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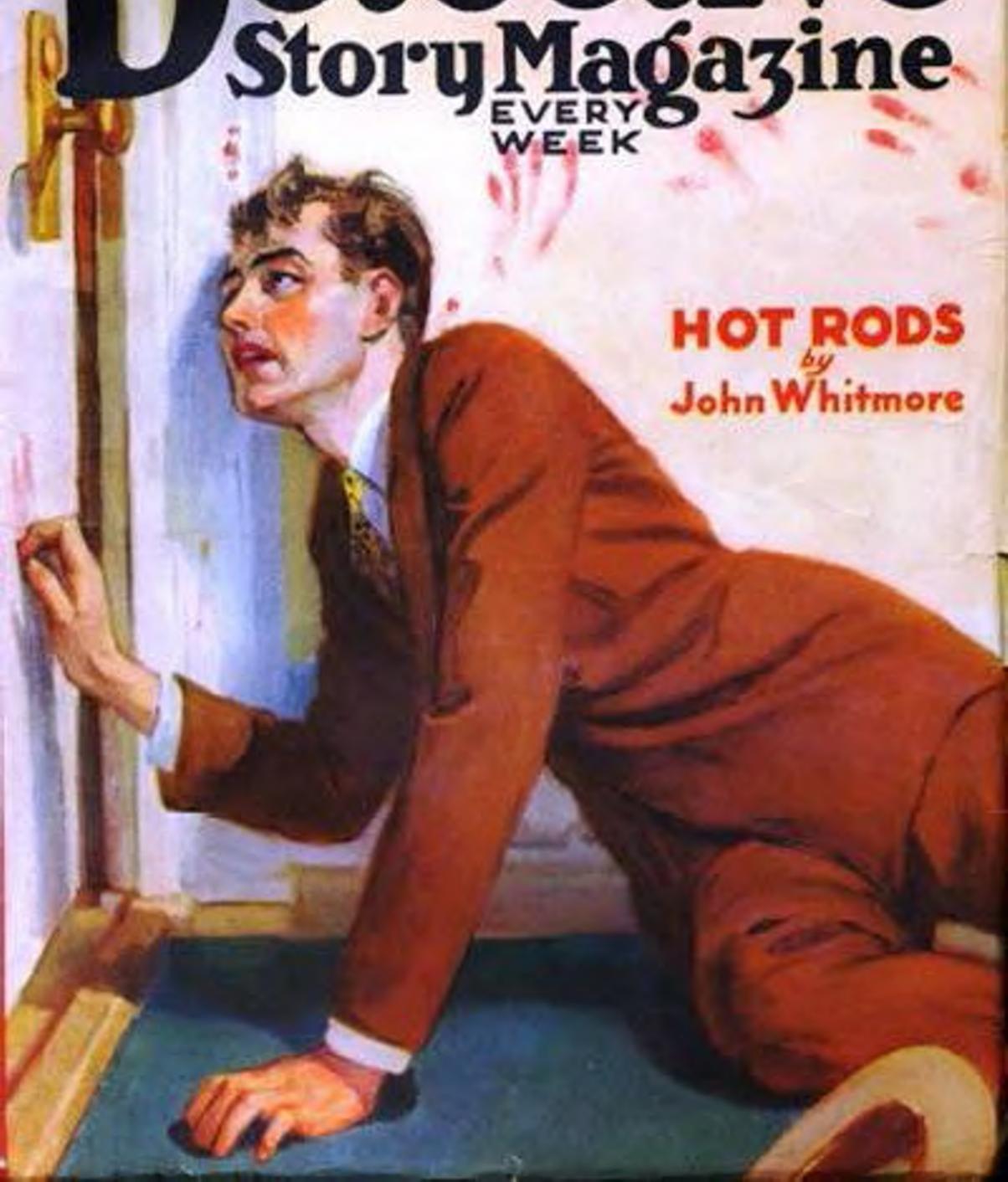
AUG. 13, 1932

Detective^{*}

Story Magazine

EVERY
WEEK

HOT RODS
by
John Whitmore



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Inside front cover

WE'RE TALKING TO MEN WHO HAVE THE COURAGE TO FACE

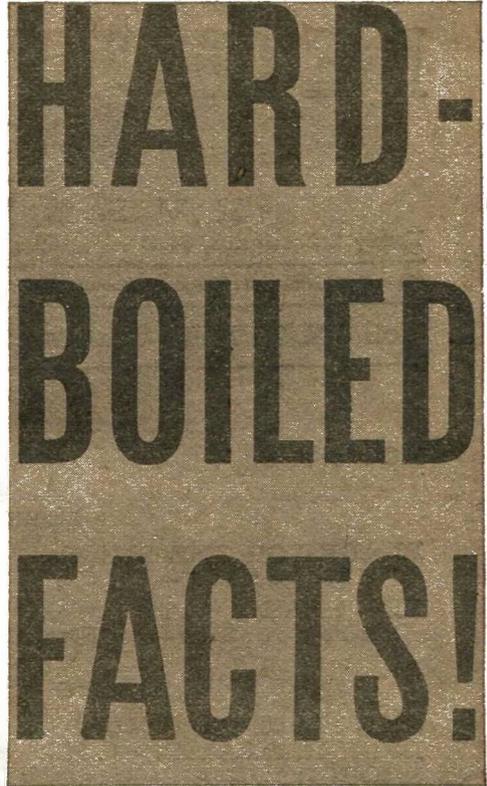
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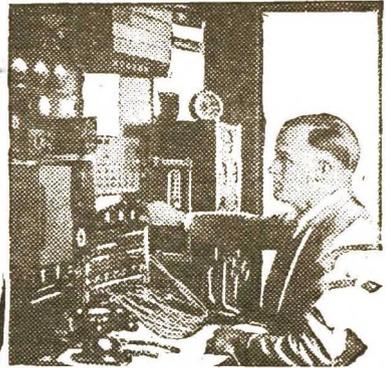
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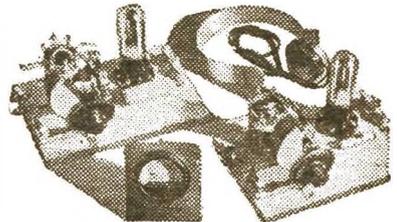
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Where the gray Gwon Fu vended wares
antique,
Came the skulking two on a midnight bleak,
And they laid him low in the doorway dim
With a blackjack blow, and made off with
him.

From Chinatown to the Bronx they fled.
In Limpy's roost, on a grimy bed,
They tied Gwon Fu, who betrayed scant
dread.

To the son of Gwon, crafty Joe Son Gay,
Down in Chinatown, came a note next day,
With a threat concise and a curt demand
For a ransom price of a hundred grand!
With directions bluff as to when and where
He must bring the stuff to the desperate
pair.

That night, alone, to the rendezvous
Went Joe Son Gay, as they told him to,
With cash to ransom his sire Gwon Fu.

In a quiet park by a willow tree,
Where the road was dark, met the anxious
three.

Joe Son gave the swag to the snarling thugs
In a leather bag with metallic lugs.
Eager Gyp, the Clown seized the ran-
som kit
And the crooks kneeled down—and they
opened it.

They plunged their hands in the bag pell-
mell
And touched sharp steel. With a mighty
yell
Of rage and pain, to the ground they fell!

For their wrists were clasped in the viselike
jaws
Of a trap that grasped them with tearing
claws!

And they could not run, so they cursed and
wept,
But they led Joe Son where Gwon Fu was
kept,
And they sobbed for shame up in Willie's
roost,

When policemen came, and the trap was
loosed.

In stir, maimed Willie and Gyp, the Clown
Go cold at mention of Gwon Fu Gwon,
The wealthy mayor of Chinatown!



HOT RODS

By JOHN WHITMORE

CHAPTER I.

KNOCKING ON THE DOOR.

JIM GARTH stood near the folding dining table in the combination bed and living room of his single apartment. On the table near him were scattered shells to fit the .38-caliber revolver that he held in his left hand. Near the shells was a small bottle of oil. It stood on a reprint edition of "Murder For Profit."

The quiet of the apartment was broken suddenly by a muffled thumping sound from the corridor

beyond the living-room door. The thumps were repeated irregularly until Garth had counted six. Then there was silence.

Garth dropped a handkerchief with which he had been wiping the gun, and turned blue eyes brightly, pleasantly, on the door.

He was a fat man—not gross, not soft, but amiably fat with the fatness that comes from expansive living. He wore gray trousers, blue shirt lined with a faint stripe of lighter blue, red Morocco slippers, and over all a ragged purple robe from which the belt was missing, and which in consequence fell from



They were some tough gangsters, but this detective could speak their language.

his shoulders in big loose folds like a deflated balloon.

For just a second, Garth regarded the door. His small Cupid's-bow mouth curved into a rosy smile that held an expression of pleased surprise. His bright blue eyes were wide with childlike wonder. Absently, he picked shells from the table and stuffed them into the revolver's chamber.

Something scraped at the door. The gun in Garth's hands clicked. Slippers slid quietly over the rug as he sluggishly crossed the room. He snapped a light switch, throwing the apartment into darkness.

The door crashed violently, shook in its frame, and held.

Garth's left hand touched the latch. He jerked the door inward and jumped back. A body came in

with the door and thudded to the floor. A yellow rectangle of light came with it from the hall.

The body on the floor lifted slightly. Red hands clawed at the rug.

Garth stepped over the body, thrust bright eyes beyond the doorway, and peered into the hall. He saw bloodstained hand prints on the white plaster wall—six of them—and nothing else.

He withdrew into the apartment, closed the door, snapped on a light, and put his revolver back on the table.

The man on the floor tried to rise. He reached hands and knees, and rested. His face turned up to Garth. It was a young face, hard, savage with determination. Red froth rose on twitching lips. Tiny

bubbles filled out, exploded, filled out again. He said: "You're Garth?"

A cadaverous grin came at Garth's slight nod. The man weaved on hands and knees, steadied, then rose slowly. He put two hands on Garth's shoulders. A dark, sodden circle high on the man's vest held Garth's eyes.

The man, following Garth's eyes, withdrew one hand, held it flat against his chest, then lifted it wet and red close to Garth's face.

"If you've anything to say, you'd better say it," Garth warned. "You should have been dead ten minutes ago."

The man's laughter made an unpleasant, crackling sound. He said thickly: "I've got dough for you." He tapped his chest on the unwounded side. "Tell Janice I saw Carruthers. She'll wise you how to go on."

"Janice who?"

The eyes widened, glazed. The lower jaw, falling away, opened his mouth. His knees started to bend out, but his grip on Garth's shoulders tightened, held him up.

"You're Garth, the private dick?" he asked.

Garth nodded. "But I don't know Janice. You'd better spill everything fast. Who are you? Who sent you to me? Get it across quickly. What do you want me to do for the jack you mention? And who is this Janice?"

"Janice didn't see you this afternoon?" The words came so thickly that only the slowest articulation made them intelligible. Strength, determination, oozed from the man's face. His eyes deadened.

Garth stood silent, watching life slip away.

The man's lips worked again. He swore slowly, steadily, incoherently.

One hand released Garth's shoulder. Still, he hung limply without falling. The free hand groped inside his coat, came up with a wallet. "It's all there—the dough, everything." The wallet thumped gently on the rug.

Garth slipped out of his robe one arm at a time and shed it to the floor. He felt in a back trouser pocket for keys, and said: "Come on, I'll get you to a hospital, then hunt up Janice."

A whisper said: "I'm through. May as well pass out here."

"Hell you may!" Garth muttered softly.

He got an arm over the man's shoulder, under an armpit. They started for the door.

Garth braced the man while one hand fumbled with the latch. He said: "I'm driving you in the direction of the hospital. If you last that long, they may pull you through. If you don't——"

The man did not speak. He was having trouble with his breathing. Garth's hand stayed on the door. He regarded his client with mild, impersonal sympathy.

The wounded man went into a fit of coughing, became an utterly dead weight on Garth. Words suddenly sprang from the coughing. A sentence began with, "They thought ——" and ended in a throaty rattle. He was silent. Garth eased him slowly to the floor.

The wallet drew Garth's glance. He picked it up, opened it, looked into each of its several compartments, but saw nothing.

"It's all there—the dough, everything!" Garth repeated the words of the dead man as he turned the wallet inside out.

He bent over the body. Blunt-ended fingers moved with agility in and out of pockets. The sum total

of the search was eighty-odd dollars in currency and a brass key. Attached to the key was a tab that bore the words: "Metropolitan Hotel," and the number 679.

Garth returned the money to the dead man's clothes. He looped the key over a little finger and stood twirling it.

There was a telephone on a smoking stand near the doors of a wall bed. Garth picked up the receiver, changed his mind, and hung up.

He put his feet into shoes, slipped into a coat that went with his gray trousers, grabbed hold of a limp-brimmed hat, and thrust his revolver into a sagging pocket. He walked carefully around the body on the floor and stepped out into the hall. His eyes followed the hand prints on the wall, but not with much interest.

He turned an L in the hall, came upon three more stains made by the wounded man as he weaved from wall to wall, then was at the automatic elevator. Blood smudged the car's open door.

Back to his apartment, Garth went. He put two hands under the dead man's shoulders and dragged him into the corridor. Light edged the doors of other apartments farther down the hall. Garth stood listening. Music, muted by walls, drifted softly through the corridor. Woman's laughter rose suddenly and was gone.

Garth dragged the dead man ten feet along the carpeted corridor, and stopped. He listened, then took the man's damp hand and smeared it against the wall. He moved farther, passed a door, and stopped again to drag the hand over the wall in a circular motion toward the floor. He straightened. For a brief second, he looked down on the dead man's features. Then he turned and walked

lightly to the elevator. He rode it to the basement.

Twin rows of cars gleamed darkly in the sparingly lighted basement. Garth opened sliding doors that gave into an alley, jockeyed a coupé out of the garage, and drove downtown.

At the Metropolitan Hotel, he took an elevator to the eighth floor, walked down two floors, and, using the dead man's key, opened the door of Room 679.

A suitcase lay across a stand at the foot of the bed. It was locked. Garth worked on it with one of the gadgets on his pocketknife. He found out that the owner of the suitcase was named Philip Gerard, that Gerard had worked for a private detective agency, that he had come to Plattsville on a blackmail case for a man named Edgar Sutton. There was no mention of a woman named Janice among Gerard's effects.

Plattsville's telephone directory contained only one Edgar Sutton. Opposite his name was an address in the Montrose Heights district. You couldn't live a week in Plattsville without hearing of Edgar Sutton; he was the First National Bank.

Garth left the hotel and drove to Montrose Heights.

Plattsville sprawls over two banks of the Tonca River. The east bank, low-lying, reclaimed from swamp land, is a drab region of railroad yards, factories, and the Platt Steel Mills. Beyond that flat industrial border are the smudged homes of the mill workers. Mixed up with them are bootleg joints and gambling houses. The cigar stands have nickel slot machines.

West of the river, the land is higher. Banks, theaters, hotels, department stores, and de-luxe speak-easies are located on this side. The cigar stands have two-bit slot ma-

chines. Beyond the compact squares of business are the homes of merchants, office workers, and professional people. Following the river north on the west bank, the land continues to rise until a mile or two beyond the city are the palisades known as Montrose Heights. It is the classy spot of Plattsville. Here live the clan Platt, and others of the town's elect.

The Sutton home stood far back from the street in grounds that occupied one half of the block. Lights burned in a few rooms on the lower floor, when Garth drove up. He parked his car and walked up a cypress-bordered cement drive to the house.

While he stood waiting an answer to his ring, a clock within the house chimed twelve times.

A butler who was tall and gaunt came to the door.

"I want to see Mr. Sutton. My name is Garth, and I have a message from Mr. Gerard."

The butler's eyes jumped up and down Garth. A car came from somewhere behind the house to the porte-cochère. It was a coupé. A chauffeur slid from the seat and came toward the front door. He wore cord breeches, slippers, a flannel shirt. He called surlily: "Tell him the car's ready." Without waiting for a reply, he turned and disappeared.

"I'll see if Mr. Sutton is at home," the butler said to Garth.

He returned and waved Garth in. They went to a small paneled room near the front of the house. Sutton was there. He was tall and gaunt, with a sharp, curving nose, and small brown eyes that held a lot of worry for their size. He was dressed in a sharply creased tan business suit and looked like a de-luxe edition of his butler.

Pointing to a leather chair, he invited Garth to sit. The chair was at the end of a walnut desk. Sutton dropped into one behind the desk. When he was seated, there were at his elbow a decanter about half full of Scotch, a thick high-ball glass that contained a few drops of liquor, a telephone, and an ash tray well loaded with half-smoked cigarettes.

He turned on Garth. His eyes were hot, dry, worried.

"I've just come from Gerard," Garth said. "He's dead."

Sutton looked from Garth's eyes to a point above his head on the door. Gerard's fate didn't seem to worry him much.

Garth went on: "He was shot—badly hit. He was a fellow with a lot of courage, or he'd never have made it to my apartment after he was hit. He came in dead on his feet, half cuckoo. He told me a lot of things that didn't make much sense. Some of it was about a wallet that was supposed to contain money and other things."

Sutton showed his first interest. "You have it?"

"No. The wallet was empty. I left it for the police."

Sutton took the information like one who has been thoroughly beaten might take a last blow. It hurt, but he was already numb. He said after a long silence: "Well, thank you for calling, Mr. Garth."

Garth sighed, relaxing deeper into his chair. "You don't seem to understand, Mr. Sutton. I said Gerard died in my apartment. I've got to know what it's all about. The police——"

"I can promise you won't need to worry about the police," Sutton said.

Garth's laughter rang musically through the room. "That's the

safest thing any one can promise in Plattsville," he said. "But Gerard was working for you. It's reasonable to assume that he died on your job. He was coming to me when he got his death wound. I'm dragged in on whatever he was doing for you, and I've got to know something about it. I'm going to know about it. I'm a patient man, and I can sit here till morning, if necessary. Can you?"

Sutton looked at his watch. "Do you know anything of conditions here in Plattsville?" he asked.

"I know they smell," Garth admitted.

Sutton leaned across the table's corner. "I understand you've come down here to clean the town up?"

Garth said nothing. A thin, forced smile came to Sutton's lips.

"Let's get back to Gerard," Garth suggested patiently. "Who sent him to me? And why?"

Sutton raised his hands helplessly. "I don't know. Gerard was getting into things. Probably, he felt he needed help and went to you on his own initiative."

"What was he doing for you?" Garth asked.

Sutton raised his eyebrows and remained silent.

"I know you think you don't have to discuss details of a blackmail gouge with me," said Garth. "And so long as you kept away from me, you wouldn't. But when your blackmail troubles wash a dead man into my bedroom, I'm interested."

Sutton's lips moved. He began picking up and putting down articles on his desk. Words sputtered from his lips: "Extortion. Twenty-five thousand."

His voice trailed off into the jingling vibrations of the telephone bell.

Sutton stood. He mumbled an

apology and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Garth watched the door with wide blue eyes. He continued to watch it as his left hand stole to the telephone on Sutton's desk. Gently, he moved the receiver from its prong to his ear. He heard Sutton's cautious: "Hello."

A voice that was vibrant with deep, throaty power asked: "Sutton?" Then, grudgingly, it said: "I'll take care of that."

Relief whistled past Sutton's teeth and along the wire. "When?" he asked after a pause.

"You said to-morrow," the voice grated.

"Yes—yes. It would have to be to-morrow," came from Sutton.

"O. K., then. Come down here right away. I'm at the club."

Sutton's receiver clicked, then Garth's.

Footsteps came to the door, stopped, and continued beyond it.

Sutton's lowered voice, almost inaudible through the door, said: "Get rid of that fellow, if you can."

"And if I can't, sir?"

"Let him stay," Sutton snapped.

A door opened and closed.

Garth heard the rising *whir* of a car's starter.

The door opened. The gaunt butler said: "Mr. Sutton has been called away. He doesn't expect to return to-night."

Garth nodded. "I'll wait."

The butler hesitated. Sutton's car whined down the drive. The butler shrugged, bowed, and left the room. Garth listened at the door. He heard footsteps ascend the stairs. A door closed in some remote part of the house.

Garth went to a window, unlatched and raised it. He put short, stout legs over the sill, drew the window part way down, lowered

himself to the ground, and then drew the window the rest of the way down.

He got his car away from the house without sound by coasting downhill to the Plattsville Road. Sutton's car was not in sight.

Half a mile from Plattsville, Garth came up behind Sutton. The banker drove into the town, crossed the Seventh Street bridge, then followed a winding course through the east bank's dark streets. He turned at last into a street where signs splashed wild color against the night. He parked under a sign that spelled:

WHITEY SCHWARTZ
CLUB DIABLO

Sutton left his car and entered the night club. Garth drove on, turned a corner, and recrossed the river. Fifteen minutes later, he climbed through the window he had left unlatched in Sutton's house.

He had no more than seated himself when a ringing bell echoed faintly through the house. It continued to ring for five minutes. Bedroom slippers clacked downstairs, and a door was opened.

Garth heard voices: the butler's, thin and outraged; a woman's, soft and throbbing, and a man's sonorous and suave. The door closed. There was a moment during which Garth heard nothing, then the bedroom slippers clacked upstairs.

Chimes struck softly, twice. Garth, dozing in his chair, raised eyelids lazily and looked at his watch. He stood up, stretched. The room was chilly. He walked back and forth from wall to wall three times. The house was very quiet.

A car came into the driveway, passed his window. A sliding garage door rumbled open. A moment

later, it was closed. Heels beat sharply on a flagged walk. Garth dropped back in his chair. Sutton was home.

The reading lamp by Sutton's desk went out. A door slammed heavily. Garth stood up, groped along the paneled wall for a light switch, and snapped it. The room remained dark. His hand fumbled for the doorknob. When he found it, a long groan made the darkness hideous. Some heavy object in the front part of the hall thudded to the floor. It carried with it some lighter object that made a slighter noise. Garth heard a racking cough. A woman's voice screamed: "What was that?" Then Garth was in the hall.

Dark shapes swam like phantoms in the blackness. Something thin, elusive, snaked around Garth to the stairs. Garth put out a groping arm, but missed the thing. It rose spectrally, a ragged oblong of blackness moving against the lighter blackness of the house. Garth ran to the stairs.

Halfway up, he got his gun out. He heard the ratchetlike sound of a match scraping along a box. The dark shape loomed up at the head of the stairs. Garth's gun was on it. He yelled a warning. The shape moved. A flashlight, pouring white radiance into Garth's eyes, blinded him. He fired twice.

A woman's voice rose from the lower floor. "Look! The stairs!"

A man said: "Careful, Janice."

The flashlight was gone. The darkness was intensified. Garth reached the top of the stairs. For one second he stood rigidly still. Straining eyes, reaching through the wide hall at the head of the stairs and a narrower one beyond it, saw something move toward the back of the house.

Garth edged quickly along the wall. He was near the end of the hall when some slight sound caused him to whirl. Metal flashed in the darkness. Garth's left hand rose. His right fired a wild shot. The gun flash blinded Garth, but in its red flame he still saw, or thought he saw, a flashing knife blade. The upward movement of his left hand was unchecked. His fingers encountered flesh and bone. Garth's grip fastened on a wrist. He twisted back. Metal clattered to the floor.

Garth's swinging gun thudded against a shoulder, brought a scream of pain as it struck an arm. Then hard, small fists pounded into Garth's middle. They rang in short, rapid blows with pistonlike regularity. Garth grunted.

He bent before the rain of blows. Metal gleamed dully on the floor beneath his eyes. Garth's left hand went down. A knife looked better than a gun here. His fingers closed on the blade, slid up to the handle. The fists were pounding on his chest and shoulders now without much effect. Garth came up. As he straightened, agony burned through his head, leaped from his eyes in a flood of yellow.

Into that yellow luminosity, Garth fell. He did not just drop to the floor. Garth knew that. He was diving through sun-dazzled space.

CHAPTER II.

COMMITTEE OF TEN.

VOICES rattled through Garth's head, prodding at nerve cells, thundering through the blank void of semiconsciousness, hammering, beating, and dragging him back to a

world of chaotic agony. Garth tried to drive the voices out of his head. The effort of will brought flaying pain, but the voices were gone. Then they were at it again, hammering, beating, clapping with redoubled fury. Garth opened his eyes.

He saw a woman. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was tall, without in any way seeming too tall. Her hair was the pale gold of sun-touched wheat straw. Her eyes were large, and blue, and damp. And in the dark blue of those eyes was more eloquent sympathy than could ever be spoken. Her forehead was wide and unscored by faintest line or wrinkle. Her skin was white, or nearly white, for a tint of coral lay beneath the surface. She had a rounded chin, a strong chin that just stopped short of jutting. Her lips were soft, smooth, and fleshy as a ripe cherry. They formed a wide, tender mouth, but it was a mouth whose "No" would never mean "Yes." The long slender lines of her body were subtly curved, and about her there was no flatness anywhere.

She wore an evening gown of some gauzy green stuff. The front of the gown was stained with blood that still was damp.

Two men stood beside and slightly behind her. One was Naideth, the deputy chief of police; the other was Sidney Platt, district attorney, one of the steel-mill Platts for whom the town was named, and the man responsible for Garth's coming here. Sidney Platt held the young woman's arm. He released it and stepped forward when Garth moved.

From somewhere above and behind him, Garth heard a strident, mighty voice. He frowned irritably. It was the same voice which had most outraged his unconsciousness. Garth's interest moved from the

people who stood around him to his surroundings. He was lying near the bottom of a narrow, thinly carpeted stairway.

His rising arm touched a round white banister. Before he could grip it, Naideth leaned over and lifted Garth to his feet.

Sidney Platt asked Garth how he felt.

Garth smiled sickishly, and asked: "What happened?"

Naideth answered Garth. He was a barrel-girthed man with a face like a red balloon. His eyes were large and empty. Thick, shapeless lips made wide parallel lines across the sphere of his face. He looked like a man who wouldn't quite know why he did things, but who would do them. He said:

"Mr. Sutton's butler knifed him to death as he came home, then you knifed the butler to death as he slammed a blackjack on you. Mr. Sutton's down at the front door; the butler's in the hall at the top of these stairs. Remember it now?"

Garth's eyes widened and rounded until they looked like blue butter chips. "Where'd you get all that?" he asked.

The red sphere of Naideth's face revolved until it looked at Platt and the blond woman. It revolved as slowly back to Garth. "They saw it," he said. "Want to look at the bodies?"

"Why should I want to see them?" Garth asked with mild astonishment.

Naideth laughed. "You're a dick, ain't you?"

Garth looked at Sidney Platt. The district attorney met Garth's glance and said nothing.

Naideth moved up the stairs. Garth and the others followed.

The long thin body of the butler lay stiff and straight along the hall.

A piece of black cloth with cut eye-holes partly covered his features. A leather lead-filled blackjack lay near him. A man in civilian clothes with a bag in his hand—presumably a doctor—was moving down the hall. Two uniformed police and two of Plattsville's plain-clothes men stood over the body. With them was Mike Stutenroth, the chief of police.

Stutenroth was clothed partly in uniform, partly in civilians. He was stolid, with a large flat head, bristling eyebrows, and loose blue jowls that quivered slightly as he turned his head and nodded to the district attorney.

Platt said: "Mr. Garth—Chief of Police Stutenroth."

At the curt introduction, Platt flushed. He said: "I beg your pardon. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Platt."

Garth bowed to the blond woman and nodded to the chief. Mrs. Platt stood behind the men, with face averted from the dead butler.

"I understand you're working under cover for Mr. Platt," Stutenroth said. "That's swell. You may be able to turn things up here that escape us. Nobody knows you. In a small town like this, every one knows the department dicks. That's a handicap."

Garth smiled politely and said: "Everybody knows me."

Stutenroth laughed. "Whatever you turn up, Garth, you'll find my department as ready to help you as Mr. Platt's office."

The bodies and police were gone. Platt, in the hall with his sister-in-law and Garth, said: "Shall we go to my apartment and talk?"

"Let's talk here," Garth suggested, "if Mrs. Platt can stand it?"

"I think I can stand anything after this," she said soberly.

They went into the paneled room

where Garth had waited for Sutton.

"You were here when Sutton came home?" Garth said. He knew the answer to that one. He spoke the question absent-mindedly, as one will when trying to fit a lot of impossibles together to make a possible.

It was Mrs. Platt's softly throbbing voice that answered. "Yes. I had something vitally important to tell Mr. Sutton. Sidney brought me. We rang the bell several times, and, after about five minutes, the butler came. He said Mr. Sutton wasn't home, and probably wouldn't be home all night. I thought he was trying to get rid of us, so said we'd wait. He took us into the living room—you saw it?—the first door on the right when you come in. He closed the door and left us.

"We waited. It must have been an hour and a half, wasn't it, Sidney?"

The district attorney nodded.

"I know," Garth said. "I was asleep in here. I heard you ring the bell, but I didn't know you came in."

Mrs. Platt continued: "We heard a car come into the drive. Then the lights went out, and the front door opened. We heard a groan, and a sound like some one falling. We ran to the hall. You were just coming out of this room. We saw some one run past you, then you ran up the stairs. Mr. Sutton half rose, gripped me, and fell back. He didn't speak. A flashlight showed you halfway up the stairs with your revolver out. I called to Sidney: 'Look! The stairs!'

"The flash went off, and there was shooting. Sidney ran back to the kitchen and out on the porch to turn on the lights. I heard a terrible struggle upstairs. Then a

crash. The lights came on. Sidney ran to me. We went upstairs and saw the butler lying with a knife protruding from his throat."

Nausea whitened her face.

Sidney Platt said: "I recognized your face in the ray of the flashlight, and we went looking for you. You were halfway down the back stairs, unconscious. We went back downstairs and found Sutton's body. He was stabbed in the back. We telephoned the police. While we were waiting for them, Mr. Sutton's chauffeur and his wife came in. She's a maid or something. They have an apartment over the garage."

"Has Sutton any family?" Garth asked.

Platt shook his head. "Childless widower. He lived here alone with his butler. The cook sleeps out."

Platt's pleasant, plumpish face grew serious. "Strange affair. Danzig, the butler, had been with Sutton twenty-odd years."

Laughter widened Garth's mouth. He sobered and stared incredulously from the district attorney to his sister-in-law.

He asked: "You're not serious? You don't mean to tell me you fell for that butler tripe of Stutenroth's? I thought you were agreeing to lull him to sleep."

Mrs. Platt leaned forward. She whispered: "You mean——" and stopped suddenly.

"I mean the butler didn't kill Sutton, and I didn't kill the butler," said Garth.

"Oh, but, it's all right for you to have killed him," Mrs. Platt urged softly. "You were fighting for your life against a murderer."

"It would have been all right for me to have killed the man I was fighting, but I didn't," said Garth.

Platt didn't look pleased.

Plattsville's crime record was sour

—fifty-three murders in a year and four convictions. Hoodlums, yeggs, and high-powered crooks had taken the town. Sidney Platt hadn't enjoyed watching the town founded by his family go crummy. He went out for the district attorney's office. That was a laugh. But the bootleggers and gamblers couldn't agree on a district attorney, and ran two of their own.

Platt had the decent vote solid, and slipped in. That was another laugh. He'd been in office three months. Murders at the rate of one a week went on unchecked. Banditry ran wild. Then Sidney Platt sent for Garth. The private detective with an operative to help was to work under cover, gather evidence, then, when the time came, rip the Plattsville underworld apart. Garth had been in town a week. Every one seemed to know why he was there.

Platt didn't look pleased now, because, for once, Plattsville had a solvable murder, and here was Garth messing the record up by ridiculing the solution. He said: "How can you be sure—how can you know you didn't kill Danzig? You were struggling in darkness. At the moment you were struck down, you could have been striking a blow with the knife. Both blows could have been completed."

Garth shook his head. "I know when the curtain came down. I had picked the knife from the floor and was straightening. But my objection to the butler theory is its goofiness. Why, if Danzig wanted to kill the boss, would he choose a time when there were three visitors within fifteen or twenty feet of the murder spot?"

"Besides, the lights went out no more than a second before Sutton groaned. We've found out that they

were turned off at the main meter switch on the back porch. Danzig couldn't have heard Sutton put his car in the garage, come down the back stairs, thrown off the switch, and walked through the dark house in time to stab Sutton as he entered the front door. It was utterly impossible."

"Then you believe," said Platt, "some one got into the house without any of us hearing him, took up his position at the front door, and a confederate turned off the lights just before Sutton walked in? Wouldn't we have heard that person break into the house and come to the front door? And wouldn't Danzig—in that case asleep in his bedroom—have heard the commotion and come down to investigate?"

Garth nodded. "That's just what he did do. Danzig was a sound sleeper. Remember, it took five minutes of bell ringing to bring him to the door when you came? Danzig probably didn't hear anything until I fired on the stairs. Things happened quickly after that. It was no more than a minute later that I was knocked out. Danzig would take about a minute to coordinate his senses when he heard the shot, get out of bed, slip on a few clothes, and come down to the second floor. He would arrive there just in time to run into the fellow who had disposed of me."

Platt was stubborn. He shook his head determinedly, groped into his brain for an argument, and rose enthusiastically with:

"But if the murderer was some one from outside, why would he deliberately risk capture by going upstairs?"

"Because he had to kill Danzig," Garth said simply.

"You mean Danzig knew him—perhaps had admitted him?"

Garth shook his head. "I mean that Danzig knew enough about the affairs of his boss to know who would be likely to have committed the murder, so he had to be killed. When he was killed, the murderer got a real inspiration. He had been fighting with me. I had the knife in my hand when I was knocked out. Why not pin Sutton's murder on Danzig? It was worth a try. So the murderer ripped off his black mask, stuck it on Danzig, and dropped his blackjack, figuring that, when I came to, I'd be goofy enough not to know who I'd fought."

Platt put a cigar in his mouth, absent-mindedly thrust one toward Garth. "If it wasn't Danzig, who was it?"

"As a rough guess, I'd say it was the fellow who killed Gerard," said Garth.

Mrs. Platt jumped up. A sob that was a mixture of grief and terror came into her voice as she exclaimed:

"Not really! Not Gerard! Oh, the poor boy!"

Platt sighed. "When?"

"To-night," Garth said. "If Stutenroth didn't tell you, it means no one has happened on his body. He was shot on his way to see me; he got to my apartment and died. I left him in the hall."

"This is ghastly—terrible, Sid," Mrs. Platt said. "Everything we do only seems to lead to more and more killing."

Garth looked at Platt. "Was he working for you, too?"

"No," Platt said. "He was working—"

He stopped and looked at his sister-in-law.

"He was going to work for us—I mean the committee," Mrs. Platt said.

"Mrs. Platt refers to the Committee of Ten," the district attorney explained. "The committee was organized more than a year ago. Mrs. Platt is the head, and the chief financial backer of the group. The organization was launched to combat crime in Plattsville. The members are all women. It is rather unique in that each member has suffered the loss of husband, father, or brother, through gangster bullets."

Garth looked at Mrs. Platt with sympathy and curiosity in his eyes. Platt answered for her.

"My brother was murdered by gangsters nearly two years ago," he said. He dropped casually into the use of his sister-in-law's given name. "Janice organized the committee to—well, to try to do something to check the appalling conditions here. The ten original members were from all stations of life. As crime has mounted, so has the membership. Now the committee is the official crime-combating force of most of the women's clubs and churches."

"Have you got anywhere?" Garth asked Mrs. Platt.

She shook her head nervously. "The first detective we engaged made a list of every person in Plattsville living beyond the law—the gamblers, bootleggers, and all manner of racketeers. He spent two months doing that. Then he was killed. Our next detective came just before an express robbery and murder. Chief Stutenroth said it was committed by out-of-town robbers. We believed differently. Our detective pooled his resources with two railroad detectives. Just when they were beginning to get somewhere, the three men disappeared. They were found later, dead, in a box car a hundred miles away. After that"—she hesitated—"we didn't think it was right to hire detectives

to come down here to almost certain death."

"But you were going to hire Gerard?" Garth asked.

Janice Platt nodded. "He came here to work on a blackmail case. Later, I found he was——" She looked at Platt and stopped. "He came to us"—she went on a different tack—"to obtain certain data. We gave him that, and he came back from time to time. I was naturally interested in what he was doing, and, from my knowledge of local conditions, I was able to help him. He suggested going to work for us as soon as his blackmail case was closed. I told him exactly what had happened to the other detectives we employed. But he was brave and wanted to go ahead in spite of the danger."

"I warned you," Platt said to Garth, "that you were accepting a hazardous assignment."

Garth nodded indifferently. "We get paid for the risks we take and expect a certain amount of danger."

He turned to Janice Platt. "Did he tell you of the case he was working on?"

She glanced at her brother-in-law, and faced Garth. Her eyes pleaded for him to bear lightly with his questions. She said: "Of course, he couldn't do that. He told me some generalities about it, though, and I—well, I was able to help him just a bit."

"Gerard spoke to me before he died," Garth said.

Platt jumped and asked: "Who killed him?"

"He didn't know, or, anyway, didn't say. He wanted to tell me other things that seemed more important to him."

He looked at Janice Platt. "He told me you sent him to me. He told me he had a wallet that con-

tained money and other things. It was empty."

Janice Platt fidgeted in her chair. Anxiety darkened her eyes. She exclaimed: "But you knew I was sending him. You got——"

A side glance went to her brother-in-law. Her eyes met Garth's again. Something in them suggested that she wanted to tell him things, but did not want to talk before Platt. Garth wondered why.

District Attorney Platt was a rosy-cheeked man of something more than forty. He was not tall, and an even plumpness covered his figure. His nose was nicely formed; his mouth was a little large and had the thick, mobile lips of an orator. His eyes were brown and very pleasant, although there was about them a certain quality of harassed bewilderment. He was a nice, gentlemanly fellow of unquestionable integrity. Too nice, too gentlemanly, for his job! He couldn't dive into things and get his neck dirty. And, Garth suspected, he was the sort of man who belongs to a lot of luncheon clubs and does a lot of talking.

Of the two, Janice Platt had the stronger character. Calm even under the strain of the three murders, she looked like a young woman of nice judgment. And now she was conveying to Garth that the things she could tell of Gerard were not to be told in the presence of her brother-in-law.

"He got what, Janice?" Platt asked suddenly.

The woman looked bewildered. Exasperation showed in the rising color of Platt's cheeks.

He said: "You started to say to Garth, 'You got——' and didn't finish."

"Oh," she said.

Platt's exasperation changed to

sullenness. "After all," he said, "I am the district attorney."

She laughed musically and patted his hand. "But your office does leak, Sid. Why, every one knows what Mr. Garth's here for. That's not fair to him, and it's dangerous."

Platt reached nervously for Sutton's telephone. He called headquarters, found Stutenroth still there, and reported the Gerard murder. He promised to meet the chief at Garth's apartment in ten minutes.

Garth smiled at Mrs. Platt, and said: "That's that. I was wanting to save it."

Platt ran fingers through his hair, looked wild, and asked nobody in particular: "When is it going to stop? Three murders in one night."

"And the night's not over," said Garth.

They picked up hats and a cloak, passed a policeman at the door, and went to their cars.

Garth's car stood almost directly in front of Sutton's house. Platt's was behind it, sixty or seventy feet away.

He watched Platt put his sister-in-law in a sedan, then got into his own coupé. He was digging into a back pocket for keys when rapid footfalls clattering on the pavement brought his head around. Platt was coming back.

Garth leaned out and waited. One of several cars parked in the driveway of a house farther down the block on the opposite side of the street rolled out. Turning, it drew alongside Platt's sedan.

Platt reached the door of Garth's coupé. He said: "I was thinking about——"

A scream ripped through the quiet. Garth jerked around, looking through the back glass of his coupé. His eyes caught a flutter of

a woman's cloak. A second scream was choked off abruptly. The racketing bang of a slammed car door came like thunder down the quiet street. A motor roared.

Platt was standing back on the sidewalk half dazed. Garth spun his car, couldn't make the turn, and backed. Platt ran out, jumped on the running board.

"They've got Janice!" he yelled wildly.

Garth watched the car ahead lurch around a corner, heard the roaring of its motor soften swiftly in the distance. He said: "Get in."

Platt started to open the door, then stopped. "I'll take my car. Two will be better than one." He dropped to the street. Garth muttered something throatily vague and stopped the car.

"Got a gun?" he called.

"Yes," Platt threw over a shoulder.

"Wait!"

Platt turned.

"Who is Carruthers—and why did you come to Sutton's to-night?"

A dozen feet away, Platt turned insane eyes on Garth. "Carruthers is in vice—road houses, liquor, women. Used to be a big liquor man, but Whitey Schwartz froze him out of town." He ran to his car. Getting into it, he called:

"Don't know why we came to-night. Janice got a telephone call. I brought her."

"If you catch up to those birds and I don't, watch where they go, but lay off them. Don't try to take Janice," Garth yelled. "Get help."

Platt had his motor going. He shouted: "If I don't catch them, I'll tear down every underworld dive in the county."

Garth's foot rose from the clutch pedal. "You'll play hell, you will," he said.

CHAPTER III.

RESCUING JANICE.

THEY called it the "Three Pines." The big hands on the lighted clock of the city hall's tower far across on the west bank, pointed to ten minutes after four when Garth turned his coupé down a narrow road that looked like a swollen welt across the swamp land and drove into the road house's parking lot.

Lights, glowing behind draped windows, failed to make the place look cheerful. The air was chill, damp, miasmal. The mist-shrouded point of marshy land on which the place stood was at the edge of Plattsville's city limits on the east bank of the river.

Garth got out of his car and went up four stairs to a porch. Swinging doors opened to admit him.

He stood in a small, dimly lighted vestibule. Over a show case of cigars and cigarettes, a girl thrust a bare, gaunt arm for his hat. Her features were razor-edged; her eyes were like cherry pits stuck in the ends of small, black funnels. Garth gave her his hat.

He pushed aside drapes and stood in a larger vestibule that was lined with slot machines. Near more drapes at the far end of the room, two men stood facing Garth. They were tall rangy fellows, with bitter, drooping mouths.

Garth nodded brightly, smiled. They looked at him with wooden faces and stepped aside to let him pass. When Garth moved the drapes, they walked down the line of slot machines, and into the outer vestibule. A sudden current of damp air told of a swinging door being opened.

Garth stood at the end of a large

room. Hidden lights slanted rose beams from four corners. A dancing space was deserted. And so were the small tables that surrounded it. Partly draped booths, higher than the main floor, lined two sides of the large room. Four of them were occupied by as many couples. Orchestra chairs and music stands were massed in disorder at Garth's left.

A red shadow, moving toward Garth, took on features and became a waiter. Garth followed him to a table.

In a far corner, a dozen limps-shouldered girls in gaudy evening gowns sat with drooping heads over a few tables. They were sodden with drink and sleepiness.

