with trees, his turning this way and that, he had lost all sense of direction.

But he climbed this fence. And sank knee-deep in mire. He was in a swamp. He did not know this part of the valley enough to guess where he was. There were so many swamps. But he heard the noise of the pursuit. He could not retreat. He must push on through this swamp.

He made his way carefully. He had apparently entered a zone of flatlands composed of juicy mud and stagnant water. He could not run. He must walk slowly. He slipped and fell often.

At length he heard the gurgle and splash of water ahead of him. Still he could not visualize the geography of this place. This creek was Ten Mile Creek, which wound and twisted from one end of the valley to the other. In some places it was so shallow that a small dog could cross without wetting his belly. In other places it was over a man's head.

Flash gingerly entered the creek. The water was bitter cold. It filled his shoes. As he progressed, it reached his knees, then his waist. Shivering, he floundered across.

On the other side was more swamp. He splashed through perhaps two hundred yards of marsh, then reached firm ground again. It was a pasture. At

the end of it he saw looming a vague white oblong. A barn or a house.

He stopped and listened. Faintly, he could hear the gurgle and chuckle of Ten Mile Creek, but there was no other sound. He had shaken off the pursuit.

CHAPTER XIII

The Black Ball

BUT his elation was short-lived. There still remained to be solved the mystery of his capture by the unknown pair. Who were they, and what purpose lay behind their attack on him?

With water and swamp mud streaming from his clothing, Flash plodded across the pasture toward the vague white oblong. He shivered with cold. He was wet to the skin. There wasn't a square inch of dryness on his whole body. He sneezed.

The white house, the cluster of red outbuildings off to the right, and the row of elms beyond the house, although all were mere shadows in the blackness, suddenly assumed familiarity.

Unless Flash was mistaken, this was Jeb Simpson's farmhouse. And he had, in crossing pastures, orchards, swamp, creek and more swamp, crossed the apex of an angle formed by the junction of the Blue Rock Road and the Milltown Turnpike. He was actually less than two miles from his own house.

He approached the back door and hammered on it with his fist. Knowing the suspicious natures of farmers for late-at-night visitors, he called, "Hey, there! Mr. Simpson!"

His clamor eventually produced a result. A light went on upstairs. Then a light went on downstairs. Then

there was the harsh click of a bolt being shot back.

The door opened. Mr. Simpson stood there in a crumpled white night-shirt, with an electric torch in one hand, a double-barreled shotgun in the other.

He peered out at Flash, shining the light in his face, holding the shotgun in readiness.

Flash panted: "I'm Dan Horton. I got lost in these swamps back here, and I want to borrow your car."

Mr. Simpson said presently, from depths of astonishment, "Well, I'll be danged! You better come in, son, and get some dry clothes on."

"Thanks," Flash said, "but I'm in too much of a rush. Ben Africa's been killed. I'm just on my way to town in connection with it. Can I borrow your car?"

"Who killed him?"

"Nobody knows."

"Hmph! Mark my word, it was that yaller woman!" Babbling out this theory, he took Flash to the barn. A down-at-heel Model T Ford touring car was protected from thieves and vandals by a padlock and chain large enough, Flash reflected, to moor a battleship.

Mr. Simpson informed him that he had told his wife only the other day that Ben Africa would come to no good end, bringing that yaller woman to Skull Knob.

"The Africas have all come to violent ends," Mr. Simpson said, as Flash climbed into the driver's seat.

Flash resumed his interrupted journey. He followed the Blue Rock Road to the Milltown Turnpike and turned left. Presently he left the turnpike, turning right into a narrow, rough macadam road which, after about a mile, became unpaved and narrower.

The old Ford scrambled up rocky ledges and slithered down into gulleys. Houses became fewer, and the country began to assume a wilder aspect.

At length Flash turned in between two tall dark cedars. The road was now dirt, and, in marshy spots, corduroy. The car bumped and rattled along to the end of a ravine which grew narrower and higher as Flash progressed.

The feeble headlights presently picked out of the rocks and trees a gaunt gray house which, from its appearance, might have merited a reputation for being haunted. In its isolation, its wild surroundings, it had an air at once bleak and sinister.

Flash stopped the car, got out, and made his way up a rocky path to a front porch with skinny posts.

HE pounded on a door and waited. Presently a light began to flit—about inside, casting long shadow, striking cold glints from metallic points and surfaces. The light floated like a wraith toward him. An old man in a blue kimono opened the door. He stared at Flash in the feeble light of an electric pocket torch and made hissing sounds through his fangs. He was Japanese.

"Is Professor Zimmerman home?" Flash asked.

"In bed, sair."

"Tell him Dan Horton is here."

"Yes, sair. Wait in there, pliz. I make a light."

He backed out of the doorway and went into a room which adjoined the hall. He removed the chimney from a large, green-domed kerosene table lamp, and applied a sizzling match to the wick. He replaced the chimney, bowed, and hissed again, and took his departure.

Flash waited. It was a rich and

amazing room. There was nothing in it with the exception of the kerosene lamp that was not Oriental. On the walls were mandarin robes from Peking. Manchu rugs of gold and blue adorned the floor. On taborets about the room were specimens of Satsuma ware and cherry lacquer from Osaka, Ming vases, a variety of bronze, iron, porcelain and wooden Buddhas from southern Asia, a Brunei cymbal, and war gongs from Borneo.

It was a fascinating room. From a teakwood peg hung, by the hair, a cured head from the New Hebrides, the lamplight gleaming on the varnished planes of nose and cheeks—a grisly relic. About the picture molding were little wind bells of glass and silver, which tinkled in the faintest breath of air.

And over it all hung the faint, pungent flavor of incense. There was a brazier, still smoldering a little, before a large pink, blue and white fat-bellied Buddha with eyes of kingfisher jade.

A man came into the room; a red-faced little man of about seventy, wizened and stooped of shoulder, blinking sleepily behind square steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Ah, hello, there, Dan," he said. "What can I do for you?"

It was characteristic of him to make no comment on Dan's muddy, bedraggled appearance. Professor Zimmerman called himself a permanently retired scientist. He had spent his life delving into the mysteries of the Far East, penetrating its rank jungles, traversing its smoldering deserts, exploring its ancient cities, to satisfy an insatiable intellectual curiosity.

He lived in this house a few months of the year. Without warning, he would pack up and be off to his beloved Orient, on the trail of some new—or

incredibly old—archeological will-o'-the-wisp.

Flash said, "Benjamin Africa was killed a little after midnight—garroted with a fine steel wire."

"Hm!" the professor said. "An old Hindu custom. The *thugs*, or *thags* of northern India used the silken slip-noose to garrot their victims. They'd slip up behind the man they wanted to rob, drop the noose over his head and jerk it tight about his neck. Know who did it?"

"No." Flash briefly described the scene of the murder, mentioned the suspects, and said, "I looked the study over pretty thoroughly for clues. This was lying near a corner of the desk blotter."

He took out the envelope and rolled the little black ball into the palm of his hand.

"What is it?"

Professor Zimmerman picked the little black ball out of Flash's palm with the tips of bunched fingers. He raised it to his nose. He sniffed it.

"Opium," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

The Man in the Shadows

FLASH nodded slowly. "That's what I thought. I wanted to make sure. Is it any particular kind of opium? Can you tell me anything about it?"

The old man sniffed the opium pill. He held it close to the light and flaked off a little of it with a thumbnail. Then he placed his thumbnail in his mouth. His eyes rolled and narrowed.

"Yes," he said. "It's the very finest kind of Benares opium. Very expensive stuff, this. A kind seldom seen in America."

Flash said, "You mean, there are

different qualities, or brands, of opium—like cigarettes?"

"Not quite the same analogy applies. But there are a great many different grades and varieties of opium. This is a peculiarly fine, purified grade. In the old days, only a ruby-button mandarin would have smoked such fine opium as this."

"Is it mild?"

"Oh, yes."

"Who would smoke this grade of opium today?"

"The highest type of Chinese women smoke a great deal of it."

Flash replaced the opium pill in the envelope, and restored the envelope to his pocket. He felt a little ill. Inexorably, it seemed, all trails, all clues, led to Lotus Africa. For a moment, he doubted his faith in her innocence. There was, first of all, the hairpin; now—this! Yet he found himself clinging to his belief that someone had placed the hairpin just within the dead man's collar so that suspicion would fasten itself to her.

And this opium, actually, did not prove anything. Certainly, it did not prove that she had killed Benjamin Africa. Nor did it even prove that she used opium.

Professor Zimmerman was saying, "Perhaps Benjamin Africa cultivated a fondness for opium in China. He was an eccentric man."

"It wasn't there, professor, when I went into his study the first time."

"Then if I were you, I'd thoroughly investigate this man from Hongkong. Doesn't the garroting wire—and also the opium—point to someone out of the Far East?"

Flash acknowledged the logic of this; thanked him and took his departure. Reaching the Milltown Turnpike, he did not proceed immediately to Skull

Knob, but stopped at his own house. Fortunately Margy's room was upstairs and his was downstairs, so that, if he moved quietly, he would not wake her. He wanted a gun and he wanted a change of clothes. So he took a shower, got into dry clothing, and dropped his automatic pistol into his coat pocket. He wanted no questions asked about his bedraggled appearance.

He reached the entrance gates to Skull Knob with no greater adventure than a boiling radiator. He passed his roadster, in the ditch, and saw that it would have to be towed out. He would have it attended to in the morning.

By the time he was half-way up the long grade to the Africa mansion, the radiator's boiling had become a serious matter. He shifted to low gear. The old engine protested with such clamorous hammerings that he realized he could not reach the hilltop. Steam was spouting from the radiator cap in clouds.

With perhaps an eighth of a mile to go, he pulled off the road. Leaving the mechanical antique under a tree, he walked the rest of the way.

THE old house came out of the darkness, a dull mass relieved by the stripes of orange light which were windows.

His thoughts went back to the pill of opium—and Lotus Africa. Inexorably the net seemed to be closing in about her. Something in him protested that it must be checked—protested that the girl was innocent.

But why had Benjamin Africa been killed! Here, Flash felt instinctively, lay the solution of the mystery. If he could discover *why*, he would know *who*. For what reason had that great, booming savage of a man been slain?

Flash took a short cut through shrubbery. He was within a hundred yards of the house when there occurred suddenly, off to his right, the sound of a whistle. It was a faint, eerie whistle—a veritable ghost of thin sound. It was as thin, as high as the notes of a Chinese flute—a curiously shrill, melancholy, Oriental sound.

From the rear of the house—in the opposite direction—a man appeared. As he passed a window, his profile was for a moment silhouetted. It was Jim Freeman, the deputy sheriff. He looked grim and wary, as if he, too, had heard the sound. As he passed the window Flash saw that there was a gun in his hand.

As Flash hesitated, the ghostly whistle was repeated. Cautiously, Flash advanced under the trees in the direction of the deputy sheriff. He presently heard his cautious footsteps in the dry grass and whispered, "Jim!"

A whisper answered, "Who is it?"
"Dan Horton."

He made his way to where the deputy sheriff was standing. Jim Freeman grasped his elbow. "You hear that whistle?"

"Yes. Wait. It sounded like a signal of some kind."

They presently saw a dark shadow detach itself from a bush near the house. As this shadow neared the house, the two men saw that it was long and slender—a tall man. He was looking up at an upstairs window. A white shade was drawn down to the sill. The light shining against this shade was as bright, as white as electric light. It was, Flash guessed, produced by a gasoline lamp with welsbach burner.

As the two men waited, a sharp silhouette was cast against the shade. It was the head, as cleanly defined as a cameo, of Lotus Africa.

Her crisp, lovely profile moved swiftly across the shade. Her head bent down. Then the shade went up.

Lotus Africa placed her hands on the sill and looked out and down. The brilliant white light, somewhere behind her, streamed about her head and struck gleams of fire from the red silk gown, and silver-blue glints from her ebony-black hair.

The shadow under the window moved. The girl softly whispered. Flash clearly heard the whisper, but the words were in some foreign tongue, presumably Chinese. The shadowy man below the window whispered an answer in the same tongue. The girl in red slowly nodded her little head and gestured with one finger.

Flash and the deputy sheriff watched the man approach the side of the house. They saw him grasp a gutter pipe and test it with his weight. And they watched him pull himself, hand over hand, with the agility of a monkey, up the pipe to the window out of which the beautiful Eurasian girl leaned.

CHAPTER XV

The Figures in the Window

IT was, to Flash, so unexpected, so mysterious, so completely Oriental from beginning to end, that he felt he must be dreaming. It was incredible, as if he had suddenly opened his eyes upon some scene from the "Arabian Nights."

But there were other surprises. As the Chinese swung in over the window-sill, Flash caught a fleeting glimpse of washed-out blue, and garish red. The washed-out blue was his clothing—a loose, strange jacket, and loose, baggy pants. Around his middle was a red sash. Was it a shred from this sash that Flash had found on the bush near

his roadster just before he started for Professor Zimmerman's?

Flash heard the deputy sheriff beside him giving little grunts of astonishment.

This strange visitor was not dressed as Orientals in America dress, but in the costume of his country, the loose, washed-out blue garments, the sash about his waist.

His hair was close-cropped and black. His mustache was of the drooping mandarin type.

Flash now glanced sharply at the girl. She had extended a slim white hand to help the young Chinaman over the sill and into her room. The climax of this swift succession of surprises was the look in her eyes. Unmasked—a look of venomous hatred!

Flash emitted a soft gasp of despair. He sensed, in this meeting, a flavor so mysterious, so Oriental, that it disheartened him. How could he hope to cope with an intrigue so dark and so intricate, with a situation so perplexing in its fantastic design!

His doubts of Lotus Africa's innocence were wavering again. Certainly, she had so far furnished not one atom of evidence to support his hope that she was innocent of her husband's killing.

The shade went swiftly down. The shadows on the shade of the girl and her mysterious visitor vanished, then reappeared. They were sinking down, facing each other, not more than two feet apart. Presumably, they were sitting in chairs. And, from their postures, Flash gathered that some sort of small, low table was standing between them.

The silhouettes of their faces and bodies to their waists was clean-cut, perfect. He could even see, very clearly, the mandarin mustache the young

man wore, and the soft, delicate curve of the girl's breast.

The man's lips were moving rapidly. Then the girl's lips began to move more rapidly. The faint murmur of their voices made a low, soft humming.

Then something appeared in the girl's hand. It appeared to be a cylindrical object. The man's hand came up and removed the object from the girl's hand.

There was more rapid fire talk. Then the man's shoulders and arms began moving in strange jerks, and the girl was bending toward him. Flash guessed that the man was searching in his pockets for something, or giving something to the girl.

Then here was an exciting new development. A long thin wire in the girl's hand was now casting its shadow on the white shade. On the end of the wire was a small lump. The girl was spinning the wire in her hands and holding the small lump over something on the table.

Flash knew what the girl was doing. She was heating a pill of opium over a flame of some sort.

Suddenly, verifying his guess, the clear black silhouette of an opium pipe appeared. The girl was thrusting the sizzling wad of gum into the pipe. She pressed it down, twirling the wire.

Quickly, she placed the bit of the pipe between her lips. A puff of smoke from her lips threw its shadow on the white shade.

Flash said, "Jim, don't mention this to a soul. Not even the sheriff. Wait here. Watch that window. If he comes out that way, grab him."

He ran to the veranda, and into the house, and up the stairs. From one of the rooms he heard voices. Sheriff Hegg's and Miss Minetta's voices, in eager discussion. Near the stairhead stood the horsefaced butler.

Flash whispered, "Where's Mrs. Africa's room?"

"There, sir."

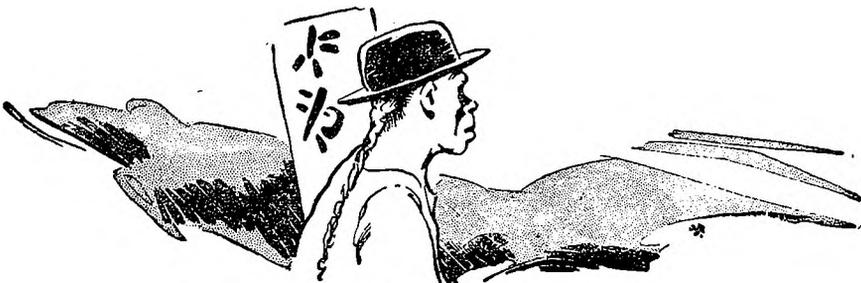
Flash went swiftly to the door. He hesitated only a moment. Certainly, this was no time to observe the amenities. Without knocking, he grasped the knob. He expected the door to be locked. But it wasn't locked.

He threw the door open and strode into the room.

Lotus Africa was standing near a dressing table with her fingers touching the lid of a red lacquer box from which jewels were strewn down upon the table; a rope of pearls, a jumble of diamonds, emeralds and sapphires in gold and platinum settings.

Flash swiftly glanced about the room. The man with the mandarin mustache was not in the room.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK



The Deadly Orchid

By T. T. Flynn



Detective Harris Sighed Dreamily as Gloria Whitney Pressed Her Delicate Body Close to Him—But He Had Been Warned She Was as Dangerous as a Cobra

“They’re gone! Every stone and setting; while you played the fool and I played bridge”

THOMPSON, eastern manager of the Blaine Agency, said to me in the hotel room in Jacksonville, “Do dames fall for towheads like you, Mike?”

“Dames fall for anyone with a good line,” I said, and waited. Six years’ sleuthing with the Blaine agency had taught me that a fellow never knew what was coming next.

“You’ll need a good line,” Thompson grinned, fishing an old cigar stub out of his vest pocket. “There’s a dame in Palm Beach who’s responsible for the deaths of two men that we know of. And she’s about ready to put a third scalp in her belt. I want you to meet her.”

“Says you,” I told him. “Figuring me for the third corpse, I suppose?”

“You never can tell.” Thompson scraped a match under the edge of his chair and sucked on the cigar, rolling an eye at me as sober as a deacon.

“Who is this female execution squad—and where do I come in?” I asked him.

“She was baptized Gloria Whitney and has a string of aliases. Her nickname is the Orchid. Her specialty is blackmail. When she hooks a man he may as well pay up, take it on the front page, or write his own ticket. They fished one of her boy friends out of the river below New Orleans, and found another in his Park Avenue

apartment with a bullet through his head. Not a bit of proof to connect the Orchid with either, of course. But there's no law against guessing."

"They should call her Aconite, the poison flower," I wisecracked. "And what do I do with this hothouse assassin?"

Thompson rolled the cigar to the corner of his mouth and grinned at me. "I'm counting on that well known sex appeal of yours I've been hearing about from Trixie Meehan."

I damned Trixie Meehan for spreading those yarns. She panned me every chance she got.

Thompson grinned again, and then became serious.

"The Orchid is one of the smoothest crooks in the country, Mike. She makes big money and makes it easy. As near as we can find out, she's got a partner or so who don't show often. She's been in Palm Beach for a month, and made a killing—all but the collecting."

"Or the suicide," I suggested.

"Exactly!" Thompson snapped. "I talked to the poor devil this morning. It won't take much to make him reach for a gun. He's Waldo Maxwell of the State Trust."

"Not *the* Waldo Maxwell?"

"None other," Thompson assured me. "No fool like an old widower, and he took it hook, line and sinker, and put it on paper. He won't stand a chance in court. And it will cost him a cool quarter of a million to buy back the evidence."

"Holy catfish!" I gasped. "What a haul! Why doesn't he take the publicity and save the dough?"

"Be yourself!" Thompson said. "He'd be the laughing stock of the country. Men who formerly trusted his judgment would think him dodder-

ing and senile. No telling what it would do to his financial strength. Not to speak of winding up a distinguished career as the country's prize clown. He'll pay if we can't settle it some other way."

Thompson was right. Waldo Maxwell had been a national figure for forty years. His bank was a Gibraltar of finance; he was the ultimate in conservative respectability. He'd be finished, out, if the scandal sheets got a thing like this.

"Maxwell retained the Blaine Agency," Thompson continued. "The sky is the limit on expense. And we're giving it to you. The Orchid is at the Palm Beach Palo Verde, registered as Miss Gloria Dean and maid. We don't know anything about the maid. It's a cinch she's crooked too. Got any ideas?"

"Plenty," I said, thinking fast. "First, make good on that expense account. And I'll want a good looking woman with brains. Got one this side of New York?"

"Trixie Meehan is due here in the morning from Chicago. She'll work with you."

I groaned, knowing Trixie.

Next morning I bought luggage, evening clothes, dress shirts, shoes, hats, all the clutter an oil millionaire from west Texas would be likely to have.

Trixie Meehan blew in, had a conference with Thompson before he left town, did some whirlwind shopping herself. We made the train together with enough luggage to do a theatrical troupe.

AN hour before dinner that evening we rolled into Palm Beach in two taxis, one packed with luggage. The Palo Verde was four stories high, with sprawling wings, acres of velvet

lawns and a golf course; shrubbery, flower beds, palms, and the blue surf of the open Atlantic creaming in on the white sand beach before it. We wheeled up a wide shell driveway and stopped before a long marquee. Four uniformed bellboys ran out to meet us.

Trixie kicked me on the ankle.

"Out, ape!" she hissed under her breath. "Husbands always help the little woman tenderly."

"There you go!" I snarled. "Trying to start something right off the bat!"

"Yes, darling," cooed Trixie for the driver's benefit as I helped her out to the sidewalk.

Trixie Meehan was a little frail slip of a thing with forget-me-not eyes, a knock 'em dead face, and a clinging vine manner that covered concentrated hell. She had a razor tongue, muscles like steel springs, a brain that made me dizzy at times, and absolutely no fear. And here she was cuddling close and cooing up into my face while the taxi driver eyed me like a sap.

I paid him and left the baggage for the bellhops.

"Lay off that googoo talk when you don't have to use it," I growled as we went into the lobby. "You get my goat."

Trixie grabbed my arm and snuggled close. "You big, strong he-man!" she sighed.

I couldn't shove her there in the lobby, so I took it out on the clerk. "A suite. Two bedrooms. Best you have. Ocean exposure, on the third floor, if possible."

"A *quiet* suite, dear," Trixie trilled.

"A *quiet* suite!" I snapped to the clerk.

"I think we have one that will be entirely satisfactory," he beamed at me. "And I can give it to you for only

eighty dollars a day, since this is late in the season."

"Eighty a what?" I gagged.

"Eighty dollars a day," the clerk repeated firmly, and managed to chill me with one eye while he eyed our mountainous luggage, just coming in, with the other.

Trixie pinched my arm, and smiled brightly. "Eighty dollars a day is quite satisfactory, darling," she cooed. "Can't you remember that we have oil wells now?"

The clerk caught it. His face cleared instantly. He handed me a registry card and a fountain pen. I registered Mr. and Mrs. Blaine, San Antonio, Texas.

We looked like wealthy young globe trotters, for our old luggage was plastered with labels from everywhere. Undercover work for the Blaine Agency means travel. When the bellhops got their toll and left us alone in the suite, I went to the connecting door of the bedrooms and moved the key to my side.

"Verboten," I grunted at Trixie. "None of your blasted tricks now. I want some peace on this case."

Trixie threw her hat on the bed and made a face at me. "Be yourself, ape. Nobody's pursuing you. What has your massive brain planned for this evening?"

"The Orchid and her maid have three rooms at the end of the hall," I snapped. "I meet her, I make her, and then we take her."

"Just as easy as that," Trixie marveled. "Well, here's hoping. But don't forget we're married, darling, and I get some of this Palm Beach whoopee."

"Nix," I grinned. "That's for me and the Orchid. You're the neglected wife who mopes in her room."

"You'll have whiskers to your

ankles when I do that," Trixie said through her teeth.

THE idle rich! The wisecracker who said that never had more than a week's pay on hand in his life. Golf, tennis, swimming, riding, dancing—and bridge thrown in whenever Trixie could scare up a game. Three days of that to put us in the public eye and get our lines out.

The unlimited expense account made it possible; oil millionaires from Texas, hicks from the sticks, lathery with money. Trixie shopped at those exclusive little Fifth Avenue branch shops. They came to the hotel collect, and we had war the first night.

"Whose little gold digger are you?" I yelled. "Look at these bills I settled today! I knew you were a tough case, but I didn't know you had mucilage fingers. Any dumbwit you drag to the altar will be going for a cleaning instead of a honeymoon. Sixty-seven berries for a hat, and I could wear it for a felt thumb protector!"

"So!" said Trixie with a glitter in her eye. "You were snooping in my packages like a second story mug, Michael Harris?"

"When I pay sixty-seven crackers for a cardboard box and four yards of tissue paper and ribbon, I want to see what I'm stung with!" I gave her.

And Trixie moved in close for battle.

"Listen to me, you sack of wind! Nobody ever dragged you to the altar and they never will. Pull those pop-eyes in and get this straight! I'll send the beach up here collect if I feel like it, and you'll pay and thank me. Whose bank account is getting nicked? Not yours! Hand you a five dollar bill and you'd start jawing J. P. Morgan. Gold digger, am I, for providing a little atmosphere? Next time I hear a—"

I slammed the door on the rest. That acid tongue of Trixie's could lift the skin off a cigar store Indian.

We buried the subject of clothes. After all it wasn't my money. I took a flier or so in the market those three days. And the tips I ladled out everywhere disturbed my sleep nights. But they were good advertising. By the second day every flunkey in sight was bowing and scraping when I appeared. Funny how oil millions can spread. We were the gossip of the hotel. Some turned up their noses, and some fell over themselves to gladhand us.

The Orchid did neither.

I spotted her the first evening in the dining room, and the waiter cinched it. "That is Miss Dean, sir."

"Pretty girl to be dining alone."

"Miss Dean seldom has anyone at her table, sir. She is, if I may be so free, a retiring woman." And the waiter rolled an expectant eye at Trixie.

"Perhaps, dear," says Trixie sweetly, "you would like to leave me and join her?"

And the waiter went off satisfied.

The Orchid had everything Thompson had outlined. I didn't try to guess her age. She was like an orchid, slender, graceful, dainty, fragile. She was a natural blonde—Trixie admitted that reluctantly—with a shell pink complexion and ripe red lips. Her eyelashes were long and dreamy, her makeup a bit of art, her expression tender and demure.

One look at her there in dainty solitude and I was willing to swear Thompson was a liar and Waldo Maxwell a lecherous old reprobate. A second look and I was hardboiled again. I've seen enough crooks to have an extra sense about them. Her eyes wandered over and caught my grin. She

took me in from hair to second button on my dinner coat, and then went on eating without a change of expression. But my neck hairs stiffened. She was like a beautiful leopard, lazily lapping cream. Claws were sheathed behind that fragile daintiness.

Trixie was on tap as usual. "All right, cave man, go into your act," she said under her breath.

"Rats to you," I said. "This is going to take technique."

The waiter returned and Trixie cooed: "Yes, dear." And we had honeymoon the rest of the dinner.

I didn't make a move for three days. But now and then when the Orchid was on the horizon I caught her studying me. The wild and woolly west, with a wagon load of money, and extra luggage in the wife, had come to Palm Beach. I spent as little time with Trixie as possible. I ogled the women when the Orchid was around. I flashed the bankroll and made a fool of myself. Anyone with half an eye could see I was ripe picking for a smart dame.

But it was Palmer, a natty customers' man for Trenholme and Edwards' branch brokerage office, who gave me my break. A little about oil wells and flyers in the market made him my man. He was a good looking young chap, a little too soft and polite; but he knew his Palm Beach, and the Orchid by sight when I pointed her out on the hotel veranda.

"Corker, isn't she?" Palmer sighed. "Haven't met her, but I hope to. See her all the time at Corey's. Say, that's a place you might like. Been there yet?"

"A big gambling joint, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'll be glad to take you and Mrs. Blaine there any time."

"Tonight," I said. "Mrs. Blaine will be busy. We'll go alone."

I'D heard about Corey's place; to gambling what Palm Beach was to society. With its clientele a Broadway gambler would have retired in six months. Strict cards of admission were required, and your name almost had to be in the social register to get one. Formal evening dress, of course, and once inside the old lavishly furnished frame building, set back in a tangle of trees and tropical growth, the sky was the limit. Private rooms upstairs for really high play. The drinks and food were on the house. The service was in keeping with the crowd who went there.

Palmer got a card some way. Things like that were his business. I went with a fat billfold, a boiled shirt, tails and everything—and tried to forget that in a few weeks I might be impersonating a longshoreman around the East river docks.

It was a joy to lose the first three hundred, of someone else's money. We shifted from game to game for an hour and a half. Cool, perfumed air, beautiful women—some of them—men whose names made the newspapers, the hum and chatter of conversation, the quiet voices of the house men, now and then a black dressed automaton moving about with a tray. But no Orchid.

And then she came in, wrapped in a black coat with a roll of white around the collar. Stunning? I skipped a breath. "Palmer," I said, "I'm going to need the rest of the evening to myself. Would you mind ordering a Rolls outside in case I need it?"

And I went to the roulette table where the Orchid had drifted. For a few minutes I watched her lose five dollar chips, and then I slipped into an

empty place at her side and slapped down five hundred. I lost and raised it to a thousand. And won, and won the next time, and the next. By that time I had the Orchid and everyone else at the table with me.

A fifty dollar bill was slipped into my palm, and I met a cool smile. "Will you play it?" the Orchid asked. "I think you are lucky tonight."

We won together.

Since it wasn't my money I didn't get the cold chills as I pushed my luck. I played the Blaine oil wells in public that night, and had the customers hanging on the edge of the table and standing three deep behind us. No, I didn't break the bank. They tell me no one ever does that at Corey's. But I put on a good show, won six thousand when the plays were evened up, and broke the ice with the Orchid.

I stuffed the winnings in my pocket and grinned at the Orchid. "I always quit while I'm cool, ma'am. Would a little drive along the ocean front cap your luck?"

"It might," the Orchid agreed as she folded her cut. "Shall we try it?"

The motor of that big Rolls purred, and so did the Orchid. Her technique would have made Delilah quit. "You were so calm over those big stakes," she sighed.

"Shucks, ma'am, back in Texas, our stud games would make that piker play tonight."

"You're from Texas?"

"West Texas," I gave her breezily. "Out in the oil country."

"How fascinating! Have you an oil well?"

"A dozen," I grinned. "An' two more spudding-in this week on proved ground. I always told Susan that when I passed my first million I was coming to Palm Beach. And here I am. But

I never thought I'd be riding around with a beautiful woman like you."

"You flatter me," said the Orchid absently. "Your wife—does she like it? I've noticed her. She's a beautiful little thing."

"Susan's pretty enough," I agreed without enthusiasm. "But she says she'd rather be back home where she can be a big frog in a little puddle instead of a little frog in a big puddle like she is here."

The Orchid laughed softly.

"Perhaps she is right at that. A woman has to be used to this life before she can get the most out of it. I owe you more thanks than I can repay for making it possible for me to stay here a little longer."

"I don't understand," I mumbled, and waited for her line.

"The money you won for me," she explained. "That was almost my last fifty dollars I gave you."

"I thought you were—"

"—rich?" She laughed shortly. What an actress! "One thinks that about everyone here. A little insurance money can create quite an effect. But when it's gone—" She broke off on a quaver.

I put a hand over hers. "I understand."

"I thought you would," the Orchid murmured. "Now forget about me and tell me about Texas."

So I spun her a few yarns about how I started as a poor kid in the oil fields and finally got in the money. When I spoke about oil field life she looked out the window, and when I mentioned big money she was all ears again.

"I want you to meet Susan," I said finally.

"No, I don't think I'd better," the Orchid said sadly. "Wives don't seem

to like me. They get jealous. We'll keep this to ourselves."

"Perhaps we'd better," I agreed—and wondered what her game was.

Trixie saw the powder on my coat lapel when I came in the sitting room, and said acidly, "Necking?"

"With the Orchid. I wanted her to meet my dear little wife, Susan, but she begged off. Wives don't usually like her."

"Susan?" Trixie had fire in her eye. "I could skin you for that, Mike Harris! Why not Abigail to that hussy?"

"Why not? Susan Abigail it is."

I got the door locked just in time.

THOMPSON long distanced from Washington in the morning.

"She's putting the screws on Maxwell," he crabbed over the wire. "Wants her dough quick, or else. The old man's frantic. He thought he'd have a couple of weeks yet anyway. Haven't you done anything?"

"It looks like I've done too much," I decided. "She wants Maxwell cleaned up before she cleans me."

"Well, get some action!" Thompson yelled. "If this thing goes sour on you, you're washed up with the Blaine Agency. It's that important."

"Button your lip," I advised. "They can hear you across the hall here. Tell Maxwell to put another padlock on his checkbook. No dame's going to toss a quarter of a million away by getting rash. He's safe enough as long as he stalls."

Thompson's groan traveled clear down from Washington. "I hope for your sake that's right," he warned.

And so did I. The Blaine Agency had a little trick of loading all the responsibility on the ones who drew a

case, and then if they didn't come through, heads began to fall. It worked nine times out of ten. But Waldo Maxwell's quarter of a million and the Orchid were a big bite.

