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STREET & SMITH'S

JULY 9, 1932

Detective Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

GANGNAPPED

By RAY HUMPHREYS

"We'll Be Married Today!"

EXCERPTS FROM THE DIARY OF A MAN WHO MISSED A JOB AND *ALMOST* LOST A BRIDE

January 10th

I HAD a bad break today. I expected to get that assistant foreman job but George Smith got it instead. George is all right but he hasn't been in the shop as long as I have and I honestly believe the men like me better. Oh well, it's life, I guess—but Dot's going to be disappointed when she hears the news. A lot depended on that job and the money it pays!

January 13th

Told Dot tonight about losing out on that new job. It made me feel mighty bad when she cried. I didn't expect that—but she said it would be foolish for us to get married on what I am making. "What are you going to do about it?" she asked. "What did the boss say?" When I told her he didn't say anything to me, she flared up and said, *"Well, I'd ask him!"* That was an idea.

January 17th

I wonder what's wrong with me! For three days I tried to get up enough nerve to ask the boss why he didn't give me that job, and every time I start towards his office I get cold feet. But I've got to do it! Dot is going to ask.

January 20th

I told Dot tonight I hadn't had a chance to talk with the boss. "Chances are scarce with you these days," she said, and there was a look in her face that made me realize I'd better do *something.*

January 22nd

Today I screwed up my courage and walked right into the boss' office. The boss sat there and looked at me until I had finished talking. There was a deadly pause. Then he leaned over his desk and said in the calmest tone: "Jack, I like you and wanted to give you that job. I thought about it a long time. But my own job depends on the men I pick—and in self-defense I promoted the best *trained* man in this shop. You've been here longer, it's true, but while you've been wasting your spare time, George Smith has been studying an I. C. S. course. He has learned the things a man on that job *must* know, and you might profit by his example. If you do, I have something in mind for you."

January 23rd

I told Dot what the boss said. "Well," she said, "there's only one thing left for you to do—enroll for an I. C. S. course right away." I nodded approval of her conclusion. (I had already mailed a coupon to Scranton!)

November 1st

This is the happiest day of my life! A new job—a new wife—a new outlook on life! Dot said she would marry me the *very* day I got my promotion—and Dot is a girl of her word, bless her heart! I owe a lot to her—and to I. C. S. *training. There is no substitute for either of them!*

STREET & SMITH'S
DETECTIVE STORY
MAGAZINE

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One True Crime Story

Miscellaneous

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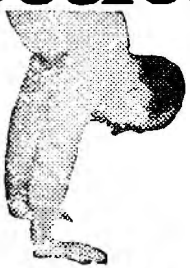

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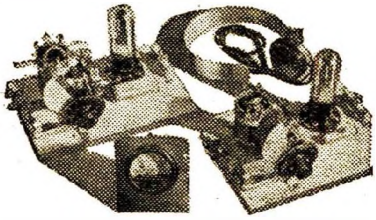

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THE STRANGLING STRING

By C. Wiles Hallock

IN Frisco, at the Lantern Lair,
A steamy, wharf-side drinking den,
Danced "Lady" Mae and "Legs" Adair.
He loved fair Mae, to his despair,
For that she smiled on sailormen!

To Lantern Lair came "Freighter" Paul,
To sing and play his violin;
A fiddling sailor, swart and small,
Whom wharf-dive bums were wont to call
The "Guinea Music Manikin."

He played as in a dreamy mist,
In dingy Lantern Lair one night,
With flaunting bow and flaying wrist,
The lusty rhapsodies of Liszt,
To Lady Mae's enthralled delight.

He swayed in drunk, ecstatic state;
He played as in a rhythmic trance;
And Legs Adair, with jealous hate,
Beheld fair Mae dance out, elate,
To lure him with her amorous glance.

Men found the Music Manikin
Stark dead upon a dock at dawn!
They did not find his violin.
'Twas strangling death. Beneath his chin
A slender, catgut cord was drawn.