One of them watched Garth with deep predatory eyes that looked red under the dull, rose light. She stood up stiffly, yawned, and came around the tables.

Some one in a booth put a nickel in an automatic piano. The girl with the predatory eyes quickened her gait, raised a smile, and came across the dancing space with snapping fingers and humming lips.

A man opened a door behind the girls' tables. His cracking fingers rose above the piano jangle, above the girl's snapping fingers. She stopped, turned. His thumb jerked back toward the table she had left. Her face went sullen.

The man came past the tables. Meeting the girl, he spoke a few words to her. She looked back at Garth, grinning. The man came on. He reached Garth's table as the waiter put a glass and a faded menu before the detective.

He was a husky fellow with a big, long face. His lower lip jutted out, and, when he spoke, it rolled flabbily.

He said to the waiter: "This gent

rates a private room. I'll look after him."

Garth's round blue eyes brightened. His head nodded up and down in quick jerks. "I'll take the private room," he said, "if it gets me a talk with Carruthers."

"Sure," the other said. "You'll have a swell talk with him—a long talk."

He took Garth to the back of the dance hall and into a narrow passage whose walls were broken by many unpainted doors. At the last door, they stopped. The fellow with Garth rapped. The door opened. Seven men, playing stud at a round table in the center of the room, looked up and looked down again at their cards. A man seated in a swivel chair at a roll-top desk in a corner of the room, turned.

He was small, dark, with close-cropped black hair that came to a Satanic point over his forehead. His clothes fitted closely to his trim figure. His nails shone redly against the white of his hands.

He stood up and started toward Garth. Teeth that were small, white, and set a little apart, gleamed in a smile in which there was no warmth.

"I'm Tom Carruthers," he said, offering a hand.

Garth took the hand eagerly. Shaking it warmly, he said: "I'm Garth."

Carruthers laughed. "You hear that, you guys? This is Garth!"

The stud players turned grinning faces on the detective.

Carruthers held Garth's hand. He said: "We've had the finger on you since an hour after you hit town."

Garth's hand relaxed. He started to withdraw it. Carruthers tightened the grip of his small, tense fingers. Chairs scraped the floor behind Garth. Two hands pulled his

left arm behind his back. A third arm came from behind to take his revolver. Carruthers drew an automatic with his left hand. He put it against Garth's middle. "What's to stop me from giving you the bump now, copper?"

Garth's carefree laughter rang through the room. His blue eyes were alive with amusement. He chuckled: "You could have had my gun for the asking, Tom."

Carruthers dug the automatic into Garth's stomach. The grin on his face soured and widened. "What's to stop me from giving you the bump now?" he repeated.

Garth's laughter rose again. He was a jovial fat man enjoying some huge joke. He gasped at last: "I'm to stop you, Tom. You don't think —" He stopped, breathless with merriment, and went on again, "I'd have walked in here alone without some reasonable guarantee of my safety?"

The grin receded from Carruthers's mouth. He pulled the automatic away from Garth, released his hand, and said: "Talk fast, fella."

Garth nodded his appreciation. He poked a finger playfully into Carruthers's stomach. "I'll talk," he promised. "And I'll say things you'll be glad to hear. I'll talk to our mutual profit. That's my guarantee of safety."

Carruthers sneered. "Just an out-of-town dick trying to suck up some gravy." He shook his head. "The pay-off down here is too big, anyway. It's cheaper to kill you guys than buy you."

Garth became suddenly serious. His voice lowered. "Clear these hoods out! I've got news that'll curl your teeth."

Carruthers frowned. "Are you a clown, or are you trying to talk

yourself off a spot, or what? Hey, you guys, scram. I want a minute alone with this bird. Tige, you and Ed stick by the door."

The door closed behind the seven men. Carruthers lowered himself slowly into the swivel chair and put his automatic on the desk. He pulled a chair up for Garth with the toe of his shoe, and said: "Spring what you've got."

Garth's round eyes looked earnestly into Carruthers's small black ones. "I came to take Janice Platt out," he said flatly.

Carruthers spread his grin again. He leaned back and tapped the automatic on the desk. "You're good, you are. It would be almost worth letting you stick around. You give a guy a laugh."

Garth smiled. "Here's another laugh. Sutton went to Whitey Schwartz. Whitey's bringing his mob over to burn you down."

"I knew it," Carruthers said wearily. "You're just trying to talk yourself off a spot. Hell, we knew Sutton went to Schwartz. That's why we gave him the rub-out tonight. Schwartz won't bother us. That's not the play for him, and he knows it. Listen, three years ago, I was the big shot of Plattsville—me and a gambler named Batista. I needed dough to finance booze deals, and Batista needed it to open new clubs and put out more slot machines. Sutton financed us. See, when I needed heavy scratch to pay off a Canadian shipment, why, I'd go to Sutton to get fifty or a hundred grand. I paid him fifteen per cent for thirty days.

"Stutenroth, the chief of police, was a friend of Whitey Schwartz. Whitey was driving a beer truck for a small outfit then. Stutenroth had taken my dough, but he figured to make Whitey the big shot. It stood

him better, see? He was going to shake Whitey down for about fifty per cent of his profits. Things began to get tough for me. My trucks got hijacked by coppers, and my joints were raided when I'd paid for a fix. Stutenroth sent for more and more jack. I went to Sutton for dough. He turned cold. The skids were under me. There was some shooting, then Stutenroth sent me word I could run dumps like this out of town, but Plattsville belonged to Whitey. They had me broke, and I took it.

"Now, I'm going back. I wised to a new racket—snatching, kidnaping. The birds I snatched mostly couldn't afford to squawk, and the cases never even got to the papers." Carruthers laughed. "But I've snatched about every one in the burg that had any dough behind them, and it wouldn't have been right to snatch the same guys twice. Then I got a hunch that the dough Sutton loaned me was bank dough and not his own. One day, I went in and put the bee on him for ten grand.

"Told him to cough it up or I'd yelp to the district attorney, the Committee of Ten, and the newspapers that he'd financed liquor deals with jack belonging to the First National's depositors. It worked. So I kept my eyes open and got dope like that on a lot more of the ritzies. Blackmail? Sure, but I was fighting to come back. Now, I'm set to make it. You saw those seven guys in here? I got seven more scattered around. They're hard, tough guys, with hot rods. I wish Whitey Schwartz would come over."

Garth smiled admiration on Carruthers. "You've got things nicely stirred up for your come-back. Gerard, Sutton, and his butler!"

Carruthers's face grew earnest, almost regretful. "This time, I put the bee on Sutton for twenty-five grand," he said. "Sutton sent Gerard to me. He wanted some guarantee that this would be the last gouge. That was O. K. Gerard and I fixed the deal up, then he went to get the dough. I had him tailed. He got the dough from a safe-deposit box and went to your place. First time you were out. My boy got word to me.

"I tumbled that Gerard was fixing a trap, so I had him bumped. Sutton was all washed up. This twenty-five grand was the last straw. I had him broke, anyway. He had a hundred grand out to Batista. He took personal notes, no security. I took the notes from a safe at his house a couple nights ago." Carruthers's teeth gleamed in a bright, mirthless smile.

"Batista wouldn't pay back the dough without the notes. Sutton went to Whitey Schwartz for help. My first idea was to make a bum of Sutton, put him in the gutter. Then I figured it might be better all around for him to be out of the way. His butler knew things. That's why he went. They were two smart kills. As a cop, you'll appreciate that. Salatino did the job. You see what happens to guys that push me around? I'm on the up. I'm going places. People better give me room. Sutton booted me down two years ago. He's gone. Stutenroth's going, and I'll put in the next chief. I'll leave the sheriff stand. He's with me."

Garth chuckled. "If he isn't with you, he soon will be." His laughter rose. "You're all right, Carruthers, but you overplayed your hand in snatching Janice Platt. The district attorney has the sheriff out now. They're knocking over every dump

in the county until they find her. That's my second piece of news. Get wise to yourself. You may own the sheriff, but, if you have Janice Platt, he's going to take you. He's got to because he's working under the district attorney's eyes. Give her to me, and I'll take her out."

Carruthers laughed. "You are crazy, or you think I am." His face faded, leaving lips parted wolfishly. "Say, do you think I'm crazy? You do. You think I'm cuckoo because I spilled all this. I just told you to show you the kind of guy you went up against. You're going out the river door. I got nothing against you, but you got in my way."

Some one rapped on the door. Carruthers called:

"Come in."

A tall, white-faced man with delicate features pushed the door open. His lips barely moved, and there was no expression on his face when he said: "Bunch of cars coming in fast. They don't look right."

Carruthers snatched up his automatic. "Watch this guy." He turned at the door. "This is Salatino, Garth."

Garth nodded. He looked with mild curiosity on the man who had killed Sutton and Danzig and slugged him.

Salatino smiled thinly.

Carruthers came back. "It's O. K.," he said. "Only the sheriff."

Some one in back of Carruthers yelled: "What are the deputys for?"

"Just a bluff," Carruthers said. "The district attorney's with him."

Doors had been locked, and now a noise of hammering reverberated through the building. Some one shouted: "They're spreading around the joint."

"I'll talk to them," Carruthers said.

He went along the hall again. His hoods swarmed after him. Salatino said to Garth: "Come on, you. I want to hear this."

Under Salatino's gun, Garth went to the dance hall. The four couples in booths ran out to the floor.

Salatino glanced back to the girls, standing now by their tables. "Take these people downstairs and stay there." He turned to the patrons. "It's a raid, folks. Nothing to get excited about."

They turned frightened eyes on the gun in his hand. A girl ran to the back of the hall. The others followed.

Led by Salatino, Garth went through the room of the slot machines and into the front vestibule. Iron bars covered the swinging doors. Carruthers stood with his face to a small open panel. He was saying: "You can take my word for it, sheriff, she's not here."

Garth heard Platt's ringing voice call: "We aren't looking for liquor, and, if you haven't Mrs. Platt, you'll not be molested. But we are going to search the building." He sounded strangely calm and determined.

The sheriff said: "You'll have to open up, Tom. He's on the level with this. We're not after anything but the lady."

"I haven't got her," Carruthers said.

"Break in that door, sheriff!" Platt shouted.

The sheriff said: "It's that way, Tom. We're coming in."

Carruthers said nothing.

The door moaned under an assault of big shoulders. Carruthers swore steadily, with bitter malevolence, at the sheriff.

"Set up a machine gun and shoot out the lock," Platt called.

Feet stamped heavily on the porch. No one spoke for a minute, then Carruthers jerked his head away from the panel, brought his gun into the opening, and screamed: "You would, you——"

His voice was lost in the gun's crash. He pulled his arm back, stuck his face into the opening, and withdrew it. "I got the double-crosser!" he shouted and jumped back.

Machine-gun fire came in sharp bursts. Bullets thudded into the heavy doors. The gangsters poured back, crashing into, and knocking aside Garth and Salatino. Garth pushed after them into the dance hall. Shrill screams of terror came from the back of the building. And above all the din rose the ever steady, staccato rattle of machine guns.

"Get to the windows upstairs!" Carruthers shouted. "We've got to knock those choppers off!"

He weaved past Garth, pushing his men, shouting, exhorting, and threatening.

Fear-whitened faces turned mutinously on Carruthers, then were subdued by the madness in his black eyes and the threat in his waving gun.

They piled through a doorway, Carruthers and Salatino behind. Between bursts of machine-gun fire, Garth heard trampling feet overhead. Lights on the lower floor went out.

Bullets ripped through flimsy frame walls, clattered through windows, screamed across the dance hall, and plunked half spent into tables and chairs.

Ducking under the meager cover of tables, sliding wildly across the polished dance floor, scurrying blindly, desperately, smashing into more tables and chairs, Garth found

the passage that led to Carruthers's office. He stopped there, breathless.

He heard shots fired from above—shouts from outside the building. Kicking open doors on one side of the passage, he struck matches, and at last came to Carruthers's office. At the roll-top desk, he struck more matches, pulled open drawers. He found a loaded automatic.

Coming into the passage again, Garth opened the door directly opposite. He struck a match, looked into the room, and moved to the next door as the match burned out.

A door farther down the passage banged open. Garth spun. He took three quick steps. Janice uttered a sob and fell against him.

Garth put an arm around her and half dragged her down the passage. They came into the dance hall. Garth leaned against the wall. Shouts and screams came from outside the building and from the floor above. Guns still crashed, roared, and shattered glass, but the fire was on the upper windows.

Garth, supporting Janice Platt, felt his way around the wall, looking for a window or door.

Carruthers's voice rose in a roar for ammunition. Lights in the dance hall came on. Garth saw a door in a side wall. He made for it. Janice Platt was stiff, half out. She hung heavily on Garth, and he thought they were an eternity reaching the door.

He threw down a bar and turned a key. Swinging in with the opening door, Garth saw Salatino at the foot of the stairs that led to the second floor. He swung his gun up. Salatino fired. His shot went above Garth and into the door.

Janice Platt screamed. She threw her arms around Garth, clinging to him in hysterical terror. Her back was toward Salatino, between Garth

and the gunman. A second shot from Salatino's gun ripped into the door, flung a long splinter into Janice Platt's cheek.

Garth lifted her, spun her around, and jumped for the outdoors.

Some one outside, covering the door, shouted. Janice Platt sank heavily, slowly down Garth's body.

Platt, followed by four of the sheriff's party, came running. He charged in, pulling his sister-in-law to her feet. A spotlight was turned on them. Janice Platt cried: "Oh, Sid! Oh, Sid!"

Platt seemed to think suddenly of the open door. He jumped aside with Janice. Garth started to move after them when a bullet spouted dust at his feet. He jumped back, stared into the white brilliance of the spot, and shouted: "Don't shoot!"

A deputy sheriff moved closer. He held a gun shoulder-high at arm's length. Platt and his sister-in-law were a dozen feet away. Bullets sang past Garth. He jumped for the only cover, the still open door to the dance hall.

Platt's voice came in a wild roar: "You fool! That's Garth!"

Salatino spun Garth clear of the door, and slammed it. He dropped the bar into its slots. Turning on Garth, he said: "Now you know where you stand."

CHAPTER IV.

PANIC.

CARRUTHERS, with three of his men, stood on the stairs. His eyes were hot, dry. His lips were turned back in a white-toothed grin. His coat was off. Shirt sleeves were rolled up, and two guns

dangled from his small hands. Blood splotted the front of his shirt. It was not his blood.

He nodded to Garth and Salatino. "It's O. K. Now they've got the broad, they'll quiet down and we can buy our way out."

"Yes, we can, after you smoked down the sheriff," Salatino said.

Carruthers's mouth tightened. His eyes burned on Salatino. "He had it coming to him. He took my dough and double-crossed me."

"Maybe, but that don't make it any easier for us to buy a passage now."

Carruthers laughed. "Turning yellow? This isn't as bad as it seems. Platt will buzz with the woman. Then we can fix those guys. I've never seen them when they didn't have their hands out. Back upstairs, boys. Hold your fire and don't show at the windows. We'll let them make the next move."

The three men went reluctantly up the stairs. Carruthers looked at the automatic in Garth's hands. "We could use your gun," he said. "Do you want to throw in with us?"

"They shot at me," Garth said. "Sure I'll throw in with you."

Garth followed Salatino and Carruthers into a long room with three windows. Two men lay on the floor with still, open eyes. Two others stood at the sides of two windows. Glass lay over the floor. Dawn made the room a sooty gray. Chill currents of air brought mist through the glassless windows.

Carruthers went to the third window. He stood with body pressed flatly against the wall and moved his head until one eye looked out. "Platt's still there," he said. "I'd like to try a shot at him."

Machine guns came suddenly to life, spraying the windows, the frame

wall, with bullets. Garth and Salatino dropped. "They're taking a log to the front door," a man at one window yelled.

Carruthers shifted. He stood side-wise to the window and peered out. His head seemed to jump six inches. Blood spurted from his throat. He pressed a hand to his severed jugular vein. In a thick monotone, he said: "Go downstairs and get some of those guys before they get you." He turned to the window and stood fully exposed in it. His gun went up. It spurted five jets of flame. Then a bullet in the chest smacked him to the floor.

The mob went into a panic. They ran cursing to the stairs. Others from another room joined the rush to the ground floor.

Salatino followed slowly with Garth. The building trembled under the thuds of the log that was being rammed against the front doors.

Three gangsters ran to the windows. They pulled aside bullet-shredded drapes and shades. Two of them climbing through crashed back into the dance hall, shook for an instant, and lay still. The third swayed across a window sill, then went headlong to the ground outside.

The front doors gave. Shotgun slugs peppered the dance hall. Salatino ran to the passage that led to Carruthers's office. Garth, keeping close to the floor, followed him.

Drapes at the front of the dance hall were pushed aside. A machine gun came into the dance hall. Garth dived for the passage. There was a long deafening burst of fire that lasted until Garth reached the end of the passage and flung himself down a stairway through which Salatino had disappeared—then silence.

There were lights in the basement.

Their pale reflection reached into a corner where white, strained faces looked out in terror.

Salatino was opening a door at the other side of the basement. Garth ran after him. He stood on the narrow platform of a boathouse.

Salatino was in a speed boat. He had put his gun down and was pulling the engine's starter button.

He looked up, snarling. Garth's gun was on him. He said: "Get the doors open."

Garth ran down the platform. The motor roared into life. Garth drew a bar that crossed the boathouse doors. Water boiled under his feet. The boat backed, smashed into the doors, and flung them open. Garth jumped into the boat as it slid by.

Bullets raked the hull, zipped over the cockpit. Garth threw himself flat. The boat went into the stream in a wild, backward, circular dash. It rolled almost to the gunwale as Salatino turned straight up the river. A burst of machine-gun fire ripped a jagged line along the hull. Then the boat leveled.

Salatino lay on the deck boards. He was steering blindly, right arm raised to the wheel, his left hand pressed to his abdomen.

Garth crawled along the bottom. The boat was listing, and water sloshed around the cockpit. There was no more gunfire from the shore.

Garth took the wheel from Salatino's loose grip. He glanced down and asked, "Hit?"

Salatino's eyes looked dully at Garth. He did not speak. Garth spun the wheel to miss an outjutting point. The speed boat wallowed around. Water rose above Garth's ankles. Salatino got to his feet. He looked back at the Three Pines, a quarter of a mile distant, and swore sullenly.

The boat was deep in the water. It plowed ahead laboriously. Salatino sat down and stared at the flooded cockpit. The engine died.

Garth steered for a floating log. Momentum drove the boat sluggishly toward it. The water in the cockpit reached the seats, then bubbled up suddenly. The river closed over the gunwale.

Garth and Salatino were in the water. Salatino swam a few strokes with one arm. As he swam, he cried out. His fingers spread over the top of the log. Garth swam to the end, rested his two hands on the log and, using a froglike kick, propelled it to shore.

There was a shack near the river's edge. Garth went dripping to it. He saw a stove, some odds and ends of home-made furniture. Salatino crawled into the shack, groaned, and spread himself on the floor.

Garth lighted a fire. Smoke and heat made him drowsy. For an hour, he dried clothes and dozed. When he left, Salatino was unconscious.

CHAPTER V.

GARTH'S DECISION.

IT was eight o'clock when Garth reached the Rafton Hotel, where his operative, Tod Baer, stayed.

Baer was so deep in sleep that it required three of Garth's knocks to arouse him. He opened the door, muttered some mockingly maledictory greeting, and slouched back to bed. He was tall enough so that from head to toes he reached from end to end of the bed.

"Get dressed," Garth said curtly. "Things are beginning to happen in this town."

Baer stretched like a greyhound, ran a long hand through red-brown hair, and put his feet to the floor.

While water splashed in the bathroom, Garth recited the night's events.

Baer came into the room glowing pinkly. "Like you to leave me out when things got interesting," he complained. "You might at least have taken me to the Three Pines. I could have loaded your gun for you, or carried water."

Garth shook his head. "No. That was a job for one man or a dozen. Two would have been dangerous."

"And one was perfectly safe," Baer jeered.

"I knew Platt was coming with the sheriff. I knew I could talk any hood off for an hour or so. I was safe enough until I realized the sheriff's mob thought I knew too much."

"But why go after the Platt girl, if you knew her brother-in-law was crashing down on the dump? Was it just plain heroics, or are you trying to marry a steel mill?"

Garth laughed. "It wasn't the steel mill. Platt sold out to the trust years ago. It wasn't heroics, because I'm too old and fat for that. I wanted to be there when the sheriff came. I wanted to see no hocus-pocus was pulled over our honest but guileless district attorney. Then I wanted to talk with Carruthers. I was getting along nicely, but the sheriff came too soon.

"Carruthers spread his paranoiac symptoms lavishly. He was a small-time, third-rate hood with a degenerate mind who landed through some accident of circumstances into a position of leadership. He suffered from an exalted feeling of self, and this feeling was in nowise lessened when he was kicked out. Instead, his delusions of grandeur persisted

until eventually they pitched him to ruin.

"He's gone; his gang has gone. But that doesn't mean our work is more than begun. Carruthers didn't stand on his own feet. Left to himself, a paranoiac like Carruthers would probably have lived in his delusions, without ever doing anything to achieve the greatness he believed was already his. But urged forward by a crafty, sane brain, there was nothing he would not have attempted. It is that brain we have to find. And we won't find it in the underworld.

"Towns are like trees, they rot from the top down. These cheap hoodlums couldn't have come into Plattsville and taken the city away from the decent people without the connivance and help of some of the community's leaders. Sutton was one such. But he was out with Carruthers and in with Schwartz. So we must look further for the brain that used Carruthers. Meanwhile, was Sutton alone? Granting that the First National is a one-man show, could one man have dipped deeply into the till to make liquor and gambling loans without some one else being in on the deals? I doubt it.

"That's your job for to-day, Tod. Next to Sutton at the bank is a fellow named Weller. He's the logical guy to have been in on the deals with Sutton. He lives up on Montrose Heights. Scoot out to his house, tail him when he leaves, tail him every time he goes out of the bank. I'm going over to see Platt now, but I'll drop by the bank sometime this morning."

"I tail a bookkeeper while you go after a master mind," Baer grumbled.

"You'll get action," Garth promised. "Carruthers's mob is finished,

and the crooked sheriff is dead. But there's still Stutenroth to get."

"How are you going to trap him?" Baer asked with mocking interest.

Garth's lively blue eyes twinkled. A little smile played over his gentle mouth. He shook his head slowly. "Platt's a decent fellow, but not much of a prosecutor. He belongs in the civil courts. No—no matter how good a case we gave him, I wouldn't want to see Platt prosecute Stutenroth. Here's another thing—all these law-enforcement officers around here aren't crooks, but, if Stutenroth were prosecuted for graft, the citizens would lose what little respect they have left for the police department. That would be bad, as well as unfair."

Baer was tying shoe strings while Garth rambled on in a pleasant conversational tone. His face suddenly lined; his eyes turned coldly on Garth.

"What do you mean?" he asked slowly.

"I mean I am going to kill Stutenroth!" said Garth.

A small rush of customers awaited the opening of the Plattsville First National when Garth came near it at ten o'clock. When these early patrons had dribbled out, a lull fell over the bank. Garth hunted down the block for Baer. He found him, and was told that he reached the home of Weller, Sutton's assistant, at eight thirty. Ten minutes later, a maid opened the front door and took in the morning paper. In five minutes, Weller came rushing from the house.

He got his car and drove directly to "Whitey" Schwartz's Club Diablo.

The night club was closed, but a door was unlocked by some one ap-

parently waiting to admit Weller. He carried a paper when he went into the club. He remained five minutes and came away without the paper. After leaving the club, Weller went to a restaurant where he ate breakfast. From there, he drove to a parking lot near the bank. He entered the bank at nine forty and had not left it.

Garth left Baer, to go to a hotel for a few hours' sleep. His course took him past the bank, but on the opposite side of the street. Three cars, parked at the bank curb, all driven by women, pulled out into the traffic.

A long touring car slid into a section of vacant space. A coupé came in behind it, hogging space so that the two cars stretched along the curb in such a manner as to prevent a third car getting in. To the pedestrians moving along the block, there was nothing in this little maneuver to excite a glance, but Garth stopped in his tracks, drew behind a telephone pole, and put a hand to his gun.

Four men went singly from the touring car to the bank. One of them carried a large carton that looked like a container for advertising displays. The man in the coupé sat behind his wheel. A street car came past. It blotted Garth's view of the bank.

The crashing impact of automobiles in collision rose above the traffic noises. Garth's eyes jumped to the nearest corner. A laundry truck and a small sedan had come together. A blue-uniformed traffic cop loomed above the small crowd that instantly encircled the smashed vehicles.

There was an open-front cigar stand at Garth's back. A pay phone hung to its wall at the sidewalk's edge. Garth called headquarters

and said in a quiet voice: "The First National's being held up."

Without much haste, he walked to the corner, pulled the traffic cop out of an argument, put his mouth to the officer's ear, and said: "This is a stall. The First National is being knocked over."

The cop was a big, rugged fellow with face sun-roasted to the color of well-broiled steak. He looked down on Garth with eyes that were sharply alert, yet cold and colorless as ice. He shot a quick glance back at the wreck, seized Garth's arm, and dragged him off, saying, "Show me, you."

He broke into a half run that brought the horde of curious from the wreck to their heels. Before they came up to the parked coupé, Garth slipped away, and got his gun out. The traffic cop reached the bank doorway. A shot crashed from far within the bank. The cop's gun came up. The man in the coupé leaned across the seat, rested a blue-barreled automatic on the window frame.

Garth fired. He was not quite abreast the coupé. His shot went through the door and smashed against the windshield. The automatic popped up, ejecting three streaks of flame. The bullets from it smashed into the wall high above the bank entrance. Swiftly, the cop turned and fired twice at the coupé. The automatic fell to the running board. The cop spun around to face the bank. As he turned, a look of glazed surprise came into his eyes. Large-knuckled fingers on his gun relaxed. His knees bent, and he folded limply to the sidewalk.

Resting himself on one hand, he pulled up his gun. Another shot from within the bank flattened him.

The block cleared miraculously. Garth stood alone in the middle of a

deserted sidewalk. He ducked for a doorway. A machine gun stuck its long barrel from the bank entrance. Three men, half masked with carelessly tied handkerchiefs, ran to the touring car. One of them carried a large canvas pouch. A fourth came from the bank and stood on the sidewalk, sweeping the submachine gun threateningly up and down the block.

The touring car's motor hummed. The chopper backed slowly to the curb, passed the gun to one of the men already in the car, and jumped to the running board. The car plunged from the curb.

Garth came from cover. He took one leisurely, well-aimed shot at the figure climbing over the car's side. The man's back caved at the impact of Garth's bullet. He fell forward, his head, chest, and arms inside the car, his stomach across the closed door, and long legs dangling below the running board. He slipped back until his toes touched the street, bounced up, and touched again; then four arms came over the side and dragged him up.

In an instant, the submachine gun was out of sight within the car; the driver was giving all his attention to getting away, and making a good job of it; the other two were occupied with the dead or wounded man they were pulling into the car. Garth stood out in the open and emptied his gun. But the touring car didn't stop or waver.

The next corner was a weaving, pushing mass of startled humanity that stared incredulously down the block. Madly, the touring car bore down on the crowd. The mob broke, disintegrated itself into fragments that scuttled to cover like a flock of scared chickens. One figure remained motionless in the center of the intersection. He wore a blue

uniform and stood with two arms outstretched. The left extended upward in a silent command to halt; the right extended outward from the shoulder.

Swiftly, the car gathered speed, flung itself like a projectile at the intersection, onward at the policeman. He stepped back. Gunfire cracked: three separate and distinct shots from the officer's gun, then the *rat-a-tat* of the submachine gun in the car. The officer spun as if picked up and twisted by a giant's hand, and smacked flatly on the pavement. The touring car lurched toward the wrong side of the street, righted its course with two wheels off the ground, then lunged out of sight beyond a street car.

Garth crossed the sidewalk to the coupé. One of the fallen policeman's bullets had taken its occupant through the temple. He was dead.

The bank's entrance was filled with a crowd of tellers, bookkeepers, and customers. Some were dazedly quiet; others yelled lustily for police.

Garth used his elbow to push a path into the bank. Inside, two men who looked as if they had authority, ran up to him. They looked at the gun, forgotten by Garth, still dangling from his hand. One of them seized his arm, and gasped: "The police are here?"

Garth grinned sourly. "Hell, no, the good cops are both dead. I'm a private detective. Any one shot in here?"

They looked breathlessly tragic. "Mr. Weller was killed," they said together.

"Are you two in charge now?" Garth asked.

"No. The cashier is out on the street," one of them answered.

"Well, who are——"

"We're bank examiners," one of

them explained. "We had just arrived."

Garth's laughter shocked the man into silence. Sirens shrieked above the hubbub on the street.

Garth glanced over his shoulder. "Exactly what happened?"

The bank examiners looked at each other. One elected himself spokesman and moved his lips hesitantly.

"Well, we were up there near the door," he said tensely, "at Mr. Weller's desk. We were talking of the tragic death of Mr. Sutton for a moment before going on the job. We didn't notice the four men until they stood in the doorway with handkerchiefs over their faces. I think it was the sound of something falling that drew my attention to them, although it may have been the sudden silence that came over the bank at their appearance."

"What fell?" Garth asked.

"I don't know. I think it must have been a narrow cardboard package that was near the feet of the man who held the machine gun. I suppose the gun was concealed in that when he came into the bank. The man with the machine gun ordered every one to get to the back of the room. Two of the men carrying pistols remained at the door. The fourth, also carrying an automatic, walked up to Mr. Weller's desk. He ordered us to get back with the others. Then Mr. Weller got up from his desk and went to the vault with the bandit.

"One of the two men at the door came behind the counter and went through the tellers' drawers. Mr. Weller and the bandit with him had been in the vault several minutes when we heard a shot. The bandit with the machine gun warned us not to move. The other man came from the vault carrying the canvas sack.

There was shooting outside the bank. A policeman appeared in the door. He was shot down. The bandits hurried out, but they didn't take the machine gun off us until they were beyond the door."

Sirens rose in wild crescendo, died into a jangle of street-car bells and excited voices. The entrance filled with plunging blue figures. At their head, carrying a large gun and looking very determined and aggressive, was Mike Stutenroth, Plattsville's chief of police.

He nodded slightly at Garth and regarded him with frank disgust.

"Whitey Schwartz's mob," Garth said. "They killed Weller, killed your man on the doorstep, and your man on the next corner."

Stutenroth's black brows rose. He said: "Bosh! Schwartz runs a couple of night clubs and peddles a little liquor. This was an out-of-town mob."

Garth smiled blandly. He winked extravagantly, obviously at the bank examiners. "If it was an out-of-town mob, they've had time to get into the next State by now," he said pleasantly. "But it wasn't. I know Whitey Schwartz. I recognized him coming in and going out. And the guy that's dead in the coupé is one of his hoods. What are you going to do about that, chief?"

CHAPTER VI.

A HAND-TO-HAND FIGHT.

IT was a swell parade: four cycle officers in front to clear traffic, four long cars loaded with tear-gas bombs, sawed-off shotguns, and coppers. At every corner where there was a traffic officer, the parade halted and a new recruit was loaded

aboard until the cars bulged with bluecoats.

Garth rode the first machine. He was wedged between Chief Stutenroth and his deputy, Bill Naideth.

They crossed the Seventh Street bridge to the east side of the river, shrieked for the right of way through narrow, twisted streets, and came noisily to the block of Whitey Schwartz's Club Diablo.

Stutenroth waved the command to halt. Coppers spilled from the cars. Stutenroth squeezed out of his seat, got to the street, and bawled orders. The cops spread out, moved slowly to the front, side, and back doors of the club. Stutenroth, Naideth, and Garth went to the front. After a lot of banging on doors with gun butts, a heavy-lidded man with a mop in his hand opened. He stared dully at the cops, looked with bewilderment and no fear at the guns in their hands, then said: "I'm good fella. Don't do nothin'."

"Where's Whitey?" Stutenroth asked.

"Ess not," the mopper answered.

"Was he here this morning?" Stutenroth bellowed.

"Ess not."

"What time did you get here?" Naideth threw in.

"Ess not."

Stutenroth pushed him aside and waved his men into the club. They spread out, moving methodically, without either haste or slowness, through check rooms, front office, rest rooms, the dimly lighted vault of the club, behind it into kitchens, dressing rooms, bar; downstairs into more dressing rooms, liquor cache, and upstairs to a mezzanine where there were private dining rooms, and another office; up still more stairs to a large and luxurious apartment, and in all this trip they met no one.

Naideth brought the mopper

along. When necessary, he took keys from the man, who yielded them ungraciously but without resistance or protest. Where keys would not win them entrance, they broke locks.

Back in the night club, Stutenroth turned to Garth. "You satisfied now?"

"Of course, I didn't look into every room, but Whitey doesn't seem to be here. Does the search prove anything?" Garth inquired.

Naideth pondered. "It proves he isn't here."

"We'll scatter," Stutenroth said determinedly. "You can search around for yourself—every room in the joint. Then, if we don't find Whitey, I know a couple other hang-outs of his." He chewed his lip for half a minute. "Whitey's a good guy, but he's going to be sore about these locks. That's if he's in the clear, and"—looking fixedly at Garth—"I know he is. Maybe we'd better take along a little of his booze. That'll shut him up if he makes a beef."

"Take it along, anyway, if it's any good," Garth suggested.

Cops sprawled into the wicker armchairs around the tables. One of them yelled jocosely for a waiter. Stutenroth roused them to another hunt.

Garth looked into those rooms which he personally had not been in on the first trip. Naideth went with him and the mopper dragged behind.

They reached the second floor. Heavy footfalls echoed through halls and up stairways, but, for the moment, Garth was alone with Naideth. The deputy chief went to a window. He stood looking down at the police cars and the mob that now surrounded them. He turned, started to say something to Garth, then frowned himself into silence.

Doors made brown oblongs in three of the room's tan walls. Garth opened one. He looked into a bathroom. Another door was set in the wall directly opposite. He crossed the bathroom and went into a bedroom similar to the one he had just left.

The mopper followed. Naideth didn't.

The footfalls and conversation of the police sounded suddenly distant.

Garth spun around. The door into the bathroom was closed. The mopper stood against it. About three fourths of the stupidity was gone from his face. He held an automatic on Garth. A grin spread slowly, malevolently across his mouth, into his cheeks.

"Whitey Schwartz is home to you," he said.

In the room there was an uncanny stillness. Beyond the closed windows, street noises rose in chaotic confusion. The bawled commands of Stutenroth, the whine of cars in low gears, the shrill cries of street viragos, and Bronx cheers from the men and boys of the neighborhood, interfused in a clangorous racket that was at once near and remote.

Garth heard the police ears go from the block. He said: "Hustle Whitey Schwartz along, son. I haven't got all day."

"You've got all your life," the other returned.

He reached backward, opened the door that led into the bathroom, stepped away from it, and waved Garth to pass.

Garth's arms hung loosely at his sides. His hands were empty, but his gun was sticking butt uppermost from the right side pocket of his coat. His arm, as he walked, had only to be drawn up a scant ten inches for his fingers to lock on the

gun. But ten inches with an automatic on you is infinity.

Garth moved in long, lazy strides. The pinkish skin of his forehead was smoothly untroubled. The ends of his small mouth were slightly upturned in a near smile. His wide blue eyes looked serenely ahead.

The automatic's yawning snout moved almost imperceptibly in little throbbing jerks. The knuckles of the hand holding it stood out whitely. The gunman's eyes contracted. Lines about his mouth deepened. Garth was too calm, too innocent. The hood watched him uneasily.

Coming near the door, Garth passed the gunman. The hood reached out his left hand and plucked the gun from Garth's pocket. He was close to Garth at that instant—so close that Garth heard breath wheeze through the fellow's teeth as his tension relaxed.

Garth passed into the bathroom. In a long mirror paneled into the door opposite, Garth saw his own body from ankles to hat—above his head, the gunman's. And, as Garth took another step, the motionless hands of the fellow, each holding a gun, were reflected in the mirror.

In the brief space of time consumed in crossing the bathroom, broken, scattered thoughts erupted in Garth's brain, were considered, and tossed aside to make room for wilder and more impossible ones. It boiled down to this: Garth was in a bad spot to make a fight, but, bad as it was, there wouldn't likely be a better time or place.

The gangster, with two guns on Garth's back, said easily: "Open that door and go through."

Garth put his hand to the knob. He stepped back and half turned with the opening door. The movement threw him very close to the

gunman, who didn't like it. He jerked his guns in close to his sides and said, "Squeeze through."

Garth completed his turn and came face to face with the gunman. His two hands struck out. They clamped over the fists around the guns like tentacled octopuses, forcing the guns back and behind the gangster.

With solid head, heavy shoulders, and plunging legs, Garth drove the gunman back. They barged across the bathroom. The gunman's feet crashed against the side of the tile bathtub. He bent back until his legs flew up from the floor. Garth, still hanging to the fellow's fists, went over with him. They smashed heads against the wall behind the tub, and slid lengthwise into the tub. Garth was on top.

The gunman put knees into Garth's stomach and drove up. Garth, hanging fiercely to the hands that held the guns, pulled the gangster with him as knee pressure raised him up and pushed him back.

The gangster's arms twisted, squirmed, and tugged in an effort to break Garth's grip. Garth felt one hand slipping. He threw his body sidewise, escaped the knees, and drove down on the gangster. The fellow went back. His head scraped down a water faucet, bringing a bitter softly spoken oath from him, and a stream of water from the tap.

Garth's left hand lost its hold. But the gangster covered the gun with his own body. Garth pulled his hand clear, doubled his fist, and sent it smashing against a lean, hard jaw. The gunman's head snapped back. Water from the running tap poured into his eyes, over his face. Garth's fist was back for another drive at the jaw, when the man under him twisted, squirmed a few inches on his side, and freed his

hand. The automatic came up. Its short barrel whipped along Garth's cheek, laying it open like a knife stroke.

A mad grin was frozen on Garth's face. In all the heaving, twisting struggle, the gunman had uttered no sound but fiercely muttered oaths. Now, with a chance to fire a gun, he had not done so. Garth was filled suddenly with new enthusiasm. There was no help within calling distance, and the fellow wouldn't fire—not until he was desperate. To kill Garth until Whitey Schwartz was ready for him to be killed, would brand him as a weak sister, and bring the ridicule of the mob and the fury of Whitey Schwartz on his head.

Garth ground his knee into the gunman's middle. The gun whipped up in another slash at Garth's head. He blocked the blow, seized the man's wrist, bent it backward over the tub's edge, and bore down. The gun clattered to the tile floor.

Then Garth's hand came away for another crack at the gunman's jaw. The fellow ducked under the blow. Garth's fist slid along wet hair and cracked against the tub. The gunman squirmed under Garth. He got one foot against Garth's side, and heaved. Garth was off balance. He went backward out of the tub and onto the floor.

The gunman scrambled to his feet, but couldn't get out of the tub before Garth bounded up with the gun from the floor in his right hand.

The man in the tub pulled up his gun. Matted hair lay wetly across his forehead. His eyes burned. He swayed in the tub, chest rising and falling in quick jerks. Water dripped from him. He gasped: "Quit! I'm shooting!"

From a distance of three feet, Garth pitched his gun. It crashed

against the side of the man's face, bounced off to the floor. As he threw the gun, Garth sprang forward. A cry from the gangster stopped him. It was a low-pitched sob, a long-drawn animal-like moan that held agony and fear.

He did not shoot. The gun slipped from his fingers, and both hands went over his right eye as if to hold back, or push away, some intense pain that lodged there.

Garth's elbow bent. His fist doubled and rose. He turned slightly to put all the weight of his shoulder behind the blow that cracked on the gunman's jaw.

The fellow pitched back against the wall. The hands came down. Their palms rubbed the tiles as if groping for support. Then the man slid down the wall and into the tub.

Cold water running into the bath stirred him. Garth put out a hand and closed the water outlet. Water formed a pool on the bottom of the tub, crept along it. Garth opened the faucet wider.

Weakly, the gunman moved a leg and raised his head. He stared at Garth and opened his mouth. Garth rolled the man over and pressed his head down, half smothering a cry for help. The water rose quickly. Garth's right hand, fastened in matted hair, bore down on the man's head; his left was clamped over the fellow's neck. Arms and legs lashed the air. Garth kept clear of them and bore down. Bubbles rose and broke on four inches of churning water.

The legs and arms stopped their threshing, started again, and then stopped. Garth took his left hand from the man's head and turned off the water. Bubbles stopped rising, and the water was tranquil.

Garth disentangled hair from his fingers and stood up stiffly. His

turning head met his reflection in the long glass of the half-opened door. Collar, shirt, and coat were sodden with blood from his gashed cheek. His wide blue eyes were wider and bluer than usual.

Garth stared at himself for a second. He was very tired. A gun reflected in the mirror, caught his eye. He put a hand forward and down to get it. When the hand touched nothing but the smooth glass, Garth looked incredulously surprised. A flash of reason came into his churning brain. He turned and saw the gun on the floor. When he bent to pick it up, he dropped to his knees. When his fingers closed on it, he couldn't get up.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING A PINCH.

SOFTLY padding footsteps beat like drumsticks on Garth's slipping consciousness. He was weaving on his knees, swaying uncertainly from side to side, as if he had decided to fall completely to the floor, but was having trouble in selecting on which side to fall. One hand rested over the gun on the floor. The other, at the quiet insistence of the padding footfalls, groped limply, encountered the bathtub and curled fingers over its edge. There Garth waited. His mind began to clear.

Objects moved from the dim shelter of an opaque void into the lucidity of a sun-lighted room. The black curtain that had hung between Garth and his thoughts was dissipated. The padding footfalls were interpreted. Some one was coming upstairs. Garth picked the gun from the floor. His hand rose un-

til gun and hand rested on a wash-bowl. He lifted himself slowly, taking his hand from the bathtub's edge, and at last stood erect.

His lowering glance fell upon the thing in the bathtub. He regarded it with eyes that were clear, intelligent, but uncomprehending. He lumbered toward the door. He opened it wide, started into a bedroom, and realized he no longer heard the footfalls.

Slipping the gun into a coat pocket, Garth went back to the bathroom. He leaned over the tub, put two hands under the gunman's shoulders, and raised them until the head of the man hung limply over the tub.

Garth turned away. He stopped in the bedroom to listen and think. He stared at two doors, then the window in the fourth wall, got his bearings and moved to a door that, opening, let him into a dim hall.

He saw stairs, started in their direction, and crashed into a man sliding through another door. His gun went up.

A hand seized his wrist; a voice whispered: "Hold it."

Garth looked up at a lean, grinning face. He saw in the dim light the features of Tod Baer, and growled: "About time you were showing up."

Baer laughed softly. "Come on," he whispered. "We've got to hustle. Whitey Schwartz and three of his hoods are downstairs in the office. We have to pass there to get out."