She was a wise one, dangerous as dynamite.

Trixie heard me out.

"You can't stall any longer, loud mouth," she decided. "Necking parties may be your forte, but you'll have to cut them short. I've been watching that hussy. She never speaks to anyone who might be in the racket with her. And a dime to a promise that those letters are not in her hotel room here. She wouldn't dare keep them so close."

"She has a maid."

"I've seen the maid!" Trixie snapped.

And so had I. A beauty, and a crook, if I knew my way around. "We've got to pull a fast one," I decided.

"He thinks," Trixie marveled. "Well, produce before we both get fired."

"I'm going swimming," I told her.

I met the Orchid on the beach, where she had said the night before she'd be. She wore black beach pajamas trimmed with white, and against her creamy skin they were enough to stop the breath and scuttle good resolutions. She gave me a smile to go with them. "Where is your wife?"

"Reading. No sunburn wanted."

"You poor neglected boy. It must be lonesome at times."

I held my breath until my face got red, and stuttered, "N-not when I'm with you." And we got along famously.

All the time I was wondering where

she kept those letters of Maxwell's. Trixie was right. Not in her room. That would be the first place private dicks would look. And despite the fact that Trixie had seen no one with her, Thompson's hint that she did not work alone kept pricking at my mind.

So I admired the big diamond ring on her finger and told her about the jewels I had bought the little woman since the oil wells came in. Three hundred grand worth, diamonds, pearls, emeralds and what not.

The Orchid swallowed the hook. "What a fortunate woman your wife is," she sighed. "I haven't seen her wearing any."

I grinned. "She's afraid to. Jewel thieves. So she keeps them in the bottom of her trunk."

The Orchid lay there on the sand like a lazy cat. Her pink finger nails dug in gently when I said that. I saw her leg muscles stiffen slightly. But she didn't bat an eye.

"How dangerous," she warned abruptly. "She should keep them in a safety deposit box."

"Susan doesn't think so," I yawned. "She likes to take them out and play with them. She's like a kid. Always wanted a diamond ring—and then got a lapful. And she's convinced no one would ever think of looking in the false bottom she had built into her trunk."

"I suppose she's right," the Orchid nodded lazily. "But just the same if they were mine I wouldn't take chances."

"Not you," I thought. Aloud I said: "Let's forget 'em. If she is robbed, I'll buy her some more. And how about taking a ride with me this evening? The wife is going to be downstairs playing bridge until late. I may have to leave tomorrow. Got a wire from my partner."

She looked at me through her lashes, smiling, mysterious, inscrutable. "Do you really want to?" she murmured.

"Try me," I dared.

"At eight," she said.

And I wondered whether I was being a fool after all. She looked soft and inviting as honey—and I knew she was dangerous as a cobra.

WALDO MAXWELL said harshly, "You are a fool!"

"I know I am," I agreed.

"We all act the fool now and then."

He winced, said something savagely under his breath and prowled back and forth. I had run him down in one of those fantastic villas that huddled up little narrow drives just off the beach. Simplicity by the hundred thousand dollars' worth. Handkerchief sized lawns, tile roofs, and luxury inside that would dim the Arabian nights.

It was indiscreet, I knew. I shouldn't have gone near him. But I needed action quick, and he was the only one who could give it to me. And there he prowled around the room like an enraged old bear, his dewlaps shaking, his white hair mussed where he had shoved his fingers through it, a scowl deepening the wrinkles over his rimless eyeglasses.

Waldo Maxwell might have been able to tame a multimillionaire board of directors, but he had never tried Michael Harris of the Blaine Agency before. "Do I get it?" I demanded.

"It is an insane request!" he blurted violently.

"I know. I've thought it all over. If something isn't done quick, you're going to be splashed on the front pages, or out a quarter of a million," I reminded. "You haven't a thing on that dame. She's got you by your reputation and you can't even yip. Unless

I'm wrong about the contents of those letters."

"No—no! I was out of my mind when I wrote them. Don't mention them! Are you certain you can control this insane—this plan of yours?"

I would have felt sorry for him, if I hadn't remembered he could sign his name to a check for five millions, and still have plenty left in the sock. "What would you give to have her come begging for mercy?" I asked.

Waldo Maxwell showed his teeth in a smile, gentle as a wolf's. "It would be some consolation for the humiliation I have been put to," he confessed.

"Then come through with what I need."

He glanced at a platinum cased watch and made up his mind abruptly. "They will be delivered to your hotel some time before six," he promised.

"Can I count on that?"

"Young man, you heard me. Some-time before six."

So I left, satisfied.

And he came through.

I opened the sealed brown paper package and poured the contents on the sitting room table. Trixie took one look and squealed: "Mike, where did you get these?"

"Kris Kringle," I grinned. "Now do you believe in fairies?"

"I've never seen such good looking imitations."

"I'll bet you never have," I agreed. "Not a phony among them. Every stone and setting is the real McCoy."

And I didn't blame Trixie for going pale and sick when she looked at me. That mess of diamond rings, bracelets, necklaces and whatnots needed a lot of explaining. Trixie picked up a pearl necklace and ran it through her fingers. "Tell me, Mike," she commanded.

"Waldo Maxwell," I admitted. "It was like pulling eye teeth, but I got him to buy the lot on consignment. If they're returned, he gets his money back. If not—he'll probably have a heart seizure."

Trixie put her little hands on her little hips and looked me up and down with her lips pressed tightly together. "Have you gone insane, Mike Harris?"

"That has a familiar ring," I recalled. "Maxwell wanted to know the same thing."

"I think you have! What are you going to do with all this jewelry? Why, it—it must be worth a fortune."

"It is," I agreed. "And we're going to put it all in that little false bottom in your trunk, and you're going downstairs this evening and play bridge, and I'm sneaking off for an automobile ride with the Orchid."

"And leave all this up here?"

"Exactly."

Trixie bristled. "Now I know you're out of your mind! We'll do nothing of the sort! You can waste another evening making sheep's eyes at that cat if you care to, but I'm staying in and sit on this jewelry, or take it down to the hotel safe."

"Jealous?"

Trixie tossed her head. "Of you, big mouth?"

"We'll do as I say."

"If we do," Trixie snapped, "something tells me we are in for grief. I think that massive brain of yours is cracking under the strain."

"Don't think," I advised. "It's dangerous."

IF I had stopped to think I would have gone shaky myself. For I knew what Waldo Maxwell and Trixie did not—that lot of jewelry was

in greater danger than if I had tossed it on the lobby floor and walked off. It might have been returned from there. And I didn't dare use phonies. A slick crook would have spotted them the first look. So I shut my eyes and walked into the manager's office and asked for four young bellhops who could ride bicycles, keep their mouths shut and stay honest for a twenty dollar bill.

He looked at me as if I were addled. "Of course, Mr. Blaine—I mean to say, we strive to furnish every service, but—"

"Then service me," I cut him off. "I'm serious and in a hurry."

Grant the Palm Beach Palo Verde service. They delivered. I chased the manager out of his office, talked turkey to those bellhops, and hung a hundred dollar prize up to sweeten their twenties. All four of them could out-think the average guest they roomed. In five minutes I drilled them letter perfect, and they scattered with expense money.

The Orchid sighed dreamily. "Isn't the surf lovely?"

"Great," I agreed, and held her hand tighter while I looked over to the beach.

Sure enough, there was a surf frothing in through the moonlight. Pretty, too, if a fellow had time to look at it. I didn't. My mind was on Trixie back there in the hotel playing bridge. And on my five bellhops, and the Orchid beside me on the front seat of the big rented sedan. No chauffeur this time. I didn't want to be bothered in case quick action was needed.

But for the time being we had no action as we loafed south in the moonlight with the open sea on the left. Some night. Some scenery. Some

girl. I forgot the times I had called myself a fool for throwing in with the Blaine Agency. Nights when the rain ran down my neck, and guns barked out of the blackness. Days when nerves were worn to a frazzle matching wits with the smartest crooks in the country. A dog's life, until I met the moon and the sea, and the Orchid went limp inside my arms as we loafed along through the miles. She was concentrated forgetfulness in a gorgeous shell.

Only I didn't forget. When I wrap my arm around a snake I watch it. I tested her out. "We'd better be getting back, beautiful."

"Not yet," she sighed, and came over another inch. "It's so lovely out here tonight. I could drive until morning."

"You won't, sister," I thought—and gave her three miles more before I turned and stepped on the gas.

"You are driving too fast," the Orchid protested.

I patted her knee. "I'm a fast chap."

"You're a fresh one," she said, and tried to steer me over to Lake Worth and down through West Palm Beach, stalling for time.

"Little girls shouldn't be out so late," I stalled back. "I have a headache, and I'm going to turn in. I'll stay over another day and we'll take this up tomorrow night."

"But I will not be free tomorrow night."

"My loss," I mourned, and rolled her back to the hotel far faster than she had gone away from it.

The Orchid said good night without much graciousness and went in the front entrance. When I parked the car one of the four bellhops popped out of the night. His eyes were wide with suppressed excitement.

"Your room was entered, Mr. Blaine!" he said breathlessly. "A thin man with a black mustache. About twenty minutes ago."

"Any trouble? Where are the others?"

"They haven't come back yet. I've been waiting here for you."

"Be back in a few minutes," I told him, and hurried inside, lifted Trixie from her bridge game and took her up to the suite.

"Powder on your coat again," Trixie sniffed while I unlocked the door. "I'm getting sick of a half baked Romeo underfoot all the time."

"It's my charm," I grinned.

"It's your oil wells!" Trixie snapped as she marched into the room.

She beat me to the trunk while I was closing the door. And a moment later pulled her hand out of the hidden compartment in the bottom and whirled on me.

"They're gone! Every stone and setting; while you played the fool and I play bridge like you ordered! Oh, why did Thompson ever put an idiot like you on this?" She stamped her foot, grabbed my arm and shook it. "Say something! Don't stand there grinning like an idiot! They're gone, I tell you!"

"That's great," I said heartily. And Trixie almost swooned.

While she was getting her breath back I came out of my room sliding a clip into my automatic. "Hat and coat," I directed. "We're going out."

"Where?"

"Ask me something I know. It's a great night."

AND Trixie almost swooned again. But she was ready in sixty seconds, slipping a small edition of my automatic in her purse. Tucked

away somewhere, too, was a fountain pen gas gun. Trixie never went without it.

A second bellhop was waiting when we got outside, his bicycle tipped on the grass. "What luck?" I asked him, and held my breath for the answer. It might mean the end of Waldo Maxwell's diamonds and pearls. If it did, it was my finish.

"Over in West Palm Beach," he said quickly. "Two of the boys are watching."

"Get in the back," I ordered. "We'll talk as we drive."

"Who are they?" Trixie demanded as we all tumbled in.

"Bellhops."

"It doesn't make sense."

"Nothing does." And as I drove, the boys in the back seat talked fast. One of them had been in an empty room where he could watch the door of our suite; another outside covering the windows; and the other two had been downstairs near a telephone.

There had been no second story work. A well dressed man had walked down the hall, fitted a key into the door of our suite, stepped inside, remained a few minutes, and stepped out again, natural and easy. He had walked out of the hotel into a waiting car—and three bellhops had jumped on waiting bicycles and followed. Simple as that.

"And you didn't tell them to call the house detective?" Trixie asked thinly.

"Think of the publicity, my dear."

"I think you are a reckless idiot!" Trixie flared.

"You've called me that before," I reminded. "He who steals and runs away will surely pay some other day."

"Mad!" Trixie muttered despairingly. "Stark, raving mad!"

Cross west on the brightly lighted

bridge over Lake Worth and you come into another world. The coast highway runs through West Palm Beach, and now and then a tourist stops off and settles. Apartment buildings, cottages, cozy houses—it was like getting home from phantasy land. We found the other two bellhops beside their bikes at a corner in the residential section.

Their dope was short and sweet. The car they had followed had turned into a driveway in the middle of the block, and was still in there.

“Stay here with the car,” I said to Trixie.

And she said: “Never again. You need someone with sense to watch you.”

“Meaning a woman,” I said sarcastically. “Nevertheless, you stay here. This isn’t a tea party.”

So she stayed, and two of the bellhops walked down one side of the street and the other guided me to the one story stucco cottage where Waldo Maxwell’s jewels had flitted. One side room was lighted. The window shades were down.

I sent the kid across the street and walked to the back of the house. A big car was standing in the driveway, heading toward the street.

No one was worried inside—and why should they be, after strolling out of the Palo Verde so easily? A radio was playing jazz. The screen door on the back porch was unlocked, and so was the kitchen door. I pulled my automatic as I stepped inside.

A swinging door opened out of the kitchen, a hall beyond that, and to the left was an archway into a dining room. A voice said: “God, Harry, this bracelet ought to be worth five grand anyway. The emerald is good for two, and most of the diamonds will bulge a carat and a half.”

And a second voice, “Shall we split this necklace and peddle the pearls separate?”

“I wouldn’t,” I advised as I stepped in. “That’s a sucker trick.”

There were two of them, sleek, good-looking young fellows. One knocked over a chair as he jumped back and reached under his coat. When he saw my gun he stood still.

Waldo Maxwell’s bait was spread over the table. They hadn’t been able to keep their hands off it. Harry had a little black mustache that jerked as he got out: “What are you doing here?”

“Don’t be so formal,” I said. “This is a pinch.”

And Harry gasped, “It’s a frame! He talks like a dick!”

“You mind reader,” I said. “He is a dick. Turn around while I collect your rods, suckers.”

Harry took a chance, dodged and grabbed for his gun. I shot him through the shoulder. The next instant the light went out as his sidekick reached the wall switch. They both cut loose as I dropped to the floor behind the table. Four shots that were almost one—and a door slammed. . . .

I was alone with my ears ringing and the radio blaring away in the next room.

That was what slowed me up! My ears and the radio. I couldn’t hear their movements, had to go slow for fear they were waiting for me. The motor in the driveway suddenly spun. Gears whined as it rushed toward the street.

And just as I opened the front door there was a terrific crash at the street. They had run into another car in front of the driveway as they turned sharp to avoid it.

I ran out.

Two groping, stumbling figures

reeled on the sidewalk, fighting at their eyes. I backed away quick from the thin drifting vapor they were trying to escape.

It was my rented car they had run into. Trixie joined me, and said coolly: "I drove up when I heard the shots, and blocked them. I let them have the gas through the open window of their car."

"Good girl!" I yelled. "Tell those bellhops to collar 'em until the cops get here!" And I ran back into the house while the neighbors poured out into the street.

I reached the street again just as the police car slid up. We settled the rest in the station house. It took the jewels on the dining room table, the testimony of the bellhops, our credentials and a telephone call to Waldo Maxwell to clear Trixie and me enough so we could leave for the evening.

And at that we were told it was damn queer business, and there was going to be a lot of explaining before the matter was settled.

"There will be," I promised.

Trixie was wild as a taxi took us back to the Palo Verde.

"See what you've done with that idiotic jewelry!" she stormed. "A man shot, two cars wrecked, serious charges plastered everywhere—with all the publicity it will bring—and Maxwell is as bad off as ever!"

"We'll ask the Orchid about that," I said.

TRIXIE was still breathing hard when I knocked on the Orchid's door. The maid, almost as good looking as the Orchid, answered it. She took one look at Trixie and informed us that Miss Dean had retired.

"Too bad," I regretted. "Get her up." And I pushed on in.

The Orchid met us in a frothy negligee that was enough to stop the breath. "What does this mean?" Her voice was knife-edged.

"Harry and his sidekick are in the West Palm Beach police station," I told her. "They were caught with the jewelry. It belonged to Waldo Maxwell."

I saw the maid, standing in the doorway, turn pale and press a hand against her throat. But the Orchid's eyes began to blaze past her long lashes.

"So you tricked me!" she said through her teeth.

"Gloria," I sighed, "it broke my heart to do it. But you've been loose long enough."

"Waldo Maxwell is behind this!"

"Sad—but so."

I've seen a furious tigress behind the bars. But never have I been so close to one. The Orchid's face turned marble white. Her eyes narrowed to points.

"Maxwell won't get away with this!" she blazed. "I'll spread his name over every paper in the country! Tell him he'd better run here and settle it quick! If those men aren't out by tomorrow, I'll call the reporters in and give them the story of their lives!"

"Can you back it up?"

"Certainly! I have letters!"

"You had," I corrected. "What do you think I planted that jewelry for? I wanted to uncover your boy friends who were probably holding Maxwell's letters. I found them in the bottom of a suitcase in their house. You might call Maxwell from the police station tonight and ask him for a little mercy. He's got an answer all ready."

She spat at me like a cat.

Trixie said later that gave her hope for me.



"Damn you for a fiend!" he cried.
"I'll get rid of you too . . .!"

The Scarlet Seal

By J. Allan Dunn

*Manning Gets an Invitation to a Murder, to Watch an "Ingenious Method"
—an Invitation Sealed with the Terrible Scarlet Griffin*

THE little graveyard was a place forgotten. A private cemetery, no longer visited. Its tombstones sagged and some were fallen. The stone had flaked and the inscriptions were illegible, if anyone had cared to read them. Sumach and thornapples and blackberry brambles discouraged investigation. Old yews and native cypress shadowed the dismal spot. There was a vault of stone that was still intact, though it had tilted as the soil had shifted with the centuries on the slope which the vault crowned. The vault had a gate of wrought iron secured by a rusty chain and padlock, and a door that seemed to await the Resurrection morning.

Behind the slope, across neglected pastures, stood a house of brick and stone that had been nobly designed but had suffered the wear of the elements for fifty years without human occupation or reinforcement. Once there had been a garden and still a few roses bloomed, stunted, and hedges once trimmed grew wild.

The land was part of a great grant by King George to one of his overseas subjects. Most of it had been sold. This had been a portion bequeathed to a minor heir. At the back of the house were great, gaunt lilacs guarding an alley where once George Washington had walked in his unsuccessful wooing of Marion Philipse, visiting there.

There was a cloud about the title. The old, proud family had gone into oblivion. But someone had recently risked buying the forty ragged acres. The house was almost a ruin, with its rotting sills and leaking roof, its sagging shutters and mouldering paint, within and without.

Tonight, dim through the driving, persistent rain, a light gleamed downstairs. Some thought the newcomers were merely caretakers for the purchasers. They made no attempt to farm, little to offset the impending ruin of house and land. They were a tall, taciturn Yankee and his equally lean and silent wife; they attended strictly to their own affairs, paid their bills in cash.

The place had long been dismal, desolate and deserted. The light in the window did little now to dispel its dreariness. Rain dripped from the dark trees, beat upon the sunken mounds in the pale gleam of a sun that fought and failed against the gloomy, swiftly gathering night.

The new owner was recorded as a Mr. Silbi. A foreign sounding name, surely not New England, like that of Cyrus Allen, now living in the house. None locally had ever seen Mr. Silbi.

Surrounding this forty acres was more deserted land, also with clouded title. Two big tracts of it, wooded and hilly. On one of them was a weedy mere that had once been a lake. No one ever fished there. Once a girl had drowned herself in it. These wild acres had been considered by real estate developers with an eye to summer bungalows and country homes, but the uncertain titles checked them and the land lay slowly reverting to wilderness.

They said the ghost of the suicide haunted the mere, that weird blue and

green lights flickered above the graves — corpse-candles lighting the phantoms back to their beds of clay. Some swore that a party, taking the back road by mistake, had seen the vault open, with an unearthly glare revealing broken coffins and scattered bones, and a fearful goblin, capering, hairy and legless, its head neckless and tiny; walking on its hands, in the midst of the charnel place.

AN owl hooted its melancholy note. A nightjar swooped with a screeching whistle. A few bullfrogs croaked in sheer defiance of the rain. Thunder muttered and lightning flickered incessantly as the smouldering sunset died.

The state road was two miles away. The dirt lanes were little better than quagmires, rutted by those who stole the timber from the old Luddington Grant. Few passed after nightfall.

A mighty, closed car came surging through the slush, driven by an expert who used the power of twelve tremendous cylinders with consummate judgment, whose steel wrists and fingers controlled their force with ease as the big black sedan threatened to skid and swerve.

Behind drawn blinds a man sat who was dressed—as his chauffeur was—in black. Sable, from wide-rimmed slouch hat, turned down, to his shoes. He was wrapped in a black cloak like a condor with folded wings. His vulturine features, half hidden between upturned velvet collar and the brim of his sombrero, were offset by a close trimmed Spanish beard, twin-forked and upcurled mustachios. His eyes were yellow of iris, his high-bridged nose was thin and bony, like a bird's beak.

This was the mysterious Mr. Silbi

and he sat couched in the deep cushions with an expression infinitely feral, evil and content.

The sedan slowed, turned to a miry rise, plowed up a lane, its headlights spraying through the darkness and the filtering rain, now beginning to slacken.

The driver showed no hesitation. This was not his first visit. Mr. Silbi did not tolerate mistakes. He was well served, as was Iblis, Prince of Darkness, cast out by God because he refused to abase himself before the latest creation—Adam.

Iblis, the Moslem Satan, becomes Silbi when spelled backwards. No one in Grangers' Mills had noticed it. Nor, as yet, elsewhere.

They surged about the house across the muck of an old byre and the car disappeared in the dark maw of a staggering barn, still held together by its frame of timbers hewn two hundred years before from forest giants. The driver stayed there. Silbi emerged, his black cloak flapping in the wind and rain, only his beaklike nose showing. He ascended a rear stoop and rapped on a door that was instantly opened and closed behind him.

The lean, bony woman who was the consort of Cyrus Allen held an oil handlamp as they passed on to a front room with a blotched Empire mirror over a black marble hearthplace, old, blistered and blackened portraits on the walls, furnished with chairs whose brocade was mildewed and frayed, chairs by Heppelwhite, a loveseat, a spinet, an inlaid sideboard by Sheraton upon which stood a tarnished empty candelabrum.

"Put down the lamp, woman," said Silbi imperatively. "Bring another, with your husband. Have him fetch kindling and logs and light a fire. It

should have been laid. It is colder than the soul of Lucifer. Begone!"

II

THERE was a dramatic and tragic air about him, an aura of force, the hint of a dynamic will never at rest within; that made his somewhat stilted phrases not unfitting as he stood wrapped in his cloak with his yellow, evil eyes gleaming in the lamplight while his distorted shadow fell upon the paneled wall like the shadow of a swooping bird of prey, hunting carrion.

There was a touch of madness in his lambent orbs that stared the woman down as she looked at him with a certain latent rebellion that dissolved like ice at the gate of hell.

He chuckled hideously as she turned away, in a low but frightful cackle of malice and satisfaction. Then he turned impatiently to the empty hearth, chafing his hands. For all the vigor that seemed to seethe within him, his face was pinched and carved with suffering, and the hands he chafed were cold. There was a ring upon one long, clawlike finger, a ring of gold with a deeply incised design of a demi-griffin, its eagle wings outspread, with tufted beak and pointed ears, its lion's tail showing above the sheer line of the coup.

There came a shriek from the woman in the dark hall and Silbi laughed noiselessly with intense enjoyment, his red tongue tip showing between his teeth. He knew the cause.

The next instant a strange shape came into the room, a creature with a microcephalous head, no bigger than an infant's, set neckless upon the shoulders of a blacksmith. The body ended at the hips, it swung between two enormous arms that raised the trunk

clear from the floor with hands set knuckles down. Silbi's grotesque fancy had dressed this unfinished being in a sort of turtle-necked sweater with long hairs woven into it like those of an Angora goat. There could not be much intelligence in that contracted cranium, but the eyes showed delight and obedience.

The freak was mute, but it babbled inarticulately as it came noiselessly to the side of its Master, the man known to a horror-stricken world as the Griffin, the monster once caged but kept alive by the law of the land for the criminally insane. Now he was free again, launched again upon his fanatical crusade against those whom he envied, or fancied had done him wrong; always the choicest citizens.

The Griffin patted the monstrosity as if it had been a dog. He called it by its monosyllabic name and the creature lip read the title and fawned with hands that could crush a potato to pulp, stroking those of Silbi, the Griffin.

AL—that was its name, the Griffin's title for the misbegotten object he had bought from a traveling show. AL—one of the gruesome group of demons in Persian mythology that sit in sandy places meditating impure designs.

This AL was peaceful enough now, but it was not hard to imagine it surcharged with malevolence, handicapped but horrible. It could travel from beams or trees with the effortless ease of a chimpanzee, it could have wrestled on even terms with an orang-outang with those long, sinewy arms where the sheathed muscles scarcely showed more than the constricting muscles of a boa. It could walk and even run on its arms as well as an ordinary man could travel on his legs.

The Griffin motioned it to a corner where it stood squat in the shadow

with eyes still twinkling from the fright it had given the woman.

There was light outside the room again. Cyrus Allen and his wife both carried lamps. Allen had kindling wood and paper. He fixed them in the grate and went away to bring back a double armful of logs. The flames gathered strength and soon the fire was roaring up the chimney, sending dancing shadows about the room with shafts of light as the wood snapped and distributed its heat. The Griffin warmed his hands, then stood with his back to the blaze, arms folded.

"WELL, Allen," he said, "have you completed the device?"

Are you ready to demonstrate it to me, as I asked? You got all the apparatus you asked for, I believe?"

"I got the tools and the machinery," said Allen slowly. "They came at night, like you said they would, like the other things came. Mine is set up in the vault. They took the stuff in through the passage back of the paneling in the dining room. The other stuff's been set up in the cellars. I ain't inspected none of it. It ain't in my line. The men are living here, keeping upstairs, using the back way. My wife's fed 'em, but she's through. It's too much work for her. I don't aim to stand having that freak swinging around, spying, noiseless. It scares my wife, coming on it unexpected, like I did once, in the vault. It ain't human. Also the work's getting too hard for her."

"Hard labor, eh?" asked the Griffin. His tone was almost jovial, but his eyes were the eyes of Satan, the eyes of an old he-goat in the dark. "You'd like to avoid hard labor—for her, or yourself, I suppose," he added.

"I'm not afraid of work," said the

man, "but I ain't got that contraption ready for you. I don't aim to *have* it ready, not unless I know what you're going to use it for. It don't figure legitimate to me. I could fix it, easy, but I won't," he went on, with growing firmness. "We're quitting, the two of us, right now. Give us what's coming to us and we'll leave tomorrow morning. This place ain't right. We just waited for you to come . . ."

Cyrus Allen had worked himself into indignation, but now he faltered under the baleful look of the Griffin's sardonic expression.

"You want what's coming to you?" asked the Griffin. "I wonder? Let me see, Allen, when you and your wife came to see me in town, at my studio, you said she was an excellent housekeeper and that you were an expert electrician. If I remember right, you told me of certain inventions you had made and that should have brought you money, if the capitalists had not robbed you. There was another one you were eager to complete. You said you preferred a quiet place, for yourself and your wife. A quiet place like this—"

"It's *too* quiet," broke in Allen passionately. "It ain't right or natural, the way things are run. You didn't say my wife should work her fingers to the bone for a lot of cranks, half of 'em foreigners—"

"Well, well," the Griffin said soothingly. "You may quit if you want to, only, I want you to remember that I showed you the crystal globe, the Orb of Truth, with its swirling fires. You remember that, Allen?"

"I remember looking into it. It gave me a headache."

"It gave me the creeps," his wife spoke up, and then the Griffin's diabolical laughter checked them to silence.

He laughed like a demon who watches some tortured soul racing down a corridor in Hades that will end in a blazing pitfall; his eyes were like the eyes of a snake watching the fluttering of a fascinated and already helpless bird.

"The Orb of Truth brought out your hidden thoughts, your memories and your fears," the Griffin said at last. "You told me *everything*. You signed a paper, which was duly witnessed. Let me read it to you."

They listened with whitening faces, with terror growing in their eyes. The woman shook like an autumn leaf in a cold wind. The man broke the spell with a screaming oath.

"Damn you for a fiend!" he cried. "I'll get rid of that and you, too!"

The Griffin did not move, but AL came in three great hitches, and reaching upwards, gripped the man's arms at the elbows so fiercely that he howled with anguish, unable to shake off the legless creature whose fingers clamped down on his nerves and paralyzed his efforts.

"Fool!" said the Griffin. "This is a copy. And if anything should happen, at any time, that would disappoint me in you, any act of disobedience, the signed and witnessed confession would be released, automatically. That you were hypnotized into telling the truth does not alter the facts that can and will be eagerly substantiated. In the State where you committed the crime, kidnaping now brings life imprisonment. If you were able to clear yourself of the question as to whether you killed the child, you could not avoid that. Hard labor for both of you, for life!"

He gestured to AL, who released Allen. The New Englander stood stricken with despair that was reflected on his wife's wan face.

"I'll fix that contraption for you tonight," he said humbly.

"I thought you would," said the Griffin. "See that it is successful."

III

GORDON MANNING was the last client that afternoon at the downtown gymnasium where business men tried to keep themselves physically fit and offset the depression by virility. There was no partner available for handball but the professional. That suited Manning well enough and he threw himself into the game with an ardor and finesse that left his opponent panting, chagrined, and frankly admiring.

Manning went into the shower and let the needle sprays run icy cold. He had played hard not merely to win, but to help him forget the problem of the Griffin, to prevent it becoming an obsession that would rob him of his best judgment by incessantly suggesting he was no match for the monster, that the handicaps were too severe. The handball game had temporarily sidetracked even the workings of his subconscious mind as he set every energy to the task in hand.

But the poisonous leaven was there. The task had to be taken up again, helpless as it seemed. He was the only man who had ever defeated the Griffin, who had ultimately sent him to the asylum for the criminally insane at Dannemora. Now it was all to do over again. The Griffin had scored. The people looked to Manning to rid them of the menace.

He was well equipped for it, late officer in the Army Intelligence, scientist, world traveler, soldier and adventurer. He had been called in when the police had failed, given special commissions by the New York Police Com-

missioner and the Governor of the State; commissions still in effect. The Griffin, with his organization, his own intuition spurred by insanity that amounted to evil genius, had written satirically congratulating himself upon obtaining a worthy opponent. He had mailed the letter with its heavy gray paper, its purple ink and scarlet seal, upon the same day Manning had secretly accepted the commission. Not even the press had known—under restriction of publication—of his undercover appointment; but the Griffin had discovered it.

The Griffin professed to call it a game. He condescended to name his victim, to state a twenty-four-hour limit to the time of mysterious murder.

But he had inevitably planned his moves, made all his preparations, studying the problem intricately during the weeks between killings, when he was silent. A silence that was like the steady drip of water upon Manning, waiting, waiting, for the inevitable boasting announcement of a crime so devilishly planned that no protection availed against the madman's craft.

That first capture had been largely owing to Manning's blocking of one of his diabolical murders. Failure had so inflamed the Griffin that rage had made him almost futile, careless of consequences in his wild desire to restore his fallen ego. Manning believed that the bringing about of another failure was the best chance once more to secure this fiend in human shape.

The man was a devil loosed on earth. He had killed a score of valuable men who could hardly be replaced. He meant to keep on killing. He juggled with astrology and divination, doubtless believing himself an appointed destroyer.

Once, since the Griffin's escape, Manning had foiled him, saved his intended victim, not so much by discovery of the devilish device employed as by strict vigilance and alertness at a crucial moment.

Then Manning had seen him, had gripped the cloak he wore, only to lose him in a surging crowd where the Griffin's minions took advantage of the confusion.

Soon the Griffin would strike again, when he was ready, the victim selected, studied, all moves considered.

Manning, brown, lean, dressed, nodded to the old trainer who ran the gymnasium, and stepped outside, swinging his favorite weapon, a cane made from a steel tapering rod on which were shrunk scores of rings of leather. It was as efficient as a sword in his skillful hands. He asked nothing better than a chance at the Griffin, cane against gun or other weapon. His morale was not shaken, but he had a hunch, certain vibrations that tuned-in to evil emanations, that told him it was not long before he would be hearing from the arch-enemy, the man who hated all other men.

Ever since the last attack, the police force, public and private, had been trying to get clues concerning the Griffin's whereabouts or those of his agents. His former elaborate organization had been shattered, but he still had great resources and he was rebuilding his force. All clues had failed. There had been no real clues. The score stood two to one, since his escape, in the Griffin's favor. And now . . .

MANNING'S powerful roadster had been standing at the curb. He stood with his hand on the doorturn, looking at the button to his siren at the hub of his steering wheel.

On the black circle a scarlet oval showed red as blood, sinister as blood. An affiche of thick paper embossed with the signet of the Griffin!

Still another scarlet symbol was placed on the flap of the side pocket of the car, indicating certainly, to Manning, that he would find a letter tucked inside. It was infinitely galling for him to recognize the probability that either the Griffin or one of his agents, perhaps the very man who had found the chance to affix the seals and place the message, was watching him from some nearby point of vantage to make sure he received the letter. He denied them that satisfaction, got in, and drove to Pelham.