None save fair Mae, dance devotee,
Gay idol of the Lantern Lair,
Guessed who the murderer might be.
While they were dancing, deftly she
Purloined the purse of Legs Adair.

And found a ticket which conveyed
Adair had pawned a violin
Sans one gut string! Adair, dismayed,
To the police by Mae betrayed,
Confessed he killed the Manikin!

GANGNAPPED

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Dazzy was putting his wild idea to the test, and it looked like a winner.

CHAPTER I.

DARK DOINGS.

"WELL!" exclaimed "Dazzy" Boyne softly, as his foot slipped off the accelerator and the roadster slowed down perceptibly. "What do you make of that, Curly? No, not that way! Ahead of us, you galoot!"

"Curly," smothering a sharp retort, looked ahead, and his startled eyes widened. There was a small coupé parked at the curb in front of an old mansion. It was dusk but still light enough for Curly to see that there was a woman at the wheel of the car. Another woman sat beside her. The peculiar thing was, however, that two men were at that instant crowding into the automobile hastily, as if their lives depended on it. It was plain to see that one of them, at least, would have to sit on one of the women's laps if the car was to accommodate the overload.

"Some drunks," remarked Curly laconically.

Dazzy Boyne, his blue eyes glowing, his cheeks flushed with excitement, let his roadster slow down until it was barely creeping. The coupé started up with a jerk and a puff of exhaust vapor, and, as it wabbled out into the avenue and headed north, Dazzy gave the roadster the gas again. Curly shot his partner a questioning glance.

"What's so interesting," he asked, rather peevishly, "in a foursome of soaks going out to have a traffic accident, maybe?"

Dazzy turned a serious face to the inquisitive Curly.

"There's plenty interesting in that car," he said quickly, but in his usual complacent, confident tone. "I'll draw your attention to a few facts that seem to have escaped your eagle eyes. In the first place, one of the gentlemen is sitting on one of the ladies' laps. In the next place, the woman driving is having one devil of a time of it, from the way that car is zigzagging. In the third place, the second gentleman is watching her, it appears, and talking to her rather fervently, I think!"

Curly knocked the ashes from his cigarette and shrugged.

"I've seen souseberries do funny things before," he grunted.

"Souseberries, my eye!" cut in Dazzy, suavely but swiftly. "Those people in that coupé aren't drunk, Curly. I think that woman at the wheel is just plain flabbergasted, frightened, and panicky. That bird leaning over her, wedged in almost on top of her, is probably saying things to her that are not at all soothing."

"You got an imagination!" said Curly. "I still maintain——"

"See that you maintain your composure then," blurted out Dazzy,

"after I give you another shot of hot news. I guess you didn't look in time when I called your attention to the coupé—but both those hams had rods in their paws as they climbed into that coupé, brother. They're taking those two women down a one-way road."

Curly didn't maintain his composure at all. Instead, he reached around, almost instinctively, and grabbed Dazzy by the near shoulder.

"Well, if they are, we ain't going to the funeral!" he snapped, his beady eyes lighting feverishly. "I didn't see the guns, but I'm satisfied. I don't want to see them pointing our way if we keep on tagging that coupé. If it's a robbery or a ride, it ain't any of our business, Dazzy. Here's a nice corner. Let's go around it and breathe easier!"

But Dazzy didn't swing the corner. He did, however, slow down enough to let a couple of cars pass him and swing in between his roadster and the vacillating coupé. In that way, it would make it more difficult for the outlaws in the coupé, if outlaws they were, to establish the fact that the roadster was "tailing" them. The temporary method of precaution did not satisfy the suspicious Curly, however. He wanted just one thing, and that was—instant abandonment of the chase that might lead to grave consequences.

"Them—janes," he stammered unhappily, "are no friends of ours. It may be a couple of dicks arresting them. We got no call whatever to butt in on that party. Here's a nicer corner to go around."

But again Dazzy ignored Curly's suggestion. He kept straight on along the avenue, a quarter of a block or so behind the coupé. The lady at the wheel had apparently regained some of her wits by now, it seemed, for she was driving a steadier, surer course. And the coupé was picking up speed. A grim smile danced across Dazzy's handsome face.