Garth shook his head and brought fresh blood from his gashed cheek. "We're taking Whitey Schwartz with us."

Tod Baer held two revolvers in two hands. He turned his wrists up, crossed the barrels of the guns until they pointed ceilingward, rolled his eyes back, and said: "Please,

Heaven, why do I work for a maniac?"

"Let's find the office," Garth said.

Halfway downstairs, Tod Baer stopped, pulling Garth to him. "I'll not do it," he whispered tensely. "I'll not fight against four hot rods with a half-wit that's been beaten too much about the head. I'll get you out of here, and that's all."

"You'll stick," Garth said, and continued down the stairs. At their foot, he stopped.

"To the right," Baer whispered.

"I remember. Are there only three of them with Whitey? No others in the building?"

"No."

"That'll be easy. We'll take 'em all," Garth said.

Baer sighed, followed his fat boss around the landing, down another flight of stairs.

Sunlight edged a door. Voices murmured beyond it. Garth, moving up, heard one say: "Go up, one of you guys, and tell Barry to bring the Pink down."

"Come on," Garth threw over his shoulder and swung forward. He turned the doorknob and flung it open. Whitey Schwartz sat with his two hands resting on a table. Six inches in front of his hands lay an automatic. A tall, loose-jawed fellow with long, stooping shoulders stood wide-eyed in front of Garth. Two others sat on straight-backed chairs near the table.

Garth yelled thickly: "Don't move your hands." But every hand in the room moved.

Tod Baer's gun came around Garth, cracked twice. Baer ducked to his knees. The tall man in front of Garth snapped a gun from a shoulder holster. Garth's gun sunk a bullet into the fellow's chest.

Whitey Schwartz's hand was on his automatic when Baer fired along the table. Schwartz yelled and pulled his arm away. The gun did a merry-go-round on the table, slid off to the floor. The room went wild with gunfire. Baer dived under the table, snagged Garth around the knees, and toppled him to the floor. He emptied his two guns at legs and bodies. The smoky room went deathly still.

Baer came out from the table. Three gunmen twitched and quivered on the floor. Whitey Schwartz, on hands and knees, was on the table. Garth, wide-eyed, pleasantly smiling, with that hideous gash on his cheek that looked like a misplaced second mouth, was on his feet covering Schwartz. Tod Baer gathered guns, frisked Schwartz for more weapons, turned to Garth and said: "You win. We take him in."

"Got a car?" Garth asked.

Baer nodded. "I borrowed one to follow them."

"Get off that table, fella," Garth said to Schwartz.

"You don't think you can do this and live?" Schwartz asked.

"It's done," Garth said.

"Not yet," Baer cut in.

Garth's eyes shifted slightly from Schwartz to look at Baer.

"They've got the stuff here—the dough from the First National," said Baer.

Garth's eyes moved over writhing bodies, up the walls, across a cabinet and desk and back to Whitey Schwartz.

"There's a safe downstairs," Baer said.

"That's swell. Come on, Whitey."

They stood in front of a long safe in a small room off the deserted night club.

"Open it, Whitey."

Schwartz's gray eyes took on a

yellow animal gleam; his face was as white as the belly of a fish. He stood with hands in front of him, one buried within the other and blood dripping through fingers to the floor. He said simply and dispassionately, "I'll not open it. Who do you guys think you are? If you want that safe opened, get yourselves a warrant—if you can."

Baer stuck the single gun he now held into a pocket. He came behind Schwartz, put his hands over the forearms of Schwartz, and drew them back until Schwartz stood with arms pinioned behind his back. Schwartz yelled at pain from his bullet-smashed finger.

"Show him your warrant, Garth!" Baer said.

Garth looked at Schwartz. "Don't you want to open the safe?" His voice was pleasantly modulated, almost seductive in its appeal.

Schwartz shook his head. "Have your fun, boys. You'll die soon and unpleasantly."

Garth lifted up his gun. Baer shifted and moved his arms deftly. One of them held Schwartz's two arms, while his other hand fastened in the gangster's hair. He pulled Schwartz's head upward and back. Schwartz lashed back with his heel, but Baer's spread legs avoided the kick.

Garth shifted and stood at Schwartz's side. The barrel of his gun lay across the stretched, white throat of Schwartz. He flipped the gun back a scant six inches, then brought it gently against Schwartz's Adam's apple. In the same pleasant voice, he asked Schwartz again to open the safe. Another refusal; another blow, less gentle, on Schwartz's throat.

It lasted three minutes. When blood came from Schwartz's mouth, he gestured toward the safe with a

foot, and sobbed. Baer released him.

Schwartz's fingers trembled on the combination. He got the door open and tottered back against Baer. Garth opened the safe's inner door. He pulled out a canvas sack, closed the safe's two doors, and said to Schwartz: "You'd better lock it."

Baer supported Schwartz, who gave the combination knob a listless spin. Garth picked up the pouch, held his gun on Schwartz, and said cheerfully, "That's all; you'd better hustle the car here, Baer."

Garth walked slowly beside Schwartz through the dim night club. When they reached the vestibule, a tinny horn honked raucously. Garth pushed swinging doors and motioned with his gun at Schwartz. Schwartz stood on the street. Garth slipped his gun into a pocket, but kept his hand over it. Baer sat at the wheel of a cheap coupé with rust perforations in its fenders. Garth tried to be self-effacing, holding a canvas pouch, and with a pocketed gun trained on an underworld prince. He urged Schwartz across the sidewalk with a prodding knee. Schwartz cast wild glances up and down the street. Baer held the door of the coupé open. Schwartz hesitated, one foot on the running board.

"You can't do this. You guys can't make a pinch."

Baer laughed. "Just a couple of kidnapers on a spree." He pulled the car out into traffic. Schwartz looked down at his smashed finger. Garth took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the man's lips. The coupé bumped over street-car tracks. Schwartz, wedged between the two detectives, uttered a tight-lipped groan, and sank back, half out.

"When you borrowed a car, you might have borrowed a decent one," Garth complained.

"Yeah? I had to talk fast for this, and give the guy who owns it all the dough I had—one hundred and twenty-five. He'll be a sap if he shows up to get his car back. Where to?"

"The district attorney's."

"The cops pull a run-out on you in there?" Baer asked.

"Uh-huh, they tossed me to the wolves. You just happened along nicely. How'd you make it?"

"I spotted you dragging a cop from that smash-up to the bank," Baer said. "Then the shooting started and it was an open book. I saw the get-away car, and got hold of this one. I knew they'd gun me out of a chase if I tried to tail them, so I got in front. Well, I figured they wouldn't make a turn for two blocks and then they'd turn left to get over one of the bridges. I was stalling along when they passed me. For a couple of blocks, I tailed them, until it looked like they were making for the Fourth Street bridge.

"They weren't driving very fast. I turned off, hit a parallel street, and got over the bridge before them. I got into a mess of traffic. They came up, going not much faster than the stream. I tailed them again. There were lots of cars, and they didn't pay any attention to this heap.

"Schwartz got out with the pouch at the Club Diablo; the other guys took away the car. They came back in about five minutes. A mob of them went into the club. In ten minutes, they started filtering out in twos and threes until Schwartz and the whole gang had gone, excepting one guy in overalls, who was messing around the front door with a mop. I tailed Schwartz. He

went over to a small joint of his about four blocks away on Sass Street. They holed in there.

"I stuck around until I heard sirens. I figured them for Schwartz's club and guessed you were in it, so I drifted back. A street crowd massed around the front, when I got there, and I milled along with them. Then I saw you and sneaked inside. You were surrounded with cops and I couldn't get to you, so I ducked under the counter of the check room.

"The cops poured out, and you weren't with them. Naideth was the last guy to leave. I heard him try the door after he closed it. You weren't in sight, and neither was the guy with the mop. I started looking for you—ground floor, basement, mezzanine. By the time I'd done those, the door downstairs was unlocked and Schwartz and three other hoods came in. I saw them in time and ducked up the next stairs. Heard him come up and go into the office. I went on and met you."

"It wasn't bad," Garth said. "I always figured, if I kept you long enough, there'd come a time when you'd earn your pay."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOOLED!

GARTH slapped the big canvas pouch down on the counter of the district attorney's reception office and asked a stunned clerk for Platt.

Platt did not see Garth until he came around the corner of a switchboard. Then he stopped short, staring dazedly from Garth to Whitey Schwartz to Tod Baer, and

to a gold-badged man from the sheriff's office who had followed them through corridors and up elevators to Platt's suite.

Garth laid a plump hand on the pouch. "There's the First National loot," he said. "And there's"—indicating Schwartz—"the murderer of Weller."

Platt's eyes bulged. He moistened his lips thirstily.

"There's three more of them, smashed up with bullets, in an office in the Diablo," Garth added, "and still another hanging over a bathtub in an apartment above the joint. He may be alive."

Platt opened a gate in the counter partition.

The cut in Garth's cheek had stopped bleeding from sheer exhaustion. Schwartz's hand was covered with a red, wet handkerchief. Platt murmured something to Garth about a doctor.

"Schwartz needs a doctor, too," he said, "but we can both wait."

They took seats in Platt's well-furnished office. The canvas pouch stood on the district attorney's desk. Platt stroked the sack unconsciously and looked at the stretched, white skin of Schwartz's face. He looked very pleased, and a little frightened. Here was a big-time criminal, and here was evidence. But here, too, was more bloodshed.

He looked at the gold-badged man from the sheriff's office, turned, and said to Garth: "You've met Undersheriff Evans?"

Garth smiled on the tall, unsmiling, gray-eyed man who sat with his back to the door. He said: "I'm glad to know Undersheriff Evans. I'll be glad to know all of the late sheriff's staff—so that I can have my gun out first when I meet them on the street."

Evans's long, serious face broke into a smile.

But Platt looked disapprovingly at Garth. He said: "Evans is acting sheriff now. We're hoping—those of us who are for law and order—that he will be our next elected sheriff."

"That's swell," Garth said. "And I'm hoping no more deputies make mistakes like that one last night. I suppose it was a mistake," he sneered. "I suppose that fellow says he thought I was Carruthers."

Evans shook his head. "He hasn't said anything yet. He's still unconscious."

Garth's eyes held a question.

"I shot him," Evans said.

"And it was Evans," Platt added, "who stopped the firing on the boat when he saw you in it."

Garth gave Evans a quick, appreciative glance. He asked: "Did you bring Salatino in from that shack?"

Evans shook his head. "No. He had crawled away—or some one took him out. I've got a party hunting for him now." Evans grinned. "But I'm more interested in this."

His long arm swept out in a gesture that embraced Schwartz and the canvas pouch.

Garth started to sketch the holdup. Platt listened for a minute, then nodded his head vigorously. "I'm familiar with most of it. They got a hundred and twenty thousand. I'll call Stutenroth, and you can give me your end later."

Whitey Schwartz's pale, expressionless face cracked into deep seams. His eyes warmed.

Platt picked up a telephone.

"That's the way you have to do it?" Garth asked.

"Don't worry," Platt said. "Nothing is going to happen to Schwartz

when I personally turn him over to Stutenroth."

Garth smiled. He said dryly: "It would be better if you didn't mention me to Stutenroth. Just say you have Schwartz and the swag here."

Platt nodded.

Whitey Schwartz chuckled. He turned to Tod Baer and said: "This is going to be good."

Stutenroth came in two minutes. Surprise did not show on his features. He glowered darkly at Whitey Schwartz, nodded an affable greeting to Platt, and turned to Garth with warm affection. His heavy eyebrows twitched. Loose blue jowls shook with his laughter as he extended a thick forefinger, dug Garth playfully in the ribs with it, and said:

"You old fox, you knew what you were up to when you sneaked away from us."

His laughter rose as he took the finger from Garth and gave his thigh a lusty slap. Tears came into his eyes. He brought a large handkerchief from a back pocket, wiped deep merriment from his face, then sent a hand under his uniform coat. Coming into sight again, its fingers held a great number of cigars. Soberly, Stutenroth offered smokes to the district attorney, to Garth, to Baer, to two plain-clothes men, who had come with him, and to Under-sheriff Evans.

This ritual completed, he glowered at Whitey Schwartz, turned to one of his detectives, and said: "Cuff him."

He pointed a glowing cigar at the canvas pouch. "Mr. Garth will want us to open that in his presence."

Platt glanced at Garth and smiled. He turned the pouch upside down. Loose currency spilled over the desk; heavy packages

thudded softly. Platt shook the pouch empty. Stutenroth stepped back from the desk.

On each package was noted the number of bills contained therein and their denomination. Platt wrote the sums of these packages on a sheet of paper. He went through the loose currency, totaled it, then added the whole.

He looked up, nodding brightly. He reached for a paper knife. Stutenroth's eyes took on a bright gleam. His heavy jowls sagged and lifted as he licked the end of his cigar. Whitey Schwartz looked at Stutenroth and smiled crookedly. Stutenroth did not see the smile.

Platt inserted the paper knife's sharp point under the glued edge of one of the currency wrappers. He pulled the wrapper open and lifted a blank rectangular sheet of paper, exposing another blank rectangular sheet. He dug deeper into the package, scattering blank papers cut to the shape and size of currency over his desk.

Color ebbed from Platt's cheeks. Without speaking, he went on through the piled packages that were supposed to contain upward of a hundred thousand dollars and found not so much as a dollar bill.

Platt sank back. He looked at Stutenroth questioningly, almost appealingly. The chief of police chewed on his cigar and said nothing. Whitey Schwartz began to whistle.

Tod Baer broke the silence. "From the time he came from the bank, Schwartz wasn't out of my sight for ten consecutive minutes."

Stutenroth laughed. "How about you, Garth? How long did you have the pouch?"

Whitey Schwartz grinned. He said: "These dicks are nice guys; I'll go their alibi. They didn't make the switch."

Garth looked at Platt. "Last night, Sutton left his home at midnight and went alone to the Club Diablo. The robbery was a set-up. Schwartz didn't like the scenario as it was and wrote in Sutton's and Weller's murders. But Salatino killed Sutton last night, and so Schwartz had only Weller to kill this morning at the bank."

Platt looked puzzled. He said haltingly: "You mean Schwartz knew——"

"Absolutely," Garth said. "He hasn't shown any surprise, has he? He knew the wrapped currency was the old 'phonus bolonus.' Sutton and Weller were in a jam. They knew the bank examiners were either in town or coming. Schwartz pulled the robbery to save Sutton and Weller from showing short. Of course, the loose dough is good and there's twelve or fifteen thousand of that, so his morning wasn't to be entirely wasted. But I don't think he would have pulled the robbery for that alone. He wanted to shield Sutton."

Platt's eyes moved to Whitey Schwartz.

Schwartz grinned and said to Garth: "Don't you dicks let any one kid you. You're the only guys that aren't glad Sutton got his, and that I turned the heat on Weller."

Platt drew himself up. "Don't forget, my man, you're confessing murder."

Schwartz laughed. "Don't be a sap. You have me, sure. But use your head. Do the best people of Plattsville want a bank failure at a time like this? Do the merchants want the depositors to lose their jack? Do the other bankers want to have the confidence broken down in their banks? Here's your angle: You had me in here for questioning, but you had nothing on me.

Holdup insurance will probably cover the loss at the bank. The First National will go merrily on.

"I didn't go into this thing for profit. Hell, I'm even willing to kick back that loose paper. Sutton came to me whining that he was up against it, that he and Weller had lost a hundred grand in the market and that the examiners were in town.

"Sutton had loaned me dough. He had other underworld connections. He was the sort of guy who would spill everything he knew if he was caught short and taken to trial. And then a bank failure would have been just as bad for my business as for any one else's. So I said I'd cover their shortage with a stick-up this morning. I was going to burn the two of them down because I have no use for a guy that can't stand on his own feet. Sutton and Weller were washed up and dangerous."

Platt was strangely subdued. He said softly: "So you think for the good of the community, I should shield Sutton and Weller, allow an insurance company to foot the shortage, and turn you loose?"

Schwartz grinned at Stutenroth and nodded.

Platt went on: "Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do for the good of the community. I am going to hang you. And I'm going to photograph this trash"—he waved his arm to the piled papers—"and give copies of the photos with a statement to the press. Take him to jail, Stutenroth, and hold him for murder."

"I wouldn't worry so much about the bank, anyway," Garth said. "The shortage may be collectable. The money wasn't lost. It was loaned to Batista. Sutton took unsecured notes which he kept at his

home. Carruthers stole the notes, and Batista refused to pay."

Schwartz jumped up. His handcuffed wrists strained apart. "That's a gambler!" he snarled. "They welsh every time. Let me go. I'll collect that dough for you. Notes or no notes. Why, just when everything was going swell, he wrecks the town. If Sutton had told me that, I'd have had his dough in five minutes. But he was yellow. He was afraid of what Batista might have done after I collected."

Garth was watching Platt. He said: "If you could find those notes, at Carruthers's place, Batista could be made to pay, legally."

Platt looked unutterably weary. "Try it," he said to Undersheriff Evans. He looked up at Stutenroth. "I told you to get this fellow to jail."

Whitey Schwartz, going to the door, turned. He grinned over the room, and nodded to Garth and Baer. "See you fellows some more."

The office was cleared of all but Platt, Garth, and Baer. The district attorney took Garth's hands. "You got a job of work done today," he said warmly. He dropped back into his chair. "But all this killing is ghastly. Well, it's done. Carruthers is finished. Now, Schwartz. It looks as if it just happened. But I can't forget that you've been in all of it, and I have a feeling that you stirred things up, made them boil over the way they did.

"I think we've come to the end of rampant crime in Plattsville. I am having a few friends out to my house for dinner to-night. It will be something of a celebration. The mayor will be there, Davis, the president of the chamber of commerce, and others who have been

interested in suppressing crime here."

Garth looked doubtful. He wanted sleep. But he wanted, too, to meet the mayor and some of the others.

Platt seemed to read his thoughts. "We can make dinner at seven thirty," he said. "That will give you time to get some rest."

"I'll be glad to come," Garth promised.

"And you, Baer?" Platt added.

Baer looked into Garth's eyes. He shook his head, murmured appreciation and regrets.

Platt followed them to the door. He put his arm on Garth's shoulder, and said: "Sutton's exposure hurt. He was my friend."

Garth and Baer stood outside the door. Baer said: "Well, he seems to think it's over. To-night's dinner is to hand you an embossed check."

Garth shook his head and grinned. "They can't get rid of me as easily as that. We've got Batista to clean out, and——"

"Stutenroth to kill," Baer finished. "And, yeah, there's the master mind to get. I'll lay you odds it's the mayor."

Garth grinned. "You go down to the jail," he said. "Scout the joint carefully, and, when you've picked a spot, stick there. I want to know the minute Schwartz crashes out, and I want to know where he goes."

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE DINNER.

THE telephone ringing in a room of an obscure hotel at a quarter to six woke Garth. He took a shower, shaved, and dressed.

At a quarter after six, he parked

his car near the city hall and found Baer. They went to a narrow street or wide alley directly behind the jail. Open gates gave entrance to a courtyard, where patrol cars, ambulances, and other department machines were parked. They stood opposite the gateway, and Baer pointed out the cell he said was occupied by Whitey Schwartz. It was on the main floor with a barred window not ten feet from the ground. The two men walked on.

"Go and eat," Garth said, "and be back by seven. Schwartz will crash. If he does while you're away, look for me around his joint; not the Diablo, but the one on Sass Street. If you don't find me there, look around Batista's Bijou Club. It's a new high-class joint of his on West Seventh Street."

Garth walked halfway up the block and watched the courtyard. There were no suspicious-looking people in the vicinity, and very little life in the police courtyard. Lights in the jail came on. They made a yellow square of the window in Schwartz's cell, but Garth saw no sign of the prisoner.

As he watched and waited, twilight faded and darkness settled over the district. Lights burned above doors in the courtyard. One of the doors opened, and Garth saw Naideth emerge. The deputy chief went to a curtained roadster that was parked almost directly under the window of Schwartz's cell. He sat there in darkness.

Garth walked across the narrow street. He watched his chance and slipped unnoticed into the courtyard. Moving along a wall, he came to an ambulance. Its open rear doors offered shelter. Garth stood on the step and watched.

At five minutes to seven, a hand rose into the yellow square of the

cell window. It broke off three bars as if they were bread sticks.

Schwartz's head rose into the window. He pulled himself up and put his legs through, turned and lowered himself until he hung outside at arm's length. He glanced down at the narrow space between Naideth's car and the jail wall, then dropped.

As he dropped, a jet of flame leaped from Naideth's car and the crash of a single shot thundered through the yard.

Schwartz lay on the ground.

Naideth jumped from his car. Doors opened. Schwartz staggered to his feet. His hand came up with a gun. Flame flashed from it, and Naideth fell.

A voice at the yard's entrance shouted:

"Keep still, you dirty rats! We've got a submachine gun on you. Come on, Schwartz."

Schwartz stood over Naideth. He started toward the voice, then turned and fired two more shots into the deputy chief. He walked slowly across the courtyard. No one offered to stop him; no one fired at him.

Three men encircled and hurried him to the street.

For seconds there was no movement, no sound in the yard. Then the place suddenly writhed with dodging, running figures. Garth joined them and reached the street.

A car spun around a corner at the end of the block. Garth, running with the crowd from headquarters, felt an arm pull him aside.

"Go to your dinner, I'm after them," Baer said.

Garth dropped out of the chase.

Janice Platt was there to act as hostess at her brother-in-law's dinner. She was in the living room

when Garth arrived. Seeing him, she crossed the room with outstretched hand. Others were present. There was no opportunity for her to say anything more than a conventional greeting. But in her handclasp, in the depths of her blue eyes as she turned them on Garth, there was more than a greeting, more than gratitude. There was a subtle but deep understanding; a vague something that was telling Garth that there existed between them a bond that might never be broken.

Garth felt suddenly close to the beautiful, tall blond woman—closer than he had been when he put his arms around her to lead her from Carruthers's resort. Her eyes held him enchanted. He forgot the others who were present in this moment of strange intimacy, and somehow felt peculiarly, happily alone with her.

Platt's voice recalled him. Introductions followed. Then came dinner.

Twelve sat down to the table. Janice Platt, acting as her brother-in-law's hostess, was the only woman. Of the men, only two held any particular interest for Garth—Mayor Sifton Hall and Deputy District Attorney Goodman.

The mayor was a small man. He had a small, round face. Some peculiarity of pigment gave it a mottled, gray color, as if his skin had been lifted and gray powder dusted beneath it. He had small, birdlike eyes that were eternally restless. A slight deformity in his neck caused his head to rest crookedly, with chin always pointing down across his chest.

He spoke a great deal during the dinner, and always in terms of citizenship, community spirit, the responsibility of civic leadership, and other rhetorical terms that roll natu-

rally around the tongue of a politician.

Platt's assistant was a big, bluff, short-spoken fellow, only a year or two younger than Platt. He had unruly hair, bold eyes, belligerent, shaggy brows, and a wide, hard mouth. He looked like the reincarnation of a pirate.

The dinner was long and tedious. Every one but Garth and Janice Platt had a lot to say. Apparently, all were satisfied that the annihilation of Carruthers's gang, and the capture of Whitey Schwartz ended crime and heralded the millenium in Plattsville.

They went at last into the living room for coffee. Logs crackled in a fireplace. Most of the company settled in davenport before it. Garth was exceedingly drowsy. He moved beyond the group to a far corner of the room.

Goodman, Platt's assistant, followed him. He asked sharp, inquisitive questions, to which Garth gave dull, noncommittal answers. Goodman tired of it and left. Garth wondered why he didn't receive a telephone call from Tod Baer.

His eyes fell on Janice Platt. She was wandering around the room, sitting here and there, making herself agreeable to every one. Platt's eyes followed her every step. In them was the dumb, watchful, worshipping, anxious love of a spaniel.

Garth left the corner. He wandered to Platt's side, chatted with him, circulated among the others, then at last was called to the telephone.

Baer's voice came over the line, saying: "They drove out to Schwartz's little joint on Sass Street, but didn't stay there five minutes. Schwartz came out and went to a basement fruit store at 6235 East Sixth Street. An old

woman runs the place. It looks like a hideaway. Cars are gathering in the block and loading up with Schwartz's hoods. No cops in sight."

Garth's round eyes shone with pleasure. His face was cherubic, boyish, shingly happy as he said: "Call me again when the cars leave. And whatever you do, don't get close to those fellows."

He returned to the living room. A financier was explaining to Platt just how the imprisonment of Whitey Schwartz had removed the yoke of gangland from Plattsville. The man saw Garth and called him over to confirm something or other. Garth did not even hear his question.

He saw Janice Platt sitting near the bay window in a chair Goodman had recently vacated. Her eyes called to him. Garth was going to her when the telephone rang again. A servant summoned Garth.

Baer's voice was vibrant with excitement. He said: "Three cars of them shoved off toward the Seventh Street bridge. One of the cars carried a guy with a Tommy. What do I do?"

"Go home!" Garth said.

He jiggled the receiver prong and asked for headquarters. Naideth's death and Schwartz's escape had brought Stutenroth back to his office—if he had left it. Garth got him on the line and said:

"Schwartz has taken three cars of his hoods over to Batista's."

Stutenroth's exuberant thanks sounded sincere.

Garth stood framed in the living room's draped doorway. "Whitey Schwartz crashed out of jail at seven o'clock," he said simply.

Garth watched the faces of Mayor Sifton Hall, Goodman, and Platt. He continued: "Naideth shot

Schwartz, and was then killed by him."

Platt broke the dramatic hush. "But—but, why wasn't I notified?" he demanded.

"Schwartz has gathered his mob and gone over to Batista's," Garth added. "I have just telephoned Chief Stutenroth to inform him of that. Schwartz's mob will wipe out Batista's. And Stutenroth will wipe out Schwartz's. There's the end of your gangs."

Platt jumped up. "We must stop it!" he shouted. "It's ghastly."

Garth strolled on into the room. Platt ran toward the door. Mayor Hall and Goodman rose to grip his arms. They held him.

"Let them shoot it out!" Goodman said.

"There's nothing we can do," Mayor Hall said. "If Garth has notified the police, then the business is in the proper hands."

Platt writhed in the restraining arms. He said: "I can telephone Batista. Tell him to clear out of his place. That will prevent bloodshed."

The mayor and Goodman let Platt go. When they did, Garth moved back into the doorway.

"It's too late to telephone Batista," he said pleasantly. "Anyway, you're not going to. I won't stand for it. You hired me to clean up your town. Now, your town is getting cleaned, and, if you don't like it, it's too late for you to do anything about it. If twenty of these fellows kill each other off tonight, what's the odds? Last year, you had some fifty murders. This year, you may as well have 'em all in one day and be finished with the whole job."

"Stand aside, Garth, you're mad," Platt shouted.

Garth drew a gun. "No one is

leaving this room for five minutes," he said. "Who else wants to save these gangsters?" No one spoke. "That's swell," Garth said. "Mr. Platt only wants to prevent bloodshed. But I thought we might have another Sutton among us."

Two minutes dragged past. Platt said to Goodman: "I'm thinking of the news reports. Our papers in the morning——"

"I don't care if your papers look like a World War casualty list," Garth said. "There's no reason for you to send out any tips to gangsters."

Sudden determination strengthened Platt's face. "Stand aside, Garth," he said. "I am going to telephone Batista."

He walked on steadily toward Garth's gun.

Garth grinned sheepishly. "Oh, well," he said, "if you feel so strongly about it."

Platt walked past Garth, and ran to the phone.

Garth crossed the room to the bay window. He smiled down on Janice Platt. "What do you think about all this bloodshed?" he asked that young woman.

Her deep-blue eyes looked up into his. There was doubt, a little fear in them. "I think you're rather terrifying," she said. "Not so much for what you do, as for the frightfully innocent way you do it. But I think you're probably right. You make it sound right, anyway."

Garth smiled and glanced over the others.

Goodman had followed Platt to the hall. The mayor stood in the center of the room. His restless eyes jumped over the strained faces of the company. His head was poised drolly on one side.

Platt was taking a long time at the telephone. The Bijou was a new

gambling club. Its number was not in the directory. Garth heard Platt ask information for the number, heard him call it. Then there was a long silence.

Platt appeared in the doorway. He said in a strained, dramatic voice: "They do not answer."

Janice Platt looked at Garth. Her eyes, moving across the room, softened with sympathy. She gave her arm to Garth, for him to help her to arise. She smiled, then walked across the room toward her brother-in-law. Garth, fatigued, dropped instantly into her chair. A bullet splintered glass, passed over Garth's head, and struck the mayor exactly between the eyes.

Mayor Sifton Hall banged to the floor. There were shouts and a scream. Then some one plunged the room into darkness.

"Turn on a light," Platt called. He shouted twice, then the lights came on.

Platt ran to the mayor's side. Some one went to the telephone.

"Who turned off the lights?" Platt asked, looking up.

The president of the chamber of commerce said: "I did. That shot came from the window. I thought another of us might be marked for murder."

Goodman came into the room. He said: "I didn't see a sign of any one."

Janice Platt's fingers clutched Garth's sleeve. She whispered: "He was out of the room when the mayor was killed."

The district attorney straightened. He looked down again on the mayor for several long seconds. He did not speak, but he turned his eyes slowly on Garth. They could not have been more accusing if a smoking gun had been in the detective's hand.

CHAPTER X.

SCHWARTZ'S LAST ACT.

IT was hours before Garth got away from Platt, from Stutenroth, and from tales of this night's gang and police war. At two o'clock, he came with Baer to his apartment. He wanted a hot bath, sleep, and the shabby comfort of his small apartment. And with the hot rods of Plattsville dead or dying, the apartment seemed safe enough.

But when they stepped from the automatic elevator and started down the corridor, footfalls sounded behind them. Garth stopped, turned.

His tired eyes brightened. A warm smile rounded his lips.

"As I live," he exclaimed, "it's the mopper! Well, I'm glad to see you didn't drown."

An eye patch covered nearly half one side of his face. He regarded Garth balefully with his good eye, and said tonelessly: "Come on. He wants to see you."

"Whitey Schwartz does? Well, I don't know. So far, I've got along swell in my interviews with Whitey Schwartz, but——"

"He wants to give himself up to you," the gangster said.

"Don't let them suck you in with a line like that," Baer said.

Garth turned his wide eyes quizzically on the hood. "I don't know that——"

"It's on the level," the gangster said. "Schwartz and me are all that's left. I didn't go to Batista's, or I wouldn't be here. Schwartz has three slugs in him right now. One from Naideth, and two from Batista's fight. He couldn't hurt you, and he gives his word it's on the level. He wants to see you bad."

"I'll go," Garth said impulsively.

Baer groaned. "All right, count me in."

The gangster shook his head doubtfully. "Schwartz didn't say nothing about you. He says: 'I'm going to croak and I want to give myself up. Get Garth. He's a square dick, and I want him to take me in.'"

"I go if Garth goes," Baer said.

The gangster shrugged wearily. "Come on, then."

They drove to the farthest side of the east bank's squalid tenements. Outside a small rooming house, the gangster told them to stop. Baer looked doubtfully at the dark building, and drew his gun.

The three men climbed two flights of unlighted stairs, walked down a dark corridor, and came to a door that permitted a thread of light to escape. To the gangster, Garth said: "You first."

He took a key from a pocket and opened the door.

Whitey Schwartz lay there fully dressed on top of the bed. His clothes were gruesome with dried blood. He was as rigidly immobile as if he were in death. But his eyes rolled, and his lips twitched into the beginning of a grotesque grin.

With economy of effort, he called Garth to the bedside by moving slightly one of his little fingers.

Baer stood by the door.

Schwartz tried to moisten lips with a dry tongue and asked for water. His gangster brought it.

"First"—Schwartz nodded toward the gangster—"let's make a deal for Barry. He wasn't in the scrap at Batista's. He was going to the freight yards for a train when I talked him into finding you. Get the idea? He put himself in your hands for me. All I ask for him is that you leave him as free as he was before he went for you."

Garth nodded. "That's fair enough."

Schwartz lifted his hand. "Scram, Barry."

Baer remained at the door. "Barry can go when we go," he said calmly.

Schwartz nodded indifferently. He said to Garth:

"I'm giving myself up because I'm full of lead and due to croak. I don't want to pass out in a dump like this. I want you to take me in—you and maybe Platt—because then Stutenroth will have to give me a break. I have paid that guy plenty scratch, but to-night he gave me the double-X. The bars of my cell were cut when I was shoved in there. Stutenroth fixed the time for me to crash, and then planted Naideth in the yard to get me in the back."

He grinned viciously, took a long breath, and started again:

"But I'm a guy that doesn't rely too much on any one. You learn that in the racket. I slipped a trusty two grand to go out to my mob with a note and bring me back a roscoe. He did. Stutenroth wanted me dead, because he figured if I got loose I'd be a fugitive, always liable to be picked up, and always liable to snitch if I got on a witness stand. He still wants me dead. That's why I can't have some one call up and tell him where I am. Get the idea? His cops would come in shooting. But if you take me in—you and Platt—why, he'll have to send me to a hospital, where I can die in peace."

"Can you walk?" Garth asked.

"I can't walk," Schwartz said, "but I *will* walk from the sidewalk to Stutenroth's office. You guys can carry me from here to your car."

"This is goofy," Baer said. "Why not call an ambulance? He'll go

straight to a hospital, then Stutenroth can stick guards over him."

Garth shrugged. His wide, innocent blue eyes turned on Baer with mild disapproval. "Schwartz is giving himself up. Why not play ball with him and let him do it his own way?"

Schwartz's lips twisted in a distorted grin. "You're not a double-crosser, Garth. That's what I like about you. I've always liked guys that couldn't be bought. No matter how much or how little you pay a guy you can buy, he's never worth it. Shall we go?"

"We shall," said Garth. "And we'll stop at the first phone and call Platt."

Baer opened the door. The gangster named Barry said: "So long, Schwartz," and slipped out.

Garth and Baer carried Schwartz to their car. Baer said as he kicked the starter: "You'd better frisk him."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," Garth said indignantly. "If I'd had to bang Schwartz down and drag him out, I'd frisk him. But he sent for us and surrendered like a gentleman, and I'll treat him as one."

"I appreciate that," Schwartz said tensely. "And I'll tell you where Batista has his dough. He's got the hundred grand he owes the First National Bank in a safe-deposit box. And here's a laugh! The box is at the First National. See, the dough was there all the time! I made Batista come through with that before I put the slug in him. I was going to take it if he had it around the club."

"While you're telling things," Baer said, "how about giving us a line on what will put Stutenroth away?"

"No," Schwartz said firmly, "I wouldn't do that. I'm a guy that's

always stood on his own feet. I would have killed Stutenroth like I did Naideth. But I don't want any one else getting him for me."

Garth got out to telephone at an all-night drug store. He reached Stutenroth first, and said: "I've got something good for you. Will you be at headquarters for twenty minutes?"

"I expect to be here forever," Stutenroth growled.

To Platt, Garth said: "I have Whitey Schwartz in my car. He's badly wounded and is surrendering. But he wants you with him when he gives himself to the coppers."

They picked Platt up at a downtown corner fifteen minutes later and drove to the city hall.

Schwartz had so much trouble getting out of the car that Platt wanted to take him directly to a hospital. But Schwartz answered that by walking stiffly up stone steps and down a corridor. Garth was on his right, Baer on his left. Platt came behind with a sergeant who attached himself to the group.

Stutenroth was at his desk with a police clerk on either side of him when they went into his office.

He looked up, saw Schwartz, and went for his gun. He was a trifle late. Schwartz brought up a gun that was stuck in the top of his trousers and fired before Stutenroth's hand got clear of the desk.

Schwartz turned. He offered the smoking revolver to Platt, and said: "There's your stiff, and there's your gun. You can hang me an extra time for this, if you can keep me alive."

Platt stared dazedly at the revolver. "Why didn't you stop him?" he demanded of Garth.

Surprise filled Garth's gentle blue eyes. "How could I? Did you see

him draw? He had it in his waistband."

"We should have foreseen it," Platt said angrily. "We should have——"

"How could we have foreseen it?" Garth countered. "Did you ever hear of a man walking into a police station to surrender and then killing the chief of police?"

Baer and Garth stood at the foot of the city hall's stone steps.

Baer searched Garth's eyes, and turned away. He was looking at the roof of a building across the street when he spoke. "You said you would, and you did. You killed him just as surely as if your hand had held the gun and your finger pulled the trigger. I suppose you're right. But——"

Garth's hand fell lightly on Baer's shoulder. He sniffed eagerly at cold, dawn air. "You know, the atmosphere seems cleaner around here already," he said.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

UNDER an assumed name, Garth hid himself away beyond reach of Platt and the police in a small hotel. He slept like a child for fourteen unbroken hours, called Platt, and promised to drop in and see him later that evening. Then, at nine o'clock, he presented himself at Janice Platt's luxurious bungalow apartment.

She was alone and expecting him.

He gave her his hat, looked at her critically, and said: "You have weathered the storm nicely. What a woman you are!"

She mustered a smile. Her eyes held some awe. She said: "You

frighten me, and fascinate me. When I look at you, I can't possibly believe the tales Sidney tells of you, and yet I know they're true. I do acknowledge that every man whose death has—shall we say touched you?—was himself a murderer or a criminal, except possibly the mayor, Sutton's butler, and, of course, poor Mr. Gerard, but nevertheless it is all terrifying.

"When we brought you here to clean our city, we hardly expected you to purge the gutters with blood. But that's what's happened. And one minute I find myself saying that you just chanced to be here for the holocaust, and, even while I'm saying it, I realize your fingers have pulled most of the strings. What have you been doing to-day? The last exploit I heard from Sidney or read in the papers, was the surrender of Schwartz."

Garth brought a mocking frown to his forehead. "I've wasted to-day. Slept. But I'm about to start again. There's a couple of loose ends."

"You mean Mayor Hall's murder?"

Garth shook his head. "No, I know that murderer. But I'm not absolutely sure where he is."

Her fingers clasped his arm tensely. She led him into the living room, and said: "You do?"

She sat in a deeply cushioned red tapestry chair. Garth seated himself on an ottoman at her feet. He was an odd, ludicrous little fat man, in this position, with bright, twinkling blue eyes, pink skin, and a rosy, round mouth.

"Yes, Salatino killed the mayor," he said.

"Oh, but Salatino is supposed to be out in the woods dying of a wound in his side," she protested.

Garth shook his head deter-

minedly. "Doesn't matter. He killed the mayor. It has to be Salatino. Every one else who was eligible was busy somewhere else."

Janice Platt frowned. "In the emotional stress of the moment, I made a mistake last night. I shouldn't have told you Mr. Goodman was out of the room when the murder was committed."

"You made a mistake," Garth agreed. "Not in what you said, but in saying it. A criminal should never direct suspicion toward any one. However, it was of no consequence. I didn't suspect Goodman. I suspected Salatino. And now—let's have him."

Her eyes were empty, blue spheres of amazement. "I—don't understand."

"Yes, you do." Garth's voice was pleasant, but unyielding. "Where have you got him hidden? Here? This would be the logical place. No one but me would think of looking here for Salatino. And if your brother-in-law came, you could easily keep him out of a spare room. Yes, I think he's here. Let's look." he finished brightly.

"Are you——"

"Please don't ask me if I'm mad," Garth cut in. "They all do, and you're too good to use the commonplace."

She did not speak.

Garth chuckled. "You know, you fit the part so perfectly, that, if you hadn't been guilty, I swear I would have had to frame you. You account for the leaks from the district attorney's office. You have the necessary social background to supply blackmail and snatching tips. You have—— Oh, well. Let's look for Salatino."

She leaned forward, put her two hands on his two hands, and with a gentle throb in her voice, said:

"Jim, something has happened. Something terrible has happened to implant some ghastly suspicion of me in your mind. What is it?"

He smiled. "Fair enough. I'll give it to you. You killed Sutton. That night, you unlocked the door for Salatino. Then he went out to the back porch where he waited for Sutton to come home. When Sutton got around to the front door, he threw off the light switch. You jumped up then, got to the front door, and stabbed Sutton in the back as he came in. That's how you got the blood on your dress, not from Sutton reaching up to you as he died. While your brother-in-law was fumbling around for lights, you gave the knife to Salatino, who had run through the house to take it. Having your brother-in-law along was a bold but practical idea. It kept you from answering a single question.

"But you didn't figure on finding me there, and, when I started questioning you about Gerard, and why you had sent him to me, you were up against it. So you ducked those questions by pretending you wanted to tell me the answers when we could be alone. But you knew I was likely to stick with you until we were alone, and so you faked the abduction act.

"You needed time to get answers to my questions because you hadn't figured on Gerard getting to me alive. Some one blundered there. Gerard was left for dead before he was quite dead. Salatino came back to the Sutton neighborhood, or may have been there all the time, and watched for you to leave. I suppose that was in case anything went wrong. You flagged him, screamed, and jumped into his car. Proof?"

"Let's go back to Three Pines, Carruthers's dive. You stayed quiet,

untied, until you knew from the shooting and commotion that your brother-in-law was hunting for you and wasn't going to be kept out. Then you stepped from a room and let me rescue you. We got to the door. Salatino came down the stairs. When I was going to fire on him, you pretended to come out of a coma and threw yourself around me so that I couldn't shoot. Salatino can handle a gun as well as a knife. But when he was shooting at us, the best he could do was hit the door two feet above our heads.

"You were afraid of me. You've always been afraid of me. Last night, you made a hard try to get me—not the mayor. Wounded as he was, you wheedled, kidded, or hypnotized Salatino into crawling out to do your shooting. For fifteen minutes, you tried to coax me over to that window.

"When I went, you raised your hand to my arm; that was the signal for Salatino—a signal that he could get through the window shade. I helped you up; instantly, you went away, taking good care to get out of the line of fire. Salatino fired at my shadow on the window shade. But I flopped down in the chair the second you left it. The bullet went over my head and into Mayor Hall's.

"I know what you're going to say," Garth went on quickly. "That all this is circumstantial—that none of it would stand up in court. To hell with courts, I say. But I'll play fair with you. I'll give you a better break than you gave me, or Gerard, or those other dicks who worked on your death-trap Committee of Ten. I'll match all my circumstantial evidence against Salatino. If he is not lying wounded on one of your beds, I'll forget all that I've said in here to-night and leave you in peace. But

if he is here—well, I can't be wrong, can I?"

Her hands covered her ears. She screamed: "Stop! Stop! Jim, I'll not hear you."

Garth laughed. "You're a sweet thing—you dear, clever, beautiful, foul murderess. Your Committee of Ten was great. All widows of gang-slain husbands. Poor saps! What a racket you had there. You tossed in five or ten grand a year and were the biggest supporter of the committee. Then you made a hundred grand a year out of blackmail and snatching. It was swell. So long as your committee was in existence, it wasn't likely a competitive, crime-combating organization would be launched. To make a showing, you hired dicks. Then, as soon as they got anywhere, you put them on the spot. Come on, let's look for Salatino."