Not until he was in his own garage did he take out the envelope, again with the signet of the Griffin, sealed in wax, on the heavy handmade gray paper. The address was in the too familiar bold hand that, to a handwriting expert, revealed eccentricity of mind and also force of character and purpose.

**GORDON MANNING ESQUIRE
ADDRESSED**

Manning's face was grim as he broke the seal in his library, after deliberately filling and lighting his pet briar and waiting until his Japanese butler brought him a highball.

Manning:

Still you serve to amuse me and therefore I again invite you as antagonist. The board is set, I have planned the gambit in which I may lose a pawn but only to win. I realize that you have been eagerly expecting my challenge. Last time we almost became closely acquainted, but, even if the cloak had held, I had not played my final trick.

You may be glad to know that I am succeeding admirably in restoring the

organization you and the authorities so ruthlessly destroyed—for which you will some day pay in full. I have another Headquarters that it will take all your vigilance to discover, my dear Manning. I believe you called my last my "eyrie" though it is by no means certain whether the griffins, who were the steeds of the sun and drew the chariot of Nemesis, nested or used a lair. It matters little. Things shape well. The next to be eliminated will be that persistent prig and self-publicist, Evans Cooke, who claims to be building the true type of young American manhood by his interest in and contributions to the Olympic Games, the Amateur Athletic Association and other "body-building organizations," as he styles them. He considers himself a philanthropist and his chief enjoyment is to read about himself in the press. The man is a stench in my nostrils.

He may have an opportunity of recommending himself, as a shade, to Zeus, on Mount Olympus itself, since he will most certainly shuffle off this mortal coil at some swift second during the twenty-four hours calendered as the nineteenth of this present month. May you, my dear Manning, be there to see. I may be a spectator myself. The method employed is ingenious and I confess to a slight curiosity to observe how well it works, though, as you know, I never repeat myself.

(There was no signature but only a delicate pen drawing of the demi-griffin, coupéd.)



Manning knew of Evans Cooke. He was himself an amateur athlete of high

standing with one record which, while not included in ordinary programs, was spectacular and interesting—the underwater long dive, "fetching." Cooke had inherited money and large interests on leaving college and had shown good capacity in handling his business.

He was always willing to give funds to true athletic promotion, however small and humble might be the attempt, however provincial. To greater projects he was equally liberal, once assured of their sincerity. He endowed gymnasiums, donated swimming pools, paid for running tracks and basketball and tennis courts, and bestowed numerous trophies every week of his existence.

It was this man the Griffin proposed so lightly to destroy, and Manning knew well that the monster considered his plans perfect before he announced his fell intention.

Manning had been given the date—seven days distant—but only in mockery. It was as if the Griffin, in this "game" of his that he likened to chess, had granted a lesser player a bishop or a castle. The main advantage still lay with the Griffin.

As for Manning's moves, they were clear enough—to enlist the police in providing protection, to himself mount guard over Evans Cooke, whether Cooke was willing or not; to exhaust every precaution and to be alert to discover the diabolical preparations, to prevent the kill. The Griffin had suggested he might himself be present. That must not be overlooked. He was mad and therefore he might make a false move out of sheer grandiose dementia.

Manning put in a call for the Police Commissioner. He was sure of full cooperation there.

"There's a dinner at the New York Athletic Club tomorrow night," said the Commissioner. "Given to some of our Olympic winners. Cooke will be there. He'll speak, distribute special awards. I shall be there. You're a member, aren't you? Good. Then we can talk with him. He's not going to be easy to handle."

IV

COOKE was not easy. He did not pooh-pooh the danger. No man could do that against the Griffin's scarlet record; but Cooke declined to take special means to protect himself.

"Look at this last chap the Griffin killed," he said. "Shut himself up with you in vaults, Manning, wouldn't eat or drink. And he died. If my time has come I can't stop it. I suppose I'm a bit of a fatalist. They say the Griffin is also. He reads the stars and uncovers fates. He may have uncovered mine. You chaps can take all the precautions you want to, so long as you don't interfere with the fête I've arranged.

"I'm opening my new pool at my country place. No sports program except that a few record holders have kindly promised to christen the pool with the spray from their dives and sprints. It's built just the length of my own record underwater dive and I'm going to see if I'm still equal to it."

He looked it, Manning fancied; a man in his prime at something over forty, deep-chested, powerful. A fine specimen, a model for the type he hoped to develop.

"That's one fine pool," he went on enthusiastically. "I'm trying out, demonstrating rather, the new method of purifying swimming pools with ultraviolet rays instead of using chlorine to sting the eyes out of you. It works wonderfully. And I'm jing-ding-

damned," he added, half humorously but evidently in dead earnest, "if I'm going to let the Griffin put off that event. The invitations have been sent out. It's a private affair so I haven't announced it to the press. They'll probably scent it and be on the job, however. Now, I suppose, I'll have to add you and the Commissioner to the guest list?"

"We'll both be there," said Manning grimly. "Invited or not. What's more, Cooke, I want a list of your guests. I want to know very precisely who will be present, as guests or employees. I don't propose to annoy any of them at all unnecessarily. We'll check ninety-five per cent out inside of twenty-four hours. But we've got to know; and I want to go to your place tomorrow and look things over. I'll drive there, may be there continually."

Evans Cooke looked at Manning more attentively. There was a manner about the crime investigator that was as evident and compelling as a flow of magnetic current. His eyes were cold with purpose.

"You're welcome, of course," said Cooke. "I wish it was only as a guest, Manning. I should like to know you better. Like to have you interested in my movement. You're the sort of chap could stir up enthusiasm."

"I'm interested right now in *you*," said Manning. "Take this threat seriously, Cooke. It's more than a threat. It's mighty likely to become a certainty."

Evans Cooke looked into Manning's eyes and there was laughter in his own. Not merriment, not derision, but the gay humor of a man who is unafraid. Manning gripped his outstretched hand with genuine liking. A man of this caliber was well worth preserving. Cooke made a gallant gesture.

"*Te morituri salutamus,*" he quoted, and turned to greet some of the guests of the evening.

"What was that he just said?" asked the Commissioner who had come up from the ranks and lacked a classical education.

"It was a slogan of the Roman arena," Manning told him. "The gladiators stood in front of the imperial box and chanted it to Cæsar or Nero or whoever happened to be emperor. 'Hail!' they said. 'We who are about to die, salute thee!'"

"LUDONIA," Evans Cooke had named his place. It was after the Latin verb indicating "sporting pastime." The place was on the level land of Long Island. The house itself was well designed but not unusual. There was a separate sports building with as complete an equipment, lacking the amphitheater, as Madison Garden. There was a quarter of a mile track encircling a space for field sports. The tennis courts were perfection.

Cooke practiced what he preached to the extent of his own capacity, and his guests were frequently amateurs and sometimes professionals of the top rank. The fête on the nineteenth was, however, largely a social affair. The new tank had been completed and was to be the last word in swimming pools.

Manning surveyed it approvingly. It must have cost plenty of money, he imagined, looking at the tiled interior, now empty, slanting from eight feet to three. The tiles had been specially designed. Fresh water was emitted through a bronze dolphin's mouth, made exit through an overflow shaped like a giant conch shell. The tiles were specially designed to represent fishes in action, luxuriant growths of weed. The

globes that illuminated the tank of a night, beneath the water line, were concealed behind shades of actual nautilus shell. The ultra-ray lamps that would automatically keep the water pure were not yet installed. Manning idly watched the man in charge of the work and passed on to his minute survey of the grounds. They were fenced and could be efficiently guarded.

The Police Commissioner was working on the list of guests. None seemed even to suggest suspicion, but the Griffin was wealthy. Aside from the society end there would be athletes, male and female. The game was none too lucrative professionally, expensive from a purely amateur standpoint. The Griffin had unlimited funds. He had bought his way out of Dannemora. He might buy an assistant murderer. There would be plenty of men in plain-clothes to look out for everyone who might be doubted. The employees were checked. Evans Cooke vouched for them.

During the late night of the eighteenth the trained, picked men of the Police Commissioner came quietly to Ludonia to take up their vigil. At midnight the place was dark. Evans Cooke believed in moderation, his entertainments were never carousals. The sound body needed sleep and he set the example and not merely expected his guests to follow it, but had all lights switched off at twelve. The estate, with neighboring ones and the village, was served by a subsidiary power line from high tension wires of the main power plant, reduced through a transformer.

Manning had a battery lamp. He had also a powerful electric torch. He had been there, day and night, for a week, and he was convinced that he had built up a good defense.

Now the zero period had commenced, he had little fear that the Griffin, for all his deviltry, could pass the cordon established about the grounds and the house. Inside, Cooke slept in the room next to Manning's. Close by there were vigilant protectors, eager and alert.

The Griffin was certainly not within the grounds. He would strike later, devise some means of delivering the blow in the open. It would fall like a bolt from the blue, it would be spectacular.

More than once the Griffin had boasted to Manning that, in order successfully to murder a man, one had only to study his habits to find the weak spot.

Manning had bestowed a week's extensive research upon the habits of Cooke, feeling sure the Griffin had done the same.

Now, prepared for twenty-four hours of tireless vigil, he went over his notes, his deductions, instructions he had issued and was yet to issue, working like a field marshal on the eve of a decisive battle by the light of his battery lamp.

The Police Commissioner would arrive in the morning. The guests would begin to appear shortly before noon. An elaborate luncheon was to be served and the waiters would be chosen members of both civic and private detective forces.

He went over once more the roster of the guests. Their records were flawless. Yet Manning believed that someone would be on the spot who was prepared to carry out the Griffin's diabolical plot.

At two in the morning he made his grand rounds. The one exception to Cooke's ukase of "lights out" was by the pool, where they were testing the

globes that, underwater, lighted the pool after dark with colors that could be combined, changed into varying effects. The switches were in a small cement building, an addition to the dressing pavilion, where also the valves for the intake and outflow of the pool were controlled.

At the pool the program of the day would center. Three girl champions, two of them Olympic winners, with two male stars, would display their speed and grace. Cooke himself would try to repeat his record. Manning believed he could, having seen him try it the day before, marveling at his host's prowess.

V

THE pool was empty now and a corps of men was busy under the brisk direction of a gaunt New Englander who had undertaken the contract and was, Cooke said, a genius in the rough. He lacked education so far as books went, but Cooke proclaimed him another of those talented products of the northeastern seaboard who begin as tinkers and wind up as Edisons or Fords.

Sentinels had challenged, and then saluted Manning in his inspection. It was inevitable that these workmen must know that special precautions were being taken for some purpose. But the master electrician seemed concentrated on his job and its success, and on that alone.

He answered Manning curtly but not rudely and showed him how the work had been planned and carried out both for the illumination and the purification violet rays. Manning saw the purple rays flash on and off. He noted the inlets and outlets for the current, inspected the switchboard. Much of the work was completed, under-

ground. Manning was not a practical electrician, but he knew the general theory and he could see nothing wrong. Yet he suspected that tank; he dreaded the moment of Cooke's underwater dive.

Still, it seemed as if the barricade was invincible. He could find no flaw in it as he returned to the house and sat on the terrace beneath Cooke's window, smoking pipe after pipe until the dawn came.

The water flowed into the pool. Final tests were made, the lights were shut off. The workmen left, checked out at the gate, the contractor remaining to see his work approved, collect his money.

"I wish," Manning told himself, "that Cooke hadn't made that gesture and used that quotation."

He meant the "*te morituri salutamur*," the "I, who am about to die, salute thee," phrase that Manning had explained to the Commissioner.

Half a dozen times, as he tapped out his briar, refilled it and sent the aromatic smoke into the still air, Manning deplored that little speech. "Confound him," Manning muttered. "I wish that had not come into his head."

The sun rose, the day wore on without sign of trouble. Vigilance was maintained. The forenoon passed, the guests arrived and were entertained, unconscious of the keen-eyed sleuths who served them deftly but watched everything, waiting for any sign of the unusual.

Manning sauntered about, introduced by Cooke as amateur handball champion. The strain was terrific, but Cooke appeared serene.

The attempt at tragedy, Manning told himself, would happen before sunset. At three in the afternoon, after the elaborate luncheon and some

speechmaking, the guests assembled about the pool. Manning kept close to his host, a service gun holstered under one shoulder, his leather-covered steel cane in his hand.

Now, with a sudden quickening of inner alarm, he felt that the supreme moment of the Griffin's would-be fatal move upon this animated chessboard was imminent. But there was no sign of it. There was no unaccredited person upon the estate. The guards were all upon the *qui vive*. The waiters, relieved of their pseudo duties, added to the ranks of the protectors. Manning saw the Commissioner himself, vigilant, experienced. The only outside employee, if the man could be so styled, was the electrician who had installed the lighting.

A shadow drifted over the sparkling pool as the first of the guest exhibitors came from the dressing rooms and started to climb to a diving platform. Manning looked up and saw an autogyro hovering overhead. He remembered the Griffin's hint that he might be present. But there were other planes close by. They had passed in circling patrol ever since sunrise. Two of them came racing up now. Police planes, armed with quickfirers, far speedier than an autogyro, if that turned out to be anything but the machine of a casual spectator out for a flight and attracted by the crowd. Someone was looking out of the gyro's cockpit. Manning caught the gleam of binoculars. If they were merely looking on, they had a commanding position.

The body of the girl Olympic champion leaped, poised in the air with exquisite grace, making a perfect swan dive as the spectators applauded heartily. The others followed.

Cooke had gone to the dressing pa-

vilion. Manning watched for his appearance, with his pulse gone up, his blood tingling, his tension strained to the limit. He could not foretell what would happen, but he knew it was imminent. Yet he was sure there was nothing connected with the pool, with the lighting, that was out of the ordinary, that was harmful.

He looked about him and caught the eye of the Commissioner, grimly watchful. He did not notice the electrician in the crowd about the pool. After all, the man was a mechanic, not a guest. He glanced up and saw the autogyro still hovering. The two police planes were close by.

COOKE appeared and the applause heightened as he took his stance.

In his diving suit he was a really magnificent figure as he acknowledged the greeting with a smile and a gesture that brought the Latin phrase flashing again into Manning's mind.

"I who am about to die . . ."

Manning half started forward to stop the dive, but he was too late. Cooke crouched, his arms back, then forward, as he lanced in a flat trajectory into the pool. His body glided beneath the surface, his head came close to it but did not break the water.

He was going to make it, to equal his record, and nothing had happened. The onlookers stood ready to cheer him, Manning stood staring, waiting.

Cooke's hands grasped the rail that ran all about the pool. He stood up in the shallow water and moved to the steps, coming out of the pool unscathed, smiling and bowing to his applauding guests. Manning almost gasped with relief. Still he could hardly believe that Cooke had passed the ordeal Manning had believed the pool somehow constituted, though he had

not been able to detect anything amiss. Cooke pressed through the crowd, walking erect in a little triumphant progress to the dressing pavilion. Manning followed him. He was not going to let Cooke out of his sight until midnight.

The swimming guests had watched Cooke's performance and remained outside. Now they were all in the pool, disporting there in an impromptu program of their own.

The dressing pavilion was empty. There was a row of cabinets, with one lettered with Cooke's own name, reserved for his private use. His hand was almost on the handle of the door when Manning entered. Cooke turned to see who had followed him, grinned in recognition.

"You see, I did it, and I'm still alive. I'll be out as soon as I've changed."

The water dripped from his bathing suit about him in a little puddle. His feet were in it as he took hold of the handle.

The smile on his face turned to a grimace. His features were contorted and his body convulsed as he clung to the metal handle in a grip he could not relinquish. Then, with his expression frozen to a mask of horrible pain, he was released, and fell backwards.

The pavilion was filled with a curious odor, sour, metallic as Manning leaped for him, made a brief inspection, then dashed outside.

The pleasure seeking crowd fell back before his stern face. The Commissioner came forward to meet him. They exchanged a glance. Manning nodded.

"Mr. Cooke has had an attack. It looks like heart failure," he announced, for the benefit of the crowd. "Better get a doctor and have the place cleared, Commissioner."

He spoke with his eyes on the little shack with the green door at the end of the pavilion. The door opened slightly and a man peered out. It was the New England expert.

The Commissioner issued sharp orders, a man revealed himself as a physician. The electrician closed the door again as he saw Manning hurling himself towards him. There was no inside bolt, he had no chance to lock the door before Manning plunged through and found the man at bay.

He had connected wires with two electrodes and held one in either hand. If they met, even while they were a little apart, Manning knew that a terrific current would unite its poles. They were sputtering now, flinging off blue light. There was the same metallic smell and taste of tremendous voltage in the air.

"Keep away," the man yelled. "Keep away, I tell you."

"I want you," said Manning steadily. "You killed Cooke, for the Griffin!"

"For the Griffin? For Satan himself! The devil drove me. Stand back! I will not surrender."

THE killer was beside himself, foam flecked on his lips, and his eyes were wild. Manning lashed out with his cane and the end of the rod struck Cyrus Allen on his elbow. It was a risky blow. It had to be precise, to avoid contact with the wires. Allen dropped one of them and then the other. They coiled sputtering on the cement floor like burning fuses. Manning glanced round for a main switch and the murderer leaped for him, grappling with mad and desperate force that took all of Manning's strength and experience to offset. They struggled about the place, the gaunt

man striving to trip Manning and Manning trying to get at his gun. He had been forced to drop his cane to grapple with the other.

Allen was like a mad dog, snapping with his teeth. They brought blood from Manning's shoulder, they grazed his jugular, breaking the skin. Manning got an arm under Allen's leg, tore loose his hold and tossed him in a heavy throw.

Allen struck the floor in a heap, lighting on top of Manning's steel-cored cane. He slid upon it towards the crackling wires, and the cane completed the circuit. There was a flash, a frightful stench of burning flesh, the body of Allen jerking in the midst of it, then still. Manning staggered back from the sheer impact of the discharge.

The shocked guests were departing when Manning came out of the green door. The detectives were handling the crowd ably. The pool was empty. The Commissioner was in the dressing pavilion, with the doctor. The body of Cooke had been laid upon a lounge, covered with a blanket found in a locker.

"We'll have to have the official examiner, of course," the Commissioner said to Manning. "But Dr. Drake here says there is no question as to the cause of death. He was electrocuted. There was no chance of bringing him back."

Manning nodded.

"I was afraid of something like that," he said. "I suspected the pool. The contracting electrician stepped-up the voltage and connected it to this handle with a switch in the control shack. He threw it when he saw Cooke going in to change. He could tell when the contact was made, and, when he was sure Cooke was dead, he shut it off."

"Cooke's hands are burned. There are ruptured veins. No doubt an autopsy will reveal deranged organs. Death was probably instantaneous, if that is any relief," said the doctor.

The Commissioner and Manning both thought of the same thing; the penitentiary autopsies of those who die in the chair. The cause of death would be verified.

"Is there anything else I can do?" asked the physician.

"Nothing, Doctor," Manning answered quietly.

When the doctor had gone he turned to the Commissioner and told him what had happened behind the green door. "It will come out soon enough," he said. "The doctor could do nothing for him, less than he might have done for poor Cooke. It was not a pleasant

death, for he knew what was coming before he died. I only wish it had been the Griffin. He said he'd be looking on. Come outside."

The autogyro had vanished. The police planes still circled, waiting orders.

"He was in that gyro; did you notice it?" Manning asked the Commissioner.

"I saw it. I . . . what's that floating in the pool, Manning, over at the outflow end?"

Manning fished out a black, wooden disk. A weight at the end of a string anchored it, had steadied it for a straight drop. Part of the center had been carved out into a shallow receptacle that was filled with sealing wax, scarlet as blood, in which was sharply imprinted the seal of the Griffin.

A Dead Man's Teeth

WORKMEN excavating the foundations of a building to be erected near Mayence, Germany, came upon the remains of a human body. The skeleton was that of a strongly built man. The skull contained a set of fine, well preserved teeth; it also contained a couple of bullet holes.

The police consulted the list of the missing. They finally got the possibilities down to three and made a systematic canvass of all who had known those three missing men. In the course of their inquiries they came upon a barber who said he had often wondered what had become of one of his regular customers whom he had not seen for three years.

He remembered him perfectly by his fine teeth. The man was proud of them and was always ready to demonstrate their strength. Dozens of times he had shown what he could do with them. One of his tricks was to pick up the barber's chair—a wooden one—in his teeth, and balance it in the air, and as proof of the performance of this feat, the barber pointed out the deep-sunken teeth marks in the back of the chair.

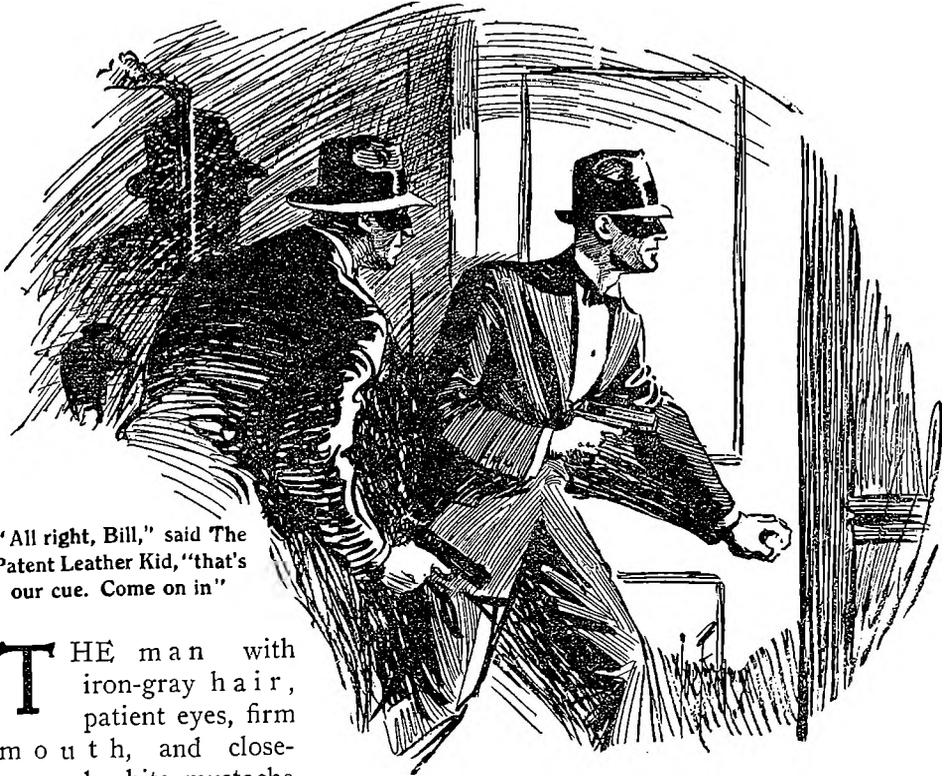
When these marks were compared with the dead man's teeth, it was found they fitted perfectly. The police were able then to establish the corpse's identity, and finally tracked down the murderer.

—R. W. Sneddon.

The Kid Muscles In

By Erle Stanley Gardner

The Patent Leather Kid Takes a Hand in the Case of Young Ed Pruett, Who Tapped on His Girl's Window and Found Himself Jailed for Murder



"All right, Bill," said The Patent Leather Kid, "that's our cue. Come on in"

THE man with iron-gray hair, patient eyes, firm mouth, and close-cropped white mustache attracted no attention as he walked toward Police Inspector Phil Brame. He was exactly the type of man who might have been a member of the club, in good standing. No one seemed to place him, but, on the other hand, no one questioned him.

Police Inspector Brame sat in his favorite chair, looking out of the window.

There were four members who pre-empted that semi-circle of chairs around the big window. There was Renfro, the banker; Bill Pope, the

explorer; Police Inspector Phil Brame, and Dan Seller, whose occupation had never been disclosed.

Renfro, the banker, knew that Dan Seller kept a substantial balance on deposit in his bank, and was inclined to treat Seller with a certain deference. Police Inspector Phil Brame, on the other hand, regarded Seller as a wealthy idler, and made no attempt to disguise his prejudice. Bill Pope, the explorer, bronzed by excursions into the tropical jungles, regarded Dan Seller with quizzical interest.

Dan Seller, young, well-knit, expensively tailored, showed entire unconcern as to the opinions the other three men might hold about him. His manner was that of a wealthy idler who need not work, and who is utterly self sufficient.

Yet it was Dan Seller who first detected something unusual in the manner of the man with the iron-gray hair and the close-cropped white mustache.

"I think, Inspector," he drawled, "that you've got a customer."

Inspector Brame glanced at Dan Seller curiously, then, as a jerk of Seller's head indicated the man that was approaching, Inspector Brame's eyes shifted to look with the steady, patient eyes of the man with the close-cropped mustache.

"Inspector Brame?" asked the man, his voice well modulated but firm.

Brame nodded.

"I don't seem to place you," he said.

"You wouldn't," said the man. "The name is Pruett, Walter C. Pruett."

Inspector Brame's forehead wash-boarded with reflection.

"Pruett," he said. "Pruett. I've heard the name . . ."

The man with the iron-gray hair stood directly in front of Inspector Brame's chair, his feet planted widely apart, his jaw jutting forward with an air of grim determination.

"I am the father," he said, "of Ed Pruett. I'm sorry to approach you at your club, but I did it because it was the only way I could reach you. My boy is innocent of that crime, and the police are giving him a raw deal, simply because they're too ignorant or too lazy to get out and chase down the real facts . . ."

Inspector Brame got to his feet,

his face flushed slightly. His eyes were cold and hard.

"Are you," he asked, "a member of this club?"

The gray-haired man shook his head.

"I got past the door man under false pretenses," he admitted. "That is beside the point. I came to you because I wanted to tell you, personally, just where the police are making a mistake. I tell you, there were burglars in that house, and I believe an investigation will show that hijackers . . ."

"Steward!" shouted Inspector Brame, turning his head in a searching scrutiny.

"Steward! This way!"

A slender man with alert eyes and deferential manner caught the note of urgency in Inspector Brame's voice, and came on the run to the window.

"What is it?" he said.

"This man," said Inspector Brame, "isn't a member of the club. He's in here under false pretenses. He worked his way past the door man in order to approach me upon a business matter. Throw him out!"

The steward stepped forward and tapped the intruder on the shoulder.

"This way, please," he said, "and don't make a commotion."

The man held his steady, patient eyes on Inspector Brame's face.

"Will you give me a chance to explain?" he said.

"No!" rapped Inspector Brame. "I won't discuss the matter. The case is closed."

The steward's hand took a tentative grip on the collar of the man's coat.

"Now, don't make a scene," he said, "or we'll have you arrested. That's Police Inspector Phil Brame you're talking with."

"I know who it is," said the man. "I wanted to tell him . . ."

Brame interrupted impatiently.

"Get out," he said, "and stay out! I don't want to talk with you. Do you understand? Steward, if this man doesn't leave, get the officer on the beat. Tell him I want him right away."

The intruder shrugged his shoulders, turned with an air of almost military dignity.

"It won't be necessary, steward," he said. "I'll go with you. I couldn't believe that the police heads could be guilty of such damnable bungling. I was willing to admit the underlings didn't know any better."

Relief showed in the face of the steward. He shifted his hand to the man's arm. Together they walked toward the elevator.

Inspector Brame sank back to his chair, his face still purple, his eyes indignant.

"Can you beat that?" he demanded. "The father of a damned, cold-blooded murderer coming to my club in order to intercede for his boy! You'd think the man would be hanging his head in shame, instead of bursting into gentlemen's clubs, annoying the representatives of law and order!"

RENFROE, the banker, said coldly: "You were more patient with him than I would have been. He's the father of this Ed Pruett who killed Doctor George Lancaster last night?"

"That's the chap," said Inspector Brame. "It was plain, deliberate murder, with no extenuating circumstances."

Bill Pope lit a cigarette.

"The father looks like rather a nice man to me," he said. "He seemed to

have something to tell you that he thought was important."

Brame snorted.

"The case is dead open and shut," he said. "Didn't you read about it in the papers?"

Renfroe nodded.

"The boy broke into the house in the first place, didn't he?" he said.

"It amounts to about the same thing," Inspector Brame growled. "He was in love with Lita Monteith, Lancaster's niece. Doctor Lancaster had forbidden him to call on the girl, and had kept the girl shut up so they couldn't have any clandestine meetings.

"Ed Pruett goes up to the house, finds out what room the girl's in, taps on the window, and gets her to let him in. Lancaster heard voices and surprised them. He ordered Pruett out of the house, and Pruett stood his ground. Doctor Lancaster tried to put him out, and Pruett, who is a young, husky fellow, threw Doctor Lancaster from the room. The doctor ran to his bedroom, shouting that he would get a gun. Pruett waited a few seconds, then followed him. There was the sound of a shot, and the girl rushed in to find Pruett standing over Lancaster with a gun in his hand. If that isn't enough of a case for you, I don't know what is."

"What happened after that?" drawled Dan Seller.

"Pruett skipped out. He and the girl hatched up a story, by which the girl was to notify the police and claim that her uncle had been shot by robbers whom he had surprised in the house. She wasn't going to let us know that Pruett had been there at all."

"As a matter of fact, some things were taken, weren't they?" asked Renfroe.

"A lot was taken," said Inspector

Brame grimly. "A lot we knew of at the time, and a lot we didn't find out until this afternoon. As a matter of fact, Doctor Lancaster was mixed up in some dope business. We didn't know it until recently. After his death, we uncovered certain facts which enabled us to chase back on his activities.

"Pruett might have pled guilty to manslaughter or second degree murder if it hadn't been for the robbery, but he looted the safe of everything it contained. We don't know how much that was, but we rather suspect that there was a very large amount of cash and perhaps several other things. He took Doctor Lancaster's watch and wallet. When we caught him, he was just getting ready to skip the country. Of course, the boys say he took the things just to make it look like a robbery, because he was afraid to report the affair as it was. He claims some one else shot Doctor Lancaster, that he heard the shot as he was going toward the Doctor's room, and that when he rushed in the Doctor was lying on the floor, the gun beside him."

"Not a likely sounding story," said the banker.

"It'll save him from the death penalty, I'm afraid," Brame admitted reluctantly. "There will be some sentimental ones on the jury. And the police department is handicapped right now. The man they call 'The Patent Leather Kid' . . ."

Bill Pope laughed an interruption.

"Come, come, Inspector," he said, "The Patent Leather Kid certainly can't be connected with this. He's just getting on your nerves, that's all."

Inspector Brame glowered.

"He's brought about a disrespect of laws," he said. "Just because his exploits are spectacular, they appeal to

the average newspaper reader. He's making things very hard for the police."

Dan Seller rose, stretched, yawned, and gazed down at the three men with eyes that held a glint of tolerant humor.

"Well," he said, "if you folks are going to talk shop, I'll go out and take a turn in the air. All this talk about business makes me nervous."

Inspector Brame snorted. "Can't even stand to *listen* about it, eh?"

Dan Seller laughed.

"My constitutional antipathy to any form of labor, Inspector," he apologized with mock gravity. "You'll just have to make allowances for it."

Bill Pope, the explorer, got up from his chair.

"Well," he said, "I'll be going, too."

As Dan Seller walked to the elevator, Bill Pope was at his side.

"You'll be back soon?" he asked.

Dan Seller regarded Bill Pope with speculative eyes.

"I'm not certain," he said. "Why?"

Bill Pope laughed.

"Nothing," he said. "I was just wondering. I thought perhaps Mr. Pruett did more good for his boy by coming here than he had suspected."

Dan Seller snapped: "Just what do you mean by that, Pope?"

Bill Pope waved his hand and laughed again.

"Go on," he said. "We'll be talking business, first thing you know. Go on out and take your walk."

Dan Seller stared for a moment, and then his face softened into a smile.

"Well," he said, "it's a good suggestion, at that."

IT took Dan Seller one hour and twenty-seven minutes to emerge from the identity of Dan Seller, wealthy young clubman, and transform

himself to The Patent Leather Kid, one of the mysterious, yet prominent figures of the underworld.

The process of transformation included the use of several taxicabs, the entering of a room by one door and leaving by another, a complete change of clothes, and the final entrance in the Maplewood Apartment Hotel, where he was known as the mysterious tenant of the penthouse on the roof. The manager, the clerk and the telephone operator alone knew Dan Seller as The Patent Leather Kid, and they were extremely careful to see that the information was never broadcast.

The Kid crossed over to the glass partition behind which the switchboard operator was taking calls.

"Hello, Gertie," he said.

The girl looked up, and her face lit as recognition flooded her features.

"Gee, Kid," she said, "you've been away a long time. Where you been?"

"Oh, just out and around," said The Kid. "Is there anything new?"

"No," she said. "Bill Brakey's up there."

"Give him a buzz and tell him I'm on the way up, will you?" asked The Kid.

He went to the elevator, nodded to the attendant, and was whisked to the penthouse.

Bill Brakey, who acted as The Kid's right hand man and bodyguard, opened the steel, bullet-proof door on the penthouse.

"Hello, Kid," he drawled.