"We'll turn a corner," he said to Curly, "when the coupé does. I'm sort of curious."

"Curious!" exclaimed Curly sarcastically. "You're cuckoo! You're meddling with dynamite, Dazzy. Let's turn off!"

Dazzy obediently swung the corner, to Curly's surprise and satisfaction, but Curly's contentment was short-lived. The coupé had preceded them around the corner, Curly saw in alarm. It was scuttling down a quiet side street now, its amber tail light gleaming sinister in the gathering darkness. Dazzy, with his headlights on, swung in to the curb abruptly, and stopped and switched off his lights. Curly sighed in relief, but, almost instantly, Dazzy swung out again, hastily resuming the chase, but with not a light showing on the car. Curly's instant, insistent protest was loud and vehement now.

"Say, you'll have the bulls on us sure, even if we have got a couple of tin badges pinned to our vests," he rasped angrily. "Or we'll have a grand crash, running so fast without lights. If you're going to insist on muscling in on a lot of trouble, I'll get out. Yes, I'll get out."

"You'll stay put!" said Dazzy, a finality to his voice that meant more to the scared Curly than the actual words. "We'll tail that car until we see what's up—what's wrong in Denmark, as it were. And if we do run foul of a cop, we'll let him in on the secret. He won't think about any insignificant lights if he hears our story."

"Yeah—us dicks!" said Curly mockingly.

The fact that he and Dazzy, long free-lance investigators in the underworld, had just formed the brand-new Boyne Detective Service, with a suite of offices in a downtown office building, gilt letters on the door, a golden-haired stenographer, a safe, and everything, hadn't impressed him very much. He was still, mentally, at least, unreconciled to his new status. He had been outside the law too long to become part of it suddenly, without a wrenching and twisting of his very soul.

Although the regular police authorities had agreed to the pair obtaining a private-detective license in gratitude for the help Dazzy and Curly had given the police on repeated occasions, Curly felt no great confidence. True, he wore a badge now himself, but he still feared others who wore badges.

"We ain't been retained by nobody on this case," he declared with emphasis. "I can't see no use in butting in without being invited."

Dazzy, his eyes ahead, spoke sharply.

"It may be Fate giving us a break," he confided quickly. "I told you when we started the detective agency that we weren't going to handle any cheap cases—any divorces, any shady snooping, any border-line blackmail. But this is none of those things apparently. This is big stuff, Curly. And who knows but that solving this thing, on which we have stumbled by mere chance, may be the very makings of our new business venture? Perk up, Curly, and keep your eyes peeled!"

Curly had his eyes peeled, sure enough, but he didn't relax any.

"If we got to chase after every suspicious car and tough-looking egg and woman in distress just because we are private detectives, then I'm resigning now to whoever takes the resignations of private dicks!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I thought a private detective had private cases. I didn't know he roamed the streets, aching for a fight."

"Any crime is our business," corrected Dazzy quietly. "I'm surprised at your outburst. But—oh, oh—look ahead!"

Curly, obeying Dazzy's injunction, snapped out of his gloomy thoughts and looked ahead. The coupé had pulled up in front of a house in the next block. The passengers were alighting. Dazzy, slowing the roadster, edged along. He wanted to see, and yet not be seen by the strange quartet just now tumbling out of the coupé.

"Great guns, don't go any closer!" came Curly's frantic whisper.

"They're on the porch of that house now," consoled Dazzy, squinting through the windshield. "They haven't the slightest idea they've been trailed. We're safe. I'm anxious to see the finish of this thing."

The porch light snapped on, revealing two men and two women waiting at the door.

"Huh!" exclaimed Dazzy, apparently mesmerized by the scene. "More funny business. Some one in the house. I figured it might be dark, vacant, a good place for a robbery or a killing."

Curly shuddered, but he couldn't take his gaze away from the porch.