Suddenly, she took her hands from her ears and raised her head. Her blue, tearless eyes looking into his, darkened until they were almost black.

She said: "Oh, Jim! The awful part—the terrible part——"

Garth interrupted: "Is—is that Salatino is here."

Her eyes fell, and she nodded her drooping head.

Garth sighed. His manner now changed. He became gentle, friendly. He spoke in a soft, pleasant voice, saying: "Well, we've got the worst of it over now. Let's see him."

She took him down a hall, through a dining room and kitchen, to a small maid's room beyond. Salatino was there. He lay motionless, slender, white, gaunt. His eyelids were closed. Garth moved to the bedside.

He drew down covers with tender care. He whispered to Janice to un-

bandage the wound. While she did so, he counted the gangster's pulse. Garth looked at the wound. He smiled gently.

"Not a chance," he whispered. "Low pulse—about the end. I give him till morning. Well, that's all right."

In the hall, he stopped abruptly, "What have you been doing with the bandages?" he asked tensely.

"I've been burning them."

"I'll get him out to-night," Garth said. "Drive him to the country. I don't want him found here."

"Oh, Jim, do you mean——"

Garth shook his head angrily. "Why did you do all this?" he asked. "It wasn't money—not entirely."

They went back to the living room. Janice Platt did not sit down. She went to the fireplace, leaned against it, and smiled helplessly.

"It was in my blood. My parents came from Europe. They were anarchists—both of them. My father worked in the steel mills. During a strike, he was caught damaging some machinery. In trying to get away, he killed a guard. He went to prison for life. All of my childhood, I stored up hate for the Platts. My mother was clever, more subtle than my father. We moved away. She spent everything to educate me. She taught me that the way to hurt the Platts was not to fight openly against them, but to win a way into their confidence, then—— Educated, I came back to Plattsville and became a stenographer at the steel mills. I kept myself under the eye of David Platt. I was young, not bad-looking. Well, we married.

"David loved to tell me scandals of Plattsville's rich. I stored them. Then, wearying of Platt, I went to

Carruthers with my scheme for blackmail. That's all. I hate the Platts. I have always hated them. I had David Platt killed by Carruthers. I would have killed Sidney Platt when he married me—which, of course, he was determined to do."

She moved away from the fireplace, came toward Garth.

"I don't like weak men. I like men who can play with other men's lives. That is why, Jim, I felt so drawn to you from the moment we met. You took these factions who were enemies, and you threw one against another until they were exterminated. I love a man like that."

She put her two hands on Garth's shoulders and looked at him. "Look at me, Jim. I am told I am beautiful. Do you think so?" She laughed softly. "Let's not deceive ourselves or each other. I have loved you from the moment I saw you, and I have read in your eyes that——"

"You read in my eyes what I wanted you to read," Garth said. "I don't like this. I don't like you trying to play me for a sap. You might have tried money first."

"But I have money, Jim; I have two hundred thousand dollars. I didn't offer it because I know you can't be touched with money. But now I offer the money, and myself with it."

"No," Garth said. "Fifteen years ago, it might have been different. When I was Gerard's age, I'm pretty sure I would have fallen for you, as he did. But, well, the fate of your lovers hardly induces me to join the list. There's your husband, Gerard, and Salatino, that we know of. Besides, my wife wouldn't like it."

Her hands dropped. She laughed suddenly, hideously. "Very well, arrest me. That's as good a way as

any to hurt Sidney Platt. I have money. Clever lawyers will make your thrilling account of my crimes look silly."

Garth shook his head. "There's no other way. Don't you understand, Janice, that you're in no position to talk of revenging yourself for any injuries, real, or imaginary, that the Platt family have done yours? You're a trapped murderess. It's childish and silly for you to talk of going to trial to shame and horrify Sidney Platt. Sidney Platt is a decent fellow. He loves you, worships you—poor devil. But he will take his punishment standing up. It's going to be far harder for you, because you are craven at heart." She winced at his words.

"You're at the end, Janice."

Their eyes locked in a steady, unwavering gaze. Janice Platt reached her hand slowly toward her purse and opened it.

Garth did not realize the purpose; his eyes had not left her tragic face. When it happened, it was too late for him to interfere.

Garth met Tod Baer at an early train. Checking the baggage, Baer asked: "What's the rush? Why not linger on the scene of your triumphs?"

Garth's cheeks were pinkly fresh. But the corners of his small mouth drooped, and his round blue eyes were muddy, dull, and staring, with no intelligence in them.

He said heavily: "We'll have to come back. But I want us to be out of here for a few days. Platt's sister-in-law committed suicide last night, swallowed a vial of cyanide of potassium which she had carried around in her purse. He hasn't heard of it yet, and I don't want to be around when he does. He'll blame it on me. That guy blames

everything on me. He'll say horror of the bloodshed I caused induced insanity in her."

Baer faced Garth. He went suddenly white. He said quickly:

"Janice Platt was linked up with Gerard. Janice Platt was at the scene of the Sutton-Danzig murders. Janice Platt was abducted by the Carruthers mob. Janice Platt

was at the window just before Mayor Hall was shot. And now you tell me Janice Platt committed suicide last night, but her brother-in-law doesn't know it yet."

Garth felt Baer's eyes on him. He didn't look up.

"You may be right, Jim," Baer said slowly. "But—well, it takes some time getting used to it."

A Thrilling Novelette,
 "THE MAN HUNTER," by HECTOR GAVIN GREY,
 in Next Week's Issue.

TWO BANDITS SEIZED

ON the fifteenth floor of the Pershing Square Building, New York, three bandits entered an office, swinging revolvers, and tied and taped the president and office manager of the company. They took two hundred dollars from the president and ran out. Two of them reached the elevator, but the third started down the stairs.

In the meantime, the president freed himself from the adhesive tape and got to the telephone, ordering that the elevator power be shut off. It was too late then as the two bandits were already at the street floor. However, the third bandit was just disappearing down the stairs, and the president ran after him, caught up with him by the time he had reached the lobby, and held him until help came.

The two who had dashed to the street separated, and one of them was chased by the elevator boy and the starter. He still held his gun, but his luck was running out. As he passed the Commodore Hotel, on Forty-second Street, a young man stood there talking to a friend. This young man's father was a police captain, and, although he himself did not belong to the police force, he had always been interested in criminal cases. His quick eye saw that the fleeing bandit was going to pass near him. The two pursuers were losing the race, due to interfering crowds. It was two thirty in the afternoon—an hour which means crowded sidewalks.

When the fugitive passed the young man, he was going too fast to notice that a foot was being pushed out quickly to trip him. He fell flat, his revolver exploding but fortunately not hitting any one. The young man who was responsible for the tripping, together with his friend, sat on the bandit until an officer appeared. Then, the trio marched the bandit over to the young man's father's precinct. He had quite a time persuading his father that his captive was real and not a joke. None of them knew at the time where their prisoner had come from or why he was being chased. The crook enlightened them, and two hundred dollars was found in his pocket which he had taken from the president.

The third robber escaped.



SIGNATURE OF GUILT

By CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

He wasn't taking any chances on the man who had played fast and loose with others.

AS the car drove into the old farmhouse lane, Ben Sykes looked out the window of the tool shop and, when he saw who it was, the effect upon him was startling. His heavy, usually passive face became distorted with an expression of passionate hatred which drew back his lips into a snarl, and nar-

rowed his eyes to ugly slits through which glittered the fierce fires of his suddenly blazing emotions.

Ben Sykes, who had recently been reduced from the estate of land owner to the humbler status of hired man, was repairing Steve Marlin's shotgun. He had the gun in his hands, and his fingers convulsively tightened about the weapon. A mo-

mentarily terrifying figure he made as he stood there with the shotgun in a half-raised position, that blasting look of hate blazing out from his eyes.

"It's Lee Batson," he said, and cried out the name as though it were something foul to his mouth. "There's the dirty, lying crook who took away from me what it cost me years of work to get. If I did what I wanted to do, I'd open this here window and let go at him with both barrels of this gun of yourn."

Steve Marlin was doing some work at the bench. Less industrious farmers might be tempted to spend a winter's day like this in idleness, but not Steve. When work could not be done out-of-doors, he found useful work to do within. The tool shop, on the second story of a detached outbuilding, was equipped for cold weather; there was a stove to keep the place warm.

"Lee Batson, did you say?" Steve Marlin's sturdy back straightened, and he turned around, a look of anxiety springing into his eyes. "Now, what on earth would he be driving out here to see me for?"

Ben Sykes laughed—a harsh, mirthless laugh. "What would you think Lee Batson wants when he drives nine miles out into the country through a snowstorm to see anybody? You don't think it's a social call, do you? Money! That's what he's after, Steve—money! That's always what Lee Batson is after. For your sake, Steve, I hope you got it to give him."

Steve Marlin frowned uneasily. "I guess it can't hardly be that," he said slowly, "for it ain't hardly been thirty days since I paid the bank a thousand on my note, and Mr. Batson said he was willin' to let the balance run until I've harvested the oat crop, come spring."

Another bitter laugh escaped from Ben Sykes's throat.

"Oh, sure! He got me in the same box. 'Don't worry, Ben,' he says, 'the bank'll see you through. Just let us have five hundred on this note, and we'll carry the balance until you harvest the crops.' And what does he do? He gets me in a place where I can't wiggle a finger, and then he sells me out. Not even one milch cow have I got left when Lee Batson gets through with me. Don't say I didn't warn you. Ain't I been tellin' you that he was gettin' ready to put the old squeeze on you, too? If my little forty acres looked good to him, I allow your place looks a lot better."

The shotgun jerked with another tightening spasm of Ben's muscles. "When I think of what Lee Batson done to me, it's all I can do to keep myself from killin' him!"

"Put down that gun!" Steve Marlin ordered sharply. "If you ain't careful, you'll be getting yourself in more trouble than you can get out of. Put it down, I say!"

Ben Sykes heaved his shoulders heavily and slowly deposited the gun on the workbench.

"I guess you're right, Steve; I ain't hardly to be trusted with a gun when I set eyes on Lee Batson and get to thinkin' of all he's done to me."

"And I guess you better go downstairs while I'm talkin' to Batson," added Steve Marlin. "He'll ask for me at the house, and Ella's to send him out here. I'd as soon she didn't hear what was bein' said—if it is money he's come after. Ella gets terribly worried about such things, and she's got too much to worry about already."

"She's goin' to have plenty to worry about now—plenty," muttered Ben, his hands clenching as he

clumped heavily toward the steep stairs. He was thinking of his own wife who had died the previous winter of pneumonia. That, too, he blamed on Lee Batson.

Steve Marlin stood for a moment, fussing with the tractor gear he had been repairing. The cogs were covered with grease. Still absently, he reached for some waste and wiped off his hands. The uneasy look remained in his eyes.

He tried to tell himself that the reason Lee Batson's bank had shut down on Ben was because Sykes had been a poor manager and a bad financial risk. With farmers like himself, surely, it would be to a bank's interest to keep on their feet until times improved and the price of crops got back to normal. Still, Batson was here, and that was ominous.

Two or three minutes passed. Steve heard the door open below, and Lee Batson stamping the snow from his feet. It had been snowing since morning.

"Hello there!" It was Lee Batson's high-pitched voice calling out. Steve went to the small, square hole cut through the floor for the stairs, and looked down.

"I'm up here, Mr. Batson. Come on up."

The president of the Midvale Trust Co. shook more snow from his overcoat and came up the steps. He was a tall, spare man with a thin face which always had a pale, cadaverous look. Anxiously, Steve watched the banker as the latter moved across the tool shop toward the fat-bellied little stove, and warmed his hands. There was a moment or two of uncomfortable silence. The farmer drew a deep breath.

"Sort of surprised to see you way out here on a day like this, Mr. Bat-

son. You—you didn't drive out here—just to see me?"

Turning around from the stove, Lee Batson nodded. "I'm afraid I did, Marlin, and there's no use mincing words about it. The bank's got to have the money—the full amount of your loan. Something's got to be done about it to-day."

Steve Marlin's heart began to pump ice water into his veins; he felt himself turning cold all over.

"But—but you know as well as I do, Mr. Batson, that it's impossible for me to do anything before spring," he stammered. "We've already talked things over, and you told me——"

"What I told you," the president of the local bank broke in sharply, "is that I would carry you along if I could. You're a good, steady fellow and the bank wanted to stand by you to the limit. But the limit has been reached. Credit is getting tighter every day, and all banks are being forced to call in loans that, in normal times, they would gladly extend. Your paper is overdue, and we've got to have the money."

Steve Marlin stood for a moment, incapable of movement, bereft of speech. Suddenly, the ice water in his veins turned back to blood again; hot blood that went searing through his body, pounding at his temples until it almost seemed his head would burst.

"Does—does this mean," he heard himself saying haltingly, "that—that you're going to sell me out?"

Lips grimly tight with unpleasant determination, Lee Batson moved his head in a nod. "I'm afraid it does, Marlin. No matter what my personal feelings may be, a bank must protect itself. The times, the present financial conditions——"

Steve Marlin laughed, a bitter, half-crazy laugh, the same way that

Ben Sykes had laughed. At the sound of it, the bank president drew back, startled.

"The times, the present financial conditions!" Marlin echoed. "Bah! You knowed, when you talked me into givin' you that thousand dollars, you was goin' to freeze me out. Do you stop to think what this does to me? The bank's got a chattel mortgage on everything I own—right down to the last pig and the last bushel of corn.

"I'm sorry, Marlin."

Again, Steve Marlin laughed crazily. "Sorry as hell, you are!" he shouted. "You lied to me—that's what you did—just like you lied to Ben Sykes and all the others. You think quicker than we do, which is why we're workin' from sunup to sundown while you're runnin' a bank. You dirty, lyin' crook!"

Lee Batson lifted his hand. "Calling me names isn't going to help the situation any, Marlin."

Marlin's massive hands clenched; the muscles of his neck swelled and stood out like whipcords. His eyes were blazing, even as Ben Sykes's had.

"Maybe I'll do more'n call you names. Maybe I'll do to you what somebody should have done a good time back. 'Present financial conditions,' you keep sayin'. Who made it? Who was it encouraged fellows like me to get in debt? Didn't you advise me to buy the eight acres across the road and offer to lend me the money to buy it with? Sure, you did. Maybe, you owned an interest in it, just like you was a silent partner in the automobile agency that loaded up this country with big cars none of us could afford to buy. Maybe, you remember I sort of hung back from buyin' that car, and you said we was livin' in a new era, that for everybody to own a

good car was what made the country prosperous. I guess it made *you* prosperous, all right."

Lee Batson smiled—a mirthless, ironical smile.

"My judgment was wrong," he admitted heavily. "It seems that almost everybody's judgment was wrong. And I'm no more prosperous than you are, Marlin. Personally, I'm broke. I'm trying to save the bank."

Again, that dizzy red mist danced in front of Steve Marlin's eyes. Suddenly, he grabbed up the shotgun from the workbench; his eyes were blazing with a light of madness in them.

"You listen to me, Lee Batson, before you go too far!" he shouted hoarsely. "First of last month, when I paid you over that thousand dollars, you give me your word that I could have until comin' spring to get my breath. You ain't kept your word with me, and now I'm givin' you mine. If you so much as lift a finger to sell me out, I'm goin' to kill you. And when I give my word, I keep it."

Lee Batson backed away hastily. "Put down that gun, you fool!"

"We might as well settle it right here and now," said Steve Marlin. "Which is it goin' to be?"

"You win," said the banker. Facing this grim man with the shotgun, he would have been an unusually courageous man to have made any other answer. "I promise."

"Put it down in writin'!" harshly ordered Steve Marlin. "Havin' had a sample of your promises, I wouldn't trust you no other way."

Unbuttoning his overcoat, Lee Batson brought forth a fountain pen; but it was dry of ink, as he now discovered when he uncapped it and tried to write out an agreement which would satisfy Marlin.

"I'll get a bottle of ink from the house," said Steve, and backed toward the stairs. Here he paused for an instant to add grimly: "And don't you try to leave this room without signin' that paper. Do you get me?" Steve's eyes burned with the fever of desperation.

Lee Batson nodded.

Marlin started down the steep steps, the shotgun still under his arm. In the shed below, he paused, hesitating, as it suddenly occurred to him that Ella, his wife, might be startled and alarmed to see him stalking in and out of the house carrying the weapon. So he put the gun beside an empty barrel that stood just within the door before plunging out into the white mist of steadily falling snow.

Up in the tool shop, Lee Batson, standing beside the window, saw the farmer hurrying toward the house. The banker's shoulders had sagged forward, and a look closely akin to despair claimed possession of his countenance.

Batson had told the truth when he said that his own affairs were in bad shape. While he was trying to save the bank from going under, he was also trying to save himself. No small part of the Midvale Trust Co.'s troubles was due to his own misuse of the institution's funds, and, if the bank failed, Lee Batson would be revealed to the community as an embezzler. He had dabbled in too many things, financing his personal ventures with the bank's money. Desperately, he was now trying to put off the day of reckoning by pressing these poor farmers who, in many instances, he had himself induced to become heavy borrowers.

For weeks, even months, he had seen the end drawing nearer. Now, it fully dawned upon him how fu-

tile it was to stave off the disaster any longer. With a groan, he made a gesture of surrender and despair.

The matter of some dozen or fifteen yards behind the tool shed was Steve Marlin's cattle barn, newly built the previous year. It was a prosperous-looking barn, except that hard times had struck the community before Marlin could get it painted. Between the barn and the tool shed was a thick-grown evergreen hedge.

Suddenly, the blast of a shotgun roared through the countryside quiet. Two or three minutes afterward, Ben Sykes burst through an opening in the hedge, running from the direction of the barn. Heading straight for the shed, he wrenched open the door and went pounding up the steep steps. His eyes were bulging with a wild stare that made him look like a crazy man.

He found Steve Marlin standing beside the open well of the stairs, the latter's bulky body shutting off the view of what lay beyond—Lee Batson there on the floor in a thick, horrible welter of his own blood, a terrible hole torn through him.

"I—I was out in the barn!" cried Ben Sykes. "Heard a shot. Sounded like a shotgun. What—what's happened, Steve?"

Marlin did not answer. He seemed too dazed for speech. He just stood there, staring. Ben Sykes ascended two more steps and peered around the screen of his employer's body. Then he drew back sharply, a shudder running through him.

"How—how did this happen, Steve? What made you do it?" he blurted thickly.

Steve Marlin swung around sharply. "You stand there and ask *me* how it happened! What a fool I was, knowin' how you felt toward

Batson, to leave the gun downstairs where you could put your hands on it. Yes, I ought to have had better sense."

For a moment, Ben Sykes's mouth hung open, and then his lips twisted into a sneer.

"So that's the way you're tryin' to make it—that I killed Lee Batson? I almost wish it *had* been me that killed him; but I didn't. And if I'd shot him, I wouldn't be tryin' to lay it onto anybody else like you're doin'."

The two men stood silent for a moment, glaring at each other. Steve Marlin drew a deep breath.

"I guess maybe murder does make a coward and a liar of a man, Ben, but seems like to me you're just bein' a fool. Everybody knows how you had it in for Lee Batson, how you'd made threats."

Ben Sykes's eyes blazed. "I tell you I was out in the barn!" he shouted.

"So I heard you say before, Ben, but it took you an awful long time to get here. And what proof you got that you *was* at the barn? Maybe you was only behind the shed, or behind the hedge. What you was doin', I guess, was to hide the gun, although I can't see how that's goin' to help you any."

Sykes again looked at the ghastly sight on the floor, and then his eyes wandered out as though he might be searching for the fatal shotgun.

"It was your gun, wasn't it?" he retorted. "You'd be the one who'd want to get it out of the way. And Lee Batson was goin' to do the same thing to you that he done to me."

Steve Marlin nodded. "That's right, Ben, Batson was tryin' to close me out. That makes it a lot easier for me to understand you doin' this thing, and I don't want to see you get hung for it. I

wouldn't want to see nobody get hung for shootin' Lee Batson."

Sykes laughed bitterly. "If you ain't tryin' to get me hung, then I'd like to know what you call it?"

Marlin was breathing heavily. "I'm goin' to give you a chance, Ben; it's the only chance you got. You haven't any money?"

"Would I be likely to have any money when you ain't paid me any wages for two months?" snapped Sykes.

"I've got fifty dollars in cash; been savin' it for an emergency. It's less than I owe you, but it's all I got. I'm going to give you the fifty dollars; then you take Batson's car and make tracks. I'll give you a good start before I call the sheriff, and it'll take the sheriff mighty near another hour to get out here—the roads bein' what they are. It's your only chance, Ben; I'm tellin' you that it's the only chance you got."

Another harsh laugh burst from Ben Sykes.

"I didn't know you was so foxy, Steve, or so rotten yellow. Do you think I'm so crazy as to fall for that stuff? Run away—fall for a trick like that? If there's any runnin' away goin' to be done, you'll be the one to do it."

Steve Marlin hesitated, his big hands slowly clenching and unclenching.

"Yeah, go ahead and call the sheriff!" taunted Ben Sykes. "You dassen't do it!"

An hour and a quarter later, a small inclosed car came plunging through the piled-up drifts of snow, radiator steaming, and turned into the lane of Steve Marlin's farm. The tall, lanky man with the grimly set, weather-beaten face who sat at the steering wheel was Sheriff Trotter, and his companion was Doctor Roy

Pettis, the recently appointed medical examiner for the county. It was a job that none of the other physicians seemed to want, for it took a doctor from his private practice at all sorts of unreasonable hours, in all sorts of weather. But young Doctor Pettis didn't have much of a practice, being just out of medical school, and the small pay that went with the position helped him to pay office rent.

"So you consider the case good as settled, eh, sheriff?" said Doctor Pettis as the car came to a halt. "Aren't you being a little premature?"

"I'm not looking for mysteries in everything like you're always doing," growled back the sheriff. "Bad habit you got, doc. Make a fool of yourself some of these times. Nothing so dangerous in a small town as making yourself ridiculous.

"Ben Sykes killed Batson. Steve Marlin didn't say so over the phone. Didn't say much of anything. But he didn't have to. Ben's been working here on Marlin's farm since Batson foreclosed on him. Bitter, bitter as gall. Made threats, even made 'em to me when I served the foreclosure papers."

The two men got out of the car and started for the house. A voice hailed them. It was Steve Marlin calling from the open doorway of the tool shop. The sheriff turned and went in that direction, Doctor Pettis plowing along behind him.

"This is where it happened," said Marlin, when the two county officers reached him. "Upstairs in the tool shop."

"Where Ben Sykes?" demanded the sheriff.

Ben himself answered that by emerging from the shadows where he had been sitting on an upturned box, stolidly waiting.

"Get on up there, both of you!" Sheriff Trotter brusquely commanded.

A moment later, the four men were standing under the sloping roof of the tool shop.

"Go ahead, doc," said the sheriff after one hasty look. Already, his gaze had shifted accusingly to Ben Sykes. The latter shuffled his feet, swallowed hard twice, and cleared his throat.

"I know what Steve Marlin told you over the phone," he blurted out hoarsely, "but it's a lie, a dirty, cowardly lie. It was Steve himself——"

"Shut up!" rasped Sheriff Trotter. "When I want you to do any talkin', I'll tell you."

It didn't take Doctor Pettis long to complete his examination. Scarcely more than a glance was necessary to tell him the cause of death, and that death had been instantaneous. It was a pretty horrible business.

"Shotgun, of course," the young county medical examiner said grimly. "Fired at very close range, probably with the muzzle pressed against his body. Charred his vest, if you care to notice."

The sheriff looked at Steve Marlin. "I guess I'll hear from you first, Steve," he said. "What do you know about this business? Who killed Lee Batson?"

Marlin's throat worked spasmodically. He shot a swift, uncomfortable stare at Ben Sykes, and then looked hastily away.

"I didn't see it happen," he muttered, "but I guess, from the way it looks, Ben Sykes must have done the shootin'."

"That's a lie!" shouted Sykes. "Steve Marlin himself killed him and is tryin' to shove it off onto me."

"Humph!" grunted the sheriff. "Speakin' personal, Ben, I'm in-

clined to believe it's you who's lying." His eyes moved swiftly about the space of the tool shop. "But, to begin with, where's the gun Batson was shot with?"

There was a moment of silence. Finally, it was Steve Marlin who spoke. "Ben must have hid it somewhere, chucked it into a snowdrift, maybe."

Doctor Pettis frowned. "I don't quite see the idea of trying to hide the gun," he observed. "Nothing alters the fact that it was murder, and it's equally clear that Batson was killed with a shotgun."

"Keep right on talking, Marlin!" commanded Sheriff Trotter.

Steve pulled at his fingers until the knuckles popped.

"I'm mighty sorry to give evidence against Ben, but a man's got to protect himself. This is how it was: Ben and me was up here in the tool shop. I was fixin' that tractor gear and Ben was doin' a mite of repairin' to my shotgun. Ben looks out the window over the bench and sees Lee Batson drivin' up in his car, and Ben says: 'If I done what I wanted to do, I'd open this window and let him have both barrels.' That's what Ben said, and, if he says he didn't, he's a liar."

"That's right," admitted Ben Sykes, "but——"

"Keep right on talkin', Steve," broke in Sheriff Trotter.

"The way Ben Sykes felt," went on the farm owner, "I thought he shouldn't be around while Lee Batson and me was talkin', so I told Ben to beat it. A couple of minutes after that, Batson, havin' looked for me at the house, come on out here to the shed. He—well, we was goin' to draw up some papers. I went to the house to fetch a bottle of ink."

Ben Sykes took a quick step forward. "Why ain't you tellin' 'em

the truth, Steve? Why don't you tell 'em that Batson was goin' to sell you out—just like he done me? And why don't you tell 'em that you said you was goin' to kill him if he went through with it?"

Marlin's eyes had a suddenly terrified look. "Why—why, I don't recollect——"

"Yes, you do, Steve. I was listenin' downstairs and heard what you said to Batson. Then he says to you, 'Put down that gun, you fool.' Tell 'em the truth, Steve!"

"How about this, Marlin?" demanded the sheriff.

The farm owner stood for an instant in nervous, unhappy silence. Then he jerked his head heavily in assent. "Yes," he admitted huskily, "that—that's true. I didn't see any sense goin' into all that, seein' as how I didn't shoot him. Batson had told me he'd give me until spring on my notes. I—well, I was just bluffin' him into keepin' his word, and I wanted him to put it down in writin'. That's why I was goin' to the house for a bottle of ink.

"I took the shotgun with me and left it behind that barrel just inside the door downstairs. Ella was upstairs. I called up to her, askin' where the ink was. She told me it was in the cupboard in the kitchen. I was lookin' for it when I heard the shot.

"Quick as I heard it, I figgered what had happened—that Ben had got even with Lee Batson. I got out here, fast as my legs would bring me, but I didn't see Ben; he must have moved mighty fast his own self. I found Mr. Batson lyin' here, just like he is now, and then Ben, he comes bustin' in, pretendin' he was out at the barn when it happened, and tryin' to save his own neck by puttin' the blame on me."

Ben Sykes, his hands clenched

into knotted fists, took a belligerent step forward.

"Maybe you can explain to 'em," he shouted, "why you was so anxious to have me make a get-away in Batson's car."

The sheriff turned toward Marlin. "What about it, Steve? Did you suggest to Ben that he clear out?"

Steve Marlin flinched. "Yes, sheriff, I reckon—I reckon that's true. I didn't want to see Ben get hung for shootin' a skunk like Lee Batson."

"This looks pretty bad for you, Marlin," said Trotter. "Especially the part of you tryin' to talk Ben into makin' an escape."

Steve Marlin looked badly frightened. He was trying to speak, but only a groan came from his throat. There was a moment of silence.

Doctor Pettis appeared to have completely lost interest in the two suspects. He stared across the length of the tool shop, a frown of perplexity riding his forehead.

"What I don't understand," he said, "is what advantage it would be to anybody to hide the gun."

Sheriff Trotter waved that aside with an impatient gesture. "Men get funny notions in their heads and do queer things when they're excited," he grunted.

The young medical examiner strode swiftly across the room and toward the window in front of which lay the body of Lee Batson.

"How long has this pane been broken?" he asked.

Steve Marlin stared at the broken square of glass, frowned, and shook his head. "Never noticed that until this minute," he said. "Don't know how it got busted."

Doctor Pettis was examining the window, bending closely forward. The corners of his mouth had be-

come tight, and there was a sudden gleam of suppressed excitement in his eyes.

"What's the idea?" growled the sheriff.

Doctor Pettis's only answer to that was to raise the lower sash of the window. He thrust out his head and looked at the white-covered ground below. Swiftly, he reclosed the window and spun around on his heel, darting for the stairs.

"Back in a minute," he said over his shoulder.

"If the doc would stick to his medical books and cut out readin' them detective stories," muttered Trotter, "he'd be all right. What does he think he's up to now?"

"The window!" exclaimed Steve Marlin, guessing at the answer. "Ben chucked the shotgun out that there window!"

"Or maybe you done that little thing yourself!" retorted the sheriff.

Doctor Pettis's absence was brief. It could not have been much more than a minute before he hurriedly returned, carrying the murder shotgun in his hand. He was beamingly happy over his discovery.

"Here's the gun!" he exclaimed elatedly. "Found it directly under the window, buried in the snow. The broken pane, of course, is how the gun got out of this room."

"I don't see how come the murderer—which ever one of these two he is—busted out a pane of glass when all he had to do was slide open the window," said the sheriff.

"Exactly!" agreed the young medical examiner. "I was going to mention that—among a few other little things."

"Then go ahead and mention 'em," grunted the sheriff, a challenging note in his voice.

Doctor Pettis's manner of triumphant excitement, of being about to

spring a dramatic surprise, irritated him.

"The thing's amazing, but quite clear, once you start figuring it out," went on the doctor. "To begin with, sheriff, the position of Lee Batson's body makes it quite clear that he was shot as he *faced* the window. Get the picture of that in your mind. The muzzle of the gun was pressed close to his body when it was fired; the nature of the wound establishes that beyond any reasonable doubt. Now, what would Batson, or any other man, be doing with a gun pointed at him? Answer: He'd be backing away as fast as he could."

Trotter's wits were not very nimble. Frowning heavily, he pulled at the lobe of his right ear. He didn't, as a matter of fact, quite get it.

"What I mean," Doctor Pettis went on earnestly, "is that Batson could hardly have been shot like that, at such close range, unless he had been backed against the wall. And here he was, standing in the center of the floor. Facing the window—remember that.

"Now, sheriff, if we measure the distance from Lee Batson's feet to the window, we'll find it just about a shotgun's length. Which means that any one, to have fired that shot, would have to be backed up against the window."

An exclamation of relief came from Ben Sykes.

"And if it had been me that shot him," Sykes shouted, "if I'd got the gun from beside the barrel where Steve left it, I wouldn't have come no farther than the stairs; why, I would have even come clear up the stairs. I'd have stopped, head level, takin' just room enough to draw a bead on 'im."

"Precisely!" agreed the young doctor with an emphatic nod.

Sheriff Trotter perceived the logic

of this argument. He also jerked his head in assent.

"That means it was Steve Marlin who done it. You see, Steve, you might as well confess," cried the sheriff.

"Just a moment," said Doctor Pettis. "Sorry to contradict you. No, that's wrong; as it happens, I'm glad to contradict you. The truth of this business is that neither of these two men shot Lee Batson."

The other three were completely dazed by this startling statement.

"Now I know you're crazy!" blurted Sheriff Trotter.

"Lee Batson shot himself," added the county medical examiner, and then went on quickly: "Marlin took the shotgun with him when he started for the house to get the ink bottle. On second thought, not wanting to alarm Mrs. Marlin, he put the gun behind the barrel downstairs. Batson, therefore, must have looked out the window and saw that Marlin hadn't the gun. Otherwise, he wouldn't have thought of going downstairs to get it.

"Why he didn't shoot himself down there in the shed, only Lee Batson himself could answer, and Lee's dead. Be that as it may, he went down there, got the gun, and brought it up here. He walked over to that window, put the stock against the bottom edge of the lower sash, cocked the hammer, and fired it with—well, I think it quite likely that he used that yardstick I see on the floor beside the body.

"These old-style shotguns have a tremendous kick; I've known 'em to almost knock a man down. The recoil was hard enough to bang the butt against the window, break the glass, and send the gun itself hurling outside where it was buried in the snow."

The sheriff was still incredulous.

"But why—why would Lee Batson do a thing like this?" he blurted.

"That's not so hard to answer, considering the whispers that are going around about the condition of the Midvale Trust Co. I've got my own private suspicions that maybe the auditors will find some things that Lee Batson wouldn't like to explain. Whether Batson deliberately planned to have it happen this way—to get either Ben Sykes or Steve Marlin suspected of shooting him—I don't know. But this much I can tell you: About a month ago, I gave him a medical examination for a thirty-five-thousand-dollar-life-insurance policy, and insurance policies aren't collectable if a man kills himself before the second year's premium is paid."

Sheriff Trotter still wavered between belief and doubt.

"Still," he objected, "you ain't actually proved that it happened like you say; it sounds right con-

vincing, doc, but you ain't proved it."

Doctor Pettis smiled grimly.

"You can prove it for yourself, sheriff, if you'll take a good, close look at the wood of the window just below the broken pane. There you'll find, dented into the soft pine wood, the monogram of the company that manufactured this shotgun. Then, if you'll take a squint at the vulcanized-rubber butt plate, you'll see the monogram on it.

"And if that's not enough, maybe we'll find Lee Batson's finger prints on the end of the barrel—and I'm pretty sure we will."

But neither Steve Marlin nor Ben Sykes waited for this detail to be checked up. As by a single impulse, the two men turned and clasped hands.

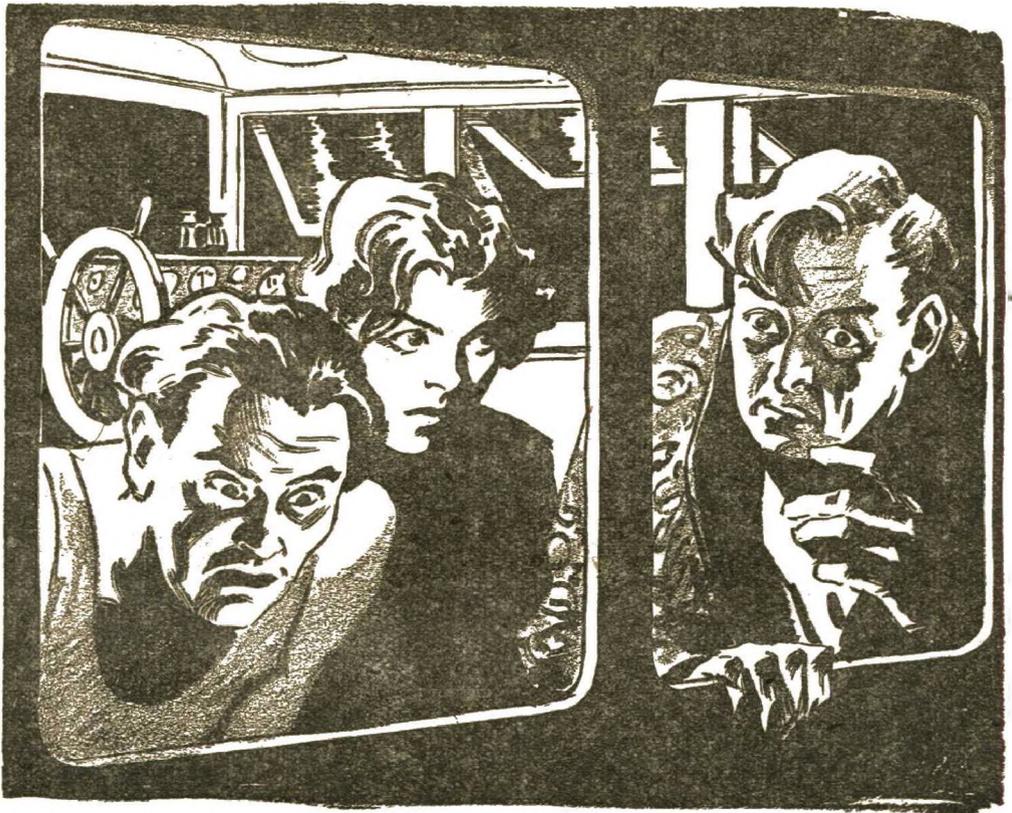
"That old gun of mine has got an awful kick," Steve said huskily. "I used to cuss every time I shot it, but I never will again."

A STYLISH-STOUT BOOTLEGGER

AT Council Bluffs, Iowa, there was a man, thirty-two years old, who had his own ideas about liquor containers, and these ideas were very original, to say the least. But he had reckoned without a Federal agent who knew more about dress styles than the average male does.

The Federal agent saw a man whose shape did not conform to the rest of his build. The object of the agent's gaze was far too rotund for his evident age, for waistlines do not appear on men until they are well into the forties. Nor did his clothes fit properly, according to the agent. The waistline bulged peculiarly, he thought, so, in order to satisfy his curiosity, he walked up to the "stylish stout," and patted a decidedly nonresisting stomach.

The young man who had apparently matured so early in life, was escorted to the police station where a careful survey of his attire disclosed a form-fitting copper tank. A small funnel was attached whereby the tank could be filled with liquor. A faucet allowed any customer one drink or as much as a gallon, according to the individual's capacity and—pocket-book.



READY FOR THE RIVER

A SERIAL

By ELEANOR BLAKE

Madness and revelry and then a ghastly ending!

CHAPTER I.

WHILE STARING AT THE CEILING.

ANNE woke to find that, for her, there was to be no escape from the syn-copated beat of that in-sidious dirge, "Ready for the river, the shivery river." It pulsed in her memory now as it had

kept time before to the throb of the boat's engine across five hundred miles of water. It had moaned with Chloe's last demand, wailed with her dying scream. "I'm ready for the river—the shivery river—so get the river ready for me."

And now the dancing lights on the white ceiling above Anne's head told her it was night, and the silence told

her that the *Flowing Free* was moored. Through the two tiny port-holes and the opened hatch, the river reflected the lights. But no broad bar of yellow, widening as it ran aft, came down from up above. The pilot cabin was dark and very still.

Tight! That's what they'd been—all of them. Drunk and asleep, Floyd had been sprawled across the bunk forward—the bunk with the rose-colored coverlet. And when he woke, he would be contrite again and bewildered.

Yes, Floyd had managed to be just unhappy, a little dazed, vague and apologetic over his wife's death. Anne recalled his face as he had looked blindly out over the water through the door that swung so helplessly to starboard of the abandoned wheel.

"I don't know," he had said. "I don't know what happened. I'm sor-ry."

She'd heard him say it then as he'd said it a hundred times before. And, of course, he would be able to manage it once more—twice more—a dozen times more, if necessary, before uniforms and lawyers and—bars!

But no! Not bars! Not for Floyd! Floyd was the fair-haired boy. There couldn't be bars for Floyd.

"I don't know. I don't know what happened." And, "I'm sor-ry."

His blue eyes had dropped like those of a child—would drop again like those of a child who has been found with his fists in the jam pot. His broad, self-indulgent, lovable mouth had pouted ever so slightly—would pout so whenever it needed to, before the remote possibility of his not being forgiven at once.

"I'm sor-ry."

Incredible! But that was what Floyd had said, looking over the

water through the door that clattered lightly back against the painted wood of the cabin, swung as it shouldn't have swung, outward over a black void of water. And then, he had added: "I'm tight. I—I'll have to——" With blank and unseeing eyes, he had stumbled down the companionway into the forward cabin that he and Chloe had shared.

Chloe! Chloe, who wasn't here now! Wasn't on the boat at all! Chloe who had—— But no! It wasn't possible. It was all part of the nightmare of being tight. It wasn't true, couldn't be true, that Chloe was in the river.

"Ready for the river. The river's ready. Get the river ready for me-e-e." The terrible monotony of that record, droning over and over during the whole trip, droning with the dreadful pathos of a good blues voice, droning while Floyd stood in the doorway and looked out over the empty river!

"Ready for the river. The river's ready. Get the river ready for me-e-e." On and on, while the three of them had stood still as death, Bert and herself speechless, Floyd muttering, "I'm sor-ry," and stumbling back into the forward cabin! On and on until it came to the end and the needle had scratched and scraped, and Bert had moved blindly, instinctively, to take it off!

It was impossible, Anne thought as she lay staring up at the white ceiling above her head, that it was only four days ago that the *Flowing Free* had slipped quietly away from the dock at Mackinac, heading south by east for Lake Huron. And it was still more impossible that, for only a brief twelve hours longer, she had known the incredible woman who had been Chloe Moran.

But nothing was really impossible

in a world where Anne Barclay had become Anne Durkin, Bert's young wife, scarcely two weeks ago. The two of them, loving and light-hearted, filled with a longing for adventure, for change, had taken, within a few short hours of their marriage, the first boat they could get out of Chicago. And with no more premeditation than that, they had gone into the hasty ceremony, headed northward toward the green island that rests like a crown on the blue waters of the Straits of Mackinac.

Yes, marriage in haste, and to a man she had known for little more than a month! But she was as sure now, in the face of the last four days' strain and the present terrible situation, as she had been when she murmured quite solemnly, "I do," that there would be no repenting. Bert—laughing, wise, generous Bert—would help her to recover from the recent ordeal as he had helped her in a hundred smaller difficulties. He would help her to regain her poise, adjust herself to life, understand.

Right now, she couldn't understand at all. The very fatality of every move they had made frightened her. It seemed to have been destined that they should now be situated as they were.

Why else had they wandered, arm in arm, just married, to the pier in Chicago, glanced up at the white stern of the *Manitou* in dock, been capriciously attracted by the swinging baskets of red geraniums and green vines that hung above her after deck and decided, with only a glance at their two wrist watches, to run back to their separate rooms at the hotel, pack separate bags as quickly as possible, and hail a cab that would take them to the boat?

Why else, having meant to leave Traverse City and take the train

back, had they changed their minds and decided to go on to Mackinac? And just at the last minute, too, just as the gangplank was being thrown out at the bay port, just as the cabin boy was running down the main cabin companionway with their bags!

There was fatality in it, she was sure—a dreadful and unbelievable destiny. This, surely, was not the sort of thing that happened to people like Anne Barclay—Anne Durkin—an ordinary, everyday, secretary sort of person with a turned-up nose and a wide, Irish grin. It just didn't.

But it had. They had spent a heavenly week on the island—a week of sunshine and late roses, of bright days in the water and on the sand, of long evenings under the quiet shadows of the trees. Quiet everywhere! No roar and dust of cars, no mounting scrape of changing gears, no rush of traffic! And, after the long, sweet evenings had come the ecstasy of each other's arms.