Bill Brakey had a perfectly calm countenance, which seemed always placid, regardless of the danger which confronted him. Only his eyes and his hands were restless. His eyes were continually roving about, staring at things, soaking in their every detail, then shifting to something else. His

hands were always in motion, fluttering, restless hands, that were never far from a holstered weapon which hung under his left armpit. He was a walking encyclopedia of miscellaneous information about the underworld, and his skill and loyalty had saved the life of The Patent Leather Kid on more than one occasion.

The Kid acknowledged the greeting, went into the sitting room, and flung himself in an overstuffed chair, lit a cigarette, and said: "Bill, what's the lowdown on this murder of Doctor George Lancaster?"

"Guy by the name of Ed Pruett did it," said Brakey. "He was calling on the doctor's niece when the doctor tried to put him out."

"I know, I know," said The Kid impatiently. "That's the newspaper version, and that's what the police have on it. What really happened?"

Brakey shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know a thing in the world about it," he said, "except that I do know something about the gun."

"What do you know about the gun, Bill?"

"Just this: The police traced the numbers on the gun, and found that it had been purchased by a chap named Rodney Field. Field said that he lost the gun about two or three months ago, and the police aren't doing a thing about it. They've let it drop right there."

The Kid scowled through his cigarette smoke.

"That's rather strange, isn't it?" he asked.

Bill Brakey made another gesture with his restless hands and said: "It all depends on the way you look at it. The police got Ed Pruett's finger prints all over the gun and proved that it was the murder weapon. *They* don't have

to prove where he got it, and they're not going to try. He might have picked it up in a hock shop; he might have had it given to him; or he might have found it on the street. They don't care. He had it in his hand, and his finger prints are on it, and it was the gun that killed Lancaster. That's all the police are going to worry about."

"Who is this Rodney Field?" asked The Kid. "A gangster?"

"No. He's a wealthy chap who goes in pretty strong for polo. He seems to be on the up and up."

The Patent Leather Kid blinked thoughtfully at his bodyguard.

"It's funny that a man would 'lose' a gun without knowing something else about the circumstances surrounding its loss," he said.

Bill Brakey nodded.

"I want to find out more about it," said The Kid, slowly.

Bill Brakey reached out one of his restless hands, caught his hat, and clamped it firmly on his forehead.

"Okay, Chief," he said. "Let's go."

The Patent Leather Kid nodded, flipped away his cigarette and smoothed down his vest.

"Do you know Rodney Field?" he asked.

Bill Brakey shook his head.

"No, but I know his bootlegger—a fellow named Harry Kramer. He can tell us. I'm going to introduce you to him as a guy who may have some big orders and wants a commission."

"Okay," said The Kid. "Shoot."

They left the apartment hotel, hailed a taxicab, and went to a speakeasy which was the official hang-out of Harry Kramer. Brakey indicated a man who sat at a table with a young woman of exotic appearance.

"That's Kramer," he said.

The Kid's eyes surveyed Harry Kramer in shrewd appraisal.

KRAMER was about thirty-three or four, black-haired and blue-eyed, slightly inclined to be stout, but carrying his weight entirely around his neck and shoulders. His hips and waist were lean and hard.

"He's a tough baby," said Brakey, and led the way over to the table.

Harry Kramer's face wreathed in a smile.

"Well, well," he said, "my old college chum—Bill Brakey."

Brakey nodded.

The men shook hands, and Kramer's eyes strayed over toward The Patent Leather Kid.

"Friend of mine," said Bill Brakey. "We want to talk a little business."

"Sure, sure," said Kramer. "Draw up your chairs and sit down."

The dark-haired girl at the table fastened appraising eyes on Bill Brakey, then shifted them to The Patent Leather Kid. The eyes widened slightly and remained fixed on The Kid's profile for a matter of some five seconds.

There were no further introductions. The newcomers sat at the table. Everyone seemed to take everyone else for granted.

Kramer nodded toward his companion and said: "Her name's Dolly."

"Hello, Dolly," said Bill Brakey.

She parted her full red lips in a smile, then turned to The Kid. "Hello, everybody," she said.

Brakey turned to Kramer.

"A friend of mine," he said, "who isn't over a million miles away from here, is in a position to control the business of a couple of clubs and some big individual buyers. He wants to know about a cut."

Kramer was effusive. He shifted his eyes rapidly from Brakey to The Patent Leather Kid, then turned, and did his talking entirely to Bill Brakey.

"This friend of yours," he said, "could get a pretty good cut if he didn't get to shopping around."

"What do you mean by a good cut?" asked Brakey.

"A couple of dollars a case on the quality stuff," said Kramer.

Bill Brakey looked over at The Patent Leather Kid, and said musingly: "I don't think this friend would want to swing the volume of business he's got at that price."

Kramer lost his smile.

"Shucks," he said. "I'm giving you the very top cut on it now, Bill. That's for the quality stuff which will run into money. On the ordinary stuff I could not possibly pay more than a dollar."

Bill Brakey looked meaningly at The Patent Leather Kid. The face of The Patent Leather Kid was as a mask. Harry Kramer's eyes shifted rapidly once more from Bill Brakey and studied The Kid's face.

Dolly leaned across the table toward The Kid, smiled at him, and said: "Do you like dancing?"

"No," said The Kid.

Bill Brakey shrugged his shoulders to Kramer.

"You see how it is," he said. "I have an idea my friend would want more than that."

"That's a good cut," insisted Kramer.

Brakey pursed his lips, flashed a glance at The Kid. "Well," he said, "I'll talk it over with my friend, and let you know."

Kramer settled back in his chair, pulled down his vest over his trim waist, and beamed about the table.

"Well, now," he said, "that's all

over with, let's forget business. What you been doing with yourself these days, Brakey?"

"Just sort of loafing right now," said Brakey.

Kramer shot The Patent Leather Kid a swift, searching glance, then turned back to Brakey.

"Heard you was acting as body-guard for The Patent Leather Kid," he said.

Brakey raised his eyebrows. "Who told you that?" he asked.

Kramer grinned, and said sagely: "I can't tell you that."

Brakey puckered his forehead in a frown.

"Say, Kramer," he said, abruptly changing the subject, "you have Rodney Field as one of your customers, don't you?"

Instantly the genial smile left Kramer's face. His eyes became cold and hard.

"What about Rodney Field?" he asked.

"I want to get some information about him."

"What information?"

"About a gun."

"What gun?"

Bill Brakey leaned forward and put his elbows on the table. "In this Pruett case, they've traced the gun that did the killing. It belonged at one time to Rodney Field. He said he lost it."

"You mean the gun that killed Doc Lancaster?" asked Kramer.

"Yes."

"It was Pruett's gun," said Kramer. "The guy that did the shooting. His fingerprints were all over it."

"How did he get it?" persisted Brakey.

Kramer frowned. "I ain't an information bureau, you know, Brakey," he warned.

"That's all right," Brakey said, "but I figured you could give me some information about Rodney Field. I figured that if there'd been been a hijacking out at his place you might have known of it."

Kramer flashed a glance at the young woman.

"Well," he said, "I don't know a thing, and Dolly and I was just getting ready to go when you came in. Come on, Dolly."

Bill Brakey looked from one to the other, with thoughtful eyes. "Don't let me keep you," he said.

Kramer half turned, looked at The Patent Leather Kid, then at Brakey.

"If I was you," he said, "I wouldn't lose any sleep worrying about that gun. Losing sleep is a bad thing for a man. It ruins his health."

Then he turned and strode toward the door, the girl on his arm. Neither one of them looked back.

Bill Brakey turned to The Patent Leather Kid, and frowned.

"Now, why the hell," he said, "should that have happened?"

"Well," The Kid told him, "it happened all right, regardless of why it should have happened. We're sitting on a powder magazine right now."

Brakey nodded.

MOLLY MALLOY was in the late forties, and approximately fifty pounds overweight. She sat in a huge overstuffed chair in a room which was over-furnished and gaudy. Once in awhile a young woman would pass through the room and nod. The place smelled of perfume and incense.

"Gee," said Molly Malloy, staring at Bill Brakey, "you sure got a crust to ask me about Harry Kramer!"

"Never mind the crust, Molly," Brakey said, "I'm asking you. I want

to know what's between Harry Kramer and Rodney Field."

"What makes you think anything is?"

"I don't know; call it a hunch if you want to, or don't call it anything at all. Just tell me. That's all I want you to do."

Molly Malloy flashed a suspicious glance to The Patent Leather Kid.

"Are you sure your friend's all right?"

Bill Brakey took the cigarette from his mouth and nodded.

The Patent Leather Kid said: "Go ahead and tell her, Bill."

Bill waved his hand toward The Patent Leather Kid.

"This," he said, with something of a flourish, "is The Patent Leather Kid."

Molly Malloy gasped. Her eyes grew round. Then she heaved herself to her feet, waddled across the room, and locked the door. She came back and dropped into her overstuffed chair with a great creaking of springs.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" she asked.

"That's all right," Bill Brakey told her. "Go ahead and give us the dope. Never mind that."

She said: "I don't know how you found it out, but Harry Kramer had Rodney Field robbed."

"Go on," said Brakey. "You interest me."

"It was his country house," said Molly Malloy. "He's got a pretty place there, and he does quite a bit of high-class entertaining."

"What was taken?" asked Bill Brakey.

She snickered. "What do you suppose? Be your age!"

Bill Brakey said: "You mean the booze?"

She nodded her head, and rolls of flesh rippled about her chin and neck.

"Sure," she said. "You see, Kramer went to Field with the proposition of buying a whole bunch of the stuff. Kramer needed money, and he said he was willing to clean out his warehouse cheap. Field took him up on the proposition.

"That was fine, while it lasted. But after Kramer spent the money he started in to try to get Field to buy some more hooch. Field wouldn't buy because he had his cellar full. He was drinking it like water at his parties, giving it to his friends and all that, but he still had enough to last him for a long while.

"So then Kramer got the bright idea of having a couple of muscle men go in and pull a hold-up and clean out Field's wine cellar. They drove up with the trucks and stuck up the watchman and a couple of servants, took their own sweet time loading up the truck, and drove away."

"Then what happened?" asked Brakey.

"Oh, the natural thing," she said. "Rodney Field needed some booze. He got in touch with Kramer and yelled about what had happened. Kramer was all crocodile tears and sympathy. So Field started buying again."

"And I presume that Rodney Field got his own stuff back again at a higher price than he paid for it the first time?"

"Sure!" said Molly Malloy. "Don't be silly! What do you suppose Kramer went to all the trouble of sticking the joint up for?"

Bill Brakey exchanged a significant glance with The Patent Leather Kid.

"Looks like we've got to go and see Field," he said.

Molly Malloy unlocked the door.

"If you guys got any life insurance," she said, "better be sure that the premiums are all paid. It always saves trouble."

"Thanks," said Bill Brakey, and they filed out into the corridor.

ON the sidewalk Bill Brakey and The Patent Leather Kid lowered their voices and discussed the situation.

"Sort of puts us in a tough spot," said Bill Brakey.

"That's all right," said The Patent Leather Kid. "You can see what happened."

"What happened?" asked Brakey.

"Kramer got a couple of muscle men to do the hijacking from Field. One of those muscle men grabbed Field's gun."

"Well?" asked Brakey.

"That man was a muscle man and a hijacker."

"I still don't get you," said Brakey.

"Lancaster was mixed up in the dope business. He must have had a big bunch of dope in his safe. Two men had hijacked Rodney Field at Kramer's suggestion. They did other hijacking on their own. They were working on Doc Lancaster's safe when Lancaster came dashing into the room. Naturally they figured he was charging them, and let him have it. Then they dropped the gun and beat it. Young Pruett came rushing in right behind Lancaster and was fool enough to pick up the gun."

"Well," said Brakey, "it sounds logical, but I don't know how we're going to get any proof."

"Yes," said The Patent Leather Kid, squinting his eyes, and frowning his forehead, "we're going to need proof."

The two men started pacing along

the sidewalk. Suddenly The Patent Leather Kid chuckled. "You don't suppose," he said, "that Rodney Field ever saw this Lita Monteith, do you?"

"Hell, no," said Brakey. "Why?"

"That makes it fine," said The Patent Leather Kid. "Gertie, the telephone operator up at the apartment house, will be off now. She'll do anything for me. She's a good scout."

"What do you want her to do?" asked Brakey, mystified.

"Go call on Rodney Field," said The Kid, "and tell him that she's Lita Monteith."

"And then what?" asked Brakey.

"Oh, then," said The Patent Leather Kid carelessly, "we kidnap her, at the point of a gun."

"While she's talking with Field?"

"Sure."

Bill Brakey made a gesture of surrender by throwing out his palms. "It's too much for me," he said.

"Stick around," invited The Kid, with a grin.

THE Patent Leather Kid turned his powerful car down a side road which was some two hundred yards from the private driveway which wound around the terraced hill to the magnificent residence of Rodney Field.

"It's going to leave you about a quarter of a mile to walk, Gertie," he said. "Do you think you can do it?"

"Sure," said the voice of the telephone operator.

"In your French heels?" asked The Kid.

She laughed. "Listen, Kid," she said, "any time a girl's worked on a hotel switchboard as long as I have she knows enough not to wear French heels when she goes automobile riding."

The two men laughed. "Come on, Bill," said The Kid, "give a boost here and we'll put her over the fence and let her start walking. Now, Gertie, you take it easy. Don't ring the doorbell for at least fifteen minutes. We've got to look around a bit, and I want to be in the house when you ring the bell."

"I gotcha," she said.

"And you remember the line about the gun?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Okay, let's go."

They pushed Gertie over the fence, watched her follow a path which showed dimly in the starlight.

The Patent Leather Kid slipped through the fence, followed by Bill Brakey. "Well," he said, "we might as well get started," and he pushed on up the terraced hill, toward the back of the huge house which showed gloomy and forbidding, blotting out the stars.

The Kid led the way to the back of the house, prowled around a few moments, then selected a window. A curved steel jimmy was inserted under the sash. There was the sound of straining wood, then a sharp click, and the window shivered open.

"Better let me go first, Chief," said Bill Brakey.

The Patent Leather Kid said nothing, but sprang lightly to the casement, and slipped into the warm darkness of the house. Once inside he assisted Brakey through the window, then paused to adjust a mask over his face.

"Now," he said, "we want to find a telephone."

"That should be easy," Bill Brakey whispered, and the beam of his spotlight cut the darkness. They found a telephone in the corner of the butler's pantry. The Kid took down the receiver and breathed a number.

"What number is that?" asked Brakey.

"The speakeasy where Kramer hangs out," The Kid said. Then, a moment later, he spoke softly into the receiver: "Hello, is Kramer there. . . Yeah. Tell him it's a friend with an important piece of information . . . okay, I'll hold the line . . ."

"Hello, Kramer? This is a friend. I just wanted to give you a tip. Don't let anyone know where you got it. The Patent Leather Kid and Bill Brakey went out to Rodney Field's place tonight. They jimmed a back window and went in. They're in the house now. I don't know what they want, but they're wearing masks."

The Kid slipped the receiver gently back on the hook, and grinned at Bill Brakey.

Brakey mopped the back of his hand across his forehead. "Gee, Kid," he said, "that's just about like putting your head in a lion's mouth!"

"Maybe," agreed The Patent Leather Kid enigmatically.

A bell jangled through the house. "That," said The Patent Leather Kid, softly, "will be Gertie, ready to strut her stuff."

They waited in tense silence while they heard steps going down stairs in the front part of the house, heard the sound of a door opening, the sound of a man's voice, then the tones of a woman's voice, then feet on the stairs once more.

They waited for an anxious two or three minutes, and then the feet went down the stairs again, and two pair of feet made noise on the treads, as two people ascended the stairs.

"Looks like he had an upstairs study or library of some sort," said The Kid.

"You think he's seeing her?" asked Brakey.

"Sure he's seeing her," said The Kid. "Let's go upstairs."

Moving with the unerring precision of men who have accustomed themselves to the dangerous pitfalls of the darkness, the two men found back stairs, went up them, moved down a corridor, and heard the sound of voices.

"But," said a man's voice, "what good would it do you, Miss Monteith, if I should tell the police that the gun had been stolen from me?"

"Maybe," said Gertie's voice, "the police would believe that the man who stole the gun from you was a professional crook and give Ed Pruett a break."

"They'd want to know all about the circumstances of the robbery," said the man's voice.

"Sure," said Gertie, "why not?"

"Well," said the man's voice, "you see, it would be most embarrassing for me to explain all of those circumstances. The only thing of value that was taken was something that I wouldn't care to tell the police about, particularly if I had to tell where I had purchased it."

"You mean booze?" asked Gertie.

"I think," said the man's voice, "that I won't definitely commit myself, if you don't mind, Miss Monteith."

ALL right, Bill," said The Patent Leather Kid to his bodyguard, "that's our cue. Come on in."

He held a gun in his right hand. His eyes gleamed with sinister purpose from behind a mask. He pushed his way purposefully into the room where Gertie was talking with Rodney Field. He had given Gertie no inkling of his intention, and when she looked up and saw a masked man pushing a gun in her general direction her facial expres-

sions were sufficiently genuine to have allayed any possible suspicion upon the part of Rodney Field.

The Patent Leather Kid swung his gun in an arc which included the two occupants of the room, and barked to Rodney Field: "Stick 'em up, guy!"

Rodney Field was attired in a lounging robe and slippers. His slender, tapering hands gripped the arms of the chair until the skin showed white and taut across his knuckles.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"You know what the idea is, all right," said The Patent Leather Kid grimly, "and it's a damn good thing that we got here just when we did."

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," said Rodney Field.

The Kid made a purposeful gesture with the gun.

"The hell you don't! You were just going to spill the goods about us to the broad."

"About you?"

"Sure, me and my partner—the ones who hijacked your cellar and copped your gun."

"Oh," said Rodney Field, settling back into the chair, after the manner of a man who suddenly sees something which has theretofore been obscure.

"Sure," went on The Patent Leather Kid. "It's about time you took a tumble. Kramer was the one who hired us. He got you pretty well stocked up with hootch, so you weren't buying regularly. He figured it'd be a good plan to clean you out. We were the birds who did it for him. Then he sold you your own booze back again at a higher price. You had a good gun here and we copped it when we were hijacking the hootch. Then, when we were hijacking some dope from Doc Lancaster he came busting into the room and we had to let him have it.

It happened we used that gun, and we left it there. We figured you'd be called on to explain that gun sooner or later, and would spill all to the police. So we decided we'd see that you kept silent."

"Just how are you going to do that?" asked Rodney Field, sparring for time.

The Kid laughed grimly. "There's lots of ways," he said, "but one's better than any of the rest. Tie him up, Bill."

Bill Brakey took rope from around his waist, and approached Field.

"Wait a minute, boys," said Rodney Field, "you're getting me wrong on this."

Gertie got slowly to her feet.

"Look here," she said.

The Kid jabbed a gun into her stomach.

"As for you," he said, "you're going with us. You've talked too damn much! You had a chance to sit back and keep out of this mess, but you wouldn't do it. You had to go pulling some slick detective stuff, and now you're due to go for a ride."

She gave a half scream, and The Kid pushed the gun against her waist, spun her half around, and started rushing her from the room.

"Tie the man up, Bill," he said, "just the way I told you."

The Kid rushed Gertie into the hallway, then said to her, in a low voice: "Take it easy, Gertie."

"What's the idea?" she asked.

"Stick around," he said, "you'll find out."

He left her and tiptoed back to the door of the room, where he greeted Bill Brakey when that individual came out.

"Tie him up, Bill?" he asked in a low voice.

"Sure."

"To the chair?"

"Yes."

"So he can reach the telephone?"

"Sure, that's what you told me to do."

"All right," said The Kid. "Let's wait a minute and see what he does."

THEY waited in tense silence for a minute or two, then there came sounds of struggling motion from the room. That motion was followed by little thuds, such as might have been made by one who was bound to a chair, but was managing to hitch that chair across the floor, by little convulsive motions. Then they heard the sound of a telephone being overturned, and the voice of Rodney Field speaking in low, tense tones: "Give me police headquarters," he said.

The Patent Leather Kid tapped Bill Brakey on the arm.

"That's all, Bill," he said, "we've finished."

"What do we do now?" asked Brakey.

"Go home."

"Okay," said Brakey, "let's go."

They picked up Gertie, made their way silently out through the window by which they had entered, three silent shadows moving with purposeful skill, the men keenly alert, as befits men who have learned to do their work at high speed and in darkness; the woman self-reliant and loyal, obeying whispered instructions unquestioningly.

They moved down the terraced slope, across the strip of level grass, and Gertie was once more lifted over the barbed wire fence.

"Okay," she said. "What's the next item?"

"Just stick around for awhile," said The Kid, "while we have a cigarette."

On the main highway, out beyond the intersection, two cars went whizzing past, the headlights dancing on the road as the cars swayed and lurched in the grip of the terrific speed at which they were being hurtled over the pavement.

The Kid looked at his luminous strap watch.

The minutes passed. There were more lights in the big house on the hill—lights which sprang abruptly into dazzling oblongs of light as another window added its golden quota to the illumination.

The night was calm and peaceful.

Of a sudden, the frogs by the side of the road ceased their interrupted chirping. The distance snarled with the sound of tires and the roar of an open exhaust.

"The police," said The Patent Leather Kid, and lit another cigarette.

Two police cars flashed past the intersection, traveling at high speed. The Patent Leather Kid pressed his foot on the starter.

"Well," he said, "we might as well start for home."

The car purred into motion, slid smoothly to the intersection, turned back on the boulevard. The Kid pushed the throttle well down to the floor boards.

From behind them came the sound of gunfire. First an isolated shot or two—then the rat-a-tat-tat of a machine gun, interspersed with the boom of riot guns.

"Sounds like a Fourth of July celebration," said The Kid.

POLICE INSPECTOR PHIL BRAME flung himself in the chair in front of the club window. His eyes were red and bloodshot, his skin gray with fatigue and coated with

the greasy covering which indicates sleepless nights and unshaven days.

"Oh, my lord, what a night!" he groaned. "I've got to go down and get shaved and massaged, but I'm just too tired to move."

Renfroe surveyed him with an eye which was cold and appraising, but his mouth clucked expressions of sympathy. Bill Pope, the explorer, stared with his calmly quizzical eyes. Dan Seller seemed mildly interested.

"Been busy, Inspector?" asked Dan Seller.

Inspector Brame snorted.

"Busy!" he said. "Of course I've been busy! My God, all hell broke loose last night. Busy! Say, I've been so busy that a fellow who doesn't do anything more strenuous than clip coupons would think that he'd done a life time of hard work if he'd been with me for the last twenty-four hours!"

Dan Seller raised a mildly supercilious eyebrow.

"Indeed," he murmured politely, in the tone of one who simulates interest only through courtesy.

"Something about that murder case, wasn't it?" asked Bill Pope.

"I'll say it was," snorted the Inspector. "Do you know what happened? You'll be getting it in the papers anyway, so I might as well tell you.

"First we got a call from Rodney Field that a couple of muscle men are out there, trying to keep him from giving some testimony about that Lancaster case, and that they're going to take him for a ride, and that they've already taken Lita Monteith out to silence her.

"Naturally we went out there on the run. We knew we were going up against a tough gang, so we sent out a squad car that was equipped with machine guns, tear gas, pineapples, and everything else."

"Did you need all that stuff?" asked Bill Pope, quizzically.

"I'll say we needed it," said Inspector Brame, "but we still can't figure just what happened. We got out there and there the gangsters were in the house all right. We surrounded the place and had them trapped. When they saw they were cornered they opened fire on us, and we hemmed them in. It was quite a *mêlée* while it lasted. We had reinforcements come out, and finally the members of the gang who weren't killed or wounded surrendered, and they kicked through with a story of what had happened. A bootlegger by the name of Kramer had employed a couple of guys to muscle Rodney Field's hooch, which is underworld parlance for cleaning out his cellar by force. That enabled the bootlegger to sell him more liquor. However, when these hijackers cleaned out the cellar they stole a gun from Field. It was the gun that killed Lancaster. Lancaster was mixed up in dope traffic. These hijackers were just getting a big shipment of dope from Lancaster's safe when he burst in on them. Naturally they shot him."

Inspector Brame stared from one to the other, as though he had been a performer on the stage, and was awaiting a hand of applause.

Renfroe, the banker, nodded his head sympathetically. "That was wonderful detective work, Inspector," he murmured.

Inspector Brame nodded slowly, almost solemnly.

"Yes," he said, "it was very clever deductive reasoning. We put two and two together and forced an admission from the gangsters, but the funny part of it was that the story, as told by Rodney Field, doesn't coincide with the facts. He says that the gangsters

came out there and took Lita Monteith some ten or fifteen minutes before they returned for the second time, and that the second gangsters were not the same as the first. On the other hand, we have found out that the gangsters only made one trip and that Lita Monteith never was out there. We had shadows on her all the time, and she never was near Rodney Field's house."

"I don't see what difference that makes, Inspector," said Dan Seller, with a look of cherubic innocence upon his face. "Your men caught the gangsters red-handed, and wiped out the gang, didn't they?"

Inspector B r a m e frowned portentously.

"Well," he admitted, "there is, of course, that aspect of the case. But we still can't understand the other. You see, one of the men who was in the house, when the police surrounded it, was this bootlegger named Kramer. He was shot through the lungs, but while he was still conscious, on his way to the hospital, he gave information to the effect that they hadn't gone out there to kidnap Rodney Field and Lita Monteith at all, but to get The Patent Leather Kid. They knew that he was out there."

"A straight tip?" asked Dan Seller.

"A straight tip," said Inspector Brame, nodding his head once more, slowly and solemnly.

Abruptly Bill Pope started to laugh.

Inspector Brame whirled on him.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded.

Bill Pope coughed, choked, caught his breath, and shook his head.

"Nothing in particular," he said. "I was just wondering how The Patent Leather Kid got into this case."

"He just muscled in!" savagely exclaimed Inspector Brame.

The left eye of Bill Pope, the explorer, closed for a brief fraction of a second, in a swift, surreptitious wink, as he caught the eye of Dan Seller.

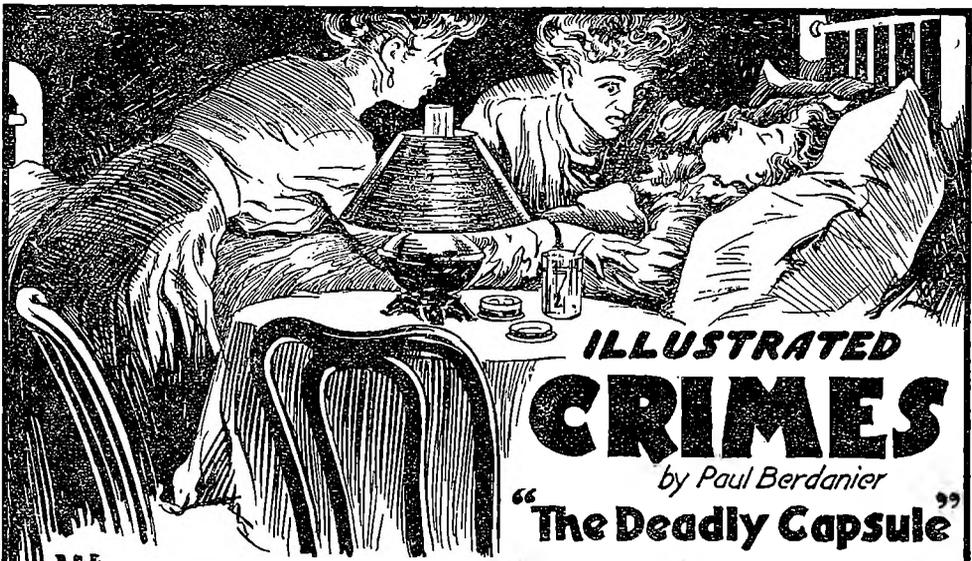
"Yes," he said, slowly and distinctly, "The Patent Leather Kid muscled in—and saved the life of an innocent man."

"Not at all," said Inspector Brame with dignity. "It was simply a matter of time until the police would have uncovered the true facts about that Lancaster murder case."

Bill Pope said nothing, but his cool smile was far more irritating than words would have been.

But the look of cherubic innocence remained stamped upon the face of Dan Seller.





ILLUSTRATED
CRIMES
 by Paul Berdanier
 "The Deadly Capsule"

When several girl students from Miss Day's Seminary in midtown New York went to a concert one Saturday evening in the winter of 1891, leaving their classmate Helen Potts, in bed, tired and ill, they had no foreboding of tragedy. But when they returned at midnight Helen's pallor and labored breathing alarmed them.

"I feel so strange" she gasped. "I am going to die..... Carl said I could take those pills. He said he had taken them himself....."

Terror-stricken, the girls sent for Dr. E. N. Fowler, the house physician. Dr. Fowler saw that Helen was under the influence of an opiate. An empty pill box lay on the bedside table. A chum of Helen's told the doctor that a devoted young medical student had prescribed for Helen once before. Helen lapsed into a coma.



The next morning Dr. Fowler sent for the young medical student, Carlyle W. Harris, slender, bespectacled, twenty-one. Harris admitted having written a prescription for Helen, six capsules, each containing five grains of quinine and one-sixth of a grain of morphine. He said he had given her only four of them. Harris was still there when Helen gave her dying gasp.

A REGULAR PICTORIAL FEATURE

"Is this going to get me into trouble?" Harris asked immediately.

The coroner ascribed death to natural causes and the body was removed at the direction of Helen's parents to Ocean Grove, N.J., where it was buried. The coffin plate bore no surname, only the given name, "MARY."



Then came the revelation that the dead girl, Mary Helen Potts, had been for the year past the secret wife of Harris by a civil ceremony.



Carlyle W. Harris

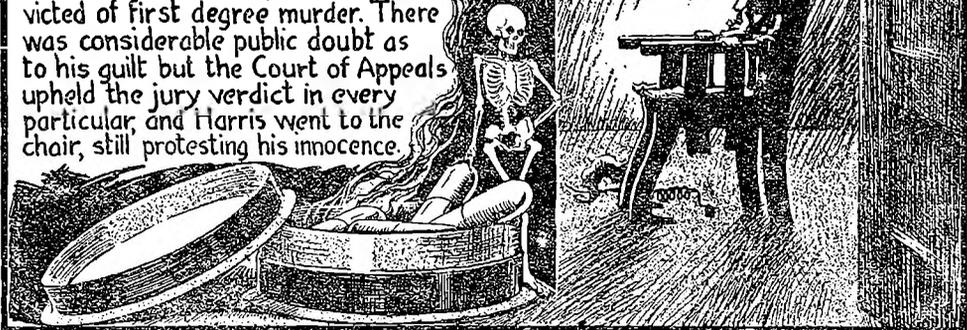
Rumors and stories, sinister in their implications, grew to such proportions that Harris himself demanded an investigation.



The body of Helen Potts was disinterred. An autopsy showed

that death had been caused by morphine poisoning. One of the capsules could easily have been filled with a fatal dose of the poison. A fellow student told the prosecutor that Harris had boasted to him a year earlier that he could poison a person without fear of detection.

Harris was indicted, tried and convicted of first degree murder. There was considerable public doubt as to his guilt but the Court of Appeals upheld the jury verdict in every particular, and Harris went to the chair, still protesting his innocence.

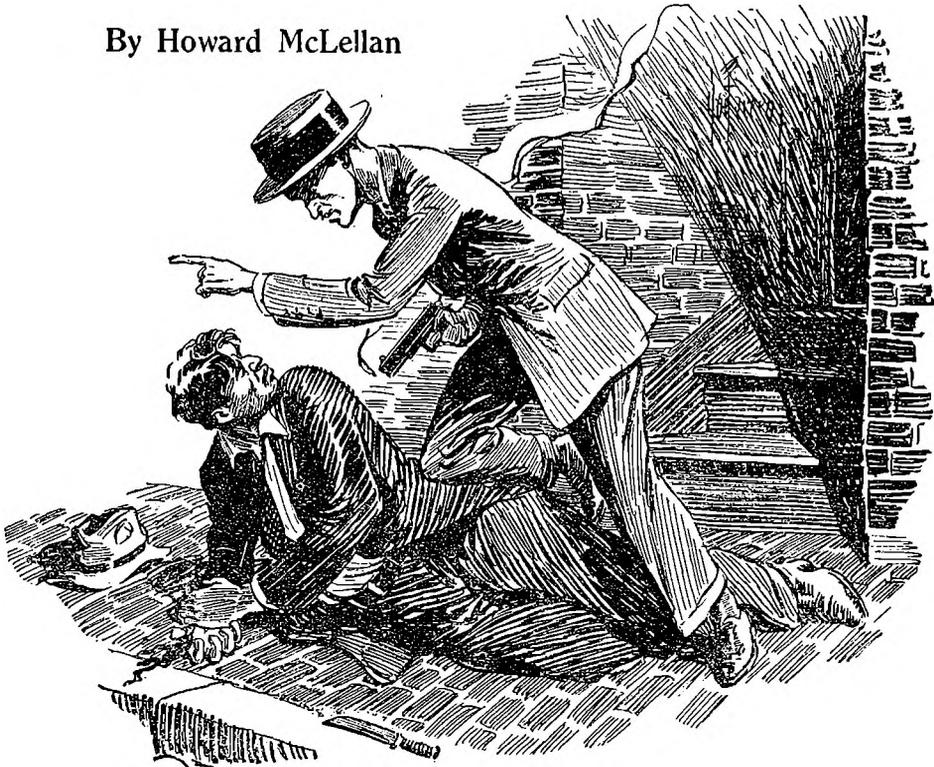


Next Week: "THE FOX OF LOS ANGELES"

The White Hander

A True Story

By Howard McLellan



"Swell way of fooling" said Wild Bill. "Now go back and tell Meehan what happened"

Once the Sissy of Catharine Street, Wild Bill Lovett Became the Chief of the White Handers and Chased Al Capone to Chicago

CHAPTER I

The Sissy of Catharine Street

WILLIAM JOSEPH LOVETT was one of the paradoxical figures in the modern underworld of a great city. He began life as a timid, chicken-hearted lad who could not bear to see a fly swatted. Before he reached manhood he was a reckless killer and gang chieftain.