Suddenly, the house door opened, and immediately things happened. The two men, who had been standing behind the two women, plunged forward, and this time Curly saw, with consternation, that at least one of the fellows carried a gun in his hand. The metal of the weapon

gleamed in the light. The next second, both men and the two women had vanished inside the dwelling. Dazzy was instantly active. He ducked out of the car and ran halfway up the terraced slope of the lawn of the house in front of which they happened to be parked. He came back in big strides.

"This is the 900 block on Pennsylvania Street," he told Curly as he scrambled back into the car. "It's a pretty good neighborhood. We'll wait here about two minutes, and, if nothing happens, we'll blow to a telephone and give the cops something to investigate——"

Dazzy didn't finish his outburst. The door of the house with the lighted porch swung open again. This time, three men emerged—briskly, but not with enough haste to arouse the suspicions of any ordinary onlooker. The women did not appear. The three men passed down the steps, across the sidewalk, and into the coupé. Then Dazzy did a most unusual thing: he swore softly. It was seldom he was profane.

"That last man has a gun on the small man," said Dazzy savagely. "Now what kind of a deal is this, anyway?"

The coupé shot away from the curb. Dazzy started the roadster. But now, with one of the men at the wheel, the coupé lost all its hesitancy. It tore down the street at high speed. Dazzy had difficulty following. He was forced to turn on his lights finally because of that speed and the danger of an intersection collision. But there was no overtaking the coupé. There was no following it, either, for it swung a corner on two wheels, flashed down a dark street, and, when Dazzy reached the corner, the coupé was nowhere in sight.

"I'm glad," said Curly defiantly. "I've seen too much now."

"And I wanted to get that license number," groaned Dazzy sadly. "I got a hunch, Curly, we've seen sensational stuff, but I don't know what."

"I don't want to know. Let's go on home!" snarled Curly.

"Yep, I guess we might as well," agreed Dazzy reluctantly. But fifteen minutes later, only part way home, Dazzy pulled up at a drug store.

"I got to make a phone call," he said, answering Curly's unasked question. "You wait here. I won't be more than three seconds!"

And he hardly was. He was back again, bubbling with information.

"I called that reporter friend of mine, Lepley, to tip him off to this foolishness we saw to-night." he said breathlessly, "but, instead, Lepley tipped me off to what it all was. The cops just got a report on it. Two toughs just kidnaped a man named Williamson out of his home, leaving word they wanted fifty thousand dollars' ransom. They got in by posing as visitors, using two women they had previously abducted, and the women's car. Clever, eh?"

CHAPTER II.

HOT NEWS.

THE headlines of the morning editions screamed the news straight at the blinking, restless Curly, who had slept badly.

RICH MAN KIDNAPED FROM HOME
ABDUCTORS WANT $50,000 RANSOM

Then, while Curly read feverishly, the lurid news account told the

story in sensational sentences. He skipped some of the details and read:

George Williamson, forty-nine years old, retired building contractor, and reputed to be very wealthy, was boldly snatched from his home and family at 998 Pennsylvania Street early last evening by two brazen unmasked ruffians who had gained entrance to the Williamson house through a ruse. As the kidnapers hustled Williamson out to a car, they ordered his wife and two daughters to be prepared to pay fifty thousand dollars' ransom for the release of the contractor.

"We'll croak him if you don't pay it," they declared. "We'll let you know when and where to pay it later! If you report this to the police, it will make matters worse for you."

The matter was instantly reported to the authorities, however, and detectives then learned that two middle-aged ladies, emerging from their home to take an evening automobile ride, had been seized by the kidnapers, who crowded into their car with drawn guns, and forced to drive to the Williamson home. There the women were made to accompany the thugs to the Williamson door to allay the suspicions of whoever might answer the ring. When the abductors fled with their victim, they used the coupé they had seized with the women.

The police are bending every effort to apprehend the kidnapers and rescue Williamson from their clutches. So far, however, the authorities are without clews. No trace of the stolen car has been found. The Williamson family and the two women who have lost the car have failed to identify any of the pictures in the police rogues' gallery as those of the two thugs. Detectives fear that Williamson may be foully murdered as a result of the police search and the notoriety.