They had laughed over the intricacies of shared finances; each had learned what plays and music and what books the other loved or hated, filled in the gaps of their knowledge of one another's lives. Then Bert had mentioned Chloe.

"Funny girl—woman, rather! I don't know—I can't begin to tell you about her. She's indescribable. Charming, beautiful, stupid or brilliant as she wants to be. Selfish and vain! It's hopeless, honey. Every man who's ever met her has fallen for her, I guess. You can't escape. She's——"

She'd caught his hand, hoping her voice didn't sound as strained and little as it felt. "Did you fall?"

He'd laughed and put his arm around her. "Sure! But that was a long time ago. Oh, a year or two,

anyway. Don't be jealous of a ghost!"

The next day, they'd been lying on the wide, sandy beach, growing brown and browner, toasting in the sun. Bert had been face down, his elbows sunk in the sand, his chin resting in the cup of his hands. Suddenly, he'd lifted his head and looked out across the water, squinted his eyes and, sitting up, exclaimed:

"See that boat, Anne? No—the white cabin job just cutting across from the mainland? It looks like the *Flowing Free!*" He'd been excited, pleased.

"What's the *Flowing Free?*"

He had glanced quickly toward her—surprised. Then he had laughed.

"I keep forgetting you don't know all about me—all my friends. You see"—he had kissed her swiftly on her brown shoulder—"it seems as though I'd known you all my life." Then, changing his tone, he had continued: "Why, the *Flowing Free* is Floyd Moran's boat. She's all mahogany and brass and white paint. A thirty-eight foot, two-cabin cruiser—pretty. He's as fond of her as he is of his wife—well, just about. Oh, yes, that's something else. Floyd's the boy who married Chloe Greene last spring. Floyd makes her second."

Anne had laughed. "How old is she?"

"Chloe? Let's see—she'll be twenty-three, I think, this fall." He had jumped to his feet and stood looking southward from beneath a hand that shaded his eyes. "By the Lord Harry, Anne, that *is* the *Flowing Free!*"

It hadn't been any too easy to keep him from racing down to the dock then and there, to greet the boat on its arrival. But she had finally convinced him that Floyd

and his wife, even if they were alone, would be tired and wanting to clean up a bit before they saw any one at all.

"All right, kitten. We'll go down to-night."

She had sighed with contentment. Bert was always like that—always agreeable, reasonable, sweet-tempered. Not that she hadn't been conscious of a large curiosity concerning the *Flowing Free* and the owners of the little boat, too! But she was hesitant, being unknown to them, about breaking in like that. Yachts, even the simplest of them, were strange in her life, and she was more than a little excited at the prospect of being able to go aboard so charming a cruiser and to meet Floyd and his intriguing wife.

Service had been slow in the dining room that night, and somebody, newly arrived from Chicago, had been generous with liquor.

As their own small supply had given out several days before, they had consumed four stiff straights in a row.

It was after eleven, and both of them feeling as though very little of anything mattered, when they strolled down the dark, still road toward the dock. Their arms were around each other—awkwardly enough because Bert was so much taller than she—and they were singing "Chloe" at the tops of their voices. Bert thought it funny when he first started to hum it and, under the circumstances, it struck her funny, too.

"Chloe-e, Chlo-e, through the dark of night, we gotta go where you are," they moaned in a joyous duet, approaching the long board walk that jutted out into the water. Here, unlighted save for the red and green and soft yellow of her riding

lamps, the *Flowing Free* rocked gently as she lay.

Bert pounded, first, on the roof with his fist and then, getting no response, he beat an intricate tattoo on the glass door of the pilot cabin that rose just above the dock's edge. At last, a light was flashed on, dimly, in the forward cabin, illuminating the round, brass-bound circle of a small port, and then a voice—a man's—called:

"Who the hell's there?"

Bert was joyous. "Who the hell wants to know?"

Then a woman, speaking in a low, husky drawl, said: "Don't tell me that's Bert Durkin!"

"Right the first time. Let us in, Chloe."

"Who's us?" But, even as she asked the question, she was unhooking the screen door, swinging it back to let them enter.

Bert jumped down first, stepping lightly and with the sureness of a cat onto the narrow ledge that ran along the door, and so to the cushioned seat inside. Then he held out his arms and called:

"Jump! I've got you."

Anne abandoned herself trustfully, was caught and lifted through the square opening, and found herself standing on the gently swaying floor of the pilot cabin—a place dim and strange, new and exciting.

"Why, Bert! I didn't know you. What you doing up in this neck of the woods? And who's the girl?" Floyd was speaking now.

"Floyd—Chloe—this is my wife. Anne, the Morans."

"When'd you get hitched? I never thought——" Floyd was jovial, welcoming now. "For Pete's sake, come on in and have a drink. We'd passed out, asleep. Rotten going, drinking alone."

He switched on a light and slipped

down through an opened mahogany hatch, descended a short companion-way into a small, snug cabin and called up:

"Come on, all of you. Chloe, will you please bring the cigarettes?"

Anne walked down, cautiously, the short flight of steps, followed by Bert and Chloe. Silent because she was both awed and charmed, Anne slid behind a narrow, stationary mahogany table and sat at the far end of a wide bench, upholstered and covered with blue-and-yellow rep, and fastened against the wall. Not far above her head, stretched the low roof of the cabin, shining with white paint. The floor was carpeted, and a small, compact side-board filled in the narrow space between bunk and doorway along one wall. There was silver and glass and shining metal. Every inch was utilized; everything was neat, orderly, efficient, and lovely to see. She felt warm with pleasure, aglow with pure delight.

Bert sat down beside her, and Chloe was across the table. Floyd, bearing glasses and a bottle, joined Chloe on the opposite bunk. He lifted one leaf of the table, and Bert bent down to do the same on their side. Floyd poured, handed two glasses across, and offered one to Chloe. Then he slipped an arm around her and raised his drink.

"To wives!" He smiled, and Bert smiled back, tipping his glass to Anne's.

Slowly, with pleasure, for the liquor was good, she drank. As the hot, stinging whisky trickled, little by little, down her throat, she leaned back and let her eyes absorb, with sensual delight, the color and the form of her surroundings.

Floyd and Chloe were lovely to look upon. Then there was soft shadowed white of the low cabin

roof above their heads, dim gold and blue of wide-banded rep in back of them, the shining breadth of the dark-red wood before. Floyd was fair, with light skin, features as regular and perfect as those of a Greek Hermes, and tawny, deep-waved hair. He was wearing a black brocaded dressing gown that made him fairer still.

Chloe, whose head rested on his shoulder, was wrapped in a scarlet velvet robe. Her hair, very black with a straight, white parting down the center of her head, fell in long, smooth curls around her shoulders. Her eyes, half-lidded, dropped dark, curving lashes against her cheeks—against a skin that was creamy, opaque, without color. Her lips were thin and long, scarlet with rouge, the sharp corners lifted in a little smile that flickered and then died.

Anne sighed.

"What is it, kitten—little duck?"

Bert's voice, low in her ear, was all that broke the silence.

She looked up at him, loving, grateful, trusting him to understand, nodded lightly toward the two who were sitting, nearly motionless, across from them.

"Look!" she whispered. "Young Shelley and Mona Lisa."

CHAPTER II.

TEMPTRESS.

CHLOE, lifting her mysterious and heavy-lidded eyes, glanced up at the sound of Anne's voice, "Mona Lisa."

"When are you two going back?" she wanted to know, looking at Bert.

"We'd planned for the next boat, Monday."

"Why not come with us? We're alone." She indicated, with a lazy sweep of her hand, the after cabin in which they were sitting. "This is empty for the trip unless you do. We're sharing the one up forward."

Anne, in spite of herself, drew her breath in sharply, surprised and pleased. "Oh, Bert!"

He looked down at her, a strange, quizzical expression in his eyes that she could not interpret, and then up again at the two who sat across from them. Floyd, by this time, roused himself and was joining in.

"Sure. Why not? I'll take you on as crew, Bert. How's that? A hundred a month and all found—for four days. It's damned hard going, piloting a boat like this, running the whole shebang. Besides which, it interferes with any serious drinking. Chloe wants to tie up at Sarnia."

"We live in Chicago," Bert objected.

"What of it? You'll be in Detroit by—well, anyway, Saturday. This is Tuesday, isn't it? You can grab the Motor City out for Chicago Saturday night. Home Sunday. Won't that do?"

Chloe, her voice really eager, animated for once, even filled with a certain urgency, an appeal, coaxed, "Oh, do! If you want to keep us from slaying each other." She paused and smiled faintly. "Four days, all alone—the two of us—cooped up on the *Flowing Free*." She shuddered, dramatizing her distaste. Then, more lightly, with a new, half-ironic note of pleading in her voice, she said: "Oh, come on! It'll be a lot of fun—really. There's always plenty to drink, and, when we hit port, we'll go places and do things." Her eyes dropped, and a slow smile lifted for a moment the down-curved corners of her mouth.

Anne slipped her hand through Bert's arm, looked up at him with a little, teasing light in her eyes that said: "I'm depending on you, Bert—being feminine and and clinging and wifely—waiting for you to decide. Don't betray me, dear! Don't let me down now that you're my husband." And aloud, she said: "Oh, please!"

So Bert said, "All right," with only the faintest tinge of reluctance in his voice. "All right, I'll be crew on the *Flowing Free*." He grinned at Floyd. "But don't be hard on me, skipper. I'm a green hand."

They had another drink on that, and Bert agreed that they should both be down—luggage and all—at seven the next morning.

"Night, captain," he called and, putting his arm around his bride, strolled with her up the dark plank of the dock to their hotel.

So began the four days on the *Flowing Free*. There was sunshine and a sky that was dazzling blue where it wasn't piled high with great, dramatic clouds; a fresh, sweet wind that whipped the water into exciting little whitecaps clear to the horizon, and sent the small, neat yacht to pitching, bow and stern, as she headed south by east away from Mackinac.

Chloe was anything but Mona Lisa when she greeted them on dock in the bright light of early morning. She was wearing white duck sailor pants that clung closely to her hips and flared out below, a sleeveless, white silk blouse with a black tie, and her curls were caught up in a loose knot at the back of her head. Only her dark eyes remained unchanged—sleepy and mysterious, lighted by a challenging pride.

As a hostess, she was generous enough—languid, but with no ten-

dency to interfere—lounging against the cushions of the pilot cabin with a cigarette always between her lips and an imperious manner toward Floyd—imperious and perverse.

"Flo-oyd!" she said petulantly.

"Yes, dear." He was studying the navigation chart that, framed in glass, lay before him as he held the wheel. He didn't look up.

"Floyd!" she snapped.

"Yes, dear."

"Floyd, you'll look at me when I speak to you."

Floyd turned at that, his blue eyes unbelievably kind and gentle and soft.

"Sorry, dear. What can I do for you?"

But Chloe was pouting now, looking away from him out over the water, her profile, that was so clear and lovely that it made you catch your breath, outlined against the sky.

"I don't think I care to ask you now," she said.

"Oh, honey!" He sounded so contrite—bewildered, too.

Anne clicked her teeth together with impatience. "How can he feel that way?" she asked herself. "I'd slap her. Of all—— Still," she added mentally, in fairness, "she's nice enough to me—and Bert."

"Hon-ey!" Floyd was really worried now. He turned around. "Bert, will you take the wheel for a while? I——" And then he added, "Don't lose your bearings."

He smiled his quick, warm, ingratiating smile, slipped off the pilot's stool, and went over to Chloe's side. There, on his knees, with his arms around her waist he remained, unmoving, his fair, charming face lifted to hers. He was sorry—and there was hope and adoration in his eyes.

Anne, watching from her cushioned corner beside the stationary

desk, was breathless. The moment, the scene, were so dramatic, so tense with potential tragedy that was founded on nothing more important than the elements of farce. But, of course, that was the secret of this woman's charm—that and the mysterious, heavy-lidded eyes, the creamy skin, the harsh, seductive mouth. The secret of her power—over Floyd, at any rate—lay in her amazing capacity for sheer, unpredictable perversity—her ability to turn the lightest, the most inconsequential incident to account in her perpetual drama of love.

At last, Chloe turned from looking out the window at the flashing green and gold of the low, pine-edged shore, gazed for a moment over Floyd's head at the expanse of whitecapped water on the other side, and finally down into his eyes. Briefly, her own softened, then one corner of her sharp, scarlet mouth dropped swiftly as if with scorn. She took his face between her hands and slowly pressed her mouth to his—deep and deeper, consuming him—herself—oblivious of her surroundings.

But, while his face was still blurred with the terrible, given ecstasy of that kiss, she lifted her own, laughed a quick, hard laugh and, clipping her hand in a swift arc, delivered on his cheek a stinging blow.

"I wonder," Anne thought while she watched Floyd rise slowly to his feet and stand rubbing his cheek, a little rueful smile on his lips, "what Bert would do if I should ever act like that. But then"—she shrugged and glanced away, embarrassed by the intensity of the scene—"I wouldn't."

Chloe rose, stretched luxuriously like a cat, and descended the short companionway that led to the for-

ward cabin. Anne heard the sound of water running in the shower and Chloe humming to herself when it was turned off. Then her voice, pleasant but imperious, with the little whine that was its constant tone whenever she spoke Floyd's name, called up:

"Flo-oyd."

"Yes, dear." He stepped quickly to the forward cabin hatch and leaned down.

"Put on a record and mix us all a drink. I'm about sunk."

"Yes, Chloe."

So, to the tune of "Ready for the River" the afternoon began. Chloe settled into what she called "a little serious drinking"—a social process that, once started, never seemed to end.

She walked slowly up the short companionway, her lovely head lifted with pride and arrogance. She had changed from the sailor pants into a cherry-colored frock that was striped with metal thread. Around and around her slender, curving body ran narrow bands of silver and red and gold, rising up in a spiral that terminated, at last, in a glittering snakehead lifted toward her chin.

"Good heavens!" Anne thought. "Whether you like it or not, you're bound to wonder what it cost." She thought of her own small, secretary's salary and the careful way she had always manipulated it, feeling fairly affluent about it, too, to build an adequate wardrobe. "Why," she told herself, "that dress must have been woven for her. It couldn't, otherwise, be made to fit like that." And then, "No! I don't like it! I don't like her!"

This realization bothered Anne while the afternoon passed and they headed in, at dusk, at the dock at Alpena. It wasn't nice, decent, kind

or human, to dislike the woman who was your hostess, the woman who had made it possible for you to take the only trip of your life on a yacht, the woman who, in the last analysis, was pleasant enough to you.

"I don't care," Anne finally decided; "she's poisonous. Simply poisonous! And I won't pretend that I think otherwise."

They tied up at Alpena—because Floyd wouldn't run at night—and the two men dressed themselves in white flannels and blue coats. Chloe and Anne slipped into filmy, semi-formal dresses. They strolled up the dock in search of a water-front speakeasy where a bad orchestra was playing for a mixed crowd of natives and resorters—a crowd that was clothed variously in everything from formal evening wear to gingham aprons. They all danced and moved from table to table with every shade of manner from that of the shy misery of country boys and girls to the weary irony of Chicago sophistication.

"Flo-oyd! There's Johnny Harpole and——" Chloe extended a languid but cordial hand. "Hello, Syd. I might have known I'd see you here. Sydney, this is my husband, Floyd Moran. And the Durkins! Sydney Netcher—Bert and Anne, Sydney. They're both awfully good eggs. Where have you been keeping yourself? I thought we'd see you in Harbor Springs last week."

The dark, attractive boy nodded to each of them politely, sparing them a moment. Then he turned to Chloe and fastened his eyes on her.

"It's good to see you, Chloe. I've been thinking about you—wondering. But I haven't been in Harbor Springs this year—or Petosky, either. You see, I'm working. That is, I'm helping with some scientific

stuff, traveling with—with"—he swallowed hard—"with Doctor Styles."

"No!" Chloe broke into a quick, light laugh, but her eyes had grown suddenly brilliant, hard, and avid. "Wherever is he now? I—— Take me to him, Sydney. I never could resist him, you know. He amuses me. He's so susceptible."

"Oh, Chloe!" The boy's voice held reproach. "How can you be like that? I should think——"

"Don't think, sweetheart." Her face was very close to his, her hand on his arm. "Just take me to him. I simply mustn't miss this chance."

She wandered away then, and returned laughing after twenty minutes or so, bringing the boy in tow. His face was dark, flushed. He was looking anything but happy. But Chloe gave him all her attention, concentrated on him, ignoring Floyd. So, with a stubborn reluctance still in his manner, he at last gave over to her, responded, played back.

Then Floyd turned sulky, a scowl settling on his face, hardening the soft, self-indulgent lines to a look almost of cruelty and hate. Chloe ignored him, flirting outrageously with Sydney Netcher, finally taking him along to the boat where she sat up until three o'clock drinking continuously, smoking without interruption, and forcing Floyd and Bert into poker, though they were tired and bored.

At a little after two, she sent Floyd, with a peremptory command, up the dock for more liquor. While he was gone, she leaned back in Sydney's arms, languorously accepting his passionate kisses, smiling at his words of hot desire.

Anne, tugging at Bert's sleeve, pulled him away and down into their own cabin where she closed the hatch abruptly.

"You little nut!" Bert said with the first note of anger she had ever heard in his voice. "Now, there will be trouble. When Floyd comes back——"

"But Bert—Bert. I couldn't sit there and watch them. There'd have been just as much trouble if I had—— Listen!" she said sharply.

In the pilot cabin a glass had crashed to the floor and then Floyd's voice—no longer soft and loving, but loud—loud and shaken, cried out:

"You sneak! You low, small-time sneak! Get out of here! This is my boat and my wife, too, if you'll happen to remember it."

There was a pause while Anne listened to the sound of water lapping rhythmically against the sides of the boat.

"Chloe!" That was Floyd again. "Chloe, I'll—— Can't I turn my back on you a minute? Can't I trust you out of my sight? You—you little cheat, you!"

Then Chloe's voice, cold and clear, decisive as a knife, came:

"A woman," she said, "can't always help herself."

Anne could hear her heels clicking on the floor, receding toward the forward cabin—descending, deliberately, step by step, the short companionway.

Anne seized Bert's hand with fingers that had grown very cold. "Oh, Bert," was all she could say.

Confused sounds came down to them from the upper cabin, the scraping of a chair, a door slamming, and then, slow, hard steps—a man's steps—passing by the starboard porthole along the wooden planking of the dock.

A long time afterward, when everything was very still save for the sound of water and the faint echo of music from Joe's Place, Bert

went softly up the five ladderlike steps that led above and slid open the mahogany hatch that shut off the after cabin and the galley from the rest of the little ship. He stood for a moment, his head raised above the level of the cabin roof, lifted into the pilot room. It was very dark up there. Anne could see no broad bar of yellow light descending from above. Then, turning, Bert came back to her.

"It's all right, honey," he said. "Everything'll be smooth as silk again to-morrow."

"What's that sound? Bert, is Chloe crying?"

"No," Bert answered slowly. "No, it's Floyd."

CHAPTER III.

ALL TIGHT.

SMOOTH as silk—well, yes! Anne supposed that everything was as smooth as silk the next day—all that day and well into the evening for that matter, and on Thursday, too. But too smooth—ominously soft and subtle like the fur of a sleeping cat—a cat that, when it woke, would turn and rend the hand that had been stroking it, with a quick, cruel ripping of its sharp claws!

She had grown, by now, openly distrustful of Chloe, responding to such overtures of friendliness as the other occasionally made, by no more than the barest courtesy. And she was bored. They were all bored, tired—a little sick. They had come to know each other, in the enforced intimacy of the little ship, so amazingly well in the brief space of not much more than two days.

Even Bert had shown a flash of anger, had grown irritable with his

bride over the episode of Chloe and Sydney Netcher. And, while it had been no more than a flash, he had settled down, afterward, to quietness—a manner of self-restraint that verged on the sullen. Only in the peace and seclusion of their own cabin with the hatch down to shut them off from the atmosphere above did he become the gentle, loving husband—the humorous and kindly boy whom she had married.

"I don't like it, honey. I don't like it at all," was all that he would say in response to Anne's attempts to discuss with him the situation in which they found themselves. Further than that, he would not go—would not say, when she tried to force him to articulation, just what it was he didn't like.

She knew well enough why it was that she didn't like Chloe and the tension she had managed to create. For Chloe, when not drinking now, was sulky and capricious. That meant that she was that way all the time, for they had run out of liquor late on Wednesday.

In Saginaw on Thursday, they tied up. Floyd and Bert were both tired after handling the boat all day in choppy water, and Floyd, after putting in gas, insisted upon changing oil. This roused Chloe to anger and a cutting irony.

"Yes, do change the oil, Floyd. That's all you need to make you completely handsome — altogether charming. You aren't dirty enough as it is. You haven't let yourself go to seed sufficiently so that you're quite disgusting—yet. Thirty minutes down in the engine room will make you look like something the cat brought in—something to spit at."

"Sorry, honey," Floyd said, smiling, "but we can't neglect the boat or we'll find ourselves with a burned-

out bearing twenty miles from shore. And that," he added, trying to lighten the heaviness of the atmosphere, "would be just too bad."

So he changed the oil, getting himself thoroughly smeared with grease in the process and looking, Anne thought, happy for the first time during the trip. Meanwhile, Chloe took a shower and changed so that, when Floyd finished with his dirty work, she emerged from the forward cabin, glowing and seductive in a flowing flowered chiffon with her curls lying, small-girl fashion, around her shoulders.

"Flo-oyd."

"Yes, dear."

"I want some hamburger—hamburger sandwiches with lots of onions and mustard. I want——" She paused. "Can't you dig up some kind of liquor in this forsaken spot?"

Floyd glanced ruefully down at his hands which were black with grease, at his duck trousers that were anything but white.

"Oh, but my dear, you haven't seen your face. Your face is simply marvelous. It looks—it looks like"—she broke into laughter—"like Ed Styles's when they brought him in after the smash-up. I thought there was something familiar about it. I thought I knew——" She stopped, laughing helplessly.

Floyd's face grew very red, and a hard, icy look came into his eyes. He stared at his wife for a minute as though he couldn't believe that he had heard her. Then he turned and went into the forward cabin and slammed the shower-room door.

"Flo-oyd," Chloe called after him, "you're cleaning up, aren't you? I want to go into town."

When Floyd came out, some fifteen minutes later, he was washed, shaved and combed, wearing white

flannel trousers and a blue coat and the yachting cap that always looked, on him, like a coronet. He was charming and handsome and blond, easy and poised, and smiling once again in the manner of a very democratic prince, wholly aware of his democracy.

"Young Shelley," Anne murmured to herself and watched Chloe slip her arm through his as they walked up the dock toward town. Anne shook her head. "Honey," she said to Bert, "how do they get that way? They can be so amazingly attractive even while you know in your heart that Floyd's a fool and Chloe simply and unmitigatedly a hell-cat."

Bert frowned. "Yes," he said, "yes, but——" And that was all.

They were silent then, and Anne sat looking out over the water at the flash of the harbor light, considering how much of beauty and peace could have made this trip memorable—how much of selfishness and greed had actually engraved it unforgettably on her mind. She sighed, and Bert, sitting quietly beside her smoking a pipe, reached over and took her hand, softly, tenderly, with comprehension.

"Sweetheart," he said in a voice so low that she could scarcely hear it, "please have patience with me. You don't quite understand. You—— I know you don't know very much about me. You didn't know very much about me when you married me. You trusted me—that's all. I hope you'll never have any reason to regret, to wish you hadn't trusted me. I'll try—I'll tell you how——"

"Hamburger on board!" Chloe announced from the darkness outside the boat. "What about having a little light?"

Bert turned the switch, and the

pilot cabin was flooded with a soft radiance into the glow of which Chloe stepped, framed by the square doorway beside the pilot wheel. She thrust open the screen door and stepped down onto the cushioned seat, the heels of her embroidered linen slippers catching in the sill so that she was saved from falling only because Bert caught her in his arms. She gazed up into his eyes with the look she had bestowed on Sydney Netcher the day before, and which she gave to Floyd on rare, generous occasions. It was a lingering look which she broke only to demand of Floyd:

"Pass the hamburger—if the rest are as ravenous as I am. And, oh, say"—she was addressing Bert and Anne—"we're making Sarnia tomorrow night according to the word of the lord and master. Good liquor, my dears! Good liquor!"

She was gay, light-hearted and singing for a minute or two, nibbled a sandwich, holding the plate in her lap—not passing it at all. Then with a petulant, "Put on a record, Floyd, it's dead as the grave in here," she jerked open the starboard screen door and flung the sandwiches out into the water.

"I hope," she said, "that you two didn't want any. Personally, I couldn't stand the sight of them a minute longer."

They made Sarnia the next afternoon an hour or so before dusk and tied up at an export dock where the two men in charge were reluctant to give them any liquor. Chloe, no longer imperious, made it her business to win the Canadians with a special brand of innocence and sophistication, nicely blended.

"They're watching us pretty close these days," one of the men told her. "You'd better go uptown and get a permit. Register, and the liquor's

better uptown, anyway. You see, if we let you have it here, and you take any of it into the States and get caught, well——” He shrugged eloquently.

Chloe had been gazing at him, wide-eyed, while he talked. She dropped her long lashes against her creamy cheeks and murmured:

“Do I look like the kind of person who’d get caught?”

“Well, no, but you see how it would be?”

“Oh, yes,” she agreed with remarkable readiness, “I see quite well. Still, if you’d come on board with us and have a drink and see that we used it all up—every drop of it—how about it then? Isn’t that an idea?” She laughed happily, like a very young girl, coquettish at her first dance.

And the laugh was infectious. By midnight, the two men were as tight as the rest of them. Anne, bored and disgusted, and realizing that all the circumstances would grow worse and worse if she remained sober while the others consumed Canadian liquor with a whole-heartedness essentially American, drank, too. Floyd was tight; Bert was pretty tight; the men were drunk to the point of broad loquacity; and Chloe was as high as she ever got, which simply meant that her sullenness disappeared and she became amusing, clever, altogether beautiful, and animated by a vivacity that nothing seemed to lessen.

Anne did not remember when she had turned in to sleep, when the men had gone, when Bert had joined her. She only knew that the next morning, when she had come to a blurred and miserable awakening, Chloe had been standing in the doorway with a high ball in her hand, demanding:

“Come on, you slackers. We’ve got to finish this before we leave.

Honest! They meant it. Won’t let us clear port until we’re dry. Up and at ’em, Bert—Anne. No stalling!”

All morning, Anne held out against continuing to drink, watching the others with a growing disgust. Once—only once—Bert had come into the after cabin with her and, putting his arm around her, had whispered in a sober and controlled voice: “It’s all right, sweetheart. I’m not tight—not very. But you’d better take a drink or two. It’ll pull you through and keep Chloe happy.”

“I don’t care whether Chloe’s happy or not!” Anne had cried. “Do you suppose she gives a damn about anybody else? Do you suppose ——” But Bert had left the room, and between his brows there had been the little frown that she had seen so often lately—rendering him foreign to her—remote and strange.

Left alone, Anne fell in a little, sobbing heap against the cushions of her bunk. Could this be Bert, her own husband, the man she had married less than two weeks before with trust and adoration in her heart? Could this be the man she had felt she could always depend on to understand when things went wrong, to understand and to help her understand as well? And now when understanding was the most urgent need of her heart in a world that had gone so very strong indeed, he had left her with a frown and the admonition to drink in order that Chloe should be kept happy.

Why should Chloe be kept happy? Why should that useless, perverse, detestible woman who had made of this potentially joyous trip a very hell on water, be considered above everybody else? Why should even Bert join the general conspiracy to accede to Chloe’s every wish, to follow through with her insane desire

to drink and drink and drink until they were all sodden, perverse, useless as herself?

Anne sat up suddenly, impelled by a thought that hurt her heart, a dawning suspicion that was nearly too dreadful to think about at all. Bert had said of Chloe, just before they had sighted the *Flowing Free* from the sands at Mackinac, that "Every man who's ever met her has fallen for her, I guess. You can't escape. She's——" And now the whole conversation came back to her with painful clarity.

"Did you fall?" she remembered she had asked him.

He, putting his arm around her, had answered: "Sure! But that was a long time ago—a year or more." And finally, he had said: "Don't be jealous of a ghost!"

A ghost! No, she hadn't been jealous of a ghost! But this woman—this Chloe on whose boat they were drinking themselves into a state of ugly helplessness—was very far indeed from being a ghost. She was a real person—a seductive, beautiful girl for all her meanness and perversity, a woman who had Floyd by the throat, who, apparently, had had Sydney Netcher just where she wanted him. She had been able to win over, by little more than the well-timed drooping of a pair of languorous eyes, two strangers who ran a Canadian export dock. Was there any reason, then, why Anne—a small, snub-nosed girl—should feel that her own loved husband was any less susceptible to a return of the emotion which Chloe had once inspired in him?

"No! No!" she cried out loud in misery and then clicked her teeth together with a hard determination. She'd not let him go without a struggle! She'd not stay in her cabin and sulk while Chloe made

the most of every opportunity to satisfy her vanity and win him back—if only for a short time. She'd dress herself, make up her snub-nosed face and go up above and drink with the rest of them. She'd be gay, light-hearted, and amusing. With a little sob, she slipped out of her pajamas and began to dress.

It was a dreadful morning, a terrifying one with Chloe developing a mania for just two records. These she played, alternately, on the portable phonograph until the very atmosphere was saturated with the melancholy, passionate strains of "Chloe" and "Ready for the River." And Bert—oh, Bert was very obviously making love to her. Not touching her, not caressing her with his hands or his lips, but with his eyes and with every gesture he made!

"If he only would," Anne thought. "If they'd only do something that would let Floyd make a move, that would open the way for me to say a word. Anything would be better than this dreadful tension."

Floyd was growing restive under it, too, and sullen. Finally, with a quick movement, he lifted the last bottle of liquor to his lips and drained it in a single, fiery gulp. He shook his head, then, like a dog just emerging from the water and, with no more than a word thrown over his shoulder at Bert to "cast off," he started the motor and swung away from the dock in a wide circle, heading downstream with the current toward the shallow waters of Lake St. Clair.

Tight! They were tight enough—all of them. Anne realized this even as she admired Floyd's seamanship in the face of a southeast gale that sprang up suddenly when they entered the lake. There was no sitting at the wheel for Floyd. He

stood, drunk as a lord, braced against the sharp, terrifying lurch of the ship, his feet wide apart, holding the wheel with a dogged and courageous determination. Everything that wasn't fastened down came loose with a series of crashes that frightened Anne even while it relieved her to find that the world did, after all, contain something besides easy pleasure. The pans fell out of the galley cupboard, the cushions slid from the bunks, and the desk chair, light and gay with its striped rep seat, banged from side to side of the pilot-cabin floor with a rhythmic repetition of resounding blows.

"It's bad!" Floyd said, and glanced at the screened door beside the wheel. With every lurch of the boat that carried water clear up and over her bows, dashing it against the glass shield of the cabin, a wave of wind-driven spray broke through the screen.

"Bert," he said at last, "we'll have to get that door closed—the outside one. Hook back the screen and climb out on the deck rail. Hang on like hell or you'll be overboard. There's a brass hook at the far edge. She's fastened against the cabin. Unhook her and bring her in. I don't know how you'll do it against this wind, but that's for you to find out. I can't leave the wheel."

Chloe, her face a ghastly green, gave one swift look around the cabin and then went forward—half falling down the companionway. In her own cabin, she lay across the starboard bunk like a woman who was dead.

But Anne couldn't move. She simply sat, her fingers holding to the sides of the cushioned bench that ran along the starboard wall, and watched Bert struggle with the door. Twice she saw one of his feet slip

off the narrow rail as the ship lurched to port, and twice he clutched the cabin support with both hands, holding tight. Unhooking the door at last, he fought with it as with an enemy that resisted him, pulling away from him, pulling him outward with its weight and the force of the wind against its flat, broad surface. But he conquered it in the end, won his victory over the elements, and drew the door inward toward the boat, fastening it securely to the upright at Floyd's side.

"Oh, my dear!" Anne cried in deep relief, and he turned in her direction, flashing the quick, reassuring smile that she had in the past counted on as part of him. Her own man again! And she realized, with a hazy intuition, that Chloe was not in the cabin with them—that it was Chloe's actual presence that altered Bert not Chloe, herself. But further than that she couldn't think, was unable to analyze because she was tight.

Oh, yes, she was tight—tight enough so that the pitching of the ship wearied more than it frightened her. And, too, she was tired after the long, emotional struggle of the morning—tired of everything, wearied to death. And Chloe was in the forward cabin, asleep across the starboard bunk. Slowly, with infinite difficulty, Anne rose and went aft, down the short companionway to her own cabin and there, in the dim tumultuous isolation, fell asleep.

She must have slept for hours, because, when she came to consciousness, it was dark, and the boat was moving forward quietly in smooth water. They must, she knew, be in the river—the Detroit River. Perhaps, even now, they were coming near the city. The thought, penetrating slowly her returning sense of

reality, cheered her immeasurably. In a little while, this beastly trip would be over. She could say good-by to Floyd and Chloe, good-by to all the tawdry, sensual atmosphere of drink and love, good-by to every one but Bert—Bert, who had fallen again for Chloe. Or—had he?

"Chloe—Chloe—through the dark of night, I gotta go where you are."

Somebody had put on that record again. Somebody—it was Chloe herself—was singing in the low, husky voice that was hers when she was in high spirits. Then Bert's voice rising above it, was pleading.

Cold and alone, her heart hurting painfully, Anne listened to her husband talk to Chloe.

"For Heaven's sake, Chloe, don't keep me on pins and needles like this. It's dirty. Don't you understand how much it means to me? No! I don't suppose you do. You've never felt love for anybody in your life. You're cold, cold. You can't feel. But try to imagine it—just try for once."

Then Chloe's, "Be quiet, Bert. You'll wake Floyd. And go dig me up a drink. There must be something on board. And shut up. You make me tired."

Somebody changed the record. "Ready for the river, the shivery river," began to drone monotonously under a scratchy needle.

Then Floyd suddenly, his speech very blurry, said: "What the hell you doing up there with my wife? Men are all alike—and women, too. Chloe, you little fool, watch that wheel or we'll be on the rocks before you know it!"

Anne heard steps coming down the companionway toward her cabin and lay very still. She didn't want to see Bert—didn't want to talk to him. But no—he wasn't coming in; he was only entering the galley,

looking for a drink for Chloe. Glasses tinkled and clicked together; a pan clattered onto the floor. Bert called up. "What's the matter with Floyd? I can't find a thing, Chloe. I tell you we're dry."

A cupboard door was closed in the galley. Bert's step started up the companionway, and then there was that scream—that dreadful, terrifying cry in a voice that resembled Chloe's only in that it was a woman's. Not articulate—no words—only a piercing shriek!

Anne went cold all over for a minute, was held rigid with fear. She couldn't move, couldn't get to her feet or climb the little flight of stairs. And when at last she reached the cabin, Bert and Floyd were both standing beside the starboard door; looking out through the gap where the hinged piece of painted wood and glass that Bert had secured with so much difficulty only a few hours before, swung open now, clattering against the cabin side. There was no one at the wheel! And Floyd, turning, said helplessly:

"I don't know. I don't know what happened. I'm sor-ry." And then, "I'm tight. I'll have to——" And he stumbled down the companionway into the forward cabin that he and Chloe had shared.

Anne only remembered now, as she lay staring up at the lights on the white ceiling above her head, that Bert had taken the wheel and cruised for an hour or more, slowly, in the neighborhood of that single scream, looking for Chloe, searching the black water for a glimpse of her body. Anne had returned to her bunk, still tight, too horrified, too deadened for anything but sleep. Bert had brought the *Flowing Free* to a mooring just below Grosse Ile where, with the dancing lights of the

power plant on the Trenton shore reflected from the water, the gay mahogany and white craft—built for pleasure—had come to rest at last.

But there was no rest for the people who were on her. There was only infinite horror stretching ahead, complications, dreadful and unbelievable publicity and shame. And fear! Was Floyd afraid? She heard his voice, now, clear and sharp—not blurry any longer:

“But Bert! I wasn’t there. I

wasn’t in the cabin at all. When I looked up, you were mounting the stairs from the galley. You——”

It was just as Anne, entirely sober, and with a constriction at her heart, mounting to her dry throat, reached the head of the after-cabin companionway and emerged into the pilot cabin, that Floyd cried out:

“You! It must have been you! It’s clearing up now, Durkin! You pushed her overboard!”

To be continued in next week’s issue.

Coming Next Week, “**GAMBLER’S BARGAIN,**”
by DONALD VAN RIPER.

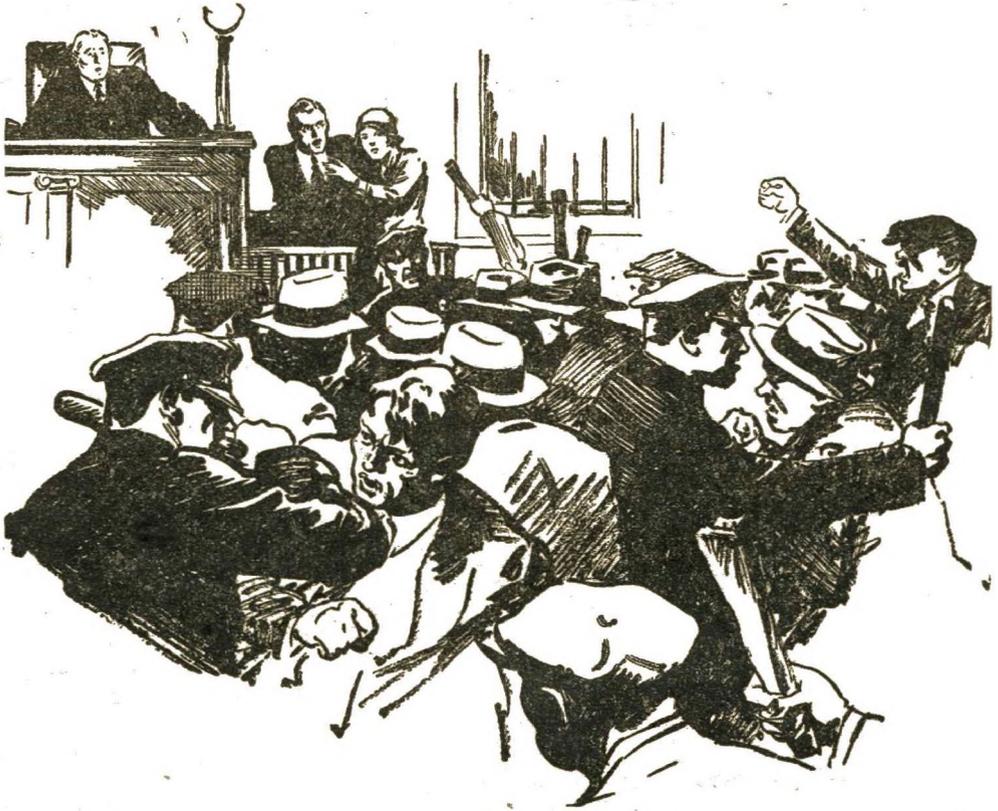
MAKING MEN

BEFORE convicts are selected to go on the prison farms which are provided in some of the States such as New Jersey, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, they are given very strict tests. They are examined as sick men would be, not as specimens of degeneracy. Those chosen to go out on the farms are weighed, measured, and analyzed, while their entire history, as far back as can be traced, is carefully considered. A resident physician, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, the industrial director, the head teacher in the prison school, and the deputy warden, all spend a month examining New Jersey’s selection of criminals to determine if they are fit to be trusted. It is not a majority of opinion which decides. Every one must agree, otherwise the convict undergoes further observation until all are satisfied that he is all right.

It is the belief of New Jersey’s investigators, according to a report by the committee chairman of their prisons that: “Forty per cent of all the convicts in this country can be safely kept on farms under minimum restraint. There they would have a far greater chance to become normal and the nation would save many millions of dollars in keeping them.

“It costs from \$5,000 to \$7,000 per man to house convicts in the crowded steel cell blocks with stone walls, armed guards, et cetera. On the farms, the housing costs only \$1,000 to \$1,200 per man. Our farm prisoners earn five sevenths of the cost of keeping them.

“We are convinced that the basis of prison administration should be to make the punishment fit the man, not his crime. We believe that we have found an economical way of helping twisted men to go straight.”



EVEN IN DEATH

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

They wanted to kill the woman who had betrayed her husband to the police.

OUTSIDE the courtroom, or rather outside the courthouse itself—for the menacing rabble had been cleared from within doors—a shouting was in progress. It was like a chant, rising, falling, but never ceasing for long.

“Emily Jones! Emily Jones! The female Judas! Bring her out! Bring her out!”

Emily Jones, sitting with others

in the crowded courtroom, heard it. The assistant prosecutor went over often and spoke to her, suggesting she might prefer privacy to this. There was more to his act than mere thoughtfulness. Emily Jones had become more important than any one else in the courtroom. The judge, the solemn jury, the lawyers pro and con, the witnesses, even the prisoner himself mattered less than she.

Everybody knew now that the fate of the prisoner was sealed. In a few moments, the jury would retire and its verdict might already have been spoken. One knew already what his end would be. But Emily Jones was different. She had betrayed the prisoner to the police. And the prisoner was her husband. The crowd outside—who liked Archie Jones, who had worked beside him, and still believed he was too good for the gallows—could not forgive her for that.

They could forgive Detective Swanson, who made the arrest; they could forgive all the legal machinery that would compass Archie Jones's doom, but they could not find words for her.

"The female Judas!"

That was the nearest they could get to it. The papers had played her up. She was front-page news. "Pretty Woman Betrays Husband. Emily Jones Chooses Odd Method of Revenge for Fancied Wrongs." Reporters had let themselves go. Now they could say with sincerity: "Emily Jones's Life Threatened. Under Constant Police Protection. Trouble Feared When Verdict is Given."

The atmosphere inside the courtroom was electrical. Admission was only by ticket, carefully scrutinized. Once, the riotous dock workers and others outside had flooded lobby and corridors. Several had been hurt before they were ejected. Five arrests were made, but the malcontents were only stirred to greater indignation.

Emily Jones sat, chin up, her eyes staring defiantly before her. They seemed to be staring at something far off, that was not in this stuffy room at all. But whether she was helped or frightened by what she saw, nobody watching her could say.

Every little while Archie Jones, from the prisoners' dock, turned to her as if in mute appeal, but she appeared not to see him, any more than she saw the judge, the lawyers, or the awed crowd.

Once a stone, thrown by some bold spirit, crashed through the upper glass of a high window, and a tinkle of splinters rained down. A woman spectator cried out and fainted. They carried her out. Nobody seemed to notice her. She might have been an empty sack. But everybody turned, uneasily, to look at Emily Jones.