A weak, pasty-faced man, he brazenly muscled Al Capone out of the underworld of the East into Chicago, and

then, after building himself a reputation as the worst bad man of his time, he came at last to rest in a hero's grave on the lawnswept hillside of a Brooklyn, N. Y., cemetery, a patriot, and yet a lawbeater and killer of the worst type.

He has been dead almost a decade but pistols still crack in the streets he once terrorized and men die trying to impose his ruthless kill upon the gang world where once he was supreme, Wild Bill Lovett.

Life poured strange fluid into Lov-

ett's veins. He gave the diabolical worst in him to the underworld; the best in him to his country. But, whatever he did, good or bad, was done in a big and reckless way.

For an infant he had an extraordinarily large head and great blue eyes which glared wonderingly at the little circle of relatives and neighbors who trooped into the modest East Side tenement to have their first look at the Lovetts' newborn.

In striking contrast to his enormous, well-shaped head was the infant's limbs and body. His legs were short and spindly, his body thin to the point of emaciation, his chest abnormally flat, while his tiny fingers were a dead white, almost as thin as matches and icy cold.

The Lovett tenement looked out upon ancient Catharine Street, overshadowed by a gaunt bookbindery. The district was known as the Deadly Fourth Precinct. It was infested by gangs and included New York's Chinatown. A few blocks from the tenement, the Brooklyn Bridge, then one of the new wonders of the world, lowered into The Swamp, a damp and desolate hiding-place for river pirates and wharf rats. Yet the neighborhood had been the birthplace of illustrious Americans including Theodore Roosevelt, who, in 1894, the year Lovett was born, was fast rising to fame. The most popular young man in the section was a smiling chap who sported a brown derby. He was Al Smith. Good men and bad first saw the light of day in that section.

The district also sheltered three brothers of whom it did not boast. The Caponi boys—Ralph, sometimes called "Bottles," and his younger brothers, Alphonse, and Jim, who later changed the final "i" on their name to "e" and

made it one of the most sinister names in modern crime. They were members of the notorious Five Points Gang, led by their kinsman, Johnny Torrio. It was a vicious gang, allied to Black Hand killers, blackmailers, counterfeiters and early types of racketeers who preyed upon Italian residents in the section.

As he grew, young Lovett was untouched by the gang life all about him. He attended parochial school, and displayed an intense interest in religious studies.

His manner was soft and mild; his voice hardly ever arose above a drawling whisper. At home he couldn't bear to see his mother swat flies and spiders. To save these pests from the annihilating crack of her swatter he caught them and liberated them through an open window.

This tender side of the boy was bound to bring him into harsh conflict with the rough life on the teeming East Side, and physically he was unprepared for the encounters. While attending high school he spent his early evenings on the doorstep of the Lonergan house near his own tenement. There was Anna Lonergan, oldest of the Lonergan brood of fourteen. A brother, Peg Leg, was younger than Bill. The girl was a self-willed, dark-eyed madcap of the Ghetto.

ON a hot summer's evening Bill Lovett and Anna were sitting side-by-side with Peg Leg looking on, when the three Capone brothers came swaggering along the sidewalk and up to Bill.

"Aw, you sissy," sneered Al Capone. "Why don't you leave the skirts alone and get out with the boys?"

"You're not boys, you're thieves," Lovett retorted.

Capone pointed at Bill's white hands. "You ought to put on an apron and take a job as a waitress. You couldn't possibly do a man's work with them hands."

Bill sprang to his feet. He made a lunge at the taunting Capone, but Anna held him back. Capone laughed, flung a final taunt that Bill was hiding behind skirts, and went on with his brothers.

"Why didn't you let me at him?" Bill demanded of the girl.

"You wouldn't have a chance against those bullies," she answered.

Bill's blue eyes followed the trio as they marched off. "Some day," he finally reflected, aloud, "I'll maybe get a chance at them."

Peg Leg broke in. "And I'll be right wid youse," he piped.

The girl looked at Bill, eyed his large head and his thin white hands. "Don't ever be foolish and go after them, Bill," she cautioned. "You're not built to fight."

Taunted by this advice, the jibes of Capone and the fact that boys along the street were calling him "White Hands," Bill quit high school in a week and took a man's job, tooling fine books in the bindery which adjoined his home. In record time he became an expert, and some of the fine books he tooled adorn the private libraries of several fashionable New York families. It was the kind of delicate work which fitted his thin, weak hands.

Then, quite suddenly, the Lonergan family moved across Brooklyn Bridge and settled in Brooklyn. Finally the Capone brothers vanished from Catharine Street and went to Navy Street, Brooklyn, and joined up with a mob of Sicilian cut-throats known as the Death Tavern Gang. They had their headquarters in an eating place known as Death Tavern, which huddled

against the great sheds of the coffee docks along the East River north of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Almost at the same moment that Bill heard that the Capones were procuring girls and selling them to the keeper of Death Tavern, who, in turn, sold them into lives of shame, he heard that Al Capone had accosted Anna Lonergan on the street and had invited her to the tavern.

Bill had never crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. When he received this news from Peg Leg he went across and straight to the Lonergan home. There he discovered that Capone had accosted the girl, but that she had taken after Capone with a hat-pin and had driven him away. She had no need of her young cavalier's protection against Capone or any hoodlum.

However, she did complain that life was getting miserable in her home. Peg Leg had joined a gang which was known as the Roof Birds, and the police were always after him. Moreover, she told Bill, her mother and father were constantly bickering and life was miserable in the same house with them.

She suggested that Bill might make her happy by marrying her and taking her away. She minced no words about it. She was blunt. Though young in years, Anna Lonergan was as old as the hills.

"Why, I couldn't support a cat on what I make!" Bill exclaimed. "And anyway I'm quitting my job. I've been too soft for my own good. A fellow's got to fight his way in this world. I'm going out to find something hard to do that'll toughen me up."

Anna may or may not have loved Bill, but this much is certain, she did not get him for a meal ticket; nor, did he ever return to Catharine Street, the

scene of his youth. He started back, but fate met him on the bridge.

CHAPTER II

"Grab Some Muscle"

HALTING on the bridge where it ascends from the Brooklyn side of the East River, Lovett looked down onto the roofs of squalid buildings shadowed by the arched steelwork. On the narrow, damp streets below he saw massive, square-shouldered men lumbering to and from the docks. Over their broad shoulders were slung rolled jumpers. From the hip pockets of their overalls hung gleaming hooks, sharp as marlin spikes. He marveled at their size; at the muscles bulging on their bronzed arms and the coarse hair showing where their blue flannel work shirts were open on broad chests. Some of them staggered as if drunk. All of them seemed to be of one huge size, picked apparently for jobs which required great brawn and gleaming hooks.

They seemed to have a common meeting place within the doors of a green front shack tottering towards the nearest dock at the water end of the narrow street. He saw the number on its door—25—and, making his way from the bridge into the street, discovered at a lamp post that he was in Bridge Street. He was in a little dark world of hard, rough men who both mystified and fascinated him. It was a sunless world, for the wide bridge above kept it dark. One thing about the men and the place lured him. In such a world, and among such giants a lad could grow hard and tough. North of him lay the coffee docks and Navy Street, and Death Tavern where the taunting Capones hung out and where murder and traffic in girls were

the joint occupations of those who made their headquarters in the inn of murder.

Bill was not aware, of course, that the section he had dropped into was notorious Shantytown, the domain of dock wallopers, great hulks who had fought bloody battles to keep Shantytown for themselves and to insure themselves and their male progeny the exclusive right to labor on the docks. They were not longshoremen or stevedores. They resented being called by either classification, for they could fight harder and do heavier work than longshoremen or stevedores. And the tottering, squalid green front shack with 25 over its door was the Loaders' Club, their headquarters, and the throne room of their despotic boss.

It was their official hangout and drinking place, and in the years of bloody fighting more than one dock walloper had been shot or clubbed to death in the squalid, dim-lit premises. And many a walloper, in the fury of drunkenness, had been done to death in brawls, clawed atrociously by the sharp, gleaming hooks which were both the badge of their hard calling and their weapons of offense and defense.

For the privilege of hanging about the club and getting work on the docks they gave a large share of their hard-earned, daily pay to a barrel-shaped, grunting czar, Dinny Meehan, who seldom moved from his high-backed chair in the club. As worn men came in from the heavy work on the docks they dropped their tribute into the fat palm of Dinny Meehan and then spent the remainder of their earnings over the long plank where Meehan's barkeep served them beer and liquor and further enriched the greedy Meehan's purse.

Meehan was a pioneer in the labor

racket—a padrone extorting cash from men for the privilege of doing a day's hard and honest toil.

PRESENTLY the large-headed newcomer in Bridge Street was peering in at the Loaders' Club through a soot-streaked front window. Suddenly a thick, gruff voice churned the air.

"What's the big idea, kid?"

Bill turned and faced a giant wallop. "Oh, I'm looking for work," said Lovett.

The big fellow grunted derisively. "You, you looking for work in Shantytown? You better clear out before somebody puts a heavy heel into you and flattens you." Then he eyed Bill's white hands. "You're up to trouble," he went on. "You're lying about wanting work around here. You couldn't do a quarter of a man's work with them hands. Where you belong? Who are you?" He moved closer to Bill, with a menacing scowl on his face.

"My name's Lovett," said Bill.

"You're not a wop then?"

"I'm Irish."

The giant scratched his shaggy head. "Irish, eh? Well, that ain't so bad. But if it's work you're really after you'll have to see the boss, Dinny Meehan. He's inside, plunked in his big chair. But look out for the blatherskite. He's a murderin' sneak."

Bill ventured into the club, while the shaggy-haired wallop stood outside awaiting the result of the encounter within. Lovett went straight up to the ogrish Meehan, but he got no chance to make his plea for a job. Meehan eyed him up and down, lifted himself out of his high-backed throne, seized the youth by the throat with both hands, carried him out and dumped him on the sidewalk.

"He wouldn't let me get in a word," Bill complained to the big dock wallop.

"He's afraid of his life," the giant explained. "The pig knows he's hated from one end of the town to the other. He figured you was a stool pigeon. That's why he threw you out. He's a bloody coward. If you were a fighter he'd have shivered in his boots. He's afraid of any man with a reputation."

"He nearly pulled the head off me," said Bill, twisting his lame neck. "I'd like to show him—"

"We'd all like to show him," the wallop cut in. "But we dassn't. He'd sick his guerillas on us. But he's a coward in his black heart. If you want to get hunk with him go out and make yourself a reputation and then come back at him. Grab yourself some muscle, kid, then you can make him crawl."

No doubt this advice was given in a kindly spirit tinged with the hatred which the big dock wallop felt against the murdering grafter who bossed him and took a major share of his daily pay. Bill took it deeply to heart. His hate for Meehan flamed. There was slight chance that he might squeeze himself in with the wallopers while he remained puny and white-handed. What he needed was to mingle with youths of his own age who were hard and tough; to be knocked about, roughened, put up against life in the raw where he could build himself a reputation. So his thoughts drifted to Peg Leg Lonergan. Peg Leg had developed into a skillful thief. He ranged with the Roof Birds, gangsters who lived in packing box shanties on rooftops and who thrived on pillage and mischief, terrorizing shopkeepers and battling the police.

Anna Lonergan had told Bill about Peg Leg's pals—Cute Charley, whose real name was Charles Donnelly and who had gotten a reputation by biting off two of a cop's fingers; Bill Raycraft—Battering Bill—who had once pushed over a brick chimney which buried and bruised a cop; Fiddler Frank Byrnes, who escaped from pursuers by tight-roping it on wires from roof to roof; and Frank Martin, a young heavyweight with prize ring aspirations who, as soon as the Lonergans moved into Brooklyn, began to pay court to the dark-eyed Anna. The members of this gang already had reputations, although the oldest one in the mob—Martin—was only twenty.

Bill was just past seventeen. He had no brawn, no reputation. But, in addition to his desire to acquire brawn and a ferocious name for himself, he had dreamed in his capacious head of making himself a ruler of other men.

When he sauntered out of Shantytown, after his first unhappy encounter with Dinny Meehan, he was on his way to find the Roof Birds.

CHAPTER III

Exit the Roof Birds

IN the gathering dusk Lovett climbed a fire escape to the roof of the Lonergan tenement. Surveying the sweep of housetops in the block he saw smoke issuing from a blazing fire on a roof three houses away. He saw Peg Leg and his gang huddled about a tin bucket warming their hands.

He scrambled over the copings, but the instant Lonergan and his pals spotted him they leaped to their feet, alert to battle the newcomer whose face was obscured by the thickening darkness. Presently, however, Peg Leg recognized the ragged straw hat cocked

on one side of Bill's large head and he shouted him a rousing welcome and an invitation to join the gang at a supper of fried pork chops and baked potatoes which were already on the fire. Cute Charley and Raycraft joined in the welcome, but Fiddler Byrnes and Frank Martin were cool and sullen.

Bill asked Peg Leg about the Capones and was told that the three brothers had opened a dive in Coney Island, a combination dance hall and saloon which they were using as a lure to attract girls into their hands.

In a rattle of words Peg Leg told of the operations of the Roof Birds; how they robbed wagons and shops in the streets below and hoisted their plunder to the rooftops by means of ropes. They had just hauled up a quarter of pork and half a bag of potatoes which explained how they had come by the pork chops and spuds for supper. They had also hoisted a case of bottled beer and a jug of whiskey which they would put away after the meal; and, Peg Leg boasted, they would have a dozen bottles of milk for breakfast after the early morning milk man had been around to the doorsteps in the street below.

It wasn't an impressive showing to Bill. His mind was on big things. Each of the four men around the fire was twice as heavy and far more robust than he, yet all they did was steal stuff to eat and drink. He remarked that he thought they were all pikers.

"Yeah," Raycraft agreed. "We're a bunch of punks. We take big chances just to grab a few pork chops and some spuds and enough booze to get drunk and fall asleep on. What we fellows need is a chief. A guy that can make us go out and do big stuff."

"You're talking a mouthful," Peg Leg put in. "We need a boss." His

big mouth widened into a grin. "A guy like you, Bill."

"What's zat?" demanded Martin. "Me take orders from a lizzie-handed guy like Lovett? You're crazy, Loner-gan."

Bill looked at Martin. "Lissen, you," he said, "you been running with the boys a long time, but I don't see you been leading them. It takes a little brains to lead any bunch of fellows. I guess you ain't got any or you'd been the boss long ago."

Martin shot up. "You punk," he bellowed. "Who'd you ever lick?"

With little effort the giant Martin might have doubled the puny Lovett into a knot.

Bill's voice came in a calm retort. "I haven't licked anybody, up to now," he said. "But, I could try out on you."

MARTIN lunged at Lovett. The latter backed away a pace.

"Just a second, Martin," he called out. "Let's make this battle worth something. If you lick me I'll drag out of here and never show face around these parts. But, if I make you call quit, then I'm boss. How's that?"

"Fair enough," yelled Peg Leg. There was a chorus of approval from Cute Charley and Raycraft. Fiddler Byrnes cocked his small eyes at Lovett and felt sorry for the puny fool.

Martin's big fist went up in the darkness and came down like a sledge on Bill's shoulder. The blow sent Bill to his knees on the tin roof. He didn't come up at once. But, what he lacked in brawn he possessed in gray matter. He dived between Martin's knees, and fastening both arms about the giant's legs, he arose and lifted Martin off his feet. The big body fell over Lovett's back like a bag of flour. In the fall Martin's head struck the roof, slightly

dazing him. The spindly-legged Bill hauled him across the roof. When he reached the coping around the edge of the roof Martin had a gorilla-like grip on the calves of his puny legs. Lovett fell across the coping, Martin still on his back.

The weight of the big load pressed Bill's stomach against the stone ledge and squeezed the breath out of him. The two figures were locked together, both half over the coping, dangling four stories above the street.

The four other roof gypsies looked on, open-mouthed, amazed. At any instant both youths might go hurtling down into the street. Bill was choking under the pressure of Martin's big body, but he held grimly on and wriggled forward a foot or two. Both bodies were slipping. Finally Martin let go Bill's shanks and caught hold of the coping but, as he did so, Lovett raised himself on the ledge and pried his adversary's hands loose.

"Do you say quits?" Lovett asked.

"You bloody fool," cried Martin, "we'll both go down."

"That'll be all right with me," said Bill. "Quick. Say what it is, or, down we go."

"Lemme up and I'll—"

"Say quit or—" The two bodies slipped further over the coping.

"Quit!" bawled Martin. Lovett let go of his legs and caught his white hands on the cross piece of a window frame. Martin clambered back onto the roof. Presently Bill raised himself to a sitting position on the coping and caught his breath. He watched Martin slouch away in the darkness.

Still perched on the coping Lovett took steps to make absolute his dominion over the Roof Birds. He had vanquished the one man who openly challenged him. He had not done it with

brawn, but by strategy. Perhaps it was this cunning which cowed the four men into subjection. Lovett took pains to warn Fiddler Byrnes that if he ever raised his voice or hand to question his leadership he would be battered out of the gang. Then, to clinch his rule, he ordered all four to raise their hands and vow to take orders only from him; to follow him wherever he went, and if anything should happen to him, to carry on as though he were still around and in command. Byrnes was the only one who faltered, but when Peg Leg and Raycroft nudged him, up went his hand.

THIS sudden, speedy ascension to power instantly transformed Bill Lovett. His mild manner and soft speech were gone. The desperate encounter with Martin had hardened him. The taunts flung at him by the Capones, the rough treatment accorded him by Dinny Meehan had embittered him. As he sat nibbling his browned pork chops under the star-lit sky he was sullenly silent. Finally he gave voice to the thoughts that were churning in the brain within his enormous head.

"There ain't nothing to this life except when fellows stick together," he announced. "They say a good guy goes to heaven with wings on his shoulders, but until I see them going up through the sky with my own eyes I'll figure it's a lot of bunk. A guy's heaven or hell is what he makes it right here."

He had not only put Catharine Street out of his life but he had turned his back on his religion. In a single night he had demonstrated that he could best men of superior fighting powers by outwitting them. In his first attempt to "grab himself some muscle" he had

succeeded without brawn, and the triumph had fired him with a lust to rule men by the might of a new kind of "muscle." He had the four Roof Birds under his thumb though any one of them could have toppled him with a slap.

He might go far with this kind of muscle. He might extend his power over many men, and thus extend his dominion, and, incidentally, pay his respects to Al Capone and Dinny Meehan, for whom he had a hate equal in its ferocity to his lust for power.

He had been taunted so often about his white hands that he decided to turn this sign of weakness into a symbol of power, too.

"No more of this Roof Birds stuff," he announced. "And no more of this stealing pork chops and little stuff like that. From now on we're the White Hands. We'll go after big stuff. We'll make everybody sit up and take notice, so, when they hear the White Hands are coming, they'll shake in their shoes."

Peg Leg passed around a demijohn of whiskey. All drank to the White Hands. It was the first liquor to pass Bill Lovett's lips, but he downed his drink as if he was an old timer at swigging the strong stuff. Peg Leg wondered aloud if Bill had a gun and knew how to use it. Peg Leg and his pals had long carried gats.

"Naw," Bill replied. "I don't want to pack a gun. I hate to think of a bullet cutting into a guy. You fellows can pack guns, but I won't. I don't need one, but that don't mean I couldn't use one if I had to. I'll show you."

Peg Leg handed him a .45. Bill raised it and shot a clothes-pin from a wire wash line, and handed the gun back to Lonergan. He had never shot a gun before.

"I guess I was made to do anything in a pinch," he explained.

His four vassals eyed him in amazement. He was cocksure of himself and he could do anything he said he could. Doubtless this quality drew at least three of the men closer to him. Byrnes was the only one to show a lack of interest in the self-appointed leader.

Lovett lost no time in looking up a job for them to do. He had a score to settle with the Capones and the next night he led his men in a flying attack on the Capone dive in Coney Island. They swept into the resort in wedge-like formation, tipped over tables, wrecked the bar, drove out patrons, barkeeps and bouncers, and turned the place upside down. The Capones were not in evidence. When the damage had been done to their joint Bill took a piece of soap from under the bar and with it printed upon the back bar mirror, in the fine lettering he had often used on books in the old Catharine Street bindery, this message for the Capones:

WRECKED BY ORDER OF WHITE HANDS

Al Capone, viewing next day the skillfully printed defi, and looking over the wreckage, was unaware that it was the handiwork of the puny Catharine Street boy he had insulted and taunted on the Lonergan steps. In Coney Island shady resort keepers wondered fearfully about the White Hands without knowing who they were or from what motive they had attacked the Capones.

The worried keepers suspected that the White Hands were an off-shoot of the secret, white-capped raiders who called themselves Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. They were frightened.

Lovett, meanwhile, had high hopes that Dinny Meehan had caught an ear-

ful of the damage done to the Capone dive in Coney Island.

CHAPTER IV

The Dock Raiders

DINNY MEEHAN'S control of the docks of Shantytown was not wholly based on his ability to supply labor to load and unload ships. For years before his rule there had been systematic looting of both docks and ships. Meehan had promised ship owners and dock operators that the pillage would end with his rule if the owners would permit him to run the dock laborers and collect his tribute from them. He put an end to pillage and the ship and dock masters gave him the run of the docks.

Suddenly one morning, a few weeks after the attack upon the Capone dive, Meehan was amazed by the news that one of the largest docks under his control had been robbed of nearly every article on it that could be carried away and the watchman either clubbed into insensibility or thrown into the river. The thieves had tacked a message, expertly lettered, on the dock gate. It read:

**WHEN DINNY MEEHAN QUILTS RUNNING
THE DOCKS JOBS LIKE THIS
WON'T HAPPEN**

THE WHITE HANDS

Meehan was puzzled and frightened and also in total ignorance of the identity of the White Hands. Likewise he couldn't comprehend why he was being attacked in this underground fashion. No one had ever openly challenged his rule.

He was not long in the dark as to why he was being attacked, and by whom. He was sunk in his high-backed throne in the Loaders' Club

when the figure of a slight young man stood before him.

"Remember me?" the visitor asked.

"You gutter rat," Meehan roared.

"I told you once to get out of here and stay out."

"Things were different then," the visitor snarled. "I was just a kid. Now they call me Wild Bill Lovett, boss of the White Hands."

Meehan's fat body became suddenly rigid. "Aw!" he cried. "It was you that boosted all that stuff off the dock and left that notice for me to quit these docks." His blubbery face flashed red.

"It was me and my White Hands," said Lovett. "Now I'm here to give you warning. Your own men hate you, I hate you, and it's time you were quitting this big graft."

Meehan sprang from the chair. Giant wallopers, drinking at the bar, turned around. They saw Meehan raise his hands and make a lunge at Lovett. He dropped his hands and stepped back when Lovett spoke.

"Touch me," said Bill, "and you won't live ten days. You kicked me out of here once without listening to what I wanted to say. This time you'll listen. I'm giving you a chance to get out quietly. If you don't, me and my White Hands'll boost you out and chuck you in the street. That's all I want to say. Now think it over, and you better do something quick."

Lovett turned on his heel and walked out, leaving Meehan standing in a daze.

That night Wild Bill—for his gang had now tied that monicker to him—went to the Lonergan home to visit Anna. Only Fiddler Byrnes knew he was visiting Anna, for he had seen Wild Bill enter the house. An hour later four plainclothes men pushed into the house when Anna opened the door. They found Wild Bill in the parlor and

pounced on him. After a struggle Bill was hauled out and taken to the station house in the Black Maria.

He was charged with robbing the dock and assaulting Dinny Meehan, but the news that Meehan was in back of his arrest was of less importance than the discovery that Fiddler Byrnes had tipped the police as to where Wild Bill could be found.

IN the police court Lovett was no longer the rough and tumble gang leader. For the moment he strategically abandoned the slangy lingo of dock pirates and thieves and was again the mild-mannered, soft-tongued youth of Catharine Street. In the charge against him Meehan had declared that Wild Bill had pulled a gun on him.

"Gun?" said Bill on the witness stand. "I never carried one in my life. Do I look like a gunman? And as for robbing the dock as I'm charged, do I look like a thief?"

The magistrate was favorably impressed. Moreover the police had no evidence against Lovett on the robbery score and he walked out of the courtroom completely exonerated. The judge couldn't believe that the meek-mannered, well-spoken youth on the witness stand was the thief and ruffian the police had described.

Meehan was nowhere in evidence around the court. He let the police do all the work while he remained at safe vantage in the Loaders' Club, flanked by a bodyguard of stalwarts consisting of four of the toughest and biggest wallopers on the docks. Meehan feared retaliation from Wild Bill, but the leader of the White Hands was more concerned with Fiddler Byrnes. Directly from court Lovett went to a saloon, where he found Byrnes. The

instant Lovett showed his face, Byrnes pulled a gun.

"Aw, put that away," Bill sneered. "You rat, you know I never pack a gun. And if you did use it on me you know damned well Peg Leg or one of the boys'd get you for it. All I want to do is tell you something. Never show up again around where I am, and don't ever poke your nose in the affairs of the White Hands. Understand?"

Apparently Byrnes understood. He knew what was meant by White Hand muscle. He dropped the gun into his pocket and Wild Bill walked off.

Bill was making his way along the docks towards a boathouse where his gang gathered when an automatic pumped five times and Wild Bill staggered to a doorstep, two bullets in his chest. He was rushed to a hospital. Detectives tried to force him to name his assailant. "I didn't see who it was, man or woman," he insisted. "I could guess who it was, but I'm not guessing anybody into your hands."

He left the hospital with one bullet in his chest. He had not seen the man who had tried to pick him off. It might have been Byrnes or Frank Martin who had fired at him, but the man back of the shooting was Dinny Meehan. Lovett was certain it must have been Meehan.

The shooting had an instantaneous effect upon the fortunes of the White Hands. It helped to magnify Lovett's importance as a gang chief. When Wild Bill got out of the hospital, thugs from all over Brooklyn and from across the East River crowded into his gang. The White Hand grew to impressive proportions, pillaged right and left, attacked other gangs and broke them up, swept into dance halls, saloons and clubs, wrecked the places and played havoc at will. Men and women

were held up, cops were beaten. Newspapers and preachers began to demand the extermination of the gang.

The police centered their attention upon Wild Bill, the brains of the mob. They had no trouble picking him up. He seemed to take a special delight in being yanked in. He actually invited the police to arrest him, but, when he was hauled into court, he managed, either by a pose of innocence, or an alibi, to escape conviction. During 1914 he was picked up twenty-one times, but each time he walked out of court with the rap beaten.

Cute Charley Donnelly was also singled out for special police attention. He was arrested fourteen times and succeeded in beating each rap. He boasted openly that, although cops had hauled him in more than 100 times in four years and had third degreed him on each occasion, they had never gotten a word out of him.

When a major robbery was reported to the police or a gangster was found murdered, the police asserted that Wild Bill was responsible. He made no remonstrance against the free and easy way all crimes were credited to him. He merely grinned slyly, raised no howl, and quietly explained to his men that all the pick-ups recorded against him, and all the crimes credited to him by the police, built up his reputation. What he had acquired was muscle; not brawn but a reputation for savagery which was sufficient to make men fear him.

Suddenly war flamed in Europe. Allied ships crowded Brooklyn docks to load ammunition and food for Allied forces. A great demand for dock wall-lopers arose and Meehan met it. Wages went skyrocketing. But the increase meant little to the dock wall-lopers. Meehan took a lion's share of the

higher wages, leaving his men little better off than they had been before. Moreover, the pot-bellied despot admitted Italians into the docks and imported Sicilian guerillas from Navy Street to keep both Irish and Italian workers in line. The Irish wallopers complained; some became rebellious. But Meehan sent his imported guerillas against them and beat them into submission. Disgruntled wallopers carried their tales of woe to Wild Bill and implored him to go in and drive out Meehan and assume leadership of the dock workers.

Bill sent Meehan an ultimatum to quit. He believed that he and his mob had acquired sufficient muscle to frighten Meehan from his throne and end his rule without bloodshed. Meehan sent back word that Wild Bill and his mob could "go plumb to Hell." Lovett took the retort calmly, although his hate for Meehan was at white heat. Day by day the United States was being drawn into the great conflict raging across the water. Meehan was growing rich on the graft extorted from his men. Finally the United States declared war against Germany and its allies. In this news Wild Bill glimpsed his opportunity.

The reckless thinking machine in his capacious head spurred by a burning hate had worked fast and furiously.

He leisurely sauntered out of the gang's boathouse quarters, went downtown and visited a department store. He made several purchases—two small silk American flags, a lithograph of Abraham Lincoln, and an enlarged facsimile of the famous longhand letter which Lincoln wrote to the widow Bixby who had given five sons to the Union cause in the Civil War. He carried these to the Lonergan home, spent half an hour with Anna Lonergan, and,

on taking leave, bade her good-bye "Perhaps for good."

Several hours later he turned up at the boathouse. The gang was waiting for him.

"Get yourselves together," Lovett announced. "Follow me and ask no questions. Just stick outside Dinny Meehan's Loaders' Club when I go in. Ditch your guns here. There won't be any need of shooting." He opened a drawer in a long table, but it was too small to hold all the guns. Some were thrown in a heap on the floor.

Wild Bill started for the Loaders' Club, his vassals following him half a block behind, deployed in groups. Under his arm he carried the package—the two flags, Lincoln's portrait, and the Bixby letter.

CHAPTER V

Fight or Fade

ALONE and unarmed, Wild Bill walked into the presence of Dinny Meehan. The four burly bodyguards were ranged along the wall in chairs. The bar was crowded with dock wallopers guzzling their beer and whiskey. Lovett threw his package on a table, and casting a surly glance at Meehan, proceeded to undo the bundle. He drew out the flags, unfurled them, and standing on a chair, draped them over a dust-streaked lithograph of playing cards fanned out in a royal flush. Meehan and his bodyguard looked on with startled eyes. Wild Bill tacked the Lincoln portrait to the wall; then the Bixby letter.

The legs of Meehan's high-backed chair scraped on the sanded floor as he pushed it back and sprang to his feet. His protectors arose, en masse.

"Pull that stuff down off there," Meehan bellowed.

Wild Bill glared at him. "Whoever touches these things won't live to tell what happened," he snapped. The bodyguards reached for their gun pockets. Lovett eyed them. "Aw, don't waste your time and bullets shooting at me," he said. "If you want to do any shooting there's a war on. Go out and join the army."

"Chuck the rat out," yelled Meehan.

Lovett touched two fingers to his lips and whistled shrilly. His shock troops, waiting outside, for his command, stormed in, led by Peg Leg and Cute Charley. Meehan's stalwarts crouched back and stood dazed. Meehan sank into his chair. Bill was still on the chair. His men were crouching, alert for a further command. The wallopers at the bar, twenty or more giants, turned away from their drinks and stood staring at Lovett.

I SUPPOSE all you guys think I'm trying to drive Meehan out so I can be your boss," he cried. "You're all wrong. I couldn't be your boss because I won't be around here long. There's a war on and I'm going into it. This afternoon I enlisted. I'll get my uniform tomorrow."

At first his listeners were struck dumb by the announcement, then they broke into cheers, the dock wallopers as well as his own followers.

"That's great stuff," Bill went on. "You're all glad to hear I've enlisted. You're strong for a guy that wants to fight for his country, eh? Well . . . if that's the case, then what about you guys climbing into uniforms, too?"

The men eyed each other gravely.

"You're all big huskies, just the kind of fighting gents the country needs," Bill cried. "And you're not taking orders from Meehan now. I'm giving orders, see? If you're the kind

of fighters you crack yourselves up to be, let's see. How many of you have got wives and kids?"

Only a few shot their hands into the air.

"You guys," said Wild Bill, "haven't got any business going to war. But the rest of you—how about digging out of here and enlisting?"

There was a solemn silence. The men eyed each other again.