A reward of five hundred dollars has been offered by the city for the arrest of the kidnapers, and the Rotary Club, of which Williamson is a member, has added a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar reward for his safe return.

The newspaper itself is offering an additional five-hundred-dollar reward for the thugs.

"Well," said Curly, as he finished the story. "I guess we could use that twelve hundred and fifty dollars, couldn't we, Dazzy? However, I'm satisfied——"

Suddenly he looked up, remembering that he hadn't seen Dazzy yet this morning. He stared around as if bewildered for a moment.

"Hey, Dazzy!" he called again, louder.

But he got no answer. The early-rising Dazzy had apparently slipped out of the apartment before Curly had awakened. With a grunt of dismay, occasioned by a vague premonition, Curly started to dress.

"I got a hunch that idiot is out messing around in this kidnaping case some more," he groaned. "It would be like him. He never can let well enough alone. What business is it of his what happened or happens to Williamson—or to ten thousand Williamsons? Let the damn police attend to that trouble. Even if we are private detectives, it's certainly none of our funeral."

But whether it was their funeral or not the dreary thought of it must have remained with Curly, judging from his long, woebegone face. He dressed, shaved, cooked and ate his breakfast all in a daze. He couldn't get his mind off the events of the night before—and Dazzy's absence. He was quite lost without Dazzy. And he was burning up with a mingled fear and curiosity. What was Dazzy doing? Where was he? Would he return or would he become involved in a mess that would result in the police calling around to pick up Curly himself? The fact that he wore a badge himself was no insurance against arrest, he figured.

When ten o'clock came, and Dazzy did not appear, the worried Curly took up a position at the front window. But it was not un-

till nearly eleven o'clock that he spotted the familiar, long-legged Dazzy hurrying up the sidewalk.

He opened the apartment door for him, a question on his lips.

"Where in thunder have you been?"

"Oh, hello, warden," greeted Dazzy. He took off his hat and coat with tantalizing delay. "I hope you'll pardon me, but I've been on a hike over to the Jerome Park branch library—that's all!"

"Library?" exclaimed Curly in astonishment. "What for?"

Dazzy gave his partner a rather quizzical look.

"Didn't you read the morning paper, Curly?" he asked quietly.

"Sure I read it—if you're talking about the kidnaping case!"

"Then you ought to know why I went to the branch library!"

Curly's suspicious eyes narrowed quickly.

"You didn't go there to read up on how to solve kidnaping cases, did you?" he sneered. "I'd hate to think that you did."

But Dazzy waved him to silence with a patient gesture.

"You'll pardon me a minute or two until I write a brief letter," he suggested, a chilly note in his voice. "I'll let you sign it!"

"Me sign it?" cried Curly, scenting a trap of some sort.

"Ssshhh!" warned Dazzy, who had already thrown back the cloth of the table and spread out paper, ink, and pens. Then, while Curly stood goggle-eyed, Dazzy went to his task of letter writing. He wasn't at it very long. In three or four minutes, he looked up, smiled cordially at the pale, frowning Curly, and handed him over the letter to read.

But Curly's hand shook as his eyes went down the page. He read:

MRS. NANCY WILLIAMSON,
998 Pennsylvania Street.

DEAR MADAM: I am writing this in the presence of your husband, who will sign it. He has not been harmed yet. But we must have the fifty-thousand-dollars' ransom delivered to us this evening along the River Bend Road. Put the money, which must be in ten and twenty-dollar bills only, in a pillowcase, and tie it securely. Drive out in your car and throw it along the road when another car comes up behind you and honks four times. You may have to drive back and forth along the road several times before connections are made. If you bring police, or notify them of this note, Mr. Williamson will surely die!

Curly, dumfounded, looked from the letter to Dazzy.

"You served time for forgery," said Dazzy, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You've often bragged what a good forger you are. Sit down and sign 'George Williamson' to that letter and see you do a good job. Here's the model. That's his signature on top of the card! Reproduce it!"