Somebody had cast the first stone.

For just an instant, a little flush stained her cheeks, then they paled again to the color of marble. She was like something cut in marble—something defiant and aloof, and rather terrifyingly alive.

The judge remembered once, in a European gallery, coming suddenly upon a figure, beautifully carved. He had a queer, unforgettable experience, of feeling that it, rather than the flesh-and-blood people moving about him, was alive. It was certainly more vivid and significant and important than any of them.

He remembered this again as he saw the star witness, but all he said was: "If you are prepared to continue, Mr. Mellin——" And the prosecutor, snapping his glasses, on their long black ribbon, into place again on an aristocratic bridge, withdrew his glance from Emily Jones, shot a quick one at the broken window, and the level flow of his eloquence recommenced.

Emily Jones was not hearing either the hostile demonstration outside, or the low, assured logic of the prosecutor. She was remembering things; she was rehearsing it all in her mind again; she was trying to see

where she could or would do it differently, if it were all to happen again.

Vividly, Emily Jones could remember Archie coming in for supper that night, late. As wharf superintendent of the shipping company, he was irregular—all hours of the day and night. She knew at once when he came in that something was wrong. It was a warm May night, quite sticky, and Archie took off his coat and sat in his shirt sleeves. He picked up the paper, glanced at it, and put it aside. Then he got up and began to walk up and down the room.

"What's the matter?"

She couldn't help asking that.

"Oh, shut up!" he said. "What about supper?"

She wanted to cry.

While he ate, without appetite, she went and stood by the window, and wondered why the world was all in blossom, and the scent of it was here in the room with her—and him. What cruelty wished to drag her back by the heartstrings to that honeymoon of theirs in a younger May than this? In those days, people in their class went to Niagara Falls. The peninsula was full of blossoms. Wherever they went, alive to their own intense happiness, it perfumed the way for them.

How the clattering of his knife and fork hurt her—returning her to the present!

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he snapped.

She faced him with tragic eyes.

"Archie! I can't stand it. I can't stand it. I'll go mad if I keep it bottled up in me any more. I've tried. I've tried to close my eyes and my mind. It's no good. You love her, don't you? So all this night work lately—" She wasn't

bitter. She hadn't that to reproach herself with. She'd grown very quiet as she said all this. It came out of her as if it were something ordinary. So, too, did Joe's name. Joe was the woman's husband. He was assistant to Archie. They were friendly at first, and Archie used to go over home with him often.

"What about Joe Simmons?" she asked in that same quiet voice. "Have you thought about him?"

Then she knew. She knew by the way Archie rose, gripped the table, and then stood up, forgetting all about the rest of his food. He stood at the window as she had, but not—she was sure—remembering back so much as thinking forward.

It wasn't that Archie said anything. They used to say in the old days—she and Archie—that they were what people called telepathic. Sometimes, even on their honeymoon, she and he'd say the identical thing, at the same time, and then they'd laugh and say: "Great minds," and all that—but they knew between themselves it was something deeper.

That had passed, but now, for an instant, it was renewed. Now, in that instant, mind flashed to mind, and she understood. Archie meant to do away with Joe. Archie's passion had carried him to a place that other men had known. He wouldn't let anything stop him in the thing he wanted.

When he had gone out, she stared at the place where he had stood, mumbling a sort of good-by. She knew he was going to that other woman. But she wasn't even thinking of that. She was remembering the Archie she knew in the old days, and trying to figure out just how he had got lost, or shaped into this new creature who was the willing residence of a terrific and murderous

idea. And then she got thinking of Uriah, the Hittite in the Bible. David could command Uriah, and he used his power. He ordered him into the front of the battle, and took his wife when she had become Uriah's widow. Thinking this, a strange picture came to her.

Now, in the courtroom, it was renewed for her, quite vividly. She saw Archie as a country boy, watching sheep in a meadow, beside still waters, clear-eyed, unsullied, eager for the adventure of living, making a slung shot for boyish fun, choosing smooth, round pebbles from the brook and tossing them expertly.

Then something happened, and she knew he was not a boy throwing pebbles for fun, eager for life, but a prisoner in the dock charged with murder. Outside, a mob—full of stimulated hatred for her who loved him better than they—were throwing stones. One had crashed through that upper window there.

The arguments were all in; the brief summing up of the judge was under way.

"But for the action and statements of the accused's wife——"

That was what he was saying. But for Emily Jones, and the things she said, and the things she did, the case would have fallen through; they could have done little with it against Archibald Jones.

Emily Jones moved in her seat. Even in the courtroom, there was something, almost a murmur, almost a hissing sibilance.

"Silence in the court!"

Emily Jones lost herself in that silence, but the word of the judge went with her.

For nearly a fortnight, she had watched that evil thing grow in Archie. For two awful weeks after that May night when the blossoms

choked her with fragrance, she had seen the thing shape itself in him. He seemed unaware of her interest or knowledge. He still came home and ate, and irregularly—as always, for his work was irregular that way—slept there.

Whatever things they spoke were the polite mechanics of the tongue in a situation palpably unreal. Just the words necessary to carry on the business of the hour and the day! In between, he sat brooding, and she was sure that he was thinking of Joe Simmons and of a way out.

Joe wasn't the kind of a fellow who would divorce his wife. He probably was ignorant of the whole affair. Knowing Joe, Emily Jones believed that it would be easier for Archie to put him out of the way than ever to face him with the facts.

For herself, it wasn't in her code to warn Joe. He must come to it as she had come to it, by personal knowledge.

Then—that awful night!

It was raining heavily—rain hurried by a wild, gusty wind. After it, the last blossoms had fallen, beaten to earth. Archie came in again, quite late, and moodily ate supper. She hung his wet things by the fire, and they gave off a steamy, sourish odor as they dried. He refused dessert, and went to the telephone. Her heart suspended its beat as he gave Joe's number. But his voice—alien and unreal—said:

"That you, Joe? . . . Finished your meal? . . . Well, I'd like to see you down at the office. I'm a bit worried about that shipment of cement. It's not any too well protected. We'd better check up on it—the both of us, see?"

He hung up.

"Must you go to-night?" Emily said urgently.

He looked at her as if not sure

who was speaking, caught off his guard, and she saw his eyes.

Archie was going out to murder Joe.

The knowledge seemed as complete to her as if he had spoken. It crushed her. She stood, helpless, while he put on wet-weather things.

"Expect me when you see me!" he said, and went out.

Even when his departing footsteps were heavily on the stairs, she had a nightmare sense of being chained to the spot. Then she ran to the door and called wildly into the night:

"Archie! Archie! Archie!"

Her voice was almost a scream. A door opened, and an oblong of light showed. Mrs. Mingan, from the lower next door, said:

"Is there somethin' wrong, Mrs. Jones?"

Mrs. Mingan was a prying person. Her tongue had done mischief before. So Emily Jones, frightened, said quickly:

"No! Oh, no. I just forgot—to tell him something!"

The oblong of light remained until she had closed her own door behind her.

Twelve men were getting up and going out of the courtroom. There was a buzz of excited whispering. The prosecutor, clasping his hands behind his back characteristically, was chatting now in friendly whispers to the lawyer for the defense, who was yawning.

A low, terrible murmur swept in from the street where the crowd stood. Somebody had told them the jury had retired. Emily Jones heard the murmur, and remembered only how wild the wind was that awful night, and how it moaned through the telegraph wires high overhead on the approach to the wharf.

How could a woman, ordinarily calm, get into such a frenzy? She should, of course, have kept her wits. She should have telephoned Joe. But when that expedient came to her, when she summoned up enough courage even to give him some warning—however vague—it was too late. There was only the woman's voice at the other end:

"Who wants him?"

"It's—it's Mrs. Jones."

"Oh!" Emily Jones could not tell what content was poured into the ejaculation. Then a false sweetness followed: "Could I give him a message? He's gone with your husband to the wharf!"

"It's all right!"

She rang off. Did the woman know? Was she in on the plan? Nobody would ever know that, probably. Emily Jones put on her hat and coat and went out. She hardly knew what she was going to do. She remembered, on that honeymoon of theirs, standing just above the Falls, where the comparatively shallow water ran, with deceptive smoothness, to the awful brink. It had terrified her. Archie had put his arm about her, steadied her, smiled at her, told her he would never let her be frightened by anything in this world or the next.

Now, a Niagara of passion was carrying him over the brink. Oh, she must go to him! She must save him. She forgot her umbrella, and the rain that descended gustily upon her. She started down the street. And just as she was passing the lighted doorway of the Swansons, who lived three doors down, her neighbor, Detective Swanson, came out and almost bumped into her. He was headed for his car parked at the curb.

"Mrs. Jones, what is it?" Her

face must have been in the light. "What's up? Can I do something?"

His sympathy unnerved her. He was so big and fatherly. He would understand. He would know what to do. So her mind, half treacherously, assured her. The final implications of his profession did not reach her yet.

"It's Archie!" she said. "Oh, Mr. Swanson, he's gone down to the docks with Joe Simmons!" She stopped.

"Well?"

"I'm afraid they might—might quarrel or something. Oh, please don't ask me. It's just I don't want them to be alone there to-night!"

Then, suddenly, the fatherly thing in his face became something else. Swanson was used to the seamier side of things. It was his business to read faces, almost to read minds.

He said quickly: "Get in, Mrs. Jones. It's lucky I came along!"

The car plunged through sheets of rain. She felt relief at the motion, and then, suddenly, a fear paralyzed her. She managed to say:

"Mr. Swanson, you're doing this just friendlylike, not—not——"

He laughed her fears aside.

"You can trust me, Mrs. Jones. Part of my work is to prevent things. Bad blood between them, eh?"

"Not exactly!" she replied.

"Don't bother tellin' me. Better not, maybe. Say, you're wet, ain't you? Look here, you mustn't shiver."

He stepped on the accelerator, driving now through streets empty and dark, filled with the sound of rain and wind, and the noise of the car tossing water from its path. It grew into a monotone to her ears, like that constant roar of the falls at Niagara—and the two of them near the brink, his arm about her,

and that inevitable movement of water—over—and down.

Then there were the docks, and Archie's wharf looming portentously in the wet darkness—and a light in the little office. Swanson jumped out as if he, too, felt the need of haste. He caught her arm, and they hurried to the door. It was locked. Wind moaned through the wires overhead. She knocked; footsteps sounded, and the door opened. Archie was alone in the office.

"You?" he cried. He did not see Swanson. "What the devil——"

She said chokingly: "Where's Joe Simmons?"

"Out on the dock somewhere. Why?"

"Oh, Archie! Archie!"

Her pent-up feelings gave way. She was in time. She had saved him from the brink. Impulsively, because this was a necessity to her then, she caught him to her and kissed him. He pushed her from him. About to speak his anger, or whatever was in him, he paused. He was listening to running feet, coming near. The night watchman burst in upon them.

"Mr. Jones, sir!" He swallowed, choked. "Joe Simmons, sir—Joe Simmons has been killed. A heavy bale must have fell on him and crushed him!"

People in the courtroom, waiting for the verdict, were looking at Emily Jones now. Once again, she was the magnet for all eyes. She became suddenly conscious of them all. Outside, the menacing crowd had grown silent. They, too, were waiting. It was like the lull before a storm.

Emily Jones saw all these people staring. But it was her husband's gaze that held her now. She looked at him sitting there in the box,

awaiting the return of the jury—pathetic, as any trapped creature must be. She remembered him as he was that night when the night watchman came running to say that Joe Simmons had been killed.

At the sight of the night watchman, at sound of his voice shaking with Joe Simmons's tragedy, Archie had looked something like that—trapped! His eyes were full of his guilt. But at sight of Swanson coming in, they changed. He looked from the detective to his wife, and back again. Then Archie snarled. No other word would fit the awful sound of it.

"So that's the game! You brought him along! You Judas!" he cried.

Thus Archie coined the word for her, or took it from the mint of tradition, and flung it at her. Then he remembered Swanson again, and saw the hard light of duty in Swanson's eyes. Swanson said curtly:

"She came along to save you from quarreling with Simmons. Get that clear, Jones! She was afraid something would happen!"

"To save me? From what? It was an accident to Joe—an accident."

"Yeah?" said Swanson. "Well, we'll see about that, too. I'm sorry, Jones, but it's got a bad look about it now. Your wife expectin' something and then this——"

They all went out on the dock, and there was Joe Simmons lying dead in a pool of blood. A heavy bale had fallen on him and crushed him. It would have passed for an accident, but for what Emily Jones had said and done.

"A female Judas!"

The lawyer told her: "That's our only hope. We got to play that up. It'll win sympathy for him. It'll go

big with the jury. Lucky the newspapers got it already. What about it, Mrs. Jones?"

And she had bowed her head to it. White-faced, she accepted—hardly knowing all the implications. The lawyer fanned that flame in every public way. It raged through the news print; it caught fire among the men of the docks who liked Archie Jones, and had always thought Joe Simmons uppish. They talked about it in little groups. They drank to Jones's acquittal.

They went from the dock-side resort one night to the Jones house. Somebody called the police and saved that situation. Why had she not fought the thing, denied it? "Our only hope, Mrs. Jones. It'll win sympathy for him!" The lawyer's word! Her own utter horror at the implications of the act! Her haunting memories of Archie in his cell, cringing, incapable, pleading with her now to do something to save him!

There was a stir in the courtroom. The jury was filing back. Archibald Jones was standing up.

"We find the prisoner guilty!" some one droned.

"No! For Heaven's sake, no!" Archie cried.

Emily Jones, for the first time in all the trial, shielded her face. She could face the jury and the judge, but the sight of the broken man in the dock was more than could be borne. She could not close her ears to his cry.

The judge was preparing to speak. Sentence of death, she thought! Sentence of death!

But the word had reached the mob. A shower of stones beat against the side of the building, and the windows, high up and grated though they were, received their

share. Splinters of glass rained down. From the hallway came greater menace. Rioting had already begun.

Fear was upon the spectators and consternation upon the officials. Police reserves were inadequate.

At the actual door of the courtroom, a desperate resistance was made; it, too, was swept aside.

"Emily Jones! We want Emily Jones!"

Emily Jones stood up, facing the menace. Two burly policemen came, intent on getting her out the back way. But it was too late; the rioters had seen to that. Two fellows, with grimy hands, and the bloodshot eyes of men full of liquor and a lust of hatred, snatched at her skirt. They were beaten down.

"Emily!"

She found herself beside the prisoners' dock. Archie, cringing there, had called to her. Horror ran through her. That awful snatching at her skirt did it. They'd pull her clothes from her when they got her. She cried out:

"Archie! Archie! Speak to them! They'll listen to you!"

A lawyer, overhearing, saw sense in this. He got Archie Jones up on a chair. But a mob is a mob. It may begin, but does not end, with reason. Whatever righteous indignation may be in its genesis can become lost in a terrible perversion.

The crowd wanted blood. Somebody pulled Archie Jones's chair from under him, and he went down. A newspaperman, coolly perched on a high and reasonably safe point of vantage, saw only the prisoner apparently leaping into the maddened crowd in defense of his wife, and in his mind was born a story.

Emily Jones, in fact, saw her husband fall, and snatched him up. They were together in this. For the

moment, all police support had been torn away. They were at the mercy of the mob. The mob had eyes, thoughts, desires, only for Emily Jones. And the end, she knew, was at hand. Then Archie stood in front of her, and her heart leaped.

"At the last—at the last," her heart cried out, "he is trying to save me!"

The leaders, seeing the prisoner there—the man whose cause they were fighting—held back. But the mob behind was insistent. It surged forward. The man who stood before Emily Jones broke, became a cowering creature, and sheltered behind her.

It didn't matter to her then, what happened. She was struck down; the maelstrom caught her; breath was struck and trampled from her at the very moment police reserves broke through.

A nurse leaned over Emily Jones, in a hospital room that swam into consciousness slowly, then definitely.

"Better?" said the nurse. She spoke sharply. Another young woman, coming in, regarded the patient with eyes none too sympathetic.

When she was able, they let her see a newspaper. They watched her as she read it.

SCANDALOUS RIOT AT COURTHOUSE PRISONER KILLED BY MOB

Archibald Jones

Found Guilty of Murder, Sacrifices Life
to Protect Wife Who Betrayed Him to
Police.

The newspaperman had his epic. Emily Jones let the paper fall from her hand. She lay back on her pillow. Her heart seemed to stop. The shock of Archie's death was a minor one. That providential accident was

a relief. It removed the awful shadow and reality of the gallows. But this—this other thing!

They were giving her some medicine—stimulant probably. By and by, she was alone, lying in that cool white room. After what seemed a long time, she saw a very young nurse standing over her. This nurse was immature, romantic, and not unsympathetic.

"There are reporters wanting to see you," she confided eagerly. "They'll ask you questions, won't they?"

Emily Jones nodded.

Touching the newspaper, the nurse said eagerly:

"Is that true? Did he do that? It seems sort of big in a way, doesn't it?"

Suddenly, Emily Jones saw a creature of utter fear crouching, shielding himself behind her—to no avail.

"My dear," she said slowly, "when I married him, I was sure he was big—that way, and courageous!"

She smiled, closing her eyes. She knew she had said her final word on the subject. When the newspapermen came, they would get no more. They had created Archie in too noble a mold, but she would not dash it to pieces if she could. She smiled. She had shielded Archie in life, why not even in death? But why, she asked herself, why? She did not answer that. She lay, eyes closed, remembering Niagara sweeping down to the brink, and everywhere the scent, too sweet to last, of blossoms not yet beaten to the earth.

In Next Week's Issue, "NOT BOUGHT,"

By WALTER C. SCOTT.

STOLE WHILE ON BAIL

A HIGH-SCHOOL graduate of Brooklyn, New York, twenty-two years old, who, with his brother, supported a widowed mother, decided that the candy business he was in did not pay well enough. So he stole a car and drove it to a Bowery place where he bought a gun.

On his way back, he was arrested for the theft of the car. While waiting for trial, he thought he might as well commit a few holdups, as he had planned when purchasing the gun. If a jail sentence awaited him, he felt he could just as well be guilty of several crimes as one, and have some money to show for it. He maintained he took in about twenty-five dollars a week, gave his mother twenty, and kept five dollars for himself.

One day he consulted a gypsy over a cup of tea leaves and she told him that a fat, dark-haired man was after him. The young man became frightened and threw his gun into Jamaica Bay, vowing to himself that he was through with crime. But his resolution came too late. There was, indeed, a fat, dark-haired man in pursuit of him, and he carried a detective's badge, which the gypsy had neglected to mention. He caught up with the young stick-up artist when the latter entered the courtroom in answer to the car-theft charge.

The youth admitted sixteen thefts and was identified by some of his victims. He also said that, in one instance, the police were holding the wrong man, since he, himself, was guilty.



THE HATED HATER

A SERIAL

By MARION SCOTT

Through the dark came the whine of steel, and then the biting, tearing slash in his arm.

ARNOLD BALLANTYNE, a judge, refuses to give his consent to the marriage of his daughter, Ann, to Phil Munro. The lovers are deeply grieved.

To add to other worries, the judge has received a threatening letter. It states that he will be murdered to-

night, a little before Big Boy Burney, a gangster he convicted, will be electrocuted. The judge calls Captain Brade for help.

On this particular night, a Halloween costume party is being held in the judge's home. Captain Brade and his assistants come in costumes

and mingle with the guests. In the midst of all this, Ann tells her blind mother, Mary, of her plight. The mother advises her to go ahead and get married.

While the party is in full sway, Brade unexpectedly comes upon an unconscious man near the summer-house. Then, suddenly, out of the dark, a man's hand gropes for Brade's ankle. The unconscious man is Phil Munro. The man groping for the detective's ankle is Judge Ballantyne with a knife through his heart. The doctor pronounces him dead.

Several people are questioned and revelations made. Beke Lavery, assistant to the chief, is suspected and questioned, but he has an alibi.

Thrale, the judge's secretary, is also suspected because the judge had intended to send him to prison for trying to break into his safe.

In the midst of things, unexpectedly, Mary Ballantyne falls unconscious. Her shock, apparently, was due to a voice which had called her name out.

The valet, Ransome, is questioned and he tells a story that contains a discrepancy.

Later, Thrale is found murdered and Ann is lying unconscious in the same room, firmly holding on to a knife.

Soon afterward, Brade discovers from Mary that Arnold Ballantyne was not Ann's father, and that Ballantyne had railroaded Ann's father to prison for a crime he had not committed. The father was supposedly dead.

Then it is that Brade has a talk with Ransome, Ballantyne's valet, who confesses that he killed Ballantyne. However, as soon as he makes this confession, a voice cries out, "It's a lie! I saw it all. Ransome didn't kill the judge."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"RANSOME'S LYING."

AT the first sound of that harsh, gasping voice, both men in the library at Royle's Rest whirled, facing the curtained entrance to the den. Brade was on his feet, tense, wary. He was taking no chances. The curtains slid back, and Phil Munro, wrapped in a dressing gown, the bandage round his head, stood there clinging to the door for support.

His eyes, filled with pain, groped uncertainly over the room. He appeared half unconscious of what he was doing, and the words seemed forced from his throat.

"He's lying," Phil said. "I was—there. I saw. Ransome didn't kill him. I swear it." He lurched forward, and Brade caught him before he struck the floor. He struggled against the captain's assistance. "I'm all right," he insisted weakly. "Damn it, I'm all right. Little groggy. Let me sit down."

Brade got him to a big tapestry divan, and the boy collapsed, breathing heavily, eyes closed. Brade noticed, with relief, that though Phil Munro looked bad, that bluish tinge was missing from the heavy lids. Ransome stood motionless by the table. Brade said over his shoulder:

"Isn't there some brandy around? My flask is empty."

Ransome crossed to a small cabinet, poured out a glass of liquor, and brought it to Brade.

Phil groaned but swallowed it. A trace of color came to his face, and he opened his eyes.

"I've got it," he said faintly. "The damned thing's been driving me

mad all day, hearing it all the time, humming like a swarm of bees. All time in my head—cursed humming!”

“Take it easy,” Brade comforted. “You’ll feel better presently. How’d you escape the nurse?”

Phil grinned. “I didn’t like her nose,” he said petulantly, “so I cleared. Couldn’t rest, with that thing humming in my head, and got to thinking. Thinking a lot about lying there on the ground after something cracked me down.”

“I don’t think he should be talking,” Ransome cut in curtly. “I’ll call the doctor.”

“Stay where you are!” Brade ordered. “I’ll be responsible for Phil Munro. Go on, Phil.” He sat on a stool beside the divan, a finger on Phil’s wrist, but his eyes did not leave Ransome’s face.

Phil said: “To hell with doctors! I want to talk. All the time, they tell me to be quiet. How can I be quiet when something hums in my head?”

“You don’t have to be quiet,” Brade said. “Talk all you like. Go on. Enjoy yourself.”

Phil sighed. “Good. Well, there I lay on the ground, and there were times when I didn’t know anything. Times when I could hear and see things. It was like a dream almost—scenes, voices, fading, growing strong. And I saw a man standing on the lilac walk. I heard him talking to the judge. I can’t remember all they were saying. It sounded crazy to me, but I could see him, for my head was on my arm and all I had to do was open my eyes and look up, and there he was.”

“Standing above you?”

Phil nodded.

“Yes, I was pointed toward him with my head, if you get what I mean. Pointed toward him.”

“I get you,” Brade said gravely.

“Go on.” And all the time, he was watching Ransome.

“Well, there he was,” Phil continued, “and they were talking, the man in the lilac walk and the judge in the summerhouse, over to my right. It was like a scene in a play, and I saw it all very, very clearly, those moments when I saw anything. And then, suddenly, something zoomed over my head, humming like a snapped violin string!”

He sat up, eyes glowing feverishly bright. “Over my head,” he insisted, “do you understand? Haven’t I been hearing it for hours—that knife humming above me! And don’t you see”—he caught at Brade’s arm—“it’s impossible that Ransome threw it. It came from over to the left, among the almond bushes. That’s why it went over me. That’s why Ransome’s lying. He didn’t kill Ballantyne.”

Brade gently pushed Phil back to the divan. He was doubting his wisdom in letting the sick man talk. He could see how the humming of that knife had impressed itself on young Munro’s consciousness, how memory of it had tormented him in the half delirium following his hurt. And now the one thing worth while to Phil was to explain it to his own satisfaction, get it cleared up, and be through with it.

Phil stirred about restlessly. “It hummed above me,” he complained, gazing round with heavy, suffering eyes. “And I couldn’t understand it. I couldn’t remember who stood there on the lilac path—not until I got into the den and heard you talking in here, heard Ransome’s voice, sounding in that funny way—then it all came over me. I remembered everything and knew what it was that had hummed.”

There was a quick, impatient tapping. The door opened at once, and

a flustered, angry-looking nurse entered. "That young man——" she began, then glimpsed Phil on the divan. "Good heavens!" she suddenly snapped. "What does this mean? Mr. Munro, come back to bed at once. I thought I could leave you a few minutes. If the doctor finds this out——"

She took Phil away, unresisting. He walked slowly, leaning on her stout, capable arm. There was a tired, relaxed slump to his broad shoulders. Already, Brade noted as he passed, Phil's eyes were drooping with weariness. Brade was willing to bet that the boy would immediately fall into a deep sleep, from which he would rouse, well along the road to recovery.

As the door closed, Brade looked at Ransome. "How about it?" he demanded.

Ransome returned to look unflinchingly. "The boy is delirious," he stated calmly. "Hurt as he was, he couldn't remember all he claims he does. He couldn't carry a picture like that."

"I'm not so sure, Ransome," Brade replied, "but we'll let it rest for the moment." He sat casually on the edge of the desk. "You're not Ransome, of course," he said. "You're Lynn Royle."

The other took it with hardly a quiver. "Yes," he admitted. "I'm Lynn Royle. I don't know how you found out."

Brade smiled. "For one thing, I talked to your daughter and your wife."

That got through. The man's face went gray. "Mary?" he cried. "She knows?"

"That you are in the house, yes. Not that you were Judge Ballantyne's valet."

Ransome laughed shortly. The sound was not pleasant. "Imagine

polishing his shoes every night," he rasped. "Consider me arranging his studs! Selecting his ties! Turning down his bed!" The tortured voice broke. Ransome trembled. "I don't know why I didn't kill him earlier," he snapped. "There was one night when I entered his room and saw him in his bed asleep—head thrown back, throat exposed. There was a razor in the bathroom. Why didn't I kill him?"

"Because you knew," Brade replied, "that merely killing him wouldn't settle the score. You knew, didn't you, Lynn Royle, that living can be infinitely worse than death? You don't *think* when you're dead. At least, I don't believe you do. You just lie quiet and rest. But when you're alive, there's always nerves to stir your aching brain toward remembering. There's a mind that can call up pictures, an imagination that can see."

"Stop it!" Ransome cried. Breath labored in his throat. "Don't you think I know all about that? Didn't I put in fourteen years on Devil's Island? Didn't I rot for three years in solitary? Silence! You don't know what silence is! Never to hear a human voice." He mopped at his wet face with a quivering hand.

"Night!" he whispered. "Night was the worst! To the silence, there was added darkness and in the darkness there were faces—Mary's, my daughter's." He seemed unconscious of Brade watching him. "I used to see them coming toward me. Mary—laughing! Her eyes sparkled like sun on the sea. And I'd try to reach out to her! But she would vanish, and there was darkness and silence."

His hoarse voice stopped, and, in the stillness of the room, a log crackled cheerfully in the grate.

Brade wondered suddenly what it would be like to be away from sounds: hum of traffic, human voices; pleasant, homely noises of the country: hens, scolding and scratching, dogs barking, kittens mewling, cattle lowing. His eardrums ached with the thought of it. If only something happened just then to break that silence! He attempted to speak, but his throat was tight and dry. He tried to force himself to slip from the table, rattling papers as he moved, to walk across the room, so his shoes would make a scuffling sound. He thought of lighting a cigarette. There would be the snap of the case as he closed it, scratch of a match—something to break the stillness.

And just then the telephone rang!

Brade's voice was harsh as he answered it. The crisp professional tones of the operator restored him to normal. He was not confined to a steel cell on Devil's Island where there was no sound. No, he was not watching black shadows on white walls, until he went blind. He was holding a telephone transmitter to his lips, had the receiver pressed to his ear, and some one was saying:

"Police headquarters calling Captain Courtney Brade!"

"Put 'em on," Brade snapped and took a long breath.

The crackling voice of Lieutenant Grierson, from his own department, reached him. "Say, Brade, just got a tip that Beke Lavery's headin' out that way. Keep on the lookout for him!"

"We've got him," Brade replied quietly.

"Good. I've been on my ear——"

"He's dead!" Brade cut in and heard Grierson's dismayed gasp. Swiftly, the captain gave the details. He didn't say anything about the robbery of the judge's safe.

Grierson couldn't do anything about that, anyway, and one jolt was enough.

CHAPTER XIX.

RANSOME'S PAST.

HE set down the telephone and looked at Ransome. "And so," he remarked, "you murdered Ballantyne?"

"Yes."

Brade shrugged. "O. K.," he said. "I'll have to arrest you."

Ransome's eyes lightened a bit. "Of course," he agreed.

"Just as a matter of information," Brade resumed, "how did you manage to get by all this time without Ballantyne recognizing you?"

The knotted muscles along Ransome's jaw worked spasmodically. His haggard eyes seemed staring straight through Brade into a hell-racked past.

He began speaking in a flat, level tone, like a child reciting a well-learned lesson.

"Two weeks after returning from Ile St. Joseph where I'd spent solitary, our dormitory was swept by fire. Thirty poor devils died like rats in a trap that night. Along with some others, I managed to win free and make the open air, but my face and right arm were scorched to a cinder."

Brade's eyes flashed to Ransome's mutilated wrist, then returned to his face. He frowned slightly. Ransome caught the look, shrugged, spreading his hands.

"You are wondering about my face. It's a case of plastic surgery in Paris, after my release. The mills of the gods grind slowly, Brade, and they finally got round to me.

An American woman, married to a French official, learned about my case and secured my release on irrefutable evidence of perjury. She made possible my operation after my return to France.

"I was tossing on that hospital cot, suffering the tortures of the damned when I conceived the idea of entering Ballantyne's service. Lynn Royle, to Arnold Ballantyne, was dead. I'd managed a rumor to that effect months before my return to America. Facial characteristics were changed; only the eyes remained."

Ransome paused; a hard smile tugged at the corners of his lips, then passed.

"Ballantyne told me, when he gave me the post as valet, that I reminded him of some one he'd known who was dead. It was hard to keep things out of my eyes, Brade. And I used to find him watching me," he continued. "These last weeks in particular. I think my hate got through to him. I was careful about mannerisms. I managed to change my voice completely. But I used to find him watching me. I had the satisfaction of seeing his nervousness grow. And when the Burney mob started sending him threatening letters, I thought I saw my chance."

"And you added one of your own?"

"Yes. It seemed an excellent alibi, and I naturally did not want my identity known. You can see how that would have complicated things. So I made up the story about the messenger who brought that last letter. I wrote it myself on Ballantyne's typewriter. Foolish, no doubt, but the idea struck me suddenly and that seemed easiest."

"Then you put on a cowled robe

and followed him across the grounds?" asked Brade.

Ransome smiled slightly. "Yes. The robe was merely a precautionary measure. There were so many on the grounds, and one more would not be noticed. I took it off immediately after I had killed him, jammed it down in some bushes, and ran. It was then that I met you in the lilac walk. I recognized you, of course, and I had to think fast, so I told you that Ballantyne had sent me to find you. I figured that would take you at once to the house. I preferred that any one else should discover the body."

Brade smiled thinly. "Thanks," he said. "How did you secure the knife?"

"I took it from the hall table as I passed through. There was no one there. I had intended shooting him, but I saw the knife and it seemed simpler."

"You say the hall was entirely deserted?"

"Yes."

Brade studied his finger tips. "And you stood on the lilac walk, saw Ballantyne in the door of the summerhouse, and hurled the knife."

"That's it. I learned something about knife throwing in my wanderings."

"I see. Interesting, Ransome, interesting." Brade drew a knife from his pocket. It was a strong, capable weapon, with a well-worn bone handle, and a long-pointed blade. He balanced it absently.

"Knife throwing," he remarked, "has always intrigued me. Mind illustrating?"

"Certainly not." Ransome took the knife from the detective holding the blade tip between thumb and forefinger. "Thrown this way," he stated, "the knife whirls and the expert learns to gauge how many

turns it will make in a given distance."

Brade nodded, staring at that outstretched hand—long, fine, with sensitive finger tips. He was staring also at the hideous scar that marred Ransome's wrist and the withered muscles and tendons, flexing weakly at the slight weight of the weapon.

"It's a flip of the wrist," Ransome was saying. "There's a trick to it, of course."

"You used the right hand?"

"Yes. I never learned to use the other."

Brade's eyes were on fire. "It must be quite an accomplishment," he said softly. "I'd like to see how it works out. That knife isn't ideal for the purpose, of course, but demonstrate for me, Ransome. Throw it the way you hurled that weapon at Ballantyne. Go ahead! Throw it!"

He saw Ransome's finger tips curl, caught the quick indrawing of his breath. Brade continued to regard the knife with interest.

"It must be a trick," he said. "I'd like to see it worked."

Ransome's hand fell. He laid the knife on the table. "I'm sorry," he said. "That knife is entirely inadequate for the purpose. I couldn't do it with that."

Brade scratched his chin. He did not look at Ransome. "Too bad," he said. "I'd like to see you throw it."

Some one knocked impatiently. Brade frowned at the door, but his eyes were still gleaming. "Come in!" he ordered, and Sergeant Shan appeared apologetically.

"Sorry to bother you, sir," he said, "but I've made a discovery."

"Excellent. What is it?"

Terry came in. From a side pocket, he drew a thick envelope and laid it on the table. The flap

gaped, and Brade saw a thick sheaf of bills.

"The money from Ballantyne's safe," Terry explained, trying not to look important.

"Yes?" Brade's glance flashed in his assistant's face. "Where was it?"

Terry drew a deep breath. "Found it in Beke Lavery's side pocket," he explained. "Don't know how he got in to crack that safe."

"He didn't get in to crack the safe," Brade said suddenly. "Beke Lavery didn't crack the safe. He knew who murdered Judge Ballantyne. He crashed out of stir, got in touch with the murderer out here, and demanded money for his silence. The murderer cracked the safe, gave the cash to Lavery out in the lilac path, then——"

"Bumped him." Terry finished with a gasp. "But why'd he give it to him first?"

"I don't know. Maybe he intended playing fair about it. Maybe, when Beke got the cash, he indicated that he wasn't through and that this money was only the beginning. Maybe a knife seemed the easiest way."

"I found it," Terry interrupted. From one of his capacious pockets, he drew an object wrapped in tissue paper and laid it on the table.

Brade loosened the wrapping, staring at the knife curiously. He had almost expected to see a duplicate of the other two. Instead, he found a beautiful weapon, with a highly polished creamy handle of bone, worn smooth, from much use. The blade was long and straight with a murderous tip.

"It was sticking in the wood of the arbor," Terry explained. "It's what the guy threw at you, Court."

Involuntarily, Brade shivered. He remembered the vicious humming the thing made when it went

past his head. No wonder Phil Munro had remembered a similar sound!

Brade straightened. "Very well, Terry," he said shortly, "and now I have something else for you to do." The detective glanced at Ransome, who stood silently, watching. "Ransome," Brade said curtly, "I am arresting you for the murder of Judge Arnold Ballantyne and giving you into the custody of Sergeant Shan, who will be responsible for you. You will be assisted in securing counsel, if you desire. Until that time, I must warn you that anything you say may be used against you." His hand, strong and steady, fell on Ransome's quivering shoulder.

"I understand, sir," Ransome said, looking straight into Brade's somber eyes. "Thank you, sir." He was the servant once more. The devil-ridden, tortured man of half an hour ago, vanished, for all except those sunken eyes. Then he said so low that only Brade heard: "May I trust you, Brade, to keep the secret of my identity on Ann's account?"

"You can trust me," Brade said simply, and Ransome walked over and paused before Sergeant Shan, who was open-mouthed with surprise.

"Take him, Terry!" Brade ordered, and the sergeant drew a pair of steel cuffs from his pocket and snapped them on Ransome's wrists. Then he glanced inquiringly at his chief. "Into town?" he inquired.

Brade nodded. "Yes, but first I have something else for you to do. Put Ransome in his room, under guard."

Terry saluted and led his prisoner out. Ransome walked with shoulders rigid, head high. Brade watched him go, and remembered the light of triumph in those sunken eyes.

Savagely, the detective thrust the money into an inside pocket, gingerly lifted the bone-handled knife to the drawer which held the other two, and locked it. Then he went into the hall.

As he opened the door, he stopped, frozen in his tracks. Somewhere, there was a dull, monotonous humming and the sound sent chills along his spine. Involuntarily, his hand flashed to his shoulder holster, then dropped, and a sheepish smile tugged at his lips.

Into his line of vision from the main hall came the stooped figure of old Archer, the butler, gray head bent, intent on his task. Archer was steering a bulky, long-handled object along the floor, and a long black electric cord suggested that the humming came from a motor.

Relief made Brade's voice quite brusque. "Why, for Heaven's sake, Archer, what are you doing, and what is that contraption?"

The old man started, and, as his head lifted, Brade saw how white and worn he looked. Then he smiled apologetically, pressed a small switch, and the humming stopped.

"Why, sir," he explained, "I'm waxing the floor. Maybe it seems odd to you that I'd be doing it all this time, it being night and all, and rightly it is not my job, anyway, but"—Archer sighed and shook his head—"I had to do something, sir, to sort of keep my mind occupied, and the floor is in bad shape." He frowned down at the dull dark luster of the boards.

"O. K.," Brade said. "I understand, but do you mind letting it go until morning? That beastly motor gets on my nerves."

"Certainly not, sir." The butler bent down, pulled the plug from the wall connection, wrapped the length of cord around supports on the han-

dle of the waxer, and started to push it away.

"Just a moment, Archer," Brade said, "come into the library. I want to ask you something."

Obediently, the old man placed the machine against the wall and followed Brade.

CHAPTER XX.

"GET ARCHER!"

BRADE unlocked the drawer which held his exhibits in the case at Royle's Rest and pointed to the bone-handled knife. "Ever see that before?" he asked.

Archer bent over, squinting at the thing. A long time, he stared at it, and Brade, having nothing else to do, studied Archer. He remembered his early feeling about Ransome—that you couldn't tell about this perfect-servant type. Here was Archer now, an old man, with little left of life. Did he hate any one particularly, cherish any ambition? How had he felt toward his master—that great man with ruddy hair, who had destroyed whatever he touched? The thoughts ran through Brade's mind idly, without particularly registering, and just then Archer straightened.

"I have never seen it, sir," he said respectfully, "and I am sure it does not belong in this house."

Brade plucked at his under lip. "Uh-huh," he grunted noncommittally. "Lovely thing, isn't it?"

Archer looked horrified "I think it is terrible, sir," he said flatly. "My son used knives like that!"

"What?" Brade snapped out of his lethargy, staring blankly at Archer. The old man had suddenly become concrete. Divested of his

perfect-servant mask, he stood revealed as a personality; some one who though his own thoughts, nourished his own hates and fears, cherished personal ambitions.

"Yes?" Brade echoed, trying to keep the interest out of his voice. "Your son used knives like that. What, may I ask, was your son's profession?"

Archer smiled sadly. "He was an actor, sir. Vaudeville. And a very clever sort, if I may say so. Acrobat, he was. Well-headed for the top, then——" Archer paused, and his thin old lips hardened.

"Yes?" Brade prompted. "Then what happened to him, Archer?"

"He got into difficulties, sir," Archer said very low, not looking at the detective. "It's quite a while ago now." Archer turned abruptly, and Brade saw his face muscles twitching.

"Do you mind telling me, Archer?" he asked kindly. "Some time, it helps to talk about things."

"Oh, sir," Archer cried, turning to face him, "it wasn't the boy's fault. He was just young and wild. He didn't mean any harm. He got in with a bad lot. There was a holdup one night and my lad was there. Of course, I know he had to be punished. I never blamed the judge."

Brade's fingers tightened on the desk edge. "Who was the judge, Archer?"

The old man blinked back tears of strain and weakness. "It was my master, sir," he said. "It was Judge Ballantyne."

"Judge Ballantyne? He sentenced your boy——"

"To twenty years at hard labor, sir," Archer said dully. "He gave him the limit. He could have made it easier, given him a chance. He had to be punished, I know that, but he could have given him some-

thing to look forward to—some hope!”

Brade remembered Steven Thrale's cry: "He took hope from me!" Again, he marveled at Ballantyne's passion for destruction. Of course, old Archer's son had to be punished.

"He died in prison," Archer said monotonously. "And the judge allowed me to keep on working here. I was getting old and new positions are hard to find." His head lifted suddenly. In his faded eyes glowed a light of sudden passion. "He was a hard man," he said fiercely, "a hard, cruel man. There was no softness about him. He was all"—his eyes flicked to the knife—"steel," he ended and shut his lips hard.

"All steel," Brade echoed, "and he died, Archer, with steel in his heart. How did your son use knives like this one?"

"Why, sir," Archer said more quietly, "he used them in his act. Just a flashy stunt, he used to call it. He got the idea from a knife thrower who traveled on the same circuit with him. He used to practice by the hour, with me watching him."

"Did you ever throw the knives, Archer?"

The old man smiled. "I got pretty good," he admitted, "but never as good as my boy. I remember one night at the theater where he was playing, he took me back stage to meet the knife thrower who was giving him lessons. But she had left and so I didn't get to meet her. I saw her array of knives, though. She used to leave them out in her dressing room for the boy to practice with." Archer nodded toward the weapon on the table. "They all looked like that," he explained.

"Who was this woman, this knife thrower, Archer? What was her name?"

Archer glanced quickly at Brade, his face puckered helplessly. Then he shook his head. "I don't remember, sir. I didn't meet her. I saw her act. She was wonderful."

"And you don't remember her name?"

"I do not, sir. I'm sorry if it would have interested you." He frowned suddenly. "Maybe I can find out," he said. "I'll try, sir."

Brade allowed him to go and sat for a time, brows puckered in thought. He was going through a session of severe self-criticism. He was seeing where he had been criminally remiss. He had allowed himself to be blinded by the mass of showy evidence that piled before his eyes, and perhaps all the time, right under his nose, was the explanation.

He got up suddenly and stepped into the hall again. It was deserted. Old Archer and his waxing machine were gone. It was very still, with only the faint whine of the wind outside, the crackling of fire up the chimney.

Brade's eyes roamed slowly, centering at last on the section of dull polish which Archer had spread over the floor boards. Had the old man been telling the truth when he said he merely wanted to occupy himself? Or had he—Brade formed the question carefully in his own mind—had he been spreading that thick coating of wax to hide something?