"Any guy can load ships and make money out of the war," Bill continued, "but not every guy can make the kind of a soldier you big fellows should make." He waved a hand at Meehan. "This fat grafter," he went on, "couldn't get into any man's army. They wouldn't have him. Come on now, whose gonna hop into a uniform and join me?"

There was a roar from the crowd.

"Let's go, Bill, let's go."

"That's the stuff," yelled Bill. He jumped down from the chair. "Follow me."

They piled out after him, dock wallopers and White Hands. There were some forty men in the crowd.

Not all of them could make the Army standard for enlistment, but a sufficient number of Meehan's brawniest dock wallopers joined the colors to sadly deplete his ranks. Those who remained behind were Meehan himself, his bodyguard, and older men with families. Peg Leg was a cripple and couldn't enlist; Cute Charley had a prison record and was barred, while Raycraft was flatfooted and had one bad eye. Wild Bill left them behind to complete the break-up of Meehan's empire. What the spindle-legged, flat-chested boy from Catharine Street had failed to do with muscle, he had accomplished by a stroke of strategy which almost emptied the Loaders'

Club and at the same time put a lot of brawny giants into army uniforms for the duration of the war.

The next day he donned his own uniform and became Private William Joseph Lovett, machine gunner, Company I, 117th U. S. Infantry. Among his buddies in the same outfit were several White Hands and dock wall-lopers. There wasn't room in the same outfit for all those who tried to get into the same regiment to be near him.

When Wild Bill was on a transport, bound overseas, Dinny Meehan found the nerve to tear down the two silk flags, the Lincoln portrait and the Bixby letter. Then he opened wide the gates of Shantytown and called in Italians from Navy Street to take the places of the giants who had followed Wild Bill into the army.

In the army Bill Lovett, for the first time in his life, touched a machine gun. He had always avoided the gun. Now it was his duty to man the wickedest and deadliest of all automatic man killers.

CHAPTER VI

The Marks of War

IF Meehan thought that the rigors of war would end the career of the weak-kneed, flat-chested demon of the White Hands—with a bullet already lodged in his chest—he cherished a futile hope.

On a sultry afternoon, late in July, 1919, Private William J. Lovett lay squirming and twisting on a cot in a Brooklyn hospital. For him the war had ended two months before the armistice in November, 1918. A jagged chunk of shrapnel had been taken from his right shoulder, deadly mustard gas had eaten his throat raw

and was ravaging his lungs. His emaciated body also held two machine gun bullets which the surgeons dared not probe for. Thus Wild Bill carried around three bullets and yet lived.

He had gone through the battle of Château-Thierry. In a later battle he had plunged into annihilating barrages laid down by the enemy to rescue and bring back to the lines wounded buddies trapped in a shell crater. He had dragged back three men, then, returning to the shell hole he had mowed down the enemy with his machine gun. Shrapnel, a creeping wave of mustard gas, and machine gun fire had put an end to his deadly work. He had been found bleeding and insensible in the shell crater.

And he had won the Distinguished Service Cross. The man who had started life hating to see a fly swatted brought back from France a reputation not only as a hero, but as a machine gunner who had taken savage delight in mowing down the enemy.

It wasn't until July, 1919, that he was permitted to have visitors at the hospital. When the doors were opened to them they streamed in, Peg Leg Lonergan, Donnelly and Raycraft among the first. They were followed by dock walllopers who hailed the man who had given Dinny Meehan his only licking. They did not bring cheerful news from the docks. They told the bed-ridden patient that Meehan had not only torn down the flags and Lincoln mementoes, but he was back in full power at the Loaders' Club. But the worst news was that Meehan had joined hands with the hated Al Capone; that he had given Capone control of the coffee docks; and that the former Five Pointer had taken up his post at the gates of the coffee docks and was extorting half a day's pay

from every walloper who did a day's work unloading coffee. The Irishmen had protested to Meehan against this alliance with Capone, and Meehan's answer had been to set Navy Street guerillas upon them.

Nor was that all Meehan had done. He had given over to Capone the job of keeping the wallopers tamed and Capone had discovered that the most effective way to subjugate rebellious wallopers was to threaten to steal their wives, daughters and sweethearts and force them into lives of shame.

Wild Bill had been within the shadow of death in France and even now he was not certain that he had passed the danger point. The surgeons doubted that he would live two years even though he had the best attention in hospital. His wounds gave him great pain. He had not given much thought to Meehan or to the affairs of the White Hands. Mention of Al Capone's name rekindled his old hate.

In spite of the surgeons' pronouncement that he wouldn't live a year if he left the hospital, Wild Bill went. Unarmed and clad in a fleece-lined trench coat, he turned up at the gates of the coffee docks and faced Capone.

"It's a swell day for you to be taking a walk, Capone," he said.

"Yeah?" grinned Capone.

"Yeah," Bill repeated. "You better walk while you can."

Capone's eyes narrowed. He stood meditating.

"When you start walking," Bill added, "you better walk far."

Capone started away.

"Never show your mug around these parts again," Bill called after him.

"Aw, you won't always be around here," Capone snarled back. Yet he kept on walking and finally vanished.

There is only one reasonable explanation of Capone's willingness to quit Brooklyn at Lovett's command; he feared Wild Bill, not alone because of the ferocious reputation the weakling had built up, but also because of Lovett's record of slaughter in the army and the unquestioned sway he held over the men in his gang; his power to command obedience from all men as had been demonstrated by his ability to lead them into the army. Besides, he was a full-fledged hero, decorated by his country.

FROM the coffee docks Wild Bill hastened to the Lonergan home and paid his respects to Anna. She poured a tale of woe into his ears. Her parents were always at war in the house. If he cared anything for her he ought to marry her and get her away from the constant fighting around her. She intimated that Frank Martin would marry her if he didn't. She was still eager to find a meal ticket.

But Bill had to start life over and the future was uncertain.

"We'll see how I turn out with Meehan," he explained.

"Meehan?" the girl exclaimed.

"Yep, Meehan," said Bill. "We've got a few things to settle." If Lovett had any deep love for Anna Lonergan he had subordinated it to his hate for his enemies and his desire for power in gangdom.

He left the Lonergan home and went straightaway to the Loaders' Club. He found Dinny Meehan plunked solidly in his high-backed chair, his four bodyguards in vigilant attendance. Wild Bill glanced up at the dust-streaked picture of the playing cards, then scowled at Meehan.

"You tore down the flags and things, didn't you?" he said. "You let

Capone in on your graft too. I've taken care of Capone and now I'm here to take care of you."

Neither Meehan nor his bodyguards stirred. Perhaps they too felt about Lovett as Capone felt. They knew, of course, that he commanded the loyalty of members of his old gang and that he could win as many more supporters as he needed. And Meehan courted no bloody conflict, when, with a little strategy, he might easily best the returned White Hander.

After a moment of reflection Meehan addressed Wild Bill.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "This Saturday night coming I'll clear out of here and leave it all to you."

Lovett agreed to this.

ON the Friday night following this quiet encounter, Wild Bill went to a party given in his honor by Owney Manley, an old pal, who had gathered in his home all the men he could find who had given their allegiance to Wild Bill. It was a merry affair. There was much dancing and much grog, and Bill forgot the pain of his wounds after a few drinks of liquor. He became quite hilarious. Toward the end of the night he drew out an automatic .45 and with one well-aimed shot cracked a whisky glass held at the lips of a merrymaker. The crowd was surprised and entertained. It was expert marksmanship, but, more important, Wild Bill now carried a gun. Lovett took pains to explain that he was used to a gun after what he'd seen in France, but he shot only steel-nosed bullets.

"I don't forget," he grinned, "that I've had soft-nosed bullets thrown into my chest and some of them's still there. If I've gotta shoot anybody I'll be as easy on 'em as I can."

The party broke up in the wee hours. Bill started down the front steps. Suddenly he halted. At the bottom of the stairway he saw a man crouching with a knife in his hands. Bill whipped out his automatic and fired. The knife clattered to the sidewalk. Lovett pounced on the figure of a gangster known as Dago Red.

"Cripes, Bill," Dago Red pleaded, "I was only fooling."

"Swell way of fooling," said Bill. "Now go back and tell Meehan what happened. And tell him too he better be out of the Loaders' Club and out of this town by tomorrow night."

The submissive attitude of Meehan and his bodyguards was now clear to Wild Bill. Meehan didn't intend to get out—not if he could put Lovett out of the way. Lovett had beaten the knife-wielder to it, but Meehan was not daunted by this failure.

At noon Saturday plainclothesmen pounced on Lovett and yanked him into court to face a charge of carrying a weapon and feloniously assaulting Dago Red. Unable to reach Lovett with a knife, Meehan was trying to put him in jail. Anything to keep Wild Bill from taking over the Loaders' Club. A dozen witnesses swore upon the witness stand that Lovett had no gun and added that the only weapon in evidence was the knife carried by Dago Red. Lovett was discharged. With Peg Leg and Donnelly he left the courtroom. They had gone along three blocks when a motor car swung into the curb just ahead of them. Suddenly, from its partly open door, gunfire flashed. Wild Bill dropped to the pavement with six bullets in his emaciated body.

As the car sped away a voice came bellowing out of it— "That's for what happened at the coffee docks."

Lovett was rushed to a hospital. Three of the bullets were removed from his side and three remained, leaving six leaden pellets imbedded in his body. The surgeons wanted to probe for all of them, but the patient insisted that "the more bullets I carry around in me the safer I seem to be." Almost a month later he left the hospital. Police questioned him about the shooting.

"Aw, I know who did it all right," he said, "But say a word about them? Not me. I'm deaf, dumb and blind when it comes to that." As a matter of truth, Lovett did not know who had shot him, but the message that was spouted to him from the fleeing car was sufficient to remind him that although Capone had left Brooklyn he still had proxies in Brooklyn to do his deadly bidding. And the Saturday night on which Dinny Meehan was to have abdicated was four weeks in the background. He still held forth in the Loaders' Club.

With the help of Peg Leg, Donnelly and Raycraft, Lovett rounded up former members of the White Hands and they assembled in a speakeasy to meet their old chief and make plans to drive out Dinny Meehan. The speakeasy was not far from the Loaders' Club and Lovett had visited it often. Now they had beers all around. After the first glass Wild Bill gripped his stomach and writhed in pain. The beer had been poisoned. Meehan was reaching out for him again, this time with poison. Lovett made short work of the speakeasy. He whipped out his automatic and emptied it into the back bar, smashed all the bottles, and finally fired a shot into a copper boiler steaming with a fresh mess of home brew. When he left the place it was to have his stomach pumped.

This happened on a cold night in March, 1921.

The next morning Dinny Meehan failed to show up in the Loaders' Club. He had been shot through the heart as he lay asleep in his bed with his wife and infant daughter at his side. As near as the police could gather, the killer had fired through a transom over the bedroom door. He had fired twice, hitting Mrs. Meehan in the shoulder with his first shot, then ending Dinny Meehan's career with the second.

Both bullets were soft-nosed.

That night Wild Bill was in jail charged with suspicion of having killed Meehan.

CHAPTER VII

An Old Enemy Back Again

THE police faced their old enemy with a certain feeling that he would end in the electric chair or go to the Big House for life. For twenty-four hours they grilled Wild Bill.

The nearest they got to an admission from him was this:

"I'm sorry to say I didn't get Dinny Meehan. If I had I'd be telling you about it. But, in the first place, I never shot a soft-nosed bullet in my life. In the second place, I'm not such a poor shot that I'd hit a woman in the shoulder."

"Then it was one of your gang that got Meehan," a detective shouted at him.

"That might be," grinned Lovett. "They'd do almost anything I ask them to do. There's a hundred of my friends that might have done it, but it's up to you to pick out the one that did."

Bill once more walked out of jail into the free air. He went direct to the Loaders' Club. At his appearance three

of Meehan's old bodyguard skulked out. Only Terror McTague remained. Openly he accused Lovett of having killed Meehan, and he swore to get the White Hander before the week was out.

"Meehan left this place to Gillen, Barry, Tim Quilty and myself," said McTague, "and we'll drive you out." He stamped out of the Loaders' Club. Slouching along the docks, three bullets were pumped into him, and though he recovered he never again set foot in Bridge Street.

The arm of the law reached out for Wild Bill again, but he had a shatter-proof alibi to meet the charge that he had wounded McTague. When he left Raymond Street jail Peg Leg was with him. The latter wanted to call a taxi for Bill, for his old wounds were causing him great pain.

"Never mind the cab," said Lovett. "Walking's good for me, and I'm not running away from any bullets. I've got six in me now. A few more won't hurt."

They walked on a block and halted at a cross-street to let a large touring car pass. The machine slowed and the blue muzzle of an automatic poked out through the side curtains. Bill made a leap for it. It blazed three times and he fell with two bullets in the right shoulder, opening up the old shrapnel wound.

Though he was in great pain, Lovett got up on his knees and said to Peg Leg: "It was Garry Barry's finger that pulled that trigger. I got a good look at his hand. He was wearing a silver horseshoe nail ring that Dinny Meehan gave him."

Lovett refused to be taken to a hospital. The wounds were superficial, and a private surgeon extracted the two bullets. Detectives called on Lovett.

"You fellows might as well ask a can of peaches to talk as to ask me to spill," Lovett said to them. "Whoever pumped that lead into me will be taken care of as he expects to be taken care of."

Garry Barry's body was found riddled with two steel-nosed bullets.

IN two hours Lovett was back in Raymond Street jail, but, lacking evidence to connect him with the killing of Barry, the detectives turned him loose. It was true that Barry was killed with steel-nosed bullets, but Wild Bill produced a score of dock wallopers who swore that at the moment Barry was killed Wild Bill was in the Loaders' Club.

Wild Bill went back to the club. His men greeted him with a bellowing welcome. And yet Bill hadn't up to this time been able actually to rule the domain which he had wrung from Meehan. He had been too busy exterminating his enemies and going to and from jail and courts. And he had broken up the succession planned by Meehan for Gillen, Barry, Quilty and McTague. He had wiped out Barry and McTague, but Gillen and Quilty remained, ready, the moment Wild Bill was unseated, to step into Meehan's shoes. Lovett was aware that the fortunes of battle might at any moment turn against him. He had arranged, in the event of a sudden taking off, that Peg Leg, Donnelly and Raycraft should succeed him in the order named, unless one of them happened to be bumped off before his time.

Gillen, who had a reputation as a killer and an unquenchable thirst for liquor, was a close and ever-present enemy. He openly vowed to kill Lovett. He was standing at a bar lifting a glass of whisky to his lips when he an-

nounced that before he took his next drink Wild Bill would be dead. A weasel-faced henchman of Gillen's, known as Sammy the Angel, stood at Gillen's side. A flash of blue fire came through a window in the rear of the speakeasy and the glass in Gillen's hand flew into splinters. The gun barked a second time and Gillen slumped to the floor with a bullet through his heart.

Sammy the Angel drew his gun and dashed to the window, crying, "Lovett got Gilly. I'll get Lovett." Whether Sammy had actually seen Wild Bill at the window no one ever has been able to say, for when Sammy stood on a chair and peered through the rear window a bullet pierced his skull and he fell back dead.

The bullets which ended the careers of Gillen and Sammy were both steel-jacketed. Lovett was hauled in again on suspicion. He put up a mild protest.

"For the love of Mike," he said. "If the king of Siam was bumped off you dicks'd pick me up for the job. Can't somebody else do the bumping off that's being done around here besides me?"

The steel-nosed bullets in Gillen and Sammy were not enough to cinch the murders on Wild Bill. Once more he made a triumphant exit from Raymond Street jail.

For a year affairs ran a comparatively quiet course in Shantytown. On New Year's day 1922 Wild Bill awoke to the realization that he was living beyond the brief span hospital surgeons had mapped out for him. The dock wallopers offered no rebellion to his rule. He kept the Loaders' Club going, and in spite of prohibition kept them supplied with beer and booze.

The day of high wages on the docks had ended with the war. Earnings

were down to their old level. Lovett assessed each man fifty cents a day when he worked, as dues in the club, and, in addition, he made a profit on the sale of home brew and moonshine to them. He had rid Shantytown docks of Italian guerillas from Navy Street, and he had piloted his men through two strikes. Dock owners claimed that Bill extorted protection money from them under the threat of more strikes. If he did so the men under him were not offended, for Meehan had extorted heavy tribute from dock owners during the war, and whatever graft the dockmen were forced to contribute was the business of the boss and not theirs.

Slowly Wild Bill extended his rule to all the docks in Brooklyn. At his whim ships loading and unloading could be tied up for weeks by his power to call strikes. The large-headed boy had gone far in his world of terror. At his will a great part of the commerce in the world's busiest seaport could be tied up; he had vanquished enemies by murdering them, and he had not served a day in jail on a sentence!

Yet he was slighter, paler and a more emaciated figure than he had ever been. His hands were still white and thin and he carried around in his puny body the bullets of gang war as well as those pumped into him in the course of his heroic exploits on the battle fronts of the World War. He was the master muscle-man of the docks; the czar of the dock wallopers and undisputed monarch of the gang world. By evil means he had achieved big things in his hate-inspired lust for power and bigness. And it had come to pass among gunman and cops that to offend or oppose Wild Lovett was to court certain death.

In this era of peace along the docks he had time to see Anna Lonergan. She pleaded with him to take her out of the wretched home where her parents were always fighting and settle down to a quiet existence. She always brought up Frank Martin's name as one of the urgent reasons why Bill should wed her. Bill told her that if he was alive, July 26, which would be the anniversary of his discharge from the army, he would marry her on that day.

On the night of January 3, 1923, Anna Lonergan sat in her home waiting for Wild Bill to call. Midnight came. Bill had not appeared. She began to bite her finger nails and show other evidence of restless apprehension. She called up the Loaders' Club. Bill was not there. Whoever answered the phone told her that Bill was in a beer joint at 289 Front Street. She called up the joint. There was no answer.

Two hours later a patrolman looked into the Front Street hangout. It was a wreck. Chairs were overturned, mirrors smashed, and the floor strewn with empty bottles. In a dark corner the cop saw something move. He investigated. The object that had moved was Wild Bill's leg. He lay face down in a pool of blood. Two bullets had torn through his flat chest. One had entered his lung. He was unconscious. An ambulance carried him away. One bullet was taken from the chest; the other was too deeply imbedded in his already afflicted lung to be probed for without fatal consequences. Slowly he came to. The police demanded to know who shot him.

"Aw," he said, "somebody popped at me and chucked me in a corner for dead. But what difference does it make who did the popping? Bullets can't kill me."

But to his slavish henchmen, Peg

Leg, Cute Charley and Raycraft, he opened up. "I don't say that Tim Quilty actually pulled the trigger on me," he said, "but he was the brain back of the gun. Eddie Hughes is the guy that got me."

Peg Leg looked at his two companions. "Quilty and Hughes," he cried. "The finger's on 'em now."

"You fellows never mind getting Quilty and Hughes," said Bill. "All I want you to do is to find out where Quilty and Hughes hang out. Then leave the rest to me."

Cute Charley went to a telephone and returned to Bill with the news that both men were in a speakeasy at Jay and Yorke Streets.

CHAPTER VIII

The Last of the Line Drops

ALONE, Wild Bill poked his way into the speakeasy. Twelve men were guzzling booze at the bar. Two of them were Quilty and Hughes.

Quilty was the first to spot the visitor. He reached for his gun, but a steel-nosed bullet ripped into his chest and he toppled back, dead. Hughes' hand went for his gun, but, instead of drawing it, he hesitated for an instant, then fled out the rear. Hughes was a big bruiser and not a man to run from a gun fight. Apparently he thought it wisest to run and save his bullets for another day.

That day never came. Hughes' body was found in a Shantytown gutter, his jugular vein severed by a steel-nosed bullet. He had been dead less than half an hour when the police found him. In a speakeasy, half down the block they found Lovett. They seized him, but not until he had covertly ditched his automatic by throwing it into a closet. The police found

the gun where he had tossed it. They led him away to the Raymond Street jail, where he was held on suspicion of having murdered Quilty and Hughes.

He was languishing in this familiar bastille when Anna Lonergan brought him news that her father had been shot to death the night before and that her mother had been arrested, accused of the murder. John Lonergan had been shot in the night of the thirtieth anniversary of his marriage to the mother of Anna and Peg Leg.

"I knew it was going to happen some day," Anna sobbed. "That's why I wanted you to take me away."

"I will, if I'm living July 26," said Bill. Then he scrawled a note to a lawyer and handed it to Anna. "He's the best mouthpiece in town and he'll take good care of your mother," Bill explained.

Early in July Mrs. Lonergan was acquitted. Bill was still in jail. The police were unable to find witnesses who could pin the Quilty and Hughes murder on him, but they had his gun and a charge of carrying a weapon was lodged against him, which meant that if he were convicted he would draw a seven-year sentence in the Big House. And in his sorry physical condition Bill would not live through half the term. The case against him was strong and his defense was phony. He insisted that he had been framed. The police laughed at this claim.

When his trial was called Bill was cool and confident. The police told about finding his gun in the speakeasy. A pal of the dead Hughes said he had seen Wild Bill toss it into the closet. The prosecution's case looked complete, fool-proof.

Then Anna Lonergan was called to the stand. She was still clad in mourn-

ing for her father. She was shown the automatic. Had she ever seen the weapon before? Sure she had, many times. It was the gun which had belonged to her father and he had told her that he had thrown it into the closet in the speakeasy because he was afraid if he brought it home he might use it. Her father was dead. The prosecution had no way of refuting her story. Lovett's lawyer, in his address to the jury, stressed his war service, his heroism and his winning of a medal. The jury deliberated twenty-four hours and finally reported it could not agree. Wild Bill was admitted to bail to await a re-trial. That was on July 25.

Next day he married Anna Lonergan.

THE two honeymooners turned their backs on Brooklyn and the East River. In the quiet little village of Little Ferry, N. J., among utter strangers, they settled down as Mr. and Mrs. William La Vett. Wild Bill had pledged his bride that he was through with the old life and would begin anew. He spoke like he meant it. Perhaps he felt that since he had wiped out the Meehan dynasty, the big job he had mapped out for himself was finished. Doubtless he was also convinced that he had not long to live with seven bullets in him and one lung completely gone; and he longed to spend what time was left to him with the only woman who had come into his life and whom he had courted in an undemonstrative way in the days of his childhood in Catharine Street. Before leaving Brooklyn, Bill and Anna promised the district attorney that when Bill's second trial on the gun-carrying charge was called he would be on hand.

In his new surroundings, Bill gave every evidence of an honest attempt to "take the level" and reform. He worked in the garden, sawed and split wood, and, in the cool Fall days, went for long hikes in the woods with Anna at his side and their cocker spaniel trailing. He called his bride "The Sheriff" because wherever he went she went too. She was bound that Wild Bill would not carry out a sudden notion to go back to Brooklyn and look over the old battleground.

He began to put on flesh and acquire a ruddy complexion. By winter he had a job in a nearby silk mill staked out for himself. He had heard nothing from Brooklyn. Letters came to the house for him from Peg Leg, Cute Charley and Raycraft, advising him that they were running the Loaders' Club and everything was jake, except that a lot of tough muggs were always asking, "Where's Wild Bill?" These letters got no further than Anna La Vett's hands and she tossed them into the fire.

"The Sheriff" kept newspapers from him, too, so that he had no way of learning that Al Capone, the first enemy he had led his White Hands against, and whom he had driven from the docks, lone-handed; was laying the foundation of his underworld empire in Chicago, killing men and muscling into the booze, gambling, vice, and cleaning and dyeing rackets in the Windy City.

Wild Bill had almost forgotten Capone in the stress of violent events which had followed his driving of Capone from the coffee docks. But Capone had left proxies in Brooklyn, pals and henchmen in the Navy Street gang.

On Columbus Day, 1923, Bill was splitting wood in the back yard of the

Little Ferry home when "The Sheriff" snapped some pictures of him. He was surprised at the change in himself when he saw them. He actually appeared robust.

"It would be a swell idea to send them to the district attorney in Brooklyn," said Bill. "He might wash out the old gun charge against me if he saw I was on the level now. And what about sending a set to my mother for her birthday, November first? It would certainly tickle her to see the change."

"That's a swell idea," Anna agreed.

"And wait a second," Bill exploded with enthusiasm. "I ought to be able to take out a life insurance policy now, in your favor."

When Anna wrote to a New York insurance company, asking that an agent be sent to see her husband about taking out a policy, she gave Wild Bill's full name and mentioned his army service, for that would show the one commendable high light in his career. There was considerable delay in getting an answer from the company. When it came a pall of gloom fell over the household. Under no circumstances, said the company, would it take a risk on a man as notorious and uncertain of life as William Joseph Lovett! The reputation he had built up had carried its ferocious import into quarters far remote from the bloody streets of Shantytown.

But "The Sheriff" and Wild Bill had the snapshots. On the last day of October, 1923, they got into a taxicab outside their new home and were driven to Brooklyn, crossing the Brooklyn Bridge and speeding past and above Shantytown. They had the snapshots with them for the district attorney, and an extra set for Bill's mother. The taxicab bore a New Jersey license

plate. Anna Lovett did not propose to let her reformed man run the risk of traveling in dangerous country in a Brooklyn taxi. As the taxi neared the Lonergan home Bill spoke about getting some flowers for his mother's birthday the next day.

CHAPTER IX

Missing

IT was dark when they reached the Lonergan house. "The Sheriff" wouldn't let let Bill out of the taxi until she made sure that Peg Leg was not around. She wanted to avoid the risk of the two pals meeting. Therefore she got out and went into the house, leaving Bill in the taxi.

When she came out to call in Bill, the taxi had gone with Lovett. For an instant she thought that he had gone for the flowers he had spoken about. At the end of half an hour she was frantic. Bill had not shown up and had not phoned. It grew late, then past midnight. Terror-stricken, Anna called a taxi and went out in search of her man. She drove straight to the Loaders' Club. It was closed and in darkness. She phoned everyone who knew Bill. None had seen him, nor did they know he was in town.

It was almost daybreak when she reached home. Bill was not there and had sent no message. She sat up, waiting for him.

Shortly after daybreak, a policeman, passing the Loaders' Club, halted at its dirty window and peered in. It was dark within. He flashed his lamp into the place. It touched a pile of lumber standing against a rear wall. Then he played it on the floor. Its bright beam touched the feet of a man lying face down on the floor. The cop broke down the door and rushed in. He turned the

body over on its back and noted that the head was enormously large; the thin face was smeared with gore and bashed in. In its right temple were two bullet wounds. Wild Bill was dead. Detectives were summoned. It was plain that whoever had fired the bullets into the temple knew that Wild Bill had survived many a bullet and had crashed in his large head to make certain he would die.

One of the detectives observed that, although Bill wore his own coat, there was a man's coat under his head. He pulled it out. On a cloth label on the inner pocket was written the name Fiddler Byrnes, the man Wild Bill had driven out of the White Hands for double-crossing him.

THE police net was spread for Byrnes and Frank Martin, both known to the police as old time enemies of the slain Bill.

"Me kill Wild Bill?" Byrnes protested. "You dicks are crazy. Sure, I was with him last night and we had drinks and patched up all our troubles."

"But how did your coat happen to get under his head?" the detective demanded.

"Well, Bill got aboard more liquor than he could stand," said Byrnes, "and he passed out on the floor. I took off me coat and made a pillow for his head. Then I beat it home. What happened after I left I don't know."

Fiddler Byrnes was released.

Martin had a shatterproof alibi and was eliminated.

In the uniform he had worn in France, Wild Bill was buried in the National Cemetery at Cypress Hills, Brooklyn. His Distinguished Service Cross gleamed on his breast. There were no burial services at the grave for the all-sufficient reason that the ceme-

tery authorities did not desire to have a battle, and word had reached them that guns would be sure to blaze if a ceremony were permitted in the open.

Quietly, the funeral services took place in a chapel in Ridgefield, N. J., not far from the Little Ferry home where Bill and his "Sheriff" had settled down. The chapel was crowded. Among the mourners were Peg Leg, Cute Charley, and Raycraft, heavily gatted, alert-eyed and tensely solemn. Chaplain Allan McNeil of the Veterans of Foreign Wars was reading the service—extolling the one heroic chapter in Wild Bill's life—when the tense atmosphere caused him to falter.

"It's all right," a voice whispered into his ear. "Go ahead. Do your best by Bill. If trouble starts you can count on us."

The chaplain concluded. The crowd was tense. The chapel was heaped with flowers. As vicious as he was in his ganging days Bill Lovett was admired by scores of respectable persons for the one act in his life that merited him a decent burial in a hero's grave.

Two hours later the flag-draped coffin was lowered into the earth. Rifles cracked over the grave in a last military salute, a Boy Scout blew taps and grumbling sod thumped against the coffin in the pit.

Anna Lonergan, her brother Peg Leg, Cute Charley Donnelly, and Bill Raycraft stood at the grave for some time, in silence.

It was Peg Leg who broke the spell. He looked at Cute Charley.

"Remember on the roof that night," he said. "The pork chops . . . the jug of whiskey . . . and Byrnes and Martin?"

Cute Charley and Raycraft nodded.

"We raised our hands when Bill told us to, and we swore to stick even if

something happened to him," Peg Leg went on. "Well, it's happened. Byrnes and Martin are still alive."

"Yeah and don't we know it," snarled Donnelly.

They left the cemetery. Anna Lovett parted from them at the grave. She seemed to want to avoid them. Though her grief seemed to be genuine, her thoughts at the grave were more concerned with her immediate and now widowed future.

CHAPTER X

Orders from the Grave

PEG LEG and the survivors of the Lovett dynasty were not satisfied with the course of the law in Fiddler Byrnes' case. They felt certain that he or Martin, or both of them, had worked out the old grudge on Wild Bill by slaying him. When they left the cemetery they went in search of both men. They stalked the streets for weeks looking for Byrnes and Martin.

Finally they ran across Byrnes' trail in the Adonis Club, a dingy meeting place for Navy Street thugs. When they reached the place Byrnes had just left in the custody of a detective. The Fiddler, realizing that he was doomed, had phoned the detectives to pick him up.

The next day he pleaded guilty to an old robbery, and in prison he found safe refuge from the guns of Lovett's pals.

The next day Anna Lonergan married Frank Martin.

Raycraft went into a furious rage and parted from his pals. A day later Anna and her new husband were walking arm-in-arm along the sidewalk when shots blazed from a doorway. Martin and his bride raced across the street, each with a bullet in the arm.

This occurred on New Year's Day, 1925. On the day following a wreath of fresh flowers was found on Wild Bill's grave in which was woven the following:

We haven't forgotten, Bill.

If this floral offering was intended to record the death of Frank Martin it was premature, for both Martin and his bride quickly recovered from their gunshot wounds.

On January 10, Bill Raycraft's bullet-ridden body was found in an apartment. Reprisal.

Peg Leg and Cute Charley were left to carry on the hunt. For some reason they did not molest Martin, but they had added to their forces two young gunmen, Needles Ferry and Aaron Harms, former members of the Navy Street gang once ruled by Capone and now members in good standing of the Adonis Club where former Navy Street gangsters hung out.

Peg Leg, Donnelly, and the two new additions to their manhunting mob, spent much time in the Adonis Club, properly gatted and exceedingly alert and curious-eyed. For almost a year they haunted the club, when they were not hanging out at the Loaders' Club, over which Peg Leg and Donnelly exercised joint rule.

On Christmas morning, 1925, Patrolman Richard Morano saw the body of a man lying in the gutter in front of the Adonis Club. Observing that a trail of fresh blood led from the body to the door of the club, he followed it. He found the club deserted. Propped against a piano in the front room he saw still another body, and near it a .45 automatic fully loaded with steel-nosed bullets. He picked up the gun and turned. Under a window he saw another body upon the floor.

The body in the gutter was that of Needles Ferry. The corpse on the floor under the window was that of Aaron Harms; while the body propped against the piano was Peg Leg Lonergan. The automatic weapon, loaded to full capacity with steel jacketed man killers, was the weapon which had been Wild Bill's!

Before nightfall the police dragnet had hauled in twelve dark-skinned members of the Adonis Club. A stout, pompous-aired man, with an eleven carat diamond ring sparkling on his finger, took upon himself the rôle of spokesman for the other eleven, who, with himself, were accused of the triple murder. He told a story purporting to be a true account of the killing. He said that Lonergan, Ferry and Harms had stormed into the club with blood in their eyes and guns in their hands and called for the "guy from Chicago."

Someone had ordered the gatted visitors out. They refused to go. Peg Leg fired his automatic at the piano; then someone back in the club opened fire, and Peg Leg, Ferry, and Harms fell, and another someone carried Ferry's body out and dumped it in the gutter.

All twelve suspects agreed that that was what had happened, but they were unable to explain how if Lonergan had fired his gun, it was still fully loaded with undischarged shells!

Detectives asked the pompous spokesman for his name and business.

"I'm the doorman of the club," he grinned. "My name's Al Capone."