Dazzy tossed the card down on the table in front of Curly. It was a citizen's application form for book-borrowing privileges at the Jerome Park branch public library.

Dazzy had gotten it on the strength of his private-detective credentials. George Williamson's bold, flowery signature was on it.

Curly, gritting his teeth, prayed for the strength to rebel, to protest, to refuse, but finally, quivering, he reached for the pen.

CHAPTER III.

DEAD MAN.

THE hours seemed to drag for both Dazzy and Curly. The latter sat with his head in his hands, surveying the gloomy prospects ahead. He hadn't wanted to sign

George Williamson's name to the phony kidnaping note at all, but, nevertheless, he had signed. It would be hard, he knew, to try to explain to district attorney or the police, just why he had signed, but then, they didn't know Dazzy as he did. When Dazzy said to do a thing, it was generally done. But that would be no alibi, no defense, when the law got busy. It would be a matter of minutes, at the most, days, until John Law would tap him, Curly, on the shoulder for signing that fake note. Curly was positive of that. He was also sure his new status as a private detective wouldn't save him, either.

Dazzy, waiting in the easy-chair by the window, was attempting to look into the future, too, but the agony of suspense was not written on his handsome face. He masked his emotions thoroughly. He had mailed the letter, with a special-delivery stamp on it, shortly before noon. It should have reached the Williamson home within an hour to an hour and a half. At the time he had mailed the letter, he had made an important telephone call—two of them, in fact—and it was time now that he was hearing from one of the parties he had called. He glanced at his watch. It was twelve minutes past two o'clock.

Then Dazzy yawned, stretched, and threw a magazine at Curly.

"Come out of it!" he ordered briskly, good-naturedly. "You look like some old Egyptian mummy mourning over his own funeral. Cheer up, little comrade, the worst is yet to come, as the poet said!"

Curly made a hopeless gesture.

"How well I know that!" he said bitterly. "I've just been sitting here, thinking, Dazzy, what a swell pal you used to be. Once you were helpful, encouraging, always on the up and up. But now you've changed. Instead of a helping hand and a friendly smile, all I get is a sharp order and a kick in the pants if I don't deliver. And what am I delivering? A lot of illegal, shady, crooked assistance."

But the telephone cut in on Curly's outburst. He reached for it with a frown, but the quicker Dazzy beat him to it.

"Oh, hello, Valerie," said Dazzy breezily. "Yes, I've been waiting to hear your voice. . . . You did? . . . He did! . . . That's fine! . . . I knew you could put it over. I'll always be grateful to you. . . . What's that? . . . Trace the call? . . . No, not in a thousand years, he couldn't. . . . No, you did just right. . . . Yes, splendid. . . . I'll be seeing you sometime. . . . So long!"

Curly's crafty eyes had narrowed to thin slits.

"Who," he asked suspiciously, "is Valerie?"

"A girl I asked to do a favor for me," said Dazzy, with astounding frankness, in Curly's opinion. "I had her call the chief of police for me, that was all."

"Call the chief of police!" exclaimed the amazed Curly. "What did you want to call the chief of police for?"

Dazzy gave him a tantalizing smile.

"Here," he said, handing Curly a dime, "go out and buy the afternoon paper. It may not be out just yet, but wait until you get it. I believe it may be interesting reading."

"Yeah?" growled Curly blackly. He reached for his hat, put it on his head at a rakish angle, and tilted his cigar cockily.

"If I don't return," he said, with a show of melancholy temper, "page

me at the city jail; charge: forgery, investigation, accessory in kidnaping, lunacy—and what have you?"