The detective drew a flashlight from his pocket and shot its brilliant rays on the floor. He began in the far corner of the front door and carefully, methodically, he went over it inch by inch.

A maid passed up the stairs, eyes round with amazement at sight of the detective on his knees, crawling over the floor with a flashlight.

Brade paid her no attention. He could certainly discover nothing on

the waxed portion. Of course, he reflected, if Archer had been trying to hide something, that was exactly what he had counted on. Then he came to the unwaxed section.

There were many footprints showing on the surface. There were crushed cigarette butts, ashes, bits of sandwiches in corners. Routine at Royle's Rest had been interrupted to-day. Suddenly, he stopped, bending lower, narrowed eyes on something his light disclosed.

It was a small round hole in a board. As if, Brade thought, a screw had been driven into the wood. Curiously, he studied it. It was fresh, for the tiny aperture showed white.

Then his eye caught another about four feet distant and on a direct line. Turning involuntarily, he detected a third and then a fourth. Together they outlined a small rectangle. Four screw holes in the floor of the hall at Royle's Rest! And so very recent! What had they been used for? The seemingly inconsequential discovery annoyed Brade. He couldn't think of any sensible explanation. Yet it was undoubtedly there.

Light footsteps made him turn. The maid was coming downstairs on her way back to the kitchen. He called to her.

"What's the meaning of these screw holes?" he asked her. "Is there any piece of furniture around here that would require screwing to the floor?"

She knelt beside him, and puzzlement darkened her eyes as she studied them. "I can't imagine, sir," she said slowly. "There isn't any reason for them being here." Then she straightened. "Oh, I know," she said. "It's where the fortune-teller's tent stood! I remember Archer fussing about marring the floor like

that, but Miss Ann, she told him to go ahead. A bit of wax would fill the openings," she said. The girl paused on a deep breath. "That's it, sir. It's where the little striped tent stood. It was only taken down this morning."

"Thank you," Brade said quietly, and the girl departed. The detective remained there a bit longer, studying the outlines. Then he squatted back on his heels, and fell to a careful reconstruction of the scene the hall had presented the night of the party.

He was so deeply engrossed in his task that he did not hear a door close behind him, and it was only at sound of his name that he roused and saw Madame Marvelle standing beside him. She had come apparently from the living room. She smiled slightly at sight of the captain sitting on the floor, chin buried in his cupped palm, long legs sticking out in front of him. He rose swiftly.

"Pardon me," he said, "I did not hear you approach."

Her eyes flashed over the hall. "Whatever are you doing?" she asked curiously, "that is, if I'm not being too impertinent in asking?"

He smiled. "Being a detective," he told her. "You caught me in the very act of detecting."

She laughed shortly. "Visible evidence, eh?"

He nodded. "Exactly. Visible evidence."

She tossed away her smoldering cigarette. "Captain Brade," she said, "you've found the murderer of Judge Ballantyne, haven't you?"

"I have arrested Ransome, the judge's former valet," Brade said. "He had an excellent motive for the crime."

"And opportunity?"

"Opportunity," Brade agreed.

"Those two things are vital, you know."

She sighed faintly. "Then may I go? You won't hold me any longer?"

She was watching him intently, and the queer glow in her eyes deepened until they looked like the eyes of a tiger.

Brade carefully lighted a cigarette, glance intent on the match he held. When the operation was completed to his satisfaction, he looked at her. Full and direct, his gaze met hers, held.

"Madame Marvelle," he said quietly, "you are at liberty to depart whenever you desire. I shall require your testimony later, of course."

"Of course," she said on a faint gasp. "You will find my residence listed in the directory. I will be ready when you come."

"Thank you," he said. She went up the steps, walking straight and sure, her small feet making no sound on the stairs. He waited until she had disappeared, then he inhaled a great cloud of smoke, and sat down as if he were suddenly very much exhausted.

Then abruptly he rose, crossed to the telephone, and called headquarters. "Any news?" he asked when Lieutenant Grierson answered.

"One of the Burney mob's squealed," the lieutenant stated.

"Yes? What's his line?"

Grierson said slowly. "They were laying off. Had given up entirely the idea of bumping the judge."

Brade frowned at the transmitter. "What's the idea?" he rapped. "That's not much of an alibi unsupported."

"It isn't unsupported," Grierson went on slowly. "It was smuggled out of the death cell the day before Burney went out. It's in his writing. It says plainly that the gang

is to forget the thing. Big Boy said he had a better plan."

Brade grunted. He was momentarily unable to digest this amazing bit of information. Grierson continued: "I don't see much chance of the thing being a fake," he said. "We've dug up the guard who delivered the note to a Burney man outside the gates. And Burney evidently had enough drag with his gang to make an order stick even then."

"What was Big Boy's better plan?" Brade asked suddenly. "Got any ideas?"

"Nary a one. That's all the dope I've got."

Brade replaced the instrument and stood for a moment frowning at it. Then he took out his knife and deliberately cut the wire. In the silence of the hall, he heard the sudden tap of rain against the window.

Terry clumped slowly downstairs, lips set and grim. "Court," he complained, "I don't like the notion of keeping this guy Ransome out here. If he's the egg that croaked the judge, he ought to be in a cell."

"All right, Terry," Brade said absently, "we'll get him to a cell quick enough. Right now, you run along and find old Archer, the butler, for me. Bring him to me in the library. If I'm not there, wait."

Terry wanted to argue about the confinement of Ransome, but something in Brade's face stopped him. He set off to find Archer.

Brade stood a moment, head bent in thought, then he went upstairs and along the hall until he came to the room occupied by Madame Marvelle. Pausing before it, he listened to evidence of activity inside, and gradually there came to him the sound of a woman singing. It was a rich, low contralto voice that

hummed a throbbing tune. And, suddenly, the singing stopped and the woman laughed.

Brade rapped sharply. There was a moment's tense pause, then he heard light steps crossing the floor, and the door was opened. Madame Marvelle was wrapped in a silk kimono of pale amber that deepened the lights in her eyes. She looked into the semidarkness of the hall.

"Oh, Captain Brade," she said, "I didn't recognize you."

"Sorry to interrupt," he began.

"That's quite all right," she told him. "I had a little packing to do, then I'm phoning for a car from the city. What can I do for you?"

"May I come in?" he asked. "I just want to settle one point."

She stepped aside, opening the door. He went in. She closed the door behind him, stood, quietly waiting.

Before Brade turned to face her, his eyes registered the condition of the room. The bed was ruffled as if she had tossed there restlessly, in an endeavor to sleep. On the dresser were various toilet articles: powder, rouge, comb, brushes, a small black mask of silk. On a small table by the window lay an open Gladstone bag. Dainty garments were visible. The red heel of a small pump protruded impudently. Hanging over a chair was a short fluffy frock of black lace, beruffled and with span-gles.

He turned slowly. "I merely wanted to be sure," he said, "about that little tent of yours. Would you allow me to see it?"

Her brows twitched in sudden annoyance. "Of course," she said shortly, "though I have it all packed now." Petulantly, she took a suitcase from under the edge of the bed. Brade pretended not to notice her ill humor and strolled to the window

whistling absently. He pulled back the curtain and stared out. The rain was falling softly, and high behind jagged clouds the moon showed at intervals, so that the night looked silver gray. He leaned against the chair, eyes narrowed.

"That's an odd effect," he said over his shoulder. "Rain and moonlight."

"Here's the tent," she said, and her long eyes smoldered at Brade's failure to assist her with the heavy straps.

Brade was at once very courteous. He insisted that she should not take it out. He just wanted to examine the texture and especially the screws that held it to the floor. It probably seemed foolish to her, he explained, but, after all, this business of crime detection had many strange angles.

And now could he help her to put it back? "I'll try," he said with his charming smile, "not to bother you again." He went out, closing the door softly after him.

He went downstairs and straight to the library. Terry had evidently not located Archer yet. Brade, still whistling, unlocked the drawer that held so many things of importance, picked up a small white envelope, and into it slipped a tiny bright fragment which he carefully drew from his vest pocket.

Terry Shan came in just then, looking annoyed. "Court," he said, "this is the damndest place for people to vanish from. I can't find Archer any place."

Brade's head lifted. His eyes narrowed, hard and bright. "Have you been over the house?"

"Yes. He isn't here."

"Who's seen him recently?"

"One of the maids reports he headed out the servants' entrance about twenty minutes ago. Had on his hat and coat."

Brade thought swiftly. "Give the grounds the once-over, Terry!" he ordered. "I want to talk to Archer—bad. He can't have gone far."

Terry hurried out. Brade closed the drawer and locked it just as some one tapped on the door. At his summons, it opened and a white-faced maid appeared.

"I understood, sir," she stammered, "that you're looking for Archer. Well——" She paused, twisting at her apron.

"Yes," Brade snapped. "What about it?"

"Why, sir, it's just that he went to the old barn, sir."

Brade frowned. "Where in thunder is that?" he demanded.

The girl gulped nervously. "It's back of the garage," she explained. "It isn't used any more, and I don't know why Archer went there."

"Very well." Brade was on his feet. "Run along," he told her, "and thanks."

She scurried out, slamming the door behind her. It echoed unpleasantly in the stillness of the house. Brade patted his shoulder holster, snatched up his flash, and slipped into the hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFESSION.

AS he ran lightly through the house and out the side entrance, he heard a big clock somewhere booming the hour of ten.

It was very dark on the grounds. The rain still fell drearily. The fitful moon had completely disappeared. There was a lonesome wind whining through the leafless branches. Brade glanced around swiftly. He remembered the old

barn now. He had noticed it the night before in making a tour of inspection. It was a gaunt, ruinous structure that stood some fifty yards behind the new modern concrete garage. He had wondered at the time why such an eyesore was allowed to remain in grounds like those at Royle's Rest.

What had taken the butler there, he could not imagine. He hurried along through the dark, trusting to his sense of direction, rather than to his flash. Once, he heard a hoarse hail and an answering shout where Terry and his men searched the grounds.

Brade approached the barn from the side, walking on the wet grass which deadened completely the sound of his footfalls. A dozen yards away, he stopped, breathing hard, and studied the layout. The building loomed a black blur in the darkness. Wind whistled lonesomely through broken glass of sagging windows. A door flapped dismally. There was the monotonous drip of water from leaky eaves. And just then, a tiny flash of light showed through a crack on the loft floor.

Brade darted forward, found the door, slipped in, and stood tensely listening. It was deathly still in there, and warm, after the cold night air outside. There was the smell of rotting vegetation and refuse from a stable, mingling with the damp freshness of the wet fields that drifted in through broken windows.

Then over his head he heard a board creak.

He wanted desperately to use his light, to discover the locality of the ladder leading to the loft, but it was too dangerous. Carefully, he groped forward, hands outstretched. One came in contact with a stout wooden stanchion. The other

touched the rough boards of a manger, moved over, touching the soggy dampness of a pile of moldy hay, then he found it.

It was built straight against the wall, strong thick boards, that led up into the blackness. The detective stood there, considering a moment. He was still deeply puzzled as to what the butler, Archer, could be doing here.

His curiosity overcame his natural caution. He began climbing, pulling himself up noiselessly, alert for a sound from above. It came with startling abruptness. A choked, stifled cough! Then a creaking board again!

Brade tensed, clinging by one hand, the other steady around the butt of his gun. The flash was in a side pocket. Silence settled thick and ominous. The drip of rain was the only sound, and it seemed very far away. Brade eased up another rung, then another. His head was on a level with the floor of the loft. It was as dark as a pit.

He negotiated those last rounds with catlike caution. Stretched out along the floor, bending forward from the hips, he waited! Nothing happened. He crept forward until he was lying flat, with only his legs from the knees down extended across the opening, then he began a cautious crawling until he was entirely on the floor.

His ears were strained until they ached. He straightened on his knees, and got slowly to his feet. He could feel the painful throb of his heart, the pounding of blood in his ears. It seemed to fill the silence with a dull, muffled thunder.

Then, over to his right, something plumped softly to the floor. Brade turned his flash straight toward that sound and saw a small chunk of wood rolling along the floor. At the

same moment, there was a dull plop. The flashlight shattered from his hand. He leaped to one side, clutching at his numbed wrist. After that, nothing!

He crouched there, back against the rough boards, momentarily staggered by the swiftness of that attack. A piece of wood thrown to make him reveal himself! A silenced bullet to shatter his light!

Somewhere in the room was a stifled breathing—a gasping animal sound that was somehow horrible. It brought cold perspiration to the detective's face, increased the beating of his heart.

His left hand still ached from the impact of that bullet on the flesh, but his right one was sound. His fingers tightened around the gun butt.

The phantom moon struggled from behind the clouds, shone for a furtive moment on a drenched world. Its pale illumination shivered fleetingly on a gaping window frame in the loft of the old barn, showed to Brade's aching eyes the ghostly outlines of boxes, a tumbled litter of what seemed to be old furniture. Then it was gone, and there was only darkness and the sound of that panting breath, which he could not exactly locate.

But he knew his danger. His antagonist was undoubtedly crouching behind a box, out of sight, out of immediate danger, while he stood almost directly before the window. The next time the moon broke through, if he had not moved—

He curled one foot forward. A board creaked warningly. He ducked but there was no shot. The uncertainty was frazzling his nerves. He wanted something definite to fight, something to grapple with. Not this eerie silence! This thick smell of dust and mold!

He stiffened. There was the faintest suggestion of sound from the far corner, the brushing of a body against wood. The panting breath was silenced. He strained into the dark. Was some one creeping forward toward him? He thought for a mad moment of making a dive for the ladder opening, but the slightest move on his part would draw a bullet.

And then, to his dazed senses, came a shout from outside—a lusty hail. Another voice cried in uncertain quavering tones: "Captain Brade! Captain Brade!"

It was the shaking voice of old Archer, the Ballantyne butler.

Brade jerked around involuntarily. Through the crawling dark came the whine of steel. He sensed its coming, and tried to avoid it. But his movement came too late. There was a stablike flame in the flesh of his left arm, the biting, tearing slash of a knife blade through flesh and muscle. Then Brade fired, and, straight on the heels of the bullet, he leaped.

A cry followed his shot. Pain of his wound was making him dizzy. He felt the impact of his own body against another that lurched sideways and was gone. All this formed a nightmare of unreality against which he fought blindly.

Then darkness gripped him—a darkness more intense than that which brooded in the old loft. There came the scrape of feet on the ladder rungs, sound again of that gasping breath, and Brade knew that he was alone.

Cursing savagely, he reeled against the wall. Blood was coursing hotly over his arm and hand. Suddenly, he realized that the beastly knife blade was still embedded in the muscles of his arm. Setting his teeth against the pain, he yanked it out.

There were sounds of activity outside. Men were shouting. Terry must have come up. They would catch the fugitive. That thought was strangely comforting to Brade as he hunched there, gasping dully. Terry would nab whoever it was, whoever had lurched in the darkness. Catch Archer!

But it wasn't Archer. He had unmistakably heard Archer's voice down below, calling to him. He groped his way to the ladder, leaned there panting, while down below flashlights played. Suddenly, Terry was looking up at him, face stark and drawn.

"Court!" he called. "What's wrong?"

Brade laughed harshly, set his foot on the ladder, and got himself down with one arm. Terry's ready hands assisted him as he reached the bottom. The sergeant was sputtering with excitement and concern.

"Court, where'd you get to? What brought you out here? You're hurt! Here, lemme see!"

"It's all right, Terry," Brade said. "Just a nasty cut. Tie something below my armpit to stop the bleeding."

Terry yanked off his tie, knotted it above the wound, inserted a pencil and twisted it tightly. Brade grunted.

"Better," he said. "Now some one came out of this place just as you heaved up here. Get 'im?"

Terry shook his head. "Didn't see a soul, Court. Maybe, he's still in here."

He snapped a hasty order, and two of the plain-clothes men started a swift search of the barn. Brade let them work but he didn't think the fugitive would be found there.

Terry said: "I found Archer. He'd gone to the garage. Digging into some old trunks out there.

Wanted to show you something. Here he is."

The old man, white and shaken, pushed into the circle of light from Terry's flash. "Captain Brade, sir," he said uncertainly, "I got to thinking I had some old theater programs tucked away in a trunk in the garage, and I thought maybe I could find that name you wanted, so I went to get them."

"That's fine, Archer," Brade muttered, getting hold of himself. "Just a minute before I hear your story. Hawkins"—he glanced at the big plain-clothes man who loomed back of Terry, "beat it to the house and see that no one leaves. No one! Understand?"

"O. K., sir," Hawkins said, and departed on the run.

"And now, Archer!" Brade, wincing at the pain of his arm which was growing numb, glanced keenly at the old servant.

"I got it here, sir." Archer drew out a folded paper and spread it before Brade. "There's the name, sir. That's the name I couldn't remember."

Brade leaned forward, supporting himself on Terry's shoulder, and narrowed his eyes on the page.

Slowly, they widened, bright with sudden comprehension. "I see!" he gasped. "I see it all now! What Beke Lavery tried to tell before he died! Whom he saw in the hall the night Ballantyne was murdered. What he meant when he said——"

Brade straightened on a deep breath. "Come on, Terry," he snapped. "We're traveling and traveling fast."

They plunged out into the dark again, Brade going first, with Terry's flash in his hand. The sergeant followed and old Archer trudged along.

To his amazement, Brade found Ann Ballantyne in the hall,

stretched out on the divan, looking rather white and big-eyed, but otherwise quite normal. She sat up as the two officers appeared, and her startled glance flashed to Brade's bloody hand.

"What is it?" she asked faintly. "Who hurt you?"

"Never mind," Brade said curtly. "Where's everybody?"

Ann pressed a cold hand against her throat. "Why—why," she stammered, "mother's still in bed. Phil's asleep. Ransome——"

Brade said to Terry. "Bring Ransome down here."

The big sergeant took the stairs two at a jump.

Brade leaned against the stair railing. His arm was like a stick of wood. Feeling had left it, and its numbness irritated him more than pain.

An impatient voice sounded from the floor above, evidently speaking to Terry. "This phone is out of order. I can't think what's happened to it."

Terry mumbled a reply and hurried on. Brade's head lifted. There was a grim smile on his lips. "Oh, Madame Marvelle," he called, "come down, will you please?"

There was a stir upstairs as she rose from the chair before the telephone stand, then she appeared, coming down slowly, wearing a bright-orange raincoat over her dark dress and a jaunty little tam set sideways on her thick hair. Behind her at the stairhead, Brade glimpsed several bags.

"It must have been the storm," she said petulantly.

Her head lifted. Her eyes flashed up the stair well where Terry Shan appeared with Ransome walking quietly before him. Madame Marvelle stepped aside to allow them to pass, then she followed slowly.

"Perhaps the wires could be repaired," she said, still intent on her own problem. "The phone was working perfectly a short time ago."

"It was," Brade agreed calmly, "working perfectly quite a while ago, when, for instance, Beke Lavery phoned you from the city demanding money as a price for his silence. Since then, I have taken the precaution of cutting the wires."

She halted abruptly, leaning on the railing, gazing down at him. There was such a look of complete amazement in her eyes that Terry, who motioned his prisoner to a chair, just then, thought Brade had taken leave of his senses in making that accusation.

Ransome sat very still, head bent, his manacled hands hanging limply before him. Ann Ballantyne, sensing tension in the air, was crouched motionless in a corner of the divan.

Madame Marvelle continued to stare at Brade. "You cut the phone wires?" she asked curiously. "How odd!"

"Not so odd," Brade said thickly, "I didn't want you leaving Royle's Rest to-night, *Jael Burney!*"

She cowered back as though he had struck her. Her face went a cold gray white. She stared at him with eyes of hate. Brade's uninjured hand was clenched tightly on the railing. He looked up at her. There was a hard smile on his lips.

"Big Boy Burney called his men off on the murder of the judge who had sentenced him to die. He had a better plan, he said. A much better plan. He left the job to you—to his wife."

She laughed suddenly, coolly, insolently. For just a moment, a tremendous pride gleamed in her eyes. "Not his wife," she said slowly. "His mother!"

Brade's jaw sagged. He blinked,

looked at the slim, youthful figure standing in the gay orange coat and tam. He studied her lovely unlined face, the thick masses of her dark hair. He remembered Big Boy Burney. He marveled.

"His mother," she repeated and shrugged. "Yes, he gave me the right to kill that murderer—Ballantyne." Her eyes closed swiftly, then opened. For just a moment, her erect shoulders sagged. "I'm almost glad you know," she half sobbed. "I'll take my chances. They don't execute women nowadays. But Ballantyne is dead. I killed him. Sent a knife into his heart."

Ransome's head lifted slowly. His eyes, burning with sudden understanding, rested on the woman's face. "You killed him!" he gasped. "It was you there in the almond bushes—not Ann?"

Madame Marvelle laughed. "It was not Ann," she admitted. "It was myself! I slipped out when the hall was empty, followed him, and hid in the bushes. I had brought my own knives, but I saw that one on the hall table. It seemed wiser to use it. That moment when Ballantyne stood in the door of the summerhouse after he had knocked Phil Munro down!"

Ransome cried thickly: "I saw the knife come out of the darkness. It found its mark, and I knew that Ballantyne was doomed. I ran then and met Brade on the lilac walk." He paused, breathing hard. Ann was watching with wide, startled eyes.

"Take the cuffs off, Terry. Ransome is innocent," Brade said quietly. "I knew he was innocent when he proved to me beyond the question of a doubt that it was physically impossible for him to have hurled that knife." Then the detective looked at Madame Marvelle.

"I might have known sooner you did it," he said, "if I had seen the costume you wore that night."

"Why did you steal a spangle from it this evening when you came to my room with that story about the tent?" she asked with a curious interest.

"I found one like it on the judge's robe. You must have been there beside him in the summerhouse."

"I was," she admitted. "I wanted him to know who killed him. I think he understood. His fingers caught at my skirt."

"You've puzzled me all along," Brade said, still staring at her. "And then you deliberately lied to me about the location of your fortune-telling booth here in this hall." He paused, then continued: "Your attempt to implicate Ann Ballantyne was the beginning of the end for you. You told me the tent stood over there in the corner, diagonally opposite the newel post here, and the table that stood beside it. I found from the screw marks on the floor that it actually stood on a line with the table, back in the corner well under the stairs, and that you could not possibly have seen what you described."

She nodded, almost casually. "When I came from the living room and saw you sitting on the floor in the hall here, I had already heard you talking to the maid, and I realized then that you knew."

"But I couldn't get the connection," he admitted, gazing straight at her. "When Beke Lavery said before he died: 'Jael got me,' naturally, I inferred he meant stir-prison. What could I think? *Jael* is not a common name."

Her lip curled. "I tried to play fair with him. I gave him the money he asked for, but he was yellow, a double-crosser, said some-

thing about seeing me again. He had promised to clear out, but I knew then that, sooner or later, he would squeal—so I killed him."

"And you killed Thrale," Brade accused, "because you listened outside the library door and heard him say that he would recognize the woman who was concealed in that almond thicket by the way she walked. I purposely allowed you to think that poor Thrale had told Sergeant Shan something else. I did not know I was signing his death warrant."

Ann Ballantyne's voice broke through the silence. "And you called to me from my sleep," she sobbed. "You called me! I didn't know who it was, but I remembered a voice speaking to me saying over and over: 'Ann. Ann! Come with me!'"

Jael Burney's lips curled faintly. "I liked the idea of Ballantyne's daughter standing trial for murder," she said. "It was a simple trick of hypnotism. I plucked the knife from Thrale's chest and put it in your——"

"Left hand!" Brade interrupted. "That was a great mistake, Jael Burney."

Her glance narrowed at him. "I didn't know that," she admitted, and fear began growing in her eyes. "I was nervous."

"And you lured me to the old barn," Brade continued inexorably. "Archer didn't go there."

"No. But I knew you would never allow me to leave this house."

Brade eased his throbbing shoulder. "But for this, I would have killed you," he said savagely.

"Oh, I wish you had. I wish you had," she cried suddenly. "What is there to live for now? What good has it all done? I killed Ballantyne, but it doesn't bring my boy

back. Just taking Ballantyne's life wasn't enough. He should have suffered—suffered like I have. Death isn't enough."

She slipped down to a step, face buried in her shaking hands, and Brade saw that she was suddenly old. As he stood there staring at her, he heard in ghostly echoes the voices of two people, Mary Ballantyne and Lynn Royle, saying the same thing: "Death wouldn't wipe out the debt! Death wouldn't give us back our youth! Death is futile!"

And he thought of Mary with her snowy hair and sightless eyes. He glanced at Royle's haggard face, his slumped shoulders. He looked at the weeping girl on the divan, who had never known what it was to love a father. He thought of Steven Thrale who had lived without hope. And he saw suddenly the mighty form of the man with ruddy hair who had done all these things.

Slowly, his eyes darkened. His lips hardened into a thin, white line. He nodded to Terry. The sergeant

laid a hand on Jael Burney's shoulder. She rose, unresisting. Terry led her away.

Brade brushed hair from his damp brow. Then he crossed over and touched Ann Ballantyne's bowed head. "Ann," he said gently, "will you come with me and—Ransome—here, into the library? There is a great deal to talk over, a number of things to be straightened out. Later, we will see your mother. Phil, too, will want to know."

Ransome started to protest, but Brade silenced him and smiled at the sudden lighting of the sunken eyes. Ann lifted her head, gazed long and questioningly at the detective. Then her glance went to the man she had known merely as Ransome.

"Yes," she whispered. "I'll come. I want to know everything."

"Good girl," Brade said softly. "Everything's going to be much better from now on."

She smiled at him through tears. He saw the dawning of a great happiness in her eyes.

THE END.

In Next Week's Issue of

Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine

THE MAN HUNTER

By Hector Gavin Grey

Two things were at stake—his position and his beloved daughter—and he fought with all the hate in him against the cruel, ruthless gangster who tried to deprive him of them.

GAMBLER'S BARGAIN

By Donald Van Riper

He made a mad bargain, knowing that the odds were against him, and he had to kill wantonly to keep it.

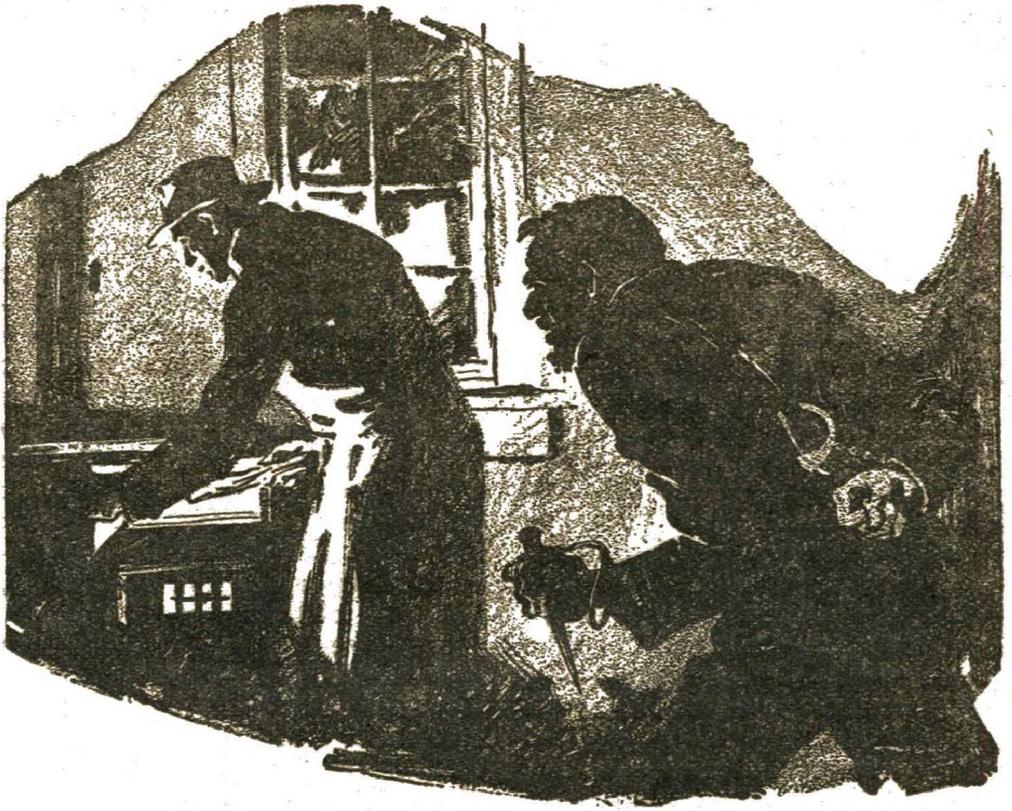
Also Features by

Eleanor Blake

Walter C. Scott

And Others

At All News Stands



BROUGHT IN ALIVE

By JEAN BROWN

One moment was enough for the killer to get the upper hand.

PAUSING beneath a dripping fir, Detective Louie Girard looked down over the valley. Some place in this rain-soaked, deserted countryside was Jake Hines.

He might even be in that deserted farmhouse that crouched at the foot of the hill, seeking shelter from the rain. Night before last, he had holed up in a deserted house like

that. Louie had found his bed of papers and moldy discarded clothing, looking like the bed of a huge wood rat. He could even see the print where his gun had lain.

Last night, Hines had slept under a log on a heap of dry ferns. And now he might be any place close. He couldn't be far away, for the bed under the logs had not been long cold when Louie found it.

Louie wanted desperately to smoke. Maybe, it would help kill that uneasy feeling that had dogged him all day. He drew out his tobacco pouch and looked at it longingly; it was the leather one Martha had given him for Christmas, his name across one corner. Then, with a sigh, he put it back. Even the odor of his pipe might give the fugitive warning.

This had been a long, wearisome pursuit. All the way from Los Angeles, he had followed the man, just missing him half a dozen times. And three days before, the thief had abandoned his car and taken to the hills there in northwestern Oregon, and Louie Girard had faithfully followed behind. He meant to take him alive. He had always taken his men alive, was proud of his record. That was his business—to capture them and turn them over to the law, not to kill them. And in spite of his small stature and his kindly, ruddy face, he had a reputation that inspired terror in those whom he hunted.

But he could see no sign of life in the valley, either human or wild, and he moved out from the indifferent shelter of the fir and started down the hillside, keeping his eyes and ears alert.

To the farther side of the valley ran the rain-swollen, muddy river, and he could hear its sullen mutterings. Two miles farther up was the dam, a project by a Portland power company that had been finally abandoned, but was as yet undrained. But that was the reason the countryside was deserted. Ten years before, a power company in Portland had bought the valley as a dam site. It had been a slight miscalculation buying the whole valley, for it later developed that they needed only the upper end. But the

inhabitants had been eager enough to sell, and now the valley lay deserted, the scattered gray farmhouses uninhabited except by wood rats and squirrels.

Louie stopped again. He thought he had heard a sound above the drip of the rain, the sullen roar of the river. It had sounded like the sudden, sharp crack of a stick beneath a heavy tread. He was not sure, but he stood still for a long time, his black slicker blending in with the wet vegetation. His round blue eyes darted here and there; his ears were strained, but the sound was not repeated. There was just the unceasing drip and swish of the rain, the growl of the river.

Early winter twilight was setting in now. There was another night to spend in some damp, silent shack, munching at the cold food old Bill Kramer, the sheriff in the little town of Scott, below, had insisted on his carrying. Louie and Bill had worked in a sawmill together years before.

"You don't know them hills, Louie, like I do," Bill had said. "Why, he can evade yuh for weeks. A hunted man can live on berries and roots, but you gotta have food. Better let me send a man with you. I'd go myself, but I'm on a committee that's meeting to-day to see about havin' that dam drained. It's a menace with the heavy winter rains settin' in. Liable to give way any time."

But Louie had shaken his head. "I'll get him, Bill," he said. "And I'll bring him in alive. He's a bad actor. Served time twice for robbery. Ought to be put away permanently. Had trouble down in Mexico, too. He hadn't been out long this last time when he beat and nearly killed this whole family—four of them. He left finger prints on the piece of iron pipe he used."

Then Louie had taken the grub and started out.

This was the third day now, and he had not even seen the maniac, though he knew the man was not far ahead, knew that he was armed with a high-powered rifle.

Louie stood for a while contemplating the house. It would soon be too dark for further progress that day. He had better spend the night there. The house would undoubtedly offer some dry corner where he could find a dreary comfort.

But he knew that Jake Hines might also be regarding the house from some other angle with the same thought in mind. He would have to approach it cautiously, make sure he was the only lodger—or make sure he was not; that would be better.

Slipping down the hillside, he hunched forward a little, his revolver at the tip of his fingers in his slicker pocket.

He looked just like one of the dark young firs that had in some mysterious way loosened itself from the hillside and was slowly moving down into the valley.

Now and then, he stopped to look about him and listen, and, on such occasions, he heard only the drip of the rain, the swish of the wind through wet boughs, the mad growl of the river.

Now, he was almost on the house. He looked down into the yard surrounded by jagged gray pickets. A large, slatted chicken coop stood desolately on a patch of bare ground. Bottomless, it was like the skeleton top of a miniature house. There was an open-sided shed at the back of the house, and he could dimly make out shadowy, indefinite objects in this.

Again he advanced cautiously, then stopped. He had seen some-

thing move among those shadows in the shed.

He stood pressed against a dripping fir, looking, listening. But there was no other movement, no sound. However, that in no way convinced him that he had not seen a movement there in the shed; he knew that he had.

Half an hour passed. Dark was definitely settling now, and the rain was falling more heavily, beating against the soggy ground, the complaining firs. The course of the river was no longer discernible; it was just a muffled roar. Louie crouched lower and proceeded warily toward the house.

He crept through a gap in the picket fence, and stood in the dark yard not far from the chicken coop. He could make it out dimly, knowing it was there. Then he slipped like a shadow to the shed.

And when he reached the shed, he knew that Jake Hines was in the house, for he could smell the faint, pungent odor of burning tobacco. Jake had not been able to withstand his craving for a smoke; or, possibly he thought he was secure, did not know that the detective trailed him so closely, if, indeed, at all.

The door to the house was open; Louie could see just a long splotch of darkness there, and he wondered just where in the dark interior Jake Hines lurked. He crouched beside one of the old packing boxes stacked in the shed and listened, waited for some movement from within to warn him of Hines's whereabouts. Finally, above the drip of the rain, it came, a sound as if the hunted man sought a more comfortable position, a stealthy floundering of legs as if he were reclining. And, after that, silence again.

But that was all Louie had wanted. Now, he knew that the

man was located to the left of the door, that he was lying down. And his reason also told him that Hines had his gun in his hands, his finger on the trigger ready to fire at the slightest provocation.

Louie crouched and waited. After a while, the man would doze. It would be a little easier than to slip up on him, although Louie knew his kind always slept with one eye open, senses alert to the least sound.

It began to rain harder. It came pouring down in torrents, beating on the roof with a fury that drowned out the sound of the river, the wailing of the firs. Now, Louie thought, was a good time. Any sound he might make would be drowned by the thunder of beating rain on the roof.

Clutching his revolver in his right hand, his small flat flashlight in his left, he moved to the door. He edged through, tiptoeing carefully, hardly breathing. He could hear the drip of water from a leak in the roof, and he moved to avoid it, stepped to the left. But he didn't quite avoid it. It caught him on the brim of his hat, and the water went bouncing off in a spray. And the spray caught Jake Hines in the face. Louie heard him rise to his elbow, knew that the gun was held in his hand in readiness, might shoot at him from the darkness at any moment.

He flashed the beam of his torch into the darkness, straight into Jake Hines's startled eyes. And with his right foot, he kicked the gun barrel into the air, so that the shot went wild.

"Put your hands up, Jake!" he said. "I've got you."

Jake put his hands up slowly, left his gun lying across his knees.

"Now get up!" said Louie.

Jake got to his feet, and the gun

dropped to the floor onto the heap of rags and paper on which he had been nesting.

"You're under arrest for assault and robbery of the Shively family," said Louie.

Jake Hines said nothing. He was staring down at the little detective with fierce hate in his small, deep-set eyes. He was a tall, loosely built man, powerful-looking. Thick wet lips showed through his stubby red beard; his nose was broken in the center. His long flight told on him; he looked weary, haggard, desperate.

"Turn around!" ordered Louie, keeping the flashlight trained on him. "Lower your hands behind you. Careful!" There was the click of steel on steel as Louie snapped the bracelets on the hairy wrists. Then his hands ran dexterously over the fellow's body in search of weapons, and found none. "All right, sit down!"

Jake lowered himself onto an up-turned box, and, with a few twists of a rope he carried in his pocket, Louie secured the man's legs.

The little detective had rested his flashlight on the edge of an old rusty stove while he did this. Now, he picked it up and surveyed his completed work with satisfaction. It was certainly a relief to have the fellow safe in hand at last. Picking up the fallen gun, he stood it against the wall and flashed the light about the room. It was littered with papers, pieces of boxes. There were two table legs, but no table, and broken shelves. When he looked at the stove, he thought how nice a fire would seem. He hadn't dared to light a fire since he had taken to the hills.

Gathering some of the pieces of broken boxes, some of the papers, and stuffing them into the stove, he struck a match and applied the

flame. But it took several matches to get it going, for the paper was damp and moldy. But, at last, it was burning, and the flames through the wide cracks in the old stove lighted the place dimly.

He tried to close the door opening into the shed, but found it so badly warped that this was impossible. This was also the case with the door that led into another room. But the fire felt good, anyway, and he kept feeding it box ends and trash.

Then he thought of food, and took out of his deep slicker pocket the remainder of the grub Bill Kramer had fixed for him. He saw Jake Hines's eyes fall on it ravenously.

"Hungry?" he asked.

Jake Hines swallowed. "I ain't eaten for two days," he said hoarsely. He swallowed again, his eyes devouring the food.

"Well, there's no call I should starve you," said Louie. "There's enough here for a snack for both of us. We can make it down out of here to-morrow."

"I've got to have my hands to eat," said Hines. "If you could cuff 'em in front, I could manage it."

Louie hesitated. He might stand there and feed the man a swallow at a time. But that didn't seem necessary. He was unarmed, his legs tied. He could let him have his left hand free. He unfastened the bracelet from the left hand, and pulling the right arm well across the man's back, snapped the bracelet through the top of the strong denim pants. He couldn't very well get his right hand loose now without actually tearing his pants from his body.

Then Louie divided the remaining four sandwiches with him and sat down to eat.

The man ate wolfishly, as if no food had passed his lips for days.

As his ragged teeth sank into his own sandwiches, he eyed hungrily those of the little detective.

There was silence between them. Louie was thinking of getting home again to Martha and the kids. That uneasy feeling he had experienced all day had vanished; he was feeling relieved and happy. He guessed it had been just his nerves, because of such a long trip.

The fire was dying down. He laid his sandwich aside with care and rose to get some wood. Just for a moment, he turned his back on his prisoner. But that moment was enough; that moment coupled with the fact that Detective Girard had overlooked two things in connection with his prisoner: that Jake Hines was left-handed and that, after the fashion of the Mexicans with whom he had lived for several years, he carried a thin-bladed knife, attached to a leather thong, up his sleeve.

Jake rose silently as a shadow, swift as a hawk. His left arm rose, fell. Louie gave a gasp, tottered uncertainly, then slipped to the floor. Jake stood over him, dripping knife ready, but the little detective did not move again.

Swiftly, Jake cut the rope that bound his feet. He got the keys from the pocket of the dead detective's coat and unfastened his handcuffs. Then all the beast that was in him showing in his ugly face, he turned to the body of the man he had killed and wrought his wicked fury on it.

He stopped when exhausted. The fire was almost out. He heaped more trash on it, and the flames leaped up again. He mopped the perspiration from his forehead. Then his eyes fell on the sandwich the detective had left, and, seizing it, he wolfed it down.

For a minute, he looked down at the grotesquely sprawled body on the floor. Maybe it would be best if he hid it some place. Yes, he'd put it some place where it wouldn't be found. He glanced out through the open door, and his eyes fell on one of the faintly discernible packing boxes there. That was it, he'd put him in one of those and nail him up. No one would think of looking there for him.

First, though, he would see if there was anything on the body that he could use. He went through the dead man's pockets. The watch was broken and useless. He should have taken that from him first, but he might sell it for a couple of dollars, anyway; he dropped it into his pocket. There were a few bills in a bill fold, some silver, a tobacco pouch half filled with tobacco.

He carried the limp body out to the shed, and, by the ray of the flashlight, selected a box. It was the heaviest box there, a substantial thing of thick wood reinforced by cleats, and he wondered vaguely what its use had been. The body fitted pretty well by bending it and squeezing it a little. Then, with a handy rock, he drove in the nails that protruded from the top. This done, he stacked another box on top of it, and went back into the house.

The fire was again getting low, so he heaped on more wood. The rain was still falling though not so hard. He took out the dead man's tobacco pouch, filled his pipe, and, settling himself back in his nest, his gun across his knees, smoked.

He should have felt relieved, knowing that he had killed his pursuer, and he was sure there had been only one man after him, but, instead, a queer uneasiness took possession of him. He couldn't name the reason for it, but he seemed to be listen-

ing, waiting for something. Some indefinite danger seemed to hang over him. He looked about the faintly lighted old kitchen, at the rafters over him; he held his pipe in his hand, bent his head to listen, but there was nothing.

Then he heard something in the next room, a movement, a rustle. He dropped his pipe and took up his gun in both hands. There was a high-pitched cry, and a chipmunk bounded into the room. It was quite obviously frightened—not of the man, for it seemed to pay no attention to him; it ran first one way and then another as if trying to escape from something, and there was nothing in pursuit. Finally, it bounced out the door into the shed.

Jake Hines relaxed; he started to grin, then stopped. There was a more ominous sound now; it terrified him as much as it mystified him—a rumbling roar—and there was a queer trembling of the house.

Then it struck. He felt the house lurch forward, and a great cataract of water came spouting through the window. The dam had burst, and the valley was flooded.

The killer got out of the house some way—into swirls of churning water that buffeted him about as if he had been a straw. He was a good swimmer, but it availed him nothing in that mad, seething torrent. Madly, he clutched at this and that object whirling by him. He was struck, beaten, and submerged until he was all but dead. Then, as he was on the verge of losing consciousness, his hands closed on a slatted something that rode well out of the water. He clung to this desperately.

After a while, the waters became more quiet; they rolled along deeply, quietly, widely. It stopped raining, and a few stars peeped through the parted clouds. Great, shapeless,

black things came at him in the flood, touched him, struck him, passed on. He heard the cry of a big mountain cat, caught the wild gleam of its eyes as it passed clinging to a green-branched log.

He clung to the slatted thing beneath his hands, hugged his body close to it. It rode the waters well, dipped only a little, never submerged even with the weight of his body clinging to it.