THE sleuths displayed no concern at mention of this name. Al Capone was not yet the keyman in Chicago's underworld, though he was getting there fast. Nor did it matter about the discrepancy between

Capone's explanation of the shootings in the Adonis Club and the circumstance that Lonergan could not have fired the automatic. Capone and his fellow Adonis clubmen were finally discharged and Al hastened back to his easy money empire on the lake. This was Capone's first visit to Brooklyn since he had been muscled off the coffee docks near Navy Street, and he has not returned since.

One man remained of the Lovett dynasty—Cute Charley. Alone he took up the hunt. On the morning of January 19, 1930, he was found dead with two bullets in his flame-topped head in a pier shanty near Bridge Street. Frank Martin, the police said, was the last man seen to come out of the shanty. He was arrested, but evidence was lacking to hold him for the crime and he was released.

And so the Lovett dynasty seemed to have been wiped out as the Meehan dynasty before it had been broken up. The docks of Shantytown were left free for whoever might risk the job of running them. Whole dynasties had been wiped out trying to rule. The job had always brought fatal consequences. Yet one man was willing to take the risk. His name was Eddie McGuire.

He had been a sort of parasite around the Loaders' Club, toadying to Meehan and trying to get the fat boss to let him in on a little of the graft. Meehan had barked him out of the club. Now, with Meehan gone, and Lovett and his crowd in their graves, leadership of the dock wallopers looked to McGuire like a sporting proposition. But five other men also wanted the job themselves. McGuire proposed that they all shake dice for the job and the bones went capering across the floor in a deserted pier shanty.

McGuire won the game but not the Loaders' Club. His body was found just outside the pier shanty with five bullets in it—five different-sized bullets from five different guns!

On this occasion a large bunch of red roses found their way to Lovett's grave. The card attached to them bore this brief message:

For Old Times' Sake

For a time no man ventured to claim the empty high-backed throne in the Loaders' Club. Not only had the job spelled death for every man who had tried to claim it, but altered conditions in the world of commerce and a great crash on Wall Street had greatly reduced the amount of work on the docks. The rich pickings which Dinny Meehan had gathered were no more. Only a handful of dock wallopers could find work. Still, however, there was an attraction in the job for one man—Frank Martin, now known to his friends as Matty the Smart, second husband of Anna.

A week before Christmas, 1931, Martin was on his way to the old green-fronted Loaders' Club when two bullets were winged at him. Both took effect, one in his chest, the other in his right temple. He was carried to a hospital. Soon Anna Lovett Martin was at his bedside.

"Matt, you ought to tell who shot you," she pleaded.

"If I knew I wouldn't tell you," he snarled. Something had turned him against the woman he had fought with Wild Bill to possess.

Martin never told who shot him, and Anna was in widow's weeds again; during the night, Frank Martin—Matty The Smart—had paid the price many another ambitious man had paid to gain the Loaders' Club throne.

Again Wild Bill's hillside grave bloomed with a bouquet of fresh and fragrant posies with a little card:

We remember you, Bill.

Martin was gone. Only one man remained of the original crew of roof gypsies whom Bill Lovett had met years before on a rooftop and had welded into the nucleus for his infamous White Hands. The sole survivor was Fiddler Byrnes. But he was safe from the guns of the unknown assassins who, on the one hand were killing off Lovett's old enemies, and on the other decorating his grave each time an enemy fell. Byrnes was languishing in prison. But now, with all the old Lovett crowd gone, he asked for a parole.

It is September 19, 1932, a clear, brisk Fall day. There is peace along the docks of Shantytown and Alphonse Capone is under lock and key in Atlanta Federal prison for cheating the government out of his ill-gotten income tax. Anna Lonergan still wears her weeds of widowhood. On the hillside grave in which Wild Bill rests no fresh flowers have appeared since Martin went the way of others who hated Lovett.

In a score of police stations scattered throughout New York City the fingers of teletypes are clicking out this message:

FOUND IN EAST RIVER OFF
FULTON STREET THIS MORNING

BODY OF A MAN IN LATE THIRTIES WITH HANDS BOUND WITH WIRE AND BURLAP SACK TIED OVER HIS HEAD APPARENTLY CHOKED TO DEATH. PAPERS FOUND IN HIS POCKET BEAR THE NAME FRANK BYRNES RECENTLY RELEASED FROM PRISON ON PAROLE.

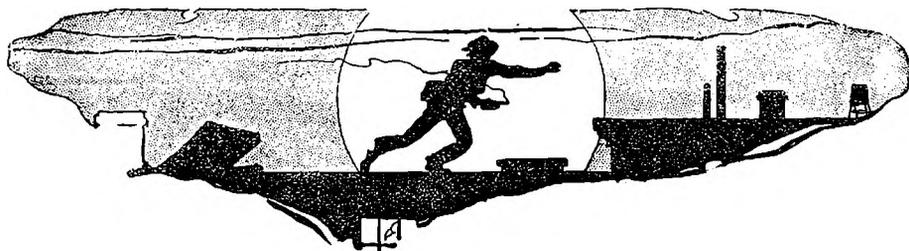
It is a long time since the name of Fiddler Frank Byrnes has been on the tongues of men in Brooklyn.

He was safe in prison, but not forgotten.

Overnight someone paid another stealthy visit to the grave of Wild Bill. There is a bunch of fresh red roses on the lawn-covered mound . . . and a little card:

O. K., Bill

Fiddler Byrnes was choked to death, according to the code of outlaw men. It was with his tongue that he betrayed Wild Bill Lovett into the hands of the police for the first time and gave impetus to Bill's plunging descent from a mild-mannered, religiously inclined youth who couldn't bear to see a fly swatted, to a ruthless muscle-man who killed and directed killers in a lust for power which grew out of an insensate hate for two men who had taunted him about his white hands, his puny body. Though he is nearly a decade in the grave, the muscle he built still possesses its ferocious quality. Men still kill in his name. Men still kill in memory of Wild Bill Lovett.





Shamus Maguire stole a hasty glance at the man who leaned over the railing

Dead Man's Eyes

By Stanley Day

To Shamus Maguire, the Overturned Chair and the Missing Bottle of Whisky Were Telling Secrets of the Mysterious Death Behind the Closet Door

SHAMUS MAGUIRE, house detective of the fashionable Hotel Paragon, rocked his two hundred and sixty odd pounds backwards and forwards on his size thirteen feet and looked calculatingly from one to another of those in the room.

From the group in the center came moans mingled with soothing phrases. The moans were contributed by a girl in the uniform of a chambermaid who lay in the middle of a large bed; the soothing phrases by the housekeeper

and two other maids who, with the aid of cold cloths and smelling salts, attempted to banish the other's distress.

Close by the door, ready to depart at an instant's warning, stood the hotel electrician. Beside him, equally skittish, was a black-bloused porter.

"Got a knife?" queried Maguire abruptly of the electrician.

The man fumbled in his overalls and produced an oversized jackknife which he extended in the direction of the detective.

"That's all right," rejected Maguire magnanimously. "I just wanted to know if you had something you could cut him down with."

"Me!" said the electrician concernedly. "No, sir, not me." He edged slowly out of the room.

"Come back here," ordered Maguire sternly. "You want the guy to die on us?"

"He's already dead."

"How do you know? Get busy and cut him down." The electrician turned a sickly gray.

"And you, too," went on Maguire turning to the porter. "The pair of you. Get in there now."

He advanced on them threateningly and they began to move hesitantly toward the open door of a deep clothes closet. At the end of the closet, almost invisible in the deep gloom, a bulky object swung against the wall. It was this object that had caused the hysterics of the young woman on the bed. On the floor lay an overturned chair.

"Get busy," Shamus commanded, urging them in with a shove.

The electrician picked up the chair and placed it gingerly against the wall beneath the bulky object. With a last appealing look at the obdurate Maguire the porter turned to assist. Shamus planted himself in the doorway to superintend things.

"You," he said to the electrician, "climb up and cut the rope. And you," to the porter, "hang onto him so he won't land on the floor when you cut him loose."

The electrician climbed reluctantly up onto the chair and made ready to saw through a taut length of rope. The porter, smothering his distaste, seized the object about the legs and made ready to bear its weight.

"Just a minute," Maguire called

suddenly. The electrician lowered his knife and the porter backed away relievedly.

"Get down," the detective ordered curtly.

When the electrician had complied Maguire stood back and surveyed the scene. Something, decidedly, was wrong. Closer inspection served to fortify his opinion.

The chair upon which the man must have climbed to place the rope about his neck was close to the wall, directly under the body, yet the extended feet were a good two inches short of touching it.

How, Maguire asked himself, did the suicide get the rope around his neck and then kick the chair from under him with the seat of the chair at least two inches from the soles of his feet? The answer, obviously, was that he could not, and had not.

"Okay," Shamus snapped. "Get going." As the two returned to their task he lit a "Little Policeman" cigar and puffed at it furiously.

Suddenly the rope parted and the body slumped forward. The porter struggled frantically to keep it from pitching head first to the floor.

"Bring him out and lay him on the bed," Maguire instructed.

Between them the porter and the electrician maneuvered the inert mass out into the bedroom. As they appeared in the doorway the screams from the bed trebled, and the group of women dissolved hastily towards the corridor.

When the corpse had been stretched decently on the bed, Maguire went to the telephone and made a brief report to the management and he complained that although he had put in an emergency call for the doctor at least twenty minutes previously, that gentleman had

not yet appeared. When he was assured that the matter would be attended to with dispatch he hung up the receiver. *

The room was strangely vacant. Housekeeper, maids, electrician and porter, all had departed silently.

II

ALTHOUGH he had already given the room a cursory examination Shamus now commenced, in the light of the puzzling circumstance of the chair and the inadequate length of the suicide's legs, to re-investigate the premises with a greater attention to detail.

A letter lying open on the desk was the first thing to re-engage his interest. This letter, written on hotel notepaper, opened with the statement that its author, finding the world too much for him, hereby intended to hang himself.

For this act no person but himself was to be held responsible. He requested that the authorities communicate the fact of his death to officials of the Coasttown National Bank, Coasttown, California. It was signed, J. Wesley Beard.

Maguire read this missive over three times and folded it carefully away in his pocket. Next, he turned to a table bearing a collection of bottles. Three of the bottles had contained ginger ale. A fourth had contained what its label called a quart of whisky. So had a fifth.

Shamus eyed the labels and swore. Next he raised the bottle to his nose and sniffed. The odor, used though he was to prohibition beverages, crinkled his nostrils.

He turned to gaze questioningly at the figure on the bed. J. Wesley Beard in pajamas was a singularly unimpos-

ing personage. The most noticeable of his features was a wispy gray moustache. Maguire had seen him frequently about the hotel, but remembered him chiefly because of a pair of heavy spectacles that lay on the bedside table. These were the most notable, because Beard wore over them covers of gray celluloid to shield his eyes from light.

Beside the glasses lay a bill form which revealed that Beard had paid nothing on his account since his arrival three weeks ago. The bill had been rendered the day before. Stamped across its face in bold blue letters were the words "*Past Due.*"

In the midst of his scrutiny of the bill, Maguire became suddenly tense. But as he turned slowly to the door his thoughts were to all appearances concentrated on the paper in his hand. He took a few slow steps, stopped, scratched his head puzzledly and took two more steps.

Then, dropping all pretense, he sprang for the door and wrenched it open. A startled youth in the blue and brass of a hotel bellboy was just straightening from a posture that would have placed his eyes on a level with the keyhole.

"Well?" demanded Maguire.

"Well what?" said the youth brazenly.

"Well this," returned Maguire. One of his beefy arms shot out and a hand clamped on the youth's shoulder. A blue and gold streak shot into the room and the door slammed.

"Say," said the bellhop a trifle shakily, "what's the idea?"

"Sit down." Maguire forced the protesting youth into a chair. His face shaped itself into a threatening glower.

"Still doin' business, I see."

"Whadya mean," protested the bellhop hotly.

Shamus went across the room and took a whisky bottle from the table.

"You're the only guy in town with enough crust to peddle that kind of firewater around a swell dump like this," he stated. "Besides, I recognize the label. The same stuff you were sellin' a couple of months ago."

"Nuts," said the youth defiantly.

"You were warned," continued Maguire coldly, "that if it happened again you'd be fired."

"You ain't got no proof."

"Proof!" Shamus laughed harshly. "I don't need no proof. All I gotta do is say the word to the manager and you'll find yourself huntin' a job."

"You wouldn't do that," said the bellhop in sudden alarm.

"Don't bank on it, kid. Don't bank on it. I might and I mightn't."

"What do you want me to do?" the youth inquired sullenly.

"I want you to come clean," Shamus told him crisply. "Why the keyhole act, for instance?"

"Aw," was the disgusted reply, "I hear downstairs that this egg has knocked himself off and I come up to make sure."

"And why the sudden interest?"

"He owed me fifteen bucks."

"Fifteen bucks!"

"The way it happened, I've been rustlin' his grog for him for the past two weeks. Last night he phones down and asks me to get him five jugs of rye in a hurry. When I get it here he wants to put it on the cuff and talks me into bein' simple. And now," he finished bitterly, "I'm out fifteen bucks. Five bottles at three bucks per. A guy is a fool to give credit."

"Five bottles," wondered Maguire aloud. "Five bottles, you said?"

"Five," said the boy sorrowfully. "I shoulda known better."

"Listen, kid. The next time I catch you bootleggin' around this hotel you get the works, understand? Now scram."

When the door had slammed Shamus instituted a third and even more thorough search. Five bottles, the boy had said. But now there were only two. Shamus sought in the bathroom, the clothes closet, under the bed, in the drawers and through the dead man's luggage. No trace of the other three bottles was to be found.

This circumstance might mean much and it might mean little, Shamus could not at the moment determine. He had a hunch, however, that it was to mean much.

III

HAVING come to this decision Maguire awoke to the fact that though another half hour had passed the doctor had not arrived. He strode irately to the phone and called downstairs for the third time. An apologetic clerk reported that after a great deal of trouble it had just been discovered that the doctor was away from his office on a professional visit.

He had been called to the same floor upon which Shamus now waited so impatiently and the clerk would without delay get him on the phone and instruct him to attend to Maguire's business.

"Never mind," said Maguire shortly. "I'll call him myself. What room is he in?"

"Eleven-twenty."

Maguire hung up the receiver and started for the door. Eleven-twenty was just down the corridor and he could go there as quickly as he could phone.

The door to eleven-twenty opened abruptly to the detective's sharp knock. As he recognized his caller a look of

annoyance faded from the doctor's face, but he held a finger to his lips warningly.

"Come in," he whispered, moving aside on his tip toes.

Shamus entered and closed the door softly. A dishevelled looking man lay asleep on the bed, breathing heavily.

"What is it?" the doctor asked. Shamus explained why he had come and the other nodded.

"I'll be right with you," he said. "Nothing much wrong with this fellow outside of too much bad booze. I've given him a quarter grain of morphine. He should be off to sleep by now."

He tip-toed to the bedside and regarded the man there expertly.

"He'll do," he said then.

As the doctor packed and closed his bag Maguire looked curiously about the room. It was a wreck. Clothes were strewn untidily about the floor. A table had been knocked over and in a corner was a broken glass and an empty whisky bottle. On the floor by the bed stood another whisky bottle. The labels on both were identical with those of the bottles in the room of the suicide.

Upon returning to the other room a scant three minutes was all that was required to complete the examination of the suicide.

"Strangled," the doctor said turning to Shamus. "Roughly speaking I'd say he's been dead twelve hours."

"That'd make it about ten last night." Maguire glanced at his watch.

The doctor nodded.

"Have you phoned the police?"

"I thought you'd better have a look at him first. The front office can put in the call. I'm goin' home to bed."

The pair left the room and went downstairs together.

"How about that lush in eleven-twenty?" Shamus inquired carelessly as they descended in the elevator. "Is he liable to raise any hell when he comes out of his stupor?"

"Not unless he absorbs some more bootleg. Anyway, the shot in the arm should keep him quiet for five or six hours."

Though he had told the doctor he was going home, Shamus did not leave the hotel. First of all he collared the bellhop whom he had interviewed so stormily an hour before.

"How much booze did you sell eleven-twenty last night?" he demanded.

"Eleven-twenty? Not a drop."

"Do you want me to go to the manager?"

"On the level. I never sold him a thing. Last night or any other time. What would be the use of me lyin' about it?"

"Okay."

Next Maguire went into the office and demanded to see the registration card of Mr. J. Wesley Beard. When it was handed to him he placed it on a desk alongside the suicide's parting message to the world.

The signatures were identical down to the last detail. Though he was no handwriting expert, Shamus could see at a glance that there was nothing phony about that letter. It had been indited by J. Wesley Beard of Coats-town, California and no other.

Maguire had expected something different and for a moment he was disappointed. Mumbling angrily to himself he approached the information desk.

"Who's got eleven-twenty?"

"H. W. Bunt, Syracuse, New York."

Maguire turned away and lumbered

across to the office of the credit manager.

"What do you know about this guy Beard?"

"Beard?" The credit man's face turned sour. "I thought I knew all about him, but it looks as if I was wrong. He's hung it onto us for two hundred and sixty-five dollars. Room, meals and service."

Shamus shook his head and clucked sympathetically.

"Who is he?"

"A bank president, no less," said the credit manager bitterly. "Not a big bank, but a solid bank, you understand. The Coatstown National of Coatstown, California. Beard's been coming here for two years, off and on, without once letting us in for any trouble."

"And what do you know about H. W. Bunt in eleven-twenty?"

"Bunt? Not a thing. Why?"

"I'd like to get a line on him. He comes from Syracuse."

"I'll see what I can do," the credit manager promised. He wrote down the name and initials. "See me tonight if I'm around."

IV

SERGEANT DETECTIVES FLYNN and SCHULTZ, two of the brighter stars from among the young men attached to the Central Office, were obviously bored. Investigating suicides, they felt, was beneath them.

"What," demanded Flynn loftily of Maguire, "about this guy Beard?"

"He's dead," answered Shamus solemnly.

"And we don't want no wise cracks," said Sergeant Detective Schultz.

"He was found," began Shamus, removing a small notebook from his

pocket and consulting it ostentatiously, "at eight-forty this morning by Miss Hettie Jones. Miss Jones is a chambermaid. Beard was in the clothes closet of his room, hanging against the wall from a rope. The rope was around his neck. It is believed that he hung himself."

Schultz swore.

"What's the trouble?" asked Shamus. "Ain't that what you want?"

"The department," explained Flynn patiently, "sent us over to get the low-down."

Maguire looked up quickly.

"The department! And why would the department be botherin' about a measly suicide?"

"The Chief of Police of a burg called Coatstown out on the coast wired us for particulars. Some bank this guy was connected with is short two hundred thousand dollars."

"Hey!" Maguire was unable to conceal his astonishment. "Two hundred thousand."

"Two hundred thousand," repeated Flynn slowly. Both Central Office men regarded Maguire suspiciously. "What's the trouble?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Shamus hastily. "I figured that egg was on the up and up, that's all."

Thereafter, for the space of ten minutes, he answered without quibble the questions Flynn and Schultz fired at him. This was unusual, for Shamus ordinarily resented interference by the police in the affairs of the hotel. The Hotel Paragon, he held, was his territory and when outside talent was introduced it got nothing but hindrance from the house detective.

"Oke," said Flynn at last. "If you'd coöperate this way all the time you'd save a lot of trouble all around."

"Wait a minute," said Shamus un-

expectedly, as the Central Office men began to move away. They halted.

"Beard," went on Maguire, "didn't knock himself off."

"What?"

Shamus explained briefly the circumstance of the chair and the impossibility of its having been kicked away from underneath him by the deceased Beard. Their surprise was due not so much to the information as to the fact that Shamus was freely parting with it.

"Repeat that," requested Flynn grimly, recovering himself.

Shamus obliged.

"Wait here a minute," Flynn called, heading towards the telephones. He returned five minutes later, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"You ain't stringing us?" he demanded.

"Don't be foolish."

"Okay then. We got hold of something big here, Shamus, and if you want to play along with us we'll see you get credit in the right spot."

"Oh, yeah," said Maguire cynically. "Thanks, pal. I always knew your heart was in the right place."

"You don't have to be like that," declared Flynn huffily. "Now take us up to the room."

"Did you tell them to send over a finger print outfit?"

Flynn nodded and the three started for the eleventh floor. The body of the late Mr. Beard had been removed to the morgue, but the room was otherwise undisturbed. Flynn and Schultz went to work like a pair of bloodhounds.

Seating himself in a corner to be out of the way, Maguire watched them.

"There's been drinkin' goin' on here," announced Schultz importantly, after ten minutes of clumsy poking into corners.

"You don't say," contributed Maguire.

"These bottles here—"

"You leave them bottles alone," called Flynn angrily from the other side of the room. "We might find prints on them. And the glasses too."

"I wasn't going to touch them," Schultz declared sulkily. Flynn scowled and sat down to rest.

"Find anything?" asked Shamus brightly.

"I found plenty, but I ain't sayin' nothin' just yet." And after a moment's thought: "What kind of a guy was this here Beard, anyhow?"

"Cagy," Maguire answered. "Been in the hotel half a dozen times in the last two years, but nobody knew much about him. Ate all his meals in his room, but never let the waiter in to serve him. He used to take his tray at the door and put it outside himself when he was through. Didn't like to go to the dining room on account of being so short sighted, I guess. Never spoke to the help any more than he had to."

"Now why," mused Flynn, "would a guy act like that?"

Before anybody had time to answer, a knock on the door heralded the arrival of a couple of fingerprint men from the Central Office. Having no interest in the routine he knew would follow, Maguire made an excuse and departed.

V

ALONE in the corridor, Shamus glanced at his watch and made a silent computation. According to the doctor, the man in eleven-twenty had been put safely to sleep for five hours at least. That left ample time for Maguire's needs, and he set off purposefully down the hall.

In room eleven-twenty he found Mr. H. W. Bunt in deep and noiseless sleep. From the open doorway Shamus looked and listened, then stepped inside.

With the speed and efficiency of long experience he set about searching the room. What he wanted was the fifth whisky bottle. The unfortunate J. Wesley Beard had bought five bottles and there were but two in his room. On a table beside somnolent Mr. Bunt were two more. Where was the fifth?

A cursory look around that morning in the presence of the doctor had failed to reveal it. But under Maguire's expert methods it was not long in coming to light.

He found it in a small hand bag that stood on the floor by the window. Besides the unopened bottle of whisky the bag contained one suit of frowzy and very threadbare clothes, a battered felt hat, one pair of socks, one pair of cracked shoes, down at the heel, one white shirt with an attached collar and one necktie.

Making a mental note of these things Shamus closed the bag and retreated. The bottle of whisky had confirmed his very grave suspicions.

Beard had purchased five bottles of whisky only. Two of these were still in his room. Three and two make five. H. W. Bunt, therefore, must have visited the room of J. Wesley Beard sometime between the time the whisky was bought from the bellboy and the time the doctor was called that morning.

Descending to the rotunda, Maguire chewed upon this fact for half an hour. At the end of that time he was approached by the quartette from the Central Office. Sergeant Detectives Flynn and Schultz looked glum.

"Any luck?" Shamus inquired.

Flynn was noncommittal, but by dint

of judicious questioning Maguire gathered that they had discovered seven distinct sets of finger prints. That, to say the least, was discouraging.

"What in hell did you expect?" Shamus said bluntly. "Those bottles must have been handled plenty before they got as far as Beard's room. This is a hotel, you understand."

"A big help you are," Flynn said wearily.

"What did you find on the drinking glass?"

"Two sets. One of them, we figure, belonged to Beard. The second set is different from any of the others. Maybe that will help us. Anyways we're goin' down to the morgue to fingerprint Beard."

"I'll save you the trouble," offered Shamus promptly. "You can verify Beard's prints by the ones on his registration card. Come on into the office and have a look at it."

The Central Office men accepted the offer with alacrity and the fingerprint men made quick work of bringing to light the several sets of prints with which the card was smudged. Comparison of these with the two sets taken from the glass showed beyond doubt which were those of the suicide.

As they emerged from the office Flynn and Schultz looked a shade more cheerful.

"Whoever put that second set on the glass," Flynn gloated, "made a good job of it. We got the thumb and four fingers of the right hand. The guy that left them is the guy that murdered Beard."

Shamus thought so himself, but said nothing. He lit a cigar and gazed doubtfully through a cloud of blue smoke.

"We'll let you know if anything

turns up," Flynn promised by way of good-by. "And in the meantime, don't let no one go into that room."

VI

PANGS of hunger were notifying Shamus Maguire that he had lunched lightly and that the welcome hour of dinner was not far off. Slowly his thoughts turned from crime to rare steaks. And then, abruptly, the pleasant visions fled.

From the wide portals of an elevator stepped Mr. H. W. Bunt of room eleven hundred and twenty. Mr. Bunt was pale and wan and his facial muscles twitched spasmodically. But to Shamus these things were of scant moment. For in his right hand Mr. Bunt carried a small hand bag.

Thus it was that when Bunt stepped out of the hotel onto the street Shamus was not far behind. Unhesitatingly Bunt plunged into the evening crowds and Maguire, giving him a brief start, plunged after.

Bunt walked briskly for a block and a half, after which he halted at a bus stop. Shamus came up and mingled unnoticed in the throng. When Bunt boarded a bus Shamus did so, too. Bunt clambered up the stairs to the top deck while Maguire eased himself into a seat below, close to the door.

From where he sat Shamus had an unobstructed view of the stairway. For nearly three-quarters of an hour his eyes never left it. The bus was well into the outskirts of the city and nearly empty of passengers before Bunt at last appeared.

Descending the steps rapidly he leaped to the sidewalk as the bus lost momentum. Without looking either to the right or left he strode off down an ill-lighted side street.

As the bus jerked into motion again

Maguire started up from his seat and lurched out onto the platform. The machine was by now moving at a good clip, but Shamus jumped. As his heels hit the pavement he grunted. Then, catching his breath, he swung round in pursuit.

Bunt had disappeared. When Shamus reached the corner, however, he caught sight of his quarry, half a block away. Banking on the darkness for concealment, he put on a burst of speed which brought him within fifty feet of the other.

Five more minutes' walking brought the pair to a bridge over a narrow, swiftly running river. Halfway over, Bunt halted suddenly and leaned on the rail. For a moment Maguire believed the man had stopped to confront him. He was already on the bridge and it was too late now to turn away.

So he kept on. But after all, Bunt paid no attention to him. The man stood gazing over the railing, his back to the sidewalk. He did not move as Maguire passed.

At the other end of the bridge Shamus crossed the road and took the opportunity to steal a hasty glance backwards. Bunt had left his place at the rail and was heading back the way he had come. And he no longer carried the small hand bag.

It took ten minutes scouting about the neighborhood to locate a taxicab. Maguire rode back to the hotel in comfort, deeply engrossed in several problems. At the hotel door he paid off the cab in a hurry and went into the building on the jump.

Taking the elevator to the eleventh floor he let himself into room eleven-twenty and switched on the lights. The odds were that Bunt would return by bus, in which event Maguire had a good twenty minutes to spare. Nevertheless

he worked fast and took no chances. A slip now might ruin everything.

To begin with he secured from the bathroom a clean towel and a piece of soap. Dampening the towel, he went out to the telephone and proceeded to rub the receiver free of any fingerprints that happened to be on it.

Next, rubbing a bit of soap on the damp towel, he applied to the receiver a light, unnoticeable coating of grease. That done, he switched off the lights, retired to the corridor, locked the door, disposed of the towel in the linen room and went downstairs, where he proceeded to satisfy an appetite that was by now ravenous.

After that, stuffed but satisfied, he took his way leisurely to the office of the credit manager where, without comment, he was handed a half page report from a credit agency.

He read it eagerly, then grunted with disappointment.

"I might get something more later," the credit manager said. "As things stand, though, there doesn't seem to be any record of him previous to two years ago."

Bunt, according to the report, maintained a home in Syracuse and had done so for two years past. He was seldom in it, however, spending most of his time traveling about the country buying and selling antiques. His credit, never stretched, was excellent.

VII

POCKETING the report Maguire went out into the rotunda and crossed to the room phones.

"Eleven-twenty," he told the operator.

The connection was made almost at once and a cranky voice demanded to know who was calling.

"Mr. Mulrooney," said Shamus

calmly. "I'd like to speak to Mr. Mulrooney."

"There's no Mr. Mulrooney here," the cranky voice stated.

"Is this room twelve hundred and twenty?"

"No, it isn't," said the voice angrily. Maguire heard the receiver crash at the other end and the connection was broken. As he hung up Shamus was grinning to himself faintly.

Without loss of time, then, Maguire descended to the bowels of the building where, in a room close to a humming dynamo, he discovered a taciturn young man seated on an upturned box. He talked to this young man earnestly and inaudibly.

When Shamus had finished the young man nodded understandingly and got up from his box. From a shelf he took a desk telephone wrapped about with wire and from the floor a small case of instruments.

"And be sure you don't touch the receiver or let nothin' rub against it," Shamus instructed finally.

"Okay," promised the young man. With the telephone and instruments under one arm he went out of the room, leaving Maguire dubiously testing the strength of the upturned box by pressing on it with one of his size thirteen feet.

Finding himself unable to place any confidence in the box and there being no chair in sight Shamus commenced striding restlessly up and down the room. The taciturn young man was absent for a quarter of an hour.

He then stepped into the room silently, placed a disconnected desk telephone on a table and his case of tools on the floor. Maguire sprang towards the telephone and lifted the receiver by its cord.

"You didn't touch it?"

The young man shook his head and with a pair of shears cut through the wire connecting the receiver to the rest of the instrument.

"You wanta step on it," the young man said gravely. "This guy is packin' up to leave."

"Hey! What guy?"

"The guy in eleven-twenty."

Maguire seized a page of soiled newspaper. As he barged out through the door he wrapped the receiver carefully about with the newspaper and stuffed the thing into his pocket.

He delayed his headlong progress through the rotunda long enough to bark a couple of questions at the dignitary in charge of the porter's desk.

"Handlin' any baggage out of eleven-twenty?"

"Trunk and two bags."

"What train?"

"Ten o'clock for Syracuse."

Maguire glanced up at the big clock over the registration desk and got himself into motion again.

"Police headquarters," he ordered, diving into a taxi at the door. "And step on it, baby."

Pulling up before the big, gray police building he dismissed the driver and sped into a labyrinth of deserted corridors towards the identification bureau.

There, after impressing the officer in charge with the need for haste, he sat down to await the photographing of the telephone receiver and the development of the pictures thereon.

"Couldn't be better," he crowed some minutes later when a damp sheet containing perfect replicas of the thumb and finger tips of Bunt's right hand was laid before him.

"And now, kid, if you'll dig up the set that Flynn and Schultz brought in from that Beard suicide I'll show you

something that'll make your eyes pop. Not Beard's prints, you understand, but the other, unidentified set."

VIII

THE identification officer began rummaging through a filing cabinet. Shamus leaned back in his chair, placed a "Little Policeman" between his teeth and viewed with much satisfaction the results of a heavy day's work.

These fingerprints would clinch the case against Bunt. They would constitute irrefutable proof that Bunt had been a visitor to the room of J. Wesley Beard just previous to the "suicide." And behind this stood the three bottles of whisky Bunt had taken from Beard's room.

"Well, well, well. If it ain't the big sleuth from uptown." These words, uttered in the horsy tones of Sergeant Detective Schultz, brought Shamus around with a jerk.

Schultz, wearing an expression far from affable, stood accusingly in the doorway. Looking over his shoulder was Sergeant Detective Flynn.

"So what?" Flynn demanded suspiciously, pushing into the office.

Rainbow-tinted visions of beating the police to another big pinch turned slightly foggy, but Shamus rallied bravely. He smiled beatifically and proffered a cigar.

"What's this?" demanded Schultz, looking down at the damp photo of Bunt's fingerprints.

"Yeah," said Flynn grimly, disdain- ing the cigar. "What is it?"

"I was lookin' for you boys," said Maguire quickly. Seizing their arms he drew them towards him intimately. "Let's get out of here and go some- wheres where we can talk private."

Reluctantly Flynn and Schultz

yielded to the pressure on their arms and moved towards the door.

"But them prints . . ." Schultz protested.

"Belong to one of the waiters," lied Shamus glibly. "He's been swipin' the silver."

They were almost through the door now, close to safety. And then Maguire chilled as he heard the voice of the identification officer.

"Hey there! Where yuh goin'? Don't you want to see them prints from the Beard case?"

"The Beard job, hey?" Flynn jerked away angrily. "You two-timin' old gorilla."

For once in his career Maguire was wordless.

"Where," demanded Schultz truculently, "did you get them prints?"

"He brought in a telephone receiver," volunteered the identification officer. "I took them offa that."

"See what he's got." Flynn was coldly angry.

The fingerprint man laid the unidentified prints from the drinking glass alongside the set from Bunt's telephone. He shook his head.