With that, he was gone, grumbling. Dazzy laughed. But. after the door had closed, Dazzy ceased to laugh. After all, he and Curly might be in a tough spot, thanks to his interference in the Williamson case. There was really no reason why they should have become involved in the case at all—except that, having seen the very start of the sensational business, Dazzy couldn't resist the temptation to match his wits against the cunning of the kidnapers. And he was playing, he well knew, a rather desperate game. He was proceeding on the theory that his hunch that he could make the abductors literally catch themselves was right. If it proved so, everything would be sunshine, singing birds, smiles, and a gay old world indeed. But if he was wrong——

"Those bulls have no humor," he said sadly. "They couldn't see anything funny in my efforts to help them out, even though my efforts were so novel, so unique that they might be asinine. And they don't like private detectives, anyway. Poor Curly would make the jail house, and so would I. However, seeing I've started, I can't very well quit now. It all depends on the afternoon paper."

The afternoon paper, however—when Curly finally returned with it—lived up to Dazzy's prayerful expectations. The big black type across the top of the front page blazed:

KIDNAPERS SEND RANSOM DEMAND

"Well," said Curly, as he handed the sheet over to the eager Dazzy, "I see the fools got the little note we wrote—and gave it out to the bulls as well as the reporters, despite the death threat. I'd like to know what the real kidnapers are going to say when they read this."

Dazzy, taking the paper, looked up sharply.

"What do you think they'll say?" he questioned abruptly.

"They'll say somebody is trying to have a lot of fun at their expense," retorted Curly grimly. "Perhaps, they'll see the joke. I don't. I think it's dangerous kidding, if you ask me."

Dazzy shook his head in very apparent disgust.

"Curly, your wits are growing duller every day," he remarked crisply. "Pretty soon, you'll have to have a nurse to take you by the hand when you go by-by in public."

"Oh, yeah?" sneered Curly, reddening. "Well, I hope I'm free to go by-by in public and not locked up as a would-be kidnaper!"

But Dazzy made no answer. He was busy scanning the paper. The Williamson story had crowded almost everything else off the front page. The contents of the phony note Dazzy had so lately dispatched by special delivery to the Williamson home were faithfully chronicled. The note itself was even reproduced in facsimile. The note, the paper stated, was the first word the family had received from the abductors. The family had desired to keep the receipt of the demand secret, but the chief of police had insisted that it be made public. Both relatives and authorities were agreed that the signature of Williamson was authentic. Dazzy chuckled.

"You come in for some praise in this article!" he exclaimed.

"I read it," said Curly, without enthusiasm. "But what about

when they tumble that it was faked, and start looking for the master forger?"

"Whew!" interrupted Dazzy, with mock awe. "You are him, aren't you?"

But the sarcasm seemed lost on the vacant-faced Curly. Dazzy went back to the story looking through the account hastily. The police did not think that the kidnapers would kill Williamson, even though the message was revealed against their orders. They would hold their prisoner and attempt to scheme out some other way to obtain the ransom, the police believed. The account then went on to delineate the measures the police were taking to apprehend the kidnapers and return the captive Williamson to his family. A score of detectives, the best in the bureau, had been assigned to the case. Every possible clew was being run to earth.

The department had virtually suspended all other activities to catch the abductors. Speed crews, vice squads, special details had been assigned to searching likely lairs for Williamson and his captors. It was believed that the kidnapers had secreted their wealthy hostage somewhere in the city rather than risk a long trip into the country with him. The police were proceeding on that theory.

Dazzy laid down the newspaper with a sigh.

"Poor Williamson," he said. "I hope we're helping him instead of hurting him, Curly! I'd never forgive myself if anything happened."

Curly was in a very bad humor.

"To hell with poor Williamson!" he exploded. "What about poor us, if anything happens? We'll be in the penitentiary!"

Dazzy's smile, however, was sagacious.

"We'll know soon," he explained slowly, "whether my hunch was right or not. If it wasn't, we'll quietly depart on a little vacation somewhere in the country until the coppers do solve this case. But if the hunch was good, you'll see so much action, your head will swim."

But it was a comparatively long time to the wistful Dazzy—all of three crawling hours—before anything happened. Then the phone rang.

"Hello," said Dazzy cautiously, and then a smile went clear across his face that reminded the watching Curly of a sudden sunrise. "Oh, that you, Lepley? . . . Yes! . . . Yes! . . . Yes!" He hung up the receiver.

"Why don't you talk Greek?" blurted the baffled Curly.