More stars came out, and it turned colder. He seemed to be growing numb, and he wasn't always sure that his hands were securely clutching the slats. He became afraid that they might slip off without his realizing it, and let him down into the cold muddy depths below him. Then he began beating one hand at a time against the cleats to restore circulation. But that did little good.

Clinging fiercely onto a slat with one numb hand, with cold clumsy fingers he unfastened his belt, slipped the end through a slat, and buckled it again. That would hold him even if his hands did slip.

The stars began to fade. His craft was riding serenely now, high out of the turgid water. It would not be long until day and the warmth of the sun.

But he did not know when day came, and he did not know when his slatted craft grounded within sight of the town of Scott, nor when Bill Kramer unfastened the belt that secured him thereto.

He opened his eyes in a room that

seemed all white. Then he saw that most of the whiteness came from the sunshine against a drawn shade. There was a little table beside the bed on which he lay, and on it was a broken watch, a bill fold and a tobacco pouch.

He tried to raise himself to a sitting posture, but something about his wrists detained him. Then he saw that his hands were cuffed to the steel rims of the bed.

Suddenly the door opened and Bill Kramer stood there. His tired gray eyes remained steel cold as they looked at the man.

"Take it easy," he said. "Take it easy. You're under arrest for the murder of Louie Girard. It——"

He was interrupted by a tall young man who came to the door.

"Here's the answer to your wire, Bill," he said, handing the sheriff a yellow envelope.

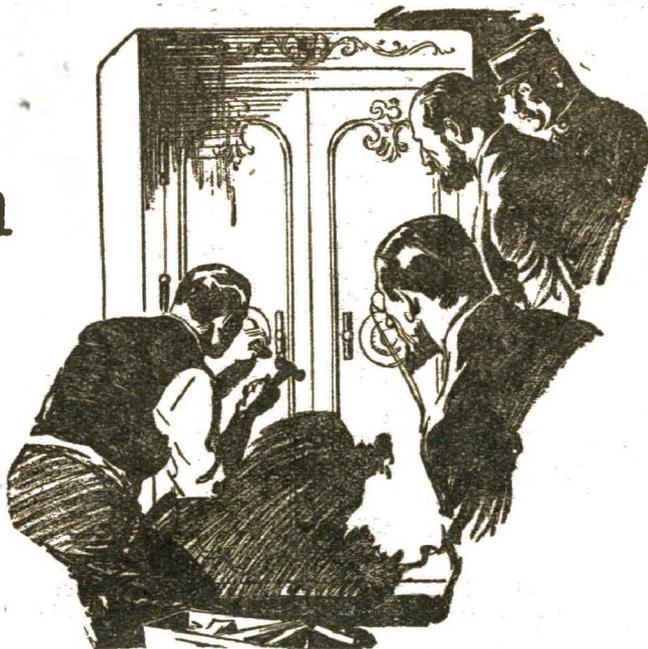
Bill Kramer took the envelope, opened it, and read it. He threw quick glances at the man on the bed as he read. When he had finished, he nodded.

"Yes, it's him—Jake Hines," he said. "Six foot one, little black eyes, dark hair, beard red when showing, two front teeth missing, nose broken. Louie brought him in alive like he said he would."

Then, in answer to the look of stupid amazement on the coarse face of the man cuffed to the bed, Kramer added, "Yeah, Louie Girard brought you in. It was the box you nailed him up in that buoyed up the chicken coop you come in on."



The Woman Who Stole



(A True Crime Story)

By HARRY VAN DEMARK

How a French peasant girl duped Paris to the tune of ten million.

IF a novelist had invented this plot, he would have been laughed at scornfully for his pains.

Theresa Daurignac—or Madame Humbert, as she afterward became, through her marriage to a barrister—is the high light of this story—and she stole ten million dollars on the security of a trouser button!

Amazing? Yes, but true! It is an intimate and revealing record of the Paris police department, as any one who cares to look may see.

Most adventuresses of Theresa's type have had either good looks to recommend them or wit, or, at least, that indefinable something which, down the ages, has been the stock in trade of women in their efforts to fascinate men.

Theresa was possessed of none of

these attributes. She was ordinary of feature and face, but she had brains. And she was a consummate actress with an insatiable ambition.

She was a shrewd judge of men and women. Finally, she was one of the most fluent and accomplished liars the world has ever known.

This latter trait manifested itself quite early in her career. When, on August 16, 1882, Theresa celebrated her twenty-first birthday, she began to look around for a husband. She did it with malice aforethought, having made up her mind, even at this early stage of her career, that the world was her oyster, waiting to be opened.

Her people were miserably poor. She was not possessed of even the traditional small dowry without which no French girl of the lower class can hope to marry well.

But this was nothing for Theresa to worry about. Relatives were something to be acquired—as needed. She invented a rich uncle—a wholesale wine merchant in Toulouse—who, she averred, had died and left her a fortune of three hundred thousand francs.

So far, so good! She confided this story, under promise of secrecy, to two or three of her girl friends. Soon the news was all over the village, as she expected and intended.

Thereafter, Theresa Daurignac had no lack of suitors. No young woman with such a dowry could be overlooked by eligible males, even if she were extremely plain and of humble origin.

Among others who came a-wooing was the barrister, Frederic Humbert. Him she chose. But there was a complication. He was under twenty-five. By French law, he could not marry without the consent of his parents.

As it happened, his father was dead; but his mother, an elderly woman and apparently not very shrewd, insisted on proof of her alleged fortune before giving her consent to the match.

“Certainly,” said Theresa kindly. “I will go to my bankers in Paris, withdraw the securities, and show them to you.”

The following day, attired in her finest frock, she set out, ostensibly for Paris. Instead, however, she journeyed no farther than a neighboring village, where lived a certain middle-aged suitor of hers—a farmer named Duluc.

He had saved three hundred thousand francs, exactly the amount of her mythical dowry, and this Theresa knew. She was also aware that Duluc had invested his savings in government securities, which he kept concealed in his house—a com-

mon practice among the peasantry of France.

Theresa persuaded her admirer to lend her the bundle of securities, promising to return them intact within a few days. Back in her own village, she triumphantly produced them for Humbert’s mother, pretending they were her own.

Consent to the marriage was duly given.

Later, in a spirit of contrition, she confessed to her newly wed husband what she had done.

“Come, Frederic,” she coaxed, “do not be angry, *mon cher*. I am clever, I tell you, very clever. You do not know it, but we are going to be rich, you and I. But first we must quit this terrible village. We must go to Paris.”

“To Paris? To—to live, Theresa?”

“Surely,” she urged. “To Paris, where money is to be quickly made.”

She silenced his protestations and finally won him over. To Paris, accordingly, they went. There, young Madame Humbert commenced almost immediately the amazing career of fraud, which lasted for twenty years, or up to an exciting dénouement in the spring of 1902.

During the greater part of this time, she dominated by the sheer force of her intellect, coupled with her reputation for possessing immense wealth, the social and political life of the brilliant French capital.

On first settling in the metropolis, Humbert was all for economy, which appealed to his frugal nature. But again his masterful wife overruled him. She rented an expensive apartment in one of the most aristocratic quarters of Paris, and in the reception room, where it could not fail to attract the attention of visitors, she installed an immense steel

safe with triple locks, each of which was secured by an immense official-looking seal.

As Madame Humbert had, of course, foreseen, this unusual object aroused the curiosity of her friends and acquaintances. Sooner or later, they all put the inevitable question:

"Whatever, madame, do you want with that enormous safe?"

And Madame Humbert would reply:

"Oh, the safe? Why, that contains my securities. They're immensely valuable, you know. They are worth, in fact, one hundred million francs."

One hundred million francs!

Her friends were staggered by the vision of such vast wealth—as well they might have been. The story spread rapidly. Soon, all Paris knew—or thought it did—that in the elegantly appointed apartment in the Avenue de l'Opera dwelt the richest woman in France—and one of the richest in all the world.

Financiers of all sorts, shady and otherwise, flocked around her like flies around a honey pot. To those who entreated her to invest money in their schemes she turned a deaf ear.

To those who had money to loan, however—well, that was different. To them she was graciousness itself, explaining that her fortune had been left to her by a deceased American millionaire, one Robert Crawford, whose natural daughter she was. This story she backed up by a copy of "Crawford's" will and a full list of the securities.

For the present, she related, she was unable to realize on them. She dared not break the seal which covered the locks of the safe, for the following reason:

There were, she related, two nephews of the testator, respec-

tively, Daniel and Henry Crawford, who claimed, between them, two thirds of their deceased uncle's estate, and they had, she said, started a lawsuit against her for the recovery of the property.

Her solicitors, she told everybody, had assured her that the two Crawfords had, legally, not a leg to stand on, and were certain to lose their case when it came up for a final hearing in the American courts. But, meanwhile, she was debarred from touching one penny of her fortune. It must remain sealed up in the big safe. To those who inquired what would happen if she should lose the lawsuit, she said she would still be entitled to her one-third share.

It would be impossible in a brief space to set forth more than a few of the many ingenious devices adopted by Madame Humbert for getting her dupes to believe in the truth of this remarkable—and, of course, entirely mythical—story. There were stacks of affidavits supposed to have been sworn to by nonexistent American attorneys, sheaves of legal documents of all sorts, forged birth and death certificates, and other documents conceived by the keen mind of this more-than-clever impostor.

By their aid, she successfully imposed on some of the shrewdest financiers in France; many of them almost fell over themselves to lend her money with which to prosecute her claims, as well as for her present necessities, hoping, of course, to be reimbursed with substantial interest at no very distant date.

Theresa Daurignac Humbert was possessed of nerves of steel and a front of pure brass.

To engineer so colossal a fraud for even one year would have taxed to the utmost the inventive powers

of any ordinary individual. Yet Madame Humbert carried it out successfully for over twenty years!

During all this time, she lived in the lap of luxury. Her dresses, her equipages, her gorgeous entertainments, were the talk of Paris—and of France.

The money for all these things literally poured in upon the adventuress. For instance, one Monsieur Roulina, a wealthy diamond merchant, lent her a considerable sum on her simple note of hand.

The great safe—the pivotal point upon which the whole gigantic fraud revolved—was a never-ceasing point of interest. As one generation passed on, a new generation came into being, wondering.

Always, Madame Humbert pretended that she wanted to open it. She brought action after action against the phantom Crawfords to compel them to allow her to do so. They, in turn, threw many legal obstacles in the way, or so she maintained.

“If we cannot have our share of uncle’s fortune, we’ll see that Madame Humbert does not get hers,” they were reputed to have said many times, each time with certain embellishments and variations.

But even the law’s delays are not endless. The time came at last when Madame Humbert’s friends began to drift away. Acquaintances looked at her askance. Creditors importuned the government to act, and, one morning, an order was signed by the minister of justice, directing that the seals be broken and the big safe opened at once.

This was on May 8, 1902.

That night, Madame Humbert, her husband, her unmarried sister, Marie Daurignac, and one or two others who had been parties to the plot, fled from Paris.

On the following day, the safe was forcibly opened by the minions of the law, who found it empty save for a solitary trouser button, placed, as if in derision, on a tiny ebony pedestal in the middle of the center shelf.

This button was the culminating touch that set all Paris laughing—all, that is to say, except those unfortunates to whom the adventuress owed money. These had no reason to laugh. Ruin stared many in the face. Two of Madame Humbert’s victims committed suicide when they realized how completely they had been duped.

Careful calculations by police agents revealed that, during the twenty years Madame Humbert had practiced her deception, something like ten millions of dollars had been handed over to her on false security by financiers and private money-lenders; most of them were either victims of her charms or actuated by purely selfish motives.

Meanwhile, warrants had been issued for the arrest of Madame Humbert, her husband, and the rest of the conspirators. But the much-wanted people were nowhere to be found.

Months elapsed before they were discovered, and that quite by accident, masquerading as Armenian refugees in a suburb of Madrid. Through the process of extradition, they were returned to Paris and the jurisdiction of the French courts.

Their trial created a tremendous sensation.

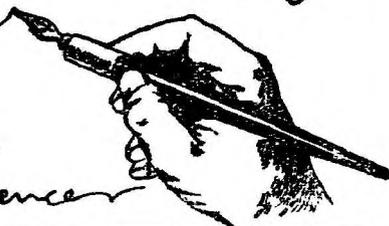
All were found guilty. Madame Humbert got off light at that, being sentenced to five years’ solitary confinement. A like punishment was meted out to her husband, whom the court adjudged equally guilty. The sister and two others were awarded shorter sentences.

What Handwriting Reveals

Conducted

By

Shirley Spencer



If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned to Shirley Spencer, Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. Shirley Spencer will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Also, coupon—at end of this department—must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read. If possible, write with black ink.

All communications will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in this department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Every care will be taken to return specimens of handwriting, but it is to be understood that Miss Spencer cannot be responsible for them.

This Week's Graphology Lesson:

The tightly closed *a* reveals a cautious and reserved nature. If lightly and normally closed, the caution is not deliberate, but, if there are extra loops tying the *a* up tight, you may be sure the writer is secretive and uncommunicative.

G. A. D., Canal Zone: The friendliness of my readers is very gratifying, and when one writes to assure me of his belief in my work, I feel the effort to be truly constructive is fully repaid. The response

to the department each week, and the letters of thanks, are the only ways I can judge whether or not I am popular. Being only human, I do like a little applause now and then. An experience I had last evening will keep me hopeful for some time. I met a woman who has read my department in every issue of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine. She has faithfully kept with me since I began the department. Her joyous smile upon learning who I was made me realize how much is expected of me by some of the readers. I have something to live up to, and I promise to put my best into these weekly chats.

If any of you have some particular phase of graphology which

you would like me to explain, write to me about it. I'll make the first part of the department an answer to request questions about this interesting science.

And now, Mr. D., I'm glad to be able to say that your writing has the rhythm necessary for success in music. The ability to play an instrument or to sing is not revealed in handwriting, but the gift of interpreting and having a naturally strong sense of rhythm is shown in flowing, rhythmic writing.

*closing, I should like
a sincere believer in
I am sure you are
of good strength*

You like physical activity and should make a good soldier as well as musician in the band.

G. J. P., New York: There is a great deal of reserve shown in your handwriting, in spite of the fact that you appear to be a very friendly person with a magnetic personality. Your innermost thoughts are secret, but outwardly you seem social and very open.

*- interested to
- think about
- see - traits -
- try - y - deep -
- to find a
- present - time -*

Those broad, firm *t*-bars are a picture of your strength of mind and character, together with your even

base line, original and rounded formations and heavy pressure. You like to have authority, are dominating, determined, confident, dignified, and forceful.

You are the type of woman who is best as a leader of society, clubs, and large enterprises. You should always follow out your own ideas and manage, direct, and control whatever you undertake. Though these times are not especially encouraging for business, I suggest that you start a business of your own rather than look for a job. You would make a success of a high-class gown shop, interior decorating, or buyer or stylist in a large department store.

R. L. McG., West Virginia: There is just enough reasonable doubt in my mind about your ability to be an artist to make it impossible for me to decide the matter for you.

*now and it seems
- years I spend
and start plodding
to goal the letter*

If you had a few more substantial traits of character, I wouldn't hesitate to urge you to take up the study of art. As it is, your rather frivolous attitude and pleasure-loving nature, which are expressed in those waving *t*-bars and terminals, cause some doubt of your ability to buckle down to hard, concentrated study. You have some very odd formations in your writing, and the majority of them point to selfishness, secrecy, and lack of frankness.

The forward flowing script is belied by all the backward terminals and tied-up strokes. You have artistic talent but need discipline. I suggest that you study commercial art—starting in with advertising—and also take your own nature in hand. Twenty-three is not too late in life to start working toward a career.

Mrs. T. B. L., Louisiana: I have just spoken about terminals which turn to the left instead of to the right, so you will understand when I say that, underneath your apparent openness, you are inclined to “hold out” on people.

*of my handwriting
I have read
I missed for a
and enjoy your
very much.
Thanking you
advance I am*

Those t-bars are not exactly signs of a big nature. Evidently, you have been blocked from achieving your goal and you are not very pleasant about it. This resentment will keep you unhappy. Try to throw it off and be your natural, cheerful self again.

F. C. K., Long Island: I think that, if you continue in the florist business but change your disposition a little, you will succeed better. One reason you are not getting anywhere is because you are not conserving all your forces and directing them wisely toward your goal. You ask for my candid opinion, and there you have it.

You are shrewd, clever, keen, energetic, and capable. On the

other hand, you are extravagant at the wrong times and calculating without being able to hold to your judgment.

*Florist business
New line work
some to get any
you could
be appreciated*

Those lancelike terminals and t-bars are the signs of an unpleasant temper with a tendency to be cuttingly sarcastic, touchy, impatient, and irritable when under pressure. There is a little streak of cruelty in your nature, which comes out in some form and reflects unfavorably. Cultivate a personality which will make people come to you, seek you out, and have confidence in you. You have good ideas and a great deal of skill, and instinctively you are kind when you let the best side of your nature rule. That protective A assures me of that.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be sent with your request for an analysis. Canadians may send coin or loose stamp with return envelope. I have a number of analyses which have been returned to me due to lack of proper address.

<p>Handwriting Coupon</p> <p>This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.</p> <p>Name.....</p> <p>Address.....</p>

UNDER THE LAMP

By GERARD HOLMES

This department is conducted by Gerard Holmes, for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us, and Gerard Holmes will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it?

Answers to this week's problems will be printed in next week's issue of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine.

WARNING: Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram asking for it.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Gerard Holmes, care of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SHARPEN your pencils and fill up your lamps, for we have a good evening's entertainment ahead of us.

First to speak up is Jayel, of Canton, Ohio, who makes a cryptic reply to Edward A. Martin's former observations.

1. Q C R N M K L V C M H
R Q L V K : R Q Z N O H Z P
K V L S K R K V C O Z X C -
N C L S R H F ; K M O Z
H C Y I K K M N O H Z ,
K V F P V F A H F .

By Bill Duval, Box 361, Cohoes, New York. Cheer up, Bill! You may be down, but you're never out.

2. Z Y X W V L T S R Q Z P J -
V K J T I P V Z K O M N L -
O Z I X K S I , X R K I
H J T Q G - P W S V N U H

Z T X R J V Z G L K X I
G W Y W Z X .

A long-division problem by Josephine H. Kelly, 15 Ninth East, Salt Lake City, Utah. The answer is a ten-letter word. Use the 1234567890 letter arrangement.

3. U I H T) R Z O E S (U O
O H Z R

A T I T S
A T I A O

A O

Here's one that will make the best of you sit up and take notice. G. A. Ferrell, 821 First National Bank Building, Montgomery, Alabama, is responsible.

4. Z Y X A B C B W V U Y D E -
Y C V V U W F T U W ,
S W E D W R E B W X -
U Y A U F X Z I U W X ,

R E W R U Z C H G E I B H

Q E W U P D F X Q F W

J Z R B B Q K B I.

For Beginners:

In this crypt by Frank E. Murphy, 5524 South Racine Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, D seems to be the most used letter. Remembering that E is the most used letter in the alphabet, let us assume that D is E. Fill in your E's. The next good clew may be found in MKZT and MZK. What four-letter word and three-letter word are similar? Try FOR for the three-letter word. Then what will the four-letter word be? This should give you a good start. We see two words ending with ABO. What could that stand for?

5. X Z B O K Q V I C Q V A Z B U

M K Z T M K Q B P. D.T I K L Y F V Z E Z Y BH. N Z F D K, M Z K

U Z C S A B O D S D K F

X K F L V R I K A B O

V Y D F D Q K B A B D V -

D D B V Y A K V F - Z B D.

T Q F F Z I Y Q S D

U Q T D K D X Z K R

V Y A U F D Q K.

Answers to Last Week's Puzzles:

Demosthenes aimed his contribution at D. C. Walker in particular.

Note: Underscored words represent proper nouns.

We wonder what kind of an impression he made. Are you there, Silver-tip?

1. Gypsy Romeo woos maiden with guitar. Irate father ruins instrument. Courtship continues sans music.

Leonard P. Bossard, 54 Partition Street, Rensselaer, New York, views the latest styles.

2. Bizarre costumes, French frocks, along with many new creations fresh from Paris appeared at charity bazaar.

And now you know all about the brief W. H. Owen, 4312 Pasadena Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

3. Instead of using an X for my signature, I may use the question mark, as my initials are W. H. and O. Also my name, which properly consists of four letters, may be written phonetically with just the O and N. I do not believe you can beat this for brevity.

A new fan, C. H. Trand, 805 Larkin Street, San Francisco, California, concocted this long-division problem.

4. TRADE QUICK.

William Paule, 315 Pennsylvania Street, Evansville, Indiana, is the kind donor of this crypt.

5. I defy any one to show me the law that hasn't loopholes in it big enough to drive a horse and wagon through.

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

Send in your answers to each week's puzzles, ye fans, and watch for your name on our monthly Honor Roll.

Headquarters Chat



WELL, in this issue you've started Eleanor Blake's "Ready for the River." You remember that last week in the Chat we told you that all of us here on the editorial staff of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine found "Ready for the River" an extremely interesting story. We'll admit that it has, here and there, its defects. What story hasn't? However, we think that the defects are more than made up for many times by the real power and strength of the story; by the reality of its atmosphere, and the drawing of the characters; we saw them; we felt their problems, their dangers, their trials, and we visualized the depth of depravity to which some of them fell.

While it is true that, after eighteen years, we ought to have a pretty good idea of the type of story the majority of you readers will feel is above the average, we can never be sure that our judgment is always correct. If, as a man said to us many years ago, an editor can have an eighty-per-cent batting average, he's good. Let us hope, however, that, in purchasing "Ready for the River," we hit the ball pretty squarely on the nose—knocked it for a four-sacker.



IT would seem that as man becomes more civilized, he is more prone to commit suicide than stick life out to the end and let nature take its course.

Animals—outside of "nature-fake" stories—never deliberately kill them-

selves. Also, it is rare indeed to find self-destruction among primitive people.

Statistics have recently reported suicide in this country to be on the increase.

Why is it that a man living in a more civilized and highly developed strata of society is more apt to take his life than the native member of some tribe in the heart of Africa?

It seems to us that there are several good reasons for this. We know that physical work is nowhere near as apt to exhaust us as mental work. A child, who has been playing all day, drops into peaceful slumber at night, whereas a child who has been studying with all the intensity that its little brain and energy can summon, is apt to be irritable, fretful, and nervous when time to retire comes.

Physical work tries the muscles naturally and induces natural sleep. Mental work, while it makes us feel limp as to muscles, really hasn't used the muscles, but it does tire the mind. In most instances, we've overexerted the mind, and this means that our nervous system becomes very much upset.

Also, most physical effort is taken in the open air, whereas mental effort has to be made indoors, and often at night. It is obvious that a man physically tired is apt to be less mentally and nervously distressed than one who has been working with his mind, forcing himself on unnaturally—often with stimulants—to think.

Thus, a person mentally exhausted

would be much more apt to act irrationally than a physically exhausted person. A physically tired man generally has but one desire—that is, to seek rest. The mentally tired man only too often cannot find rest; his brain is racing on wildly as it becomes more and more exhausted.

This argument that we are putting forth seems to be borne out by the fact that Canadians, who are more rural than citizens of the United States, are less apt to commit suicide than citizens of the United States.

Four men to every woman commit suicide, except in Spain, where the ratio is three men to one woman. Men, as a whole—with all due respect to woman—have to use their minds more than women do. In addition to this, of course, there is also the strain of carrying the load—being responsible for the support of the family—that is borne by the male more than by the female.

From time to time, we've discussed suicide in the Chat, but these discussions have always had to do with whether a person was justified in taking his own life. We haven't gone to any great extent into the reasons which prompt a person to take his own life. But, from what we have said above, you will gather that we are inclined to feel that a man working at too high a mental tension is more apt to bring about a melancholy condition than one who devotes his life to physical effort.

While we wouldn't for a moment belittle the attainments that man has made, and is making, with his mental development, we do feel that he only too often becomes rather frantic in his efforts to "make good."

Europeans are apt to think that Americans grow almost frantic with our "making-good" efforts. They contend that we do not know how to

live, that we lack poise. They also maintain that we are wrapped up in our efforts to make material gains, and that we lose many of the spiritual qualities which we should possess to a greater degree than we now own.

Suicide among doctors is much more prevalent than among clergymen. It seems odd that a man who is devoting himself to the preserving of life should deliberately take his own. But doctors live a very nervous, high-strung existence. On the other hand, clergymen, spiritually inclined, positive of the life hereafter, lead a tranquil, peaceful life, and they are among the least susceptible to self-destruction. It is also interesting to note that clergymen live longer than persons in other walks of life. The reason to us is obvious. Their minds and their spirits are at peace. Their time is given up in bringing peace to others.

To commit suicide is a crime against the State and against all religions. Also, lonely and bereft of friends and relations indeed is the person who can take his own life without causing distress to those who are fond of him.

It seems clear to us that the way to cut down the number of suicides is to teach people self-discipline; caution them against mental and emotional exhaustions that break down their nervous system and cause them to become morbid and discouraged. Surely, no happy person would commit suicide! Therefore, no doctrine better than that of happiness and its attainment can be taught. The most potent influence for unhappiness is doing wrong; breaking social, moral, and legal laws, disregarding well-established rules for health, straining too hard for material and not spiritual needs.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine and Western Story Magazine, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

"blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unobtainable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

ELLICHMAN, NED O.—Of German descent. Thirty years old. Tall and slender. Black hair, blue eyes, dark complexion. Last heard of in St. Helens, Oregon, where he stayed with a sister. His father lives in Albany, Oregon. I still love you, and am waiting for you. Received no answer to my last letter. Please forgive me if I hurt your feelings in any way, and write to E. L. C. care of this magazine.

WATSON, GEORGE G.—Home town, McKeesport, Pennsylvania. About fifty-eight years old. Six feet tall. Blue eyes. Dark hair. Went to Deer Lodge, Montana, many years ago, and later to Eugene, Oregon. Last heard of on a ranch near Seattle, Washington. If he or any one knowing him will write, his sister will be most grateful. Address Mrs. Grace Justice, R. F. D., Smiths Ferry, Pennsylvania.

WILLIAMS, JIM, or BRYAN, HERBERT.—Of Lemont, Centre County, Pennsylvania. Was in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about thirty years ago. Lived with his uncle, Amos Garbrack. An old friend in Philadelphia would be pleased to hear from him. Kindly address any information to M. X., care of this magazine.

CARNEY, EDWARD P.—Left home six years ago, to see the West. Last heard from a year later in Crosby, North Dakota. Five feet six inches tall. Weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Dark-brown wavy hair. Brown eyes. If any one knows his whereabouts, please write to his mother, Mrs. Lucy Carney, 1806 East Genesee Avenue, Saginaw, Michigan.

SIZEMORE, EDITH.—Known as Edith Kelly or Singleton. Twenty years old. Dark hair. Brown eyes. Left Baton, New Mexico, in 1914. Last heard of in Pasadena, California, in care of Miss L. E. Kelly. Will she, or any one having information about her, please write to her brothers, George and Wayne, care of this magazine.

McCABE, JENNIE.—My mother. Maiden name Johnson. Last heard of in 1908, in St. Paul, Minnesota, was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, May 6, 1908, and placed in the orphanage there when I was two weeks old. About six months later, I was adopted by a family named Thompson. My name was given as Darrell Eugene McCabe. Would appreciate any communications regarding my mother or her whereabouts. Kindly address G. D. Thompson, Box 68, Plainfield, Iowa.

TOM.—Why are you treating me like this? Don't you care any more? If you do, won't you please come back, or let me come to you? Write me, if nothing else. Address Madge, care of this magazine.

NASH, THOMAS.—Dealer in horses and mules. Left Charleston, West Virginia, twenty-two years ago. Might be in Texas. Any information about him will be greatly appreciated. Address Box 14, Box 814, Prescott, Arizona.

BAILEY, BILL and HATTIE.—Last heard from at Gladden, Wyoming, about eight years ago. Information appreciated by Hattie's nephew, Owen Miller, Lesterville, Missouri.

RUSSELL.—Remember Mrs. Pat in Florida? If you do, write to Betty, care of this magazine.

LETTERS RECEIVED.—Letters addressed to the following persons have been received by this office: Rose Contil, of New Orleans, Louisiana; Harold S. Barrett; Jack Gray; Addie May Shook; Arthur W. Smith; Bill Archer, of Australia; "Angelo" or Miss V. E. P., of New York City; Bernard Wright; John Trombly; Miss Lee, who answered notice regarding Joseph Barley; Bob, who wanted to get in touch with Chris Allenback and "Dutch Brother Edward"; John R. Marquette; J. C. Beatty; Anna Riggins. Will the above, or any one knowing their whereabouts, kindly communicate with the Missing Department, care of this magazine.

BATES, MRS. MARY.—Formerly of Madison, Tennessee. Information requested by Missing Department, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, ROSE.—Letter to General Delivery returned unclaimed. Please send better address to Missing Department, care of this magazine.

NELSON, JOHN J.—Last known address was 522 Tremont Street, Boston, Massachusetts. Write to Peggie Sherman, 1762 East Sixty-third Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MCCARTHY, DONALD S.—About seventy-five years old. Was in Tonopah, Nevada, when last heard from. I should very much like to get in touch with him, or persons knowing his whereabouts. Kindly address Sam M. Smith, Numa, Iowa.

GARTON.—Will persons whose surname is Garton, or whose name was Garton before marriage, kindly communicate with E. E. Garton, P. O. Box 421, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

MILLS, HARRY PERCIVAL.—Born in London, England. Lived in Houston, Texas, thirty years ago. May have gone to British Honduras, and then back to England. Had mother and sisters in London. Would greatly appreciate his present address, or any information regarding him. Address Old Friend, care of this magazine.

CARSTENS, HAROLD O.—Will be, or any one knowing him, please write to mother, care of this magazine.

GOFF, MARY.—My mother, regarding whom I am anxious to obtain information. Would also like to hear from any of her relatives. I was born February 26, 1911, at 113 East Sixty-ninth Street, New York, New York. Kindly address any communications to Thomas Goff, 66 Boerum Place, Brooklyn, New York.

WATKINS, E. L.—Went through Naval Training Camp, at Hampton Roads, Virginia, in spring of 1920. Please write to your old buddy, Charles J. Evans, care of this magazine.

RUFF, GEORGE P.—Missing since June 6, 1921. Formerly a railroad engineer employed by the Pennsylvania Railroad, Buffalo Division. Later sold oil and automobile stock. Last heard of in New York City. Age, about fifty-one years. Height, five feet eight inches. Hair, dark brown, slightly gray at temples. Several gold teeth. Round-shouldered. Very quiet disposition. Any one knowing the whereabouts of this man will confer a great kindness on his family by communicating with the advertiser. Dangerous illness prompts this appeal. Address Ruff, care of Miss Keating, 13 Lester Street, Buffalo, New York.

REZER, FLETCHER.—Lived at 1022 Strong Street, North Side, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, when last heard from. His only daughter, the former Callie Rezer, would like to hear from him. Address Callie Powell, Wheelwright, Kentucky.

HIGGINS.—I was born October 7, 1893, in a hospital located at 5 Livingston Place, New York, New York. At the age of three weeks, I was placed in the New York Foundling Home. Later, a family named Taylor brought me up. The records show that my parents were John and Katie Higgins (maiden name McFarland), that they were twenty-four and twenty-three years of age, respectively, at the time of my birth, and that they lived at 34 Morton Street, New York City. There were two other children, older than myself. Father was a bartender. I shall be eternally grateful to any one who can help me find trace of my relatives. Please send any information to Robert W. Taylor, 17 Pettit Avenue, Baldwin, Long Island, New York.

STONE.—About thirty-four years old. Tall. Slender. Originally from Missouri. Information welcomed by M. S., care of this magazine.

TIM.—Wrote to your old address, but received no answer. Terribly worried and remorseful. At least you could set my mind at ease, or else let me know that it is useless to hope. Write to M. S., care of this magazine.

GIBSON, RICHARD.—Former member of Company H, Twenty-third Infantry, stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, left home May 22, 1931. Last heard of in Topeka, Kansas, in June, 1931. Was on his way to San Antonio, Texas, or to southern California, and was accompanied by a one-armed man. He is twenty years old, about six feet tall, with blue eyes, light-brown hair, and fair complexion. Any word regarding him deeply appreciated by his mother, Mrs. S. M. Gibson, Route 2, Marion, North Carolina.

BROWN, NEWTON.—Once lived on the old Earl Peffer farm, near Valer, Pennsylvania. Wrote to Harry F. Mercer to come for me, November 10, 1922. Word from or concerning him welcomed by Russell C. Mercer, Seward, Pennsylvania.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from relatives and schoolmates of Hazel Stoops, who lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1906. Please address Monroe, care of this magazine.

ARTOBELLA.—Would like to hear from my mother and brothers of this name. They lived in Utica or Syracuse, New York, at the time my parents were separated, twenty-eight or twenty-nine years ago. Father's name was Mike Artobella. I was about three years old at that time, and remember having a brother Carl. Please write to me, mother. I have wanted to see you all my life. Dad is dead. Address Mrs. Bae Bohmert, Route 1, Box 232, Merced, California.

BROADSHAW, FLORENCE or MRS. C. T.—Twenty-seven years old. Five feet four inches tall. Red hair. Blue eyes. Fair complexion. Left foot crippled. Last heard of at Wink, Texas. Her mother would welcome information of any kind. Please write to Mrs. A. B. Moseley, Robert Lee, Texas.

MARSHALL, DOC.—Pharmacist's mate. First class. Served on board U. S. S. "Lark," A. M. No. 21, about 1924 or 1925. Home was in Brooklyn, New York. Any information greatly appreciated by Billie Webber, 1515 Twenty-eighth Avenue, Oakland, California.

STEINFELD, ADOLF.—Fifty-three years of age. With circus for many years. His aged father would welcome word from him or from persons knowing him. Kindly write to Henry Steinfeld, Kingsford, Saskatchewan, Canada.

NOTICE.—At the age of four months I was taken from a home located at Twentieth Street and First Avenue, New York City. My name at that time was believed to be Frank Larson or Lawson. The people who raised me told me the date of my birth was September 15, 1908. Any one who can give me information regarding myself or relatives, will have earned my deepest gratitude. Please send any communications to Frank Larson, care of this magazine.

HOOPER, BERYL G.—Would appreciate his address, or that of his best friend, Bob Gordon, of Hutchinson, Kansas. Write to Hilma, care of this magazine.

HOWARD, H. B.—Thirty-seven years old. Stout, with light hair and gray eyes. Small tan birthmark on cheek, near ear. Last heard from at 441 DuVal Street, Jacksonville, Florida, December 20, 1927. Word of any kind regarding him will be thankfully received by his mother, Mrs. Mary Puckett, 410 Harrison Street, Petersburg, Virginia.

NOLA.—Please come home. The children want you so badly. They speak of you all the time. Even if you don't care for me, come or write for their sake. Burke, California, Missouri.

RAWLINSON, S. B.—Present address wanted. Believed to be in Los Angeles, California, or elsewhere on Pacific coast. Remember the appointment you made for December 24, 1931, at noon? I missed your letter. Please write to Jon, care of this magazine.

GREGORY, ISABELLA and LELA.—Sisters. Last heard of in Newark, New Jersey. Any one knowing their whereabouts please write to W. G. Gregory, Hemet, California.

CRAWFORD, W. GEORGE.—Scotch-Canadian. Left Chicago, Illinois, in 1888. Was superintendent of Bridge Building, on the Santa Fe Railroad, and was last heard of in Lead or Leadville, Colorado. His three surviving children would be happy to hear from any one having information concerning him, whether he is living or dead. Address Emma J. Dare, General Delivery, Daytona Beach, Florida.

STIEGERWAHL or STIEGERWALD, CHESTER.—Believed to be living in the vicinity of Danville or Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Would appreciate any information as to his present address. Kindly write to L. J. Klence, 308 Bancroft Trust Building, Worcester, Massachusetts.

FORD, GRANT.—Son of an insurance man. Last seen in Gainesville, and last heard from in Moultrie, Georgia. Any one knowing whereabouts, communicate with Wilby Peters, II, P. O. Box 164, Moultrie, Georgia.

COX, ELIZABETH.—Formerly of Moultrie, Georgia. Now residing in Atlanta. Her address requested by Wilby Peters, II, P. O. Box 164, Moultrie, Georgia.

MURRELL, CHARLES.—Was in Manning, Iowa, two years ago. Word from concerning him welcomed by his mother, Mrs. Mary Murrell, 715 South Chestnut Street, Lola, Kansas.

LESLIE, BRIG.—Let us hear from you, as mother is sick and worrying. No job. Address P. L. Adams, 407 West Beard Avenue, Syracuse, New York.

ED.—Get in touch with me at once. Sally B., care of this magazine.

MINOR, CARL P.—World War veteran. Last known address Veterans' Administration Hospital, Oteen, North Carolina. Important news awaits him. Any assistance in locating him will be thankfully received. Address all letters to Miss Margaret Dudderar, 563 South Upper Street, Lexington, Kentucky.

BOB.—I have waited a long time for a glimpse of the only man I ever loved. Why did you never write, as you promised? Honey, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

LENNON, LAWRENCE PETER.—Twenty-one years old. Left home in New York City November 1928. His mother is ill, and would like to hear from him before it is too late. Will he, or any one knowing him, please write to Mrs. Mary Ann Lennon, 141 West Sixty-seventh Street, New York, New York.

WENTWORTH, EDWARD.—Last heard of in Quincy, Massachusetts. Please write to your friend H. P., care of this magazine.

LARSON, OLE.—Norwegian. Thirty-seven years old. Five feet eight inches tall. A seaman, who also worked as carpenter, and who lived in Carroll Street, Brooklyn, New York, when last heard of. His landlady was a German widow. Kindly forward any news of him to E. Berg, 111 Webster Street, East Boston, Massachusetts.

BURT, FRED E.—Last heard from in 1902, when he was in the army. My last letter returned unclaimed. Any one knowing him or his whereabouts, please write to his mother, Mrs. Hattie A. Dill, Stillwater, Maine.

HOWLETTE, MAE.—Sister of Madeline Curtis. Lived in East Thirty-second Street, New York City, about three and one half years ago, and worked as waitress in one of Childs restaurants. Have very important news for her. Any assistance in locating her will be gratefully received by her niece, Mrs. Eleanor Wildes, 1317 University Avenue, Bronx, New York City.

NOTICE.—My parents were separated in Brooklyn, New York, twelve years ago, and I have not seen my mother since. I should be happy to hear from her, if she will write to Eva, in Newark, New Jersey.

MOVLAN, MRS. MABEL.—Last heard from February 6, 1929, in Pioche, Nevada. Twenty-nine years old, five feet six inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighteen pounds, has black or red bobbed hair, large brown eyes. Mole on chest. May be using another name at present. Any information concerning her or her whereabouts will be gratefully received by her mother, Mrs. H. Tiedeman, 605 North Fourth Street, Phoenix, Arizona.

WILLIAMS, "BUTCH."—Ex-service man. Enlisted at Birmingham, Alabama. Was later sent to Camp Pike, Arkansas, 164th Depot Brigade, Second Battalion, and was assigned to medical corps. Butcher by trade. Forty years old now. About five feet six inches tall, and slightly stooped. Dark hair. As a means of identification, he was hit in the chin with a baseball bat, while in camp August, 1918. Information requested by his sister, Charles Verne Covey, care of George Cantrell, 827 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles, California.

WILSON, MARY.—Went to South Bend, Indiana, in 1930, and is believed to have married a man named Omar Callion. Any one knowing her present location, please communicate with C. B. X., care of this magazine.

WRIGHT, LUCILLE.—Lived near the oil fields at Smackover, Arkansas, in 1926 or 1927. Has good news for her. Write to C. B. X., care of this magazine.

KIDMAN, SIDNEY.—Please communicate with your mother, at 5023 St. Catherine Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

NOTICE.—It is believed that I was kidnaped from Boston, Massachusetts, between 1912 and 1915. I was taken to West Virginia by a woman who later disappeared. At that time I was judged to be about four years old. I was brought up by a family in West Virginia, and given their name, which I still bear. Having lost all family connections and traces of relatives, I should appreciate hearing from any one who can offer a lead. I can relate many details to persons who believe themselves acquainted with my case. Please write to Glenn Harper, Headquarters Company, Fifteenth Infantry, American Barracks, Tientsin, China.

MATJEVICH, TOM and JOHN.—Believed to be living in Seattle and Rustling, Washington, respectively. Their addresses would be welcomed by Miss Millie Matjevich, care of Mrs. F. B. Norwood, 503 South Fourteenth Street, Boise, Idaho.

CREAMER, THOMAS HENRY.—Left Acton, Ontario, Canada, for the United States twenty-five years ago. Would now be about forty-five years old. Any word regarding him highly appreciated by his mother and sister. Address Mrs. Frank Bomphf, Box 48, Acton, Ontario, Canada.

WOLF, MR. and MRS.—An elderly couple, who formerly lived in Seely, California. Returned to their home in the vicinity of Boise, Idaho, in 1930. Will any one acquainted with them kindly ask them to write to the "Kids from Seely," care of this magazine.

DANRELL, HAROLD.—Last seen in Chicago, Illinois, in 1909. Twenty-four years old, five feet ten inches tall, fair hair, brown eyes, light complexion. May be using step-father's name, which is Brown. Will appreciate any information concerning him. Please write to Rose Harsky, 2435 South Whipple Street, Chicago, Illinois.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the boys who served on board the U. S. S. "Johnston" at Governor's Island, New York, from April, 1928, to the early part of 1929. Remember the times we had? Address Lou Laschiaro, Company A, Fourteenth Infantry, Fort Davis, Panama Canal Zone.

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- SECOND That this INVISIBLE DYNAMIC POWER is the self-same POWER that Jesus used over 2000 years ago when he held the MULTITUDES SPEECHLESS with his POWER to “Heal the Sick, Cleanse the Leper, Raise the Dead.”
- THIRD—That the so-called MIRACLES performed by the humble NAZARENE were NOT THE RESULT of any Supernatural power but WERE THE RESULT of a DIVINELY NATURAL POWER which on account of its VERY SIMPLICITY was entirely misunderstood by the listeners of Christ’s day and by those who PROFESS TO FOLLOW HIM TODAY.
- FOURTH That Jesus had NO MONOPOLY on this POWER but that it is possible for anyone who understands this SPIRITUAL LAW as the GALILEAN CARPENTER understood it to duplicate EVERY WORK that He did and that when He said “the things that I do shall YE DO also” He meant EXACTLY what He said, and meant it to apply LITERALLY to ALL MANKIND throughout ALL TIME.
- FIFTH That when rightly understood and correctly used THIS MIGHTY POWER NEVER FAILS to bring ABUNDANT HEALTH RADIANT HAPPINESS and OVERWHELMING SUCCESS.

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