"Wrong," he said. "They ain't the same at all. You been stung, Maguire."

"Well, who claimed they were the same? I told you they belonged to a waiter we figure has been grabbin' the silverware. And the reason I wanted to look at the set off the glass was to see if there was a scar across the thumb tip. A hunch I had."

Flynn and Schultz registered disbelief:

"I come down here," continued Shamus sorrowfully, "to talk to you boys about a hot lead. But if this is the kind of coöperation I get you can both go to hell. I'll do my own coöperatin'."

So saying and having assumed an

expression of righteous indignation, Shamus picked up the wet photograph and the receiver and stalked out.

When he was alone, however, dejection enveloped him like a black cloud. With a feeling of complete discouragement he regarded the wreck of his theory. He was not now even sure that there had been a murder.

According to the rules of common sense the fingerprints of H. W. Bunt should have turned out to be the same as those of J. Wesley Beard's unknown murderer. But fingerprints cannot lie. Mr. Bunt was not this person and Maguire's reasoning was wrong.

So wrong, in fact, that Shamus lacked the heart to review it in a search for flaws. He was past caring now whether the criminal was ever found or not. He climbed wearily into a taxi and returned to the hotel.

There, plunged in gloom, he propped himself against a pillar in the rotunda and resolved to forget the whole heart-breaking business. He was still there and still as gloomy when at nine-fifteen sharp he noted that the object of his late activities was walking briskly across his line of vision.

IX

H. W. BUNT was preparing to check out of the hotel. Behind him trailed a bellhop carrying a large club bag. Bunt stepped up to a wicket marked "Bill Clerk" and gazed through the grille.

"My bill, please," Shamus heard him say. "H. W. Bunt. Room eleven hundred and twenty."

The bill was slid through the wicket. Bunt picked it up, turned around to the light and gazed at it puzzledly. From where Shamus stood there seemed to be something about the bill the man couldn't understand.

His brow wrinkled in a frown. The puzzle seemed to deepen. He stepped, closer to the light, holding the bill so it caught the full force of the beams. Finally, exclaiming impatiently, he gave up the attempt and swung round on his heel.

Shamus, watching with an interest that was fully revived, saw him march to the cashier's wicket. Shoving the bill through the aperture he bent down to speak.

"What is the amount of this bill, please? I can't quite—"

Maguire did not linger to hear more. He galloped to the front door and out into the night. Once more he was in a taxi, leaning far forward in his seat to shout promises and imprecations into the ear of the chauffeur.

Due to his consistent disregard of metropolitan traffic regulations the driver was able, at the conclusion of a trip that normally took twenty minutes, to deposit Shamus Maguire before the doors of the County morgue in ten.

Shamus took a flight of wide stairs two at a time and dove through a set of revolving doors. He flashed his credentials before the eyes of a startled attendant.

"You got a stiff in here from the Paragon," he said rapidly. "Guy named Beard. He come in this morning. I wanta give him the once over."

He was conducted at once to a long chamber in which stood a row of oblong objects draped eerily with white sheets. Leading the way to the middle of the row the attendant whisked away a sheet and revealed the mortal remains of J. Wesley Beard, bank president.

Maguire bent forward till his nose was not more than a few inches from that of the deceased. He seemed to be gazing deeply into the corpse's faded eyes.

He straightened, grunted with satisfaction and charged out of the building.

"Central Station," he shouted, leaping into the waiting taxi.

The train for Syracuse left at ten o'clock. It was ten minutes to when Shamus pulled up at the station, flinging a bill to the driver he headed, bull-like, into a hurrying stream of people. He pulled up at an open gateway before which stood a Pullman conductor at a high desk.

Breaking in at the head of a queue of waiting people Shamus again flashed his credentials, stemming the flood of protest the conductor had begun to deliver.

"Got a reservation for a man named Bunt? H. W.? He's wanted."

The conductor seemed doubtful.

"Wanted for murder," Shamus added.

"Oh." The man ran his eye over a list. "Car three hundred and eight. Lower nine."

Shamus passed through the gate and started down a long line of Pullmans. He was running heavily and panting. At car three hundred and eight he stopped.

"Where's the man that's got lower nine, porter?"

"He's aboard, sir."

Clambering up the steps Maguire barged down a narrow, green-curtained aisle. The curtains before lower nine were parted and inside a light burned. On the berth lay a hat, coat and club bag.

Shamus grabbed the hat and coat in one hand and the bag in the other and continued on down the car. He turned into the men's washroom.

H. W. Bunt, seated on the lounge reading a newspaper, looked up casually. Then, as he recognized the hat, coat and bag, his eyes widened.

"Come on," Shamus commanded, flinging the hat and coat on the seat. "Make it snappy, now."

"What," said Bunt, sounding outraged, "does this mean?"

"It means you're pinched. Are you comin' under your own steam or do I have to crack you on the jaw and carry you out?"

"Who are you?"

Shamus drew back his fist menacingly. Mr. Bunt stood up and put on the hat and coat. Maguire seized his arm and yanked him out the door. They went along the aisle on the double, Bunt stumblingly. As they stepped down onto the concrete walk the train shuddered and began to move.

X

THE Captain in charge of the night detail at the Detective Bureau looked at Maguire and his prisoner amusedly. Sergeant Detectives Flynn and Schultz stood alertly to one side, ready to lay down a barrage of sneering laughter the moment Shamus began to look foolish.

"Murder?" remarked the Captain. "Murder, you said?"

"I said murder," Shamus declared coolly, "and I meant murder." He shifted his grip on Bunt's arm. "It wasn't suicide at all."

"There's a report in your basket," put in Flynn. "Me and Schultz was over havin' a look around."

The Captain ruffled through a sheaf of reports and settled into the perusal of one in the scratchy hand of Sergeant Detective Schultz.

"You mean to say," he queried upon concluding, "that this here guy—Bunt you say his name is—killed J. Wesley Beard?"

"No," said Shamus loftily, "that ain't what I mean to say."

"Then what the hell do you mean?"

"Two years ago," began Shamus rhetorically, "J. Wesley Beard began makin' trips east from California. He stayed at the Paragon nine times during those two years and got himself fairly well known. Except that nobody ever seen him without his glasses. He used to wear a pair of thick-lensed glasses with a set of gray celluloid covers on them.

"The result is that if you asked anybody around the hotel to describe him they'd tell you that Beard was a medium sized guy with a moustache and that he wore glasses with gray covers. And that's all they could tell."

"So what," sneered Schultz.

"Two years ago," Maguire continued, "a guy named H. W. Bunt went into Syracuse, rented and furnished a house, opened a bank account, hired a housekeeper and went away again. He's been back on short visits eight or nine times since. This is H. W. Bunt."

"My ears are ringin'," said the Captain skeptically.

"And this," stated Maguire composedly, "is also J. Wesley Beard."

Sergeant Detective Schultz burst into a derisive guffaw, but Sergeant Detective Flynn, the keener witted of the two, gave a startled jerk.

"Three weeks ago J. Wesley Beard, glasses and all, checked into the Paragon for the ninth time and proceeded to give an imitation of a dead beat. Charged everything. Even got credit from a bellhop for liquor. This was a build up.

"Four days ago H. W. Bunt, a medium sized guy with a gray moustache, checked into the hotel. He asked for, and got, a room on the eleventh floor. Beard's room was on the same floor.

"Last night Beard had a visitor. This visitor was a down and out bum that nobody would ever miss. Some time during the last two years Beard had gone to a lot of trouble to make friends with this guy. The bum was medium sized and had a gray moustache.

"The pair of them turned loose on five bottles of bootleg. When the bum passed out Beard undressed him, put him in a pair of pajamas, wound a rope around his neck and strangled him. When the bum was good and dead Beard hoisted him up and hung him onto the closet wall.

"Then he wrote the suicide note, packed the bum's clothes in a small bag and scrambled down the hall to room eleven-twenty, where, without the glasses, he was H. W. Bunt."

"Is that right?" the Captain demanded of Beard.

Beard nodded dispiritedly.

"Sure it's right," Shamus said, preening himself. "All you need to

do to make sure is fingerprint him. I was on to him from the start, but I never figured out this double identity stuff until just a while ago.

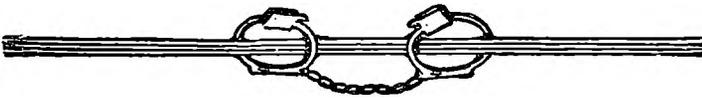
"When I brought Bunt's fingerprints down here and compared them with the unidentified set off the glass I thought for awhile I was up against it. Naturally, the unidentified set were the ones left by the dead guy—the bum—the one we thought was Beard.

"But I went back to the hotel and done a little more hard work. Then when I seen Bunt ask the cashier to read his bill for him I was in the clear. He couldn't read without the glasses.

"So I beat it down to the morgue to check. When I seen the stiff there had no ridge on his nose that people get from wearin' glasses, I made the pinch."

"And you call that coöperation," said Flynn bitterly.

Maguire turned around slowly, fixed Flynn with a derisive stare and emitted a loud and triumphant snort.



The Hangman's Limb

AS a monument to the occasional gross miscarriage of justice, an old tree stands near Fayette, Missouri.

In 1857 a neighbor of John Chapman was found dead in a field in the vicinity. Chapman was accused of the crime and, despite his protests of innocence, was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging.

Even as the noose was fastened around his neck he steadfastly repeated, "I am innocent." Years afterward his innocence was established by the confession of the man who actually committed the murder.

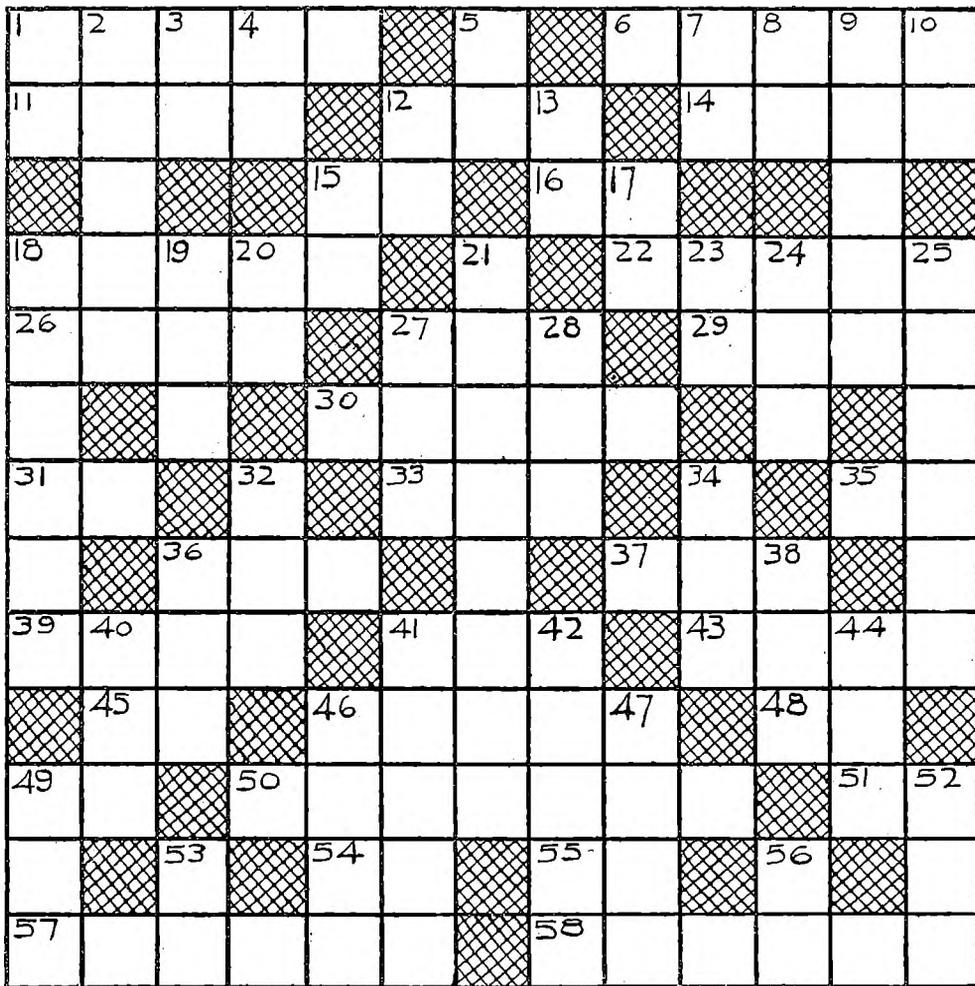
The tree used for the hanging is now dead, except for the limb on which Chapman was hanged. Strangely, this limb remains alive as a reminder of a ghastly error.

—Keith L. Harrison.

Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

A GOOD JOKE ON A PICKPOCKET

By Richard Hoadley Tingley



A-ACROSS

D-DOWN

A 43

The train was, and the platform of the Interborough

A 51

"..... my!" complained one

D 18

..... station at 168th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue was

A 48 D 12

of the young to her

A 1

..... with activity and crowded

chum. "..... is me, a wreck! That brute nearly stove in my ribs, the horrid man!"

D 34

with men and women anxious to be on their way downtown.

A 46

"We'll have to wear corsets soon if this sort of keeps up," moaned her friend

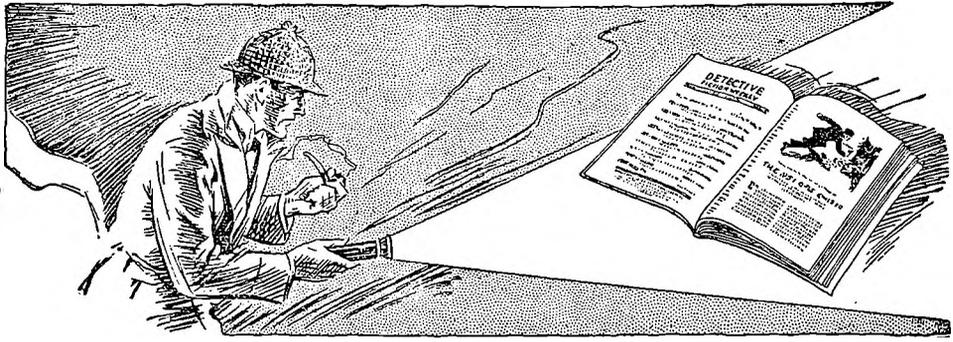
A 30

D 1 , with a rattle and a
A 49 rumble, the train pulled in
the station.
A 29 ".....!" whispers Sergeant
D 53 Jenkins to his colleague,
D 13 Patrolman Lardner, as
he drops his nickel into the
D 46 at the turnstile and
A 58 D 24 the platform to
with the ever-increasing mob.
"Watch that miserable looking
D 32 over there with the
A 50 A 12 gray suit. He's
Castro, a sneak thief. Used to
D 36 be a driver. Now don't
D 41 He knows me and is
looking this way. I'll bet he's
up to some monkey business
A 54 other with that nob
D 20 front of him."
A 55 ".....?" responded the cop.
"Who's the swell? Know him
D 44?"
"Sure I know him," an-
D 49 swered Jenkins with an
D 47 of superiority. "He's Mr.
Garcia of the Amalgamated
D 28 Cigar Company, of the
A 22 big in the social register,
A 18 and a, substantial man;
D 19 probably has a of money
A 31 on him. can't afford to
A 6 here on the sidelines
when there's trouble brewing.
A 35 Let's a little nearer and
D 7 in on the fun if there is
D 4 any. is our duty to
A 16 all we can to protect
such men."
D 5 "....., Sergeant," replied
A 45 the cop. "The place for
is where things are doing, and
D 23 how I would like to be
D 17 in a good scrimmage!
A 15 I consider I a match for
D 10 any of, and, besides,
D 8 like a good yarn to
A 57 to the boys at Head-
D 27 quarters, and reporters

who are always looking around
for a"
The gray-suited man was seen
D 3 slip his hand into the
A 33 pocket of his victim, but
D 40 he could draw it a by-
D 52 stander jarred arm, and
with that the row began!
A 27 much the smaller man,
A 41 Garcia up a stiff fight,
D 42 while, with interest, the
crowd watched the tussle. The
crook appeared to be having the
D 15 (Prefix) vantage until, with a
rush, the two officers of the
D 38 took a hand. And when
they got through with Castro
D 56 must have felt like a
A 14 piece of cheese.
A 39 "Thank you for help,
boys," graciously said Mr.
Garcia as he got his feet
and picked up his hat. "I
as hard as I could, but it might
have gone with me, and
that thug might have got off
A 11 free if you hadn't been
A 36 here on the job. the joke
of it all is that I have only
D 21 cents in my clothes!"

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

C	A	M	E	S	H	E	L	A	S	T
I	R	E	S	T	E	A	M	T	H	O
G	O	F	A	R	G	A	Y	I	T	
A	S	H	W	I	D	E	N	O	N	E
R	E	A	R	P	A	R	A	W	E	D
S	E	A	R	P	R	E				
A	S	F	L	A	T	T	E	R	T	O
R	E	P	E	L	R	A	T	E	D	
E	V	E	R	F	I	T	S	E	N	D
E	N	M	I	D	A	S	N	O		
O	N	M	E	N	L	O	T	R	E	
U	O	R	E	B	E	L	A	A		
T	H	R	E	E	E	D	O	N	O	R



FLASHES FROM READERS

*Where Readers and Editors Get Together to Gossip
and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind*

HOWARD McLELLAN'S first experience with police and the underworld occurred when he was a thirteen-year-old boy playing sandlot baseball in a California town. His interest, as an observer and reporter of crime, has endured. Remembered by *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* readers as the collaborator with Al Lewis of the amazing "I Looted Broadway," "Trigger Muscle," the story of Owney Madden, and other exciting stories, he has written the history of another desperado, Wild Bill Lovett, in this week's issue.

The sandlot experience was a curious one. A gentleman with a moustache came up to Master Howard and offered him a dollar to throw a baseball through the window of a nearby house. Nothing loath, young McLellan let fly, and then watched with amazement as the moustached gentleman went into the house, which was occupied by an old man, ostensibly to pacify the old fellow and ask for the return of the ball. Pretty soon Mr. Moustache emerged. The old man was with him—under arrest. Mr. Moustache was a member of the United

States Secret Service and his elderly captive was a notorious counterfeiter.

The throwing of the ball was a pretext to enter the house and catch the phony money man at his plant. Master Howard got his dollar six months later, after due Congressional enactment.

The incident fired his imagination and inspired his manhunting instinct. He played at shadowing people, and even managed to work once or twice for the police in a shadow's rôle, where a small boy wouldn't be noticed.

After high school and college he got jobs as a reporter on San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles newspapers. He frequently took leaves of absence to aid the Federal authorities and the locals in various exploits running down opium smugglers, diamond smugglers, and rings which were shipping in Chinese coolies.

When the Los Angeles *Times* was blown up he was assigned the job of finding the dynamiters, who had also threatened the newspaper for which he was then working. His clue was the wrapper on an unexploded stick of gelatine dynamite, and it led him to

the cache of five hundred pounds of the stuff. He worked on that case for two years, digging up clues, shadowing, working on undercover plants, and finally roping in.

During the World War he was a counter-espionage agent, roamed Paris for a while, and then became attached to the staff of General Bandholtz, Provost Marshal General of the A. E. F., as a member of the Division of Criminal Investigation. Switzerland, Germany and Italy were his playground.

He returned from the war to a job on the New York *World* as police and court reporter, and wrote scathing indictments of bail bond chiselers, shyster lawyers, and others of the same ilk. In 1924 he went West to direct an investigation of an epidemic of bank robberies, as an agent of the American Bankers Association.

He knows crooks and he knows the cops and the dicks. He has been in the game so long himself that he is thoroughly familiar with all the details, and the drama, and the tragedies. That is why his stories have such a grip. They ring true. Even his fiction is served up almost raw from his own eventful life.

BUYS HER COPY AT 7:30 A. M.

DEAR EDITOR:

I think *Satan* is a wonderful character and I'd like a good picture of him for my D. F. W. scrapbook in which I keep all of the short articles and also the covers.

The bookstand opens at 7:30 A.M. and at that time I get my copy. It's too long between Wednesdays for me.

Yours very truly,

MRS. C. D. JONES,
Los Angeles, Calif.

FIRST THE PUZZLE

DEAR SIR:

When you ask your readers to name the five stories they like the best, you are asking a very

difficult problem. Because they are all the best and it is hard to favor some and not the others.

Personally, the first page I turn to is the crossword puzzle. It is very good.

Now, if suggestions are in order, I would like to suggest a crossword puzzle contest, and think it would be lots of fun.

Sincerely,

EDGAR F. CALLAHAN,
Allston, Mass.

FROM A LITERARY CRITIC

DEAR EDITOR:

At last I have saved the last coupon required for my free drawing. I esteem the DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY as the best magazine I buy, barring none. My favorite characters are *Fluffy McGoff*, the *Mongoose*, *Lester Leith*, *Red Duke*, *Jimmy Wentworth*, the *Griffin* and *Satan Hall*. I write small articles myself and as a literary critic I think Erle Stanley Gardner, Max Brand, Milo Ray Phelps, Carroll John Daly, J. Allan Dunn and Johnston McCulley are the best detective writers at present.

Truly yours,

B. H. PROUTY,
Galeton, Pa.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

Editor,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY drawing.

This coupon not good after July 15, 1933.

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER

used x to represent e, x will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. For instance, affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first puzzle each week is the easiest.

COMMENTING further on last year's cipher activities, besides setting up the large number of individual records published last week, our readers also established a new yearly record by submitting a total of 35,211 answers for the entire year, as compared with 29,092 answers in 1931, and 16,722 in 1930! Great work, fans! And thanks for your wonderful cooperation!

But now let's get set for a goal of 45,000 answers this year! We can make it! Remember, for every single answer sent in you get credit both in our monthly Solvers' Clubs and in your individual record for the year! As a time saver, send your answers by post card. The first five or six words of a message are enough—no need to write out the answer in full. Let's go!

The word *who* proved to be a weak link in C. W. Ferguson's No. 78 of two weeks ago and again in last week's No. 84 by Larry Bee. In No. 78, for instance, ARP (frequencies 1-8-10) suggested *who*, symbol R used four times as second letter indicating *h*, and P highly probable as *o*. And so to RPOFC (*ho--*) and FRPOG (*-ho--*), noting the letters in common, etc.

Likewise in No. 84, where JZA (4-8-7) suggested *who*, duly noting the occurrence of J three times as initial (characteristic *w* position), Z four times as second letter, and A not otherwise used in the final position. Whereupon the long pattern word, JZGXAXAAUJGY (wh--oo-w--), would follow as *whippoorwill* as a matter of course.

The rest would then be smooth sailing. An obvious *with* in JGNZ (*wi-h*) would lead to BXGNZBNI (*-pith-t-*), *epithets*, context with which would suggest *vile* for SGYB (*-ile*). Next, the lengthy third group, with but three letters missing, could only be *ventriloquist*; and so on. Group 13, with the repeated double, provided another point of entry.

And now to this week's puzzles! In Robert Neville's division problem, note the sequence indicated in the last subtraction. Comparison will then show all of the values for $B \times L = A$, $B \times V = V$, and $B \times A = R$. The 10-letter keyword is numbered from 0 to 9. A study of ZYX Y will lead to the first six words of Tenderfoot's message. Or compare RU RON, ON, RNVRO, etc.

Noting the high frequency of R, you

might begin with the phrase OZKR XRRY ZXDR in Hopulikit's crypt, next trying word 18. Or compare AU and the endings -AEUYL and -ELAL, and follow up with word 4. Guess the ending -HYYG (note finality of G) in G. T. Anderson's crypt. Then work through GBE, BV, VHABED; and so on. The asterisk indicates a proper name.

GKL may be identified by its position and the punctuation in Doc's cryptogram. Continue by comparing DEKQZU and the ending of word 7. Spot your own clues in this week's hardest or "Inner Circle" cryptogram. by Mrs. W. D. Gray. A solution of this cipher and the answers to all of this week's puzzles will be published next week.

No. 85—Cryptic Division. By Robert Neville.

```

G I B ) R R L G G V ( A V L
        R F L R
        -----
        R F O G
        O B G V
        -----
        R B L V
        R B B A
        -----
        E
    
```

No. 86—Illustrated Lecture. By Tenderfoot.

"Z YX Y XYV UT YSRZUV," QYZP
 RON LUKYSZUJQ HJNQR, YQ ON
 PUGVNP OZQ RNVRO OUXNXYPN
 FZQSJR RU RON HKNYR PNEZHOR,
 EZDNGZQN PZQXYC, UT RON HYC
 CUJVH OUJQNGZTN.

No. 87—Zoölogical Veracity. By Hopulikit.

PJUB PULLED JRBZEYL, LVERYAELAL
 OZKR XRRY ZXDR AU JRVUYLAJSVA
 LFRDRAUYL ZYT BZFR DEPRDEFR
 JRLAUJZAEUYL UP BZYW QJROELA-
 UJEV KRJARXJZARL.

No. 88—Funniment. By G. T. Anderson.

*THOBZ *AEZIWHEJZ KLQJD WLD
 HEULJZIJD NYJZPG BV YHEKWD,
 JDNJILHYYG FWJZ WJ CEBPJD WLD
 VHABED "QHD GBE UJOJ, *IWBYYG?"

No. 89—Prescription. By Doc.

ZABCDEFAGH, ZAEUU-JEAL, GKL VQF
 UGJ CMNNOS UEOMDQEKU CAEYS
 JEKLSAPMO DEKQZU PEA ROMSU.
 DGWS OGAFS LEUSU SYSAB LGB!

No. 90—Playing Possum. By Mrs. W. D. Gray.

QKYNE LCF NEFKGMB KSRCG
 "SXOYT" QMYTOLKYG. HKY VCNB
 LCFS; LKYOYM VCFG. SMNNKF
 FMZRFBG LKF XOLMYBM YCQSMF.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

79—Key: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 S O M E C R Y P T

80—"Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighboring ocean speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest."—LONGFELLOW.

81—Down, down, down to yon dark gulf where skulls abound, and cipher fans sit all around a-cursing and a-swearin'!

82—College class banning colloquial expressions, school official appreciatively approves, comments, "pippin idea."

83—Radio announcer contracts sudden spasm of hiccoughs. Rabid dry calls station manager, demanding immediate dismissal for drunkenness.

84—With rhythmic voice, mystic youthful ventriloquist imitates whippoorwill, calmly enduring pugnacious, ribald rirraff who shriek vile epithets.

Enroll in our April Cipher Solvers' Club by sending us your answers to any of this week's puzzles.

Address: M. E. Ohaver, care of
 DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280
 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

THE taxi in which Detective Satan Hall rode was doing funny things—cutting peculiar capers. Satan didn't know if the driver, who sat stiff and straight as the taxi lurched toward the curb, was dead or alive.

Satan only knew that he himself was lying on the floor of the cab and that a car had come alongside to pump lead directly into the taxi.

Then the crash—the disappearing headlights; the jar as the taxi mounted the sidewalk. After that the sudden ripping of metal and the sickening sensation of a car balancing on a cliff before it goes over.

Satan tried to struggle free when the truth struck him. The gasoline tank had exploded. That was what he had heard. Fire raged around him. And he couldn't free his body. Something pressed on his chest; something pressed against his hand. His fingers gripped it. It was his gun.

Then he heard a familiar voice.

"Hello, Mr. Satan Hall," Devine was saying. "How do you like your funeral pyre?"

Satan opened his eyes and stared straight into the fleshy face of Fats Devine—stared, too, at that up-raised arm and the ham-like hand that clutched a heavy monkey wrench.

There was a great spurt of flame—metal creaked, glass tingled and the taxi door beneath Satan ripped from its broken hinges.

Satan was dropping—dropping. It seemed an endless distance to the sidewalk. Then blackness—stark and unfathomable blackness . . .

Don't miss this stirring novelette in which Detective Satan Hall flings caution to the wind and becomes embroiled in a death duel that has a strange twist. Read

Satan's Mark

A Novelette
By Carroll John Daly

TO Jimmy Wentworth the Chinese laundry marks he found on the dead man's shirt suggested the crazed deeds of an opium fiend. While the thunder rumbled, the lightning flashed across the sky, and rain beat a dismal tattoo on his slicker, Jimmy Wentworth scoured the subterranean hop joints of San Francisco's Chinatown. Go with Jimmy into the adventure of the perilous dives which are so graphically described in

The Yellow Rat

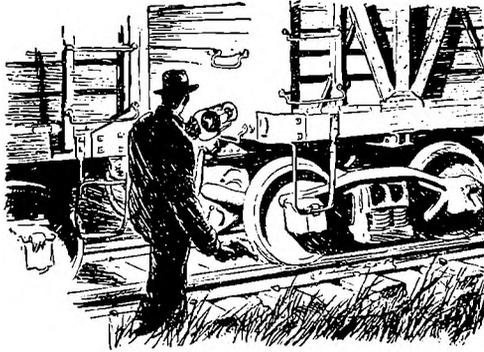
By Sidney Herschel Small

In the same issue, stories by J. ALLAN DUNN, GEORGE F. WORTS, HENRY LA COSSITT, FREDERICK C. DAVIS, and others.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—April 22 (on sale April 19)



Creeping Shadows



Terrible things began to happen when a railroad was built through the outlaw country ... Desperadoes who roamed the wilderness resented the coming of the law ... They wrecked trains, stole valuable freight, murdered railroad men ... But they overplayed their hand by attacking Adoniram Steele's girl and killing his father ... Don't miss this

Fast-Action Novelette by

E. S. DELLINGER

Complete in the May Issue of

15c

**RAILROAD
STORIES**

20c in Canada

JUST OUT « ASK YOUR NEWS DEALER

"IF MY HUSBAND HAD ONLY KNOWN—"



\$100

WOULD HAVE KEPT US FROM WANT

"My husband meant to insure his life. It was uppermost in his mind that when things got a little better he would take out insurance to protect us... somehow he just never got around to it.

"And now we have only a few hundred dollars. When that's gone I don't know what I shall do."

Tragic—yet it represents a common occurrence in hundreds of homes every day all over the United States.

Almost seventy per cent. of the heads of families leave no insurance when they die.

Stop and think right now of the danger of delay. "I'll take care of it tomorrow," you say—what if there should be no tomorrow? Your wife, your children—your loved ones, protect them this very minute.

Postal Life's Dollar Policy

Designed for the thousands who, like yourself, want the fullest possible insurance protection at the lowest price, this Postal Dollar Policy meets the needs of these times perfectly. Only the Postal Life Insurance Co.'s DIRECT-BY-MAIL method of selling could give you an insurance value like this.

A Dollar a Month

(See the Table at Right)

Just a dollar a month will buy this "modified life" policy with full cash and loan values, and paid up and extended insurance privileges. No matter what your age, glance over the table showing the "Amount of Insurance Purchasable by a Monthly Premium of \$1.00 for the next five years." Note how much protection you can buy at this trifling cost. The premiums you pay for the first five years are only one-half the permanent premiums (payable after five years) and these are reduced by the dividends Postal pays you as earned.

A Safe Company

For the past 28 years Postal Life Insurance Company has been providing insurance

direct-by-mail to thousands upon thousands of thrifty, sensible people in every State in the Union. Postal Life has sold \$70,000,000 of insurance through the United States Mails by its economical, direct selling plan.

Coupon Acts As Your Application

No matter what age, from 18 to 50 years, one dollar a month is all you pay for this special policy. The amount of insurance that a dollar a month will buy, however, varies with the age. At age 25 it will buy \$1,176 worth and at age 30, \$1,031. Turn to the Table just below and you will find listed there the amount of insurance a dollar buys at your age. Two dollars will buy twice as much; three dollars, three times as much and so on.

Decide how much insurance you should have to make the future safe for your family. Then fill in the coupon below and send it with your first month's premium to the Postal Life Insurance Company. That's all—the Coupon acts as your Application.

Mail Coupon—No Agent Will Call

Thousands have already taken advantage of this wonderful dollar policy and can look the future squarely in the face, knowing that they have done their duty by their loved ones. You get your money back if your application is not accepted. You take no risk.

\$1.00 a month for the next 5 years purchases

Age	Insurance	Age	Insurance
18	1389	35	877
19	1351	36	855
20	1316	37	820
21	1289	38	784
22	1266	39	769
23	1235	40	741
24	1205	41	709
25	1176	42	685
26	1149	43	658
27	1111	44	633
28	1087	45	606
29	1053	46	578
30	1031	47	556
31	1000	48	529
32	971	49	505
33	935	50	483
34	909		

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We also issue a \$1.00 policy for Juniors. Write for information to Dept. 222.

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Dept. 222, 511 Fifth Avenue, New York.

I wish to apply for a life insurance policy in accordance with your offer.

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My occupation is..... I wish to pay a premium of..... per month. This entitles me to..... worth of insurance. I am enclosing the first month's premium, which will be returned to me if my application is not accepted.

Insurance payable to.....
Full Name

Relationship to me.....

Name.....

Street and Number.....

City..... State.....