For once, the usually composed Dazzy showed signs of excitement.

"Get your hat and coat!" he snapped. "We're getting out on the walk!"

"Wagon coming?" asked Curly. "The one-way taxi?"

"Get your hat and coat!" repeated Dazzy ominously.

Curly got his hat and coat, complaining all the while. He also got down on the sidewalk, outside of the apartment, in practically no time at all, seeing the impetuous Dazzy had him by one arm. It was dusk, but that didn't prevent Curly from glancing about surreptitiously for any lurking bluecoat. He saw none, however, and gained confidence.

"If you're in your right mind," he began querulously, "you might tip me off as to what I'm to expect."

A car pulled up at the curb. Dazzy propelled Curly toward it.

"Hop in quick, fellows!" came an agitated invitation. Curly, floundering in, recognized one of the men,

the speaker, as Lepley, the reporter. "We got no time to lose. The police have already started. This is Mr. Baird, our photographer, and Mr. Owens, our driver."

"Glad to know you both," said the complacent Dazzy. "And now, Lep, where is this dead man we're going to see?"

"At West Tenth and State," said Lepley, "where they dumped him out of the car. The body should be just as it lit—if we get there in time!"

Dead man! Dumped out of car! Curly blinked and shuddered.

CHAPTER IV.

ROUGH STUFF.

VALERIE was a very pretty girl, and she was also a very good driver. The shaken Curly, still suffering from shock, had to admit both those things in five minutes after he entered her car. She had picked him and Dazzy up at an isolated corner after Dazzy had telephoned her where to come. Now, according to the directions Curly had just heard Dazzy give the young lady, they were on their way to a small packing house in the stockyards' section, and it was almost ten o'clock at night. The blond, blue-eyed girl was driving fast.

"I telephoned Chuck to wait for me at the time I called you," Dazzy was telling the girl as Curly cocked an inquisitive ear. "He said he'd be ready. I told him we'd be there before ten fifteen!"

The girl laughed, and Curly thought it was a nervous laugh.

"We'll be there if we have no bad luck," she sang out.

"Chuck!" Now, who was Chuck? —wondered Curly. He raked his brain to place the name, to tack it to a face, but failed. Chuck, at a packing house! Packing house! Curly made a wry face at the thought. It made him think of blood, and he had seen enough blood for one evening. In fact, he had seen so much blood that he had been unusually silent now for almost an hour, passing up many opportunities to protest, to question, to air his views on the events of the wild evening.

First, Curly recalled as he cringed in the back seat of the girl's speeding car, had come the mysterious telephone call from Valerie. The message she had given Dazzy at that time had pleased Dazzy, and, when Curly had quizzed his good-looking coworker about it, Dazzy had confided that Valerie had done him a favor and called the chief of police for him. But when Curly had sought more details, Dazzy had sent him out to buy an afternoon paper. Afterward had come the call from Lepley, the rush to the sidewalk, the crazy dash through traffic-choked streets to West Tenth and State, where a dead man lay sprawled near the curb, face down, a bullet hole in the back of his head.

Curly edged into the crowd at the sight of the police in control there. He heard from bystanders how the slain man had been tossed from a speeding car. He watched when the coroner came and turned the body over, searching it for clews to its identity. He saw Dazzy and Lepley in excited but hushed conference. Then Lepley and the other reporters and photographers had faded away. Dazzy had beckoned, and he and Curly had retired to a drug store where Dazzy phoned the

girl. Then they had walked to the designated corner, and Valerie had arrived.

Now, thought Curly, in alarm, they were going to a packing house.

For once, Curly held his tongue. He had no faith in women. He had no trust in this pretty Valerie. Why she was being "rung in" on the party, he could not fathom. But, as long as she was in, he had no intention of giving anything away by a question or a remark.

" 'Find the woman,' the police always say," he thought to himself, " 'and then find the man!' If they find Valerie, they'll eventually get their hooks onto me and Dazzy, too. All women talk!"

Valerie, however, didn't do a great deal of talking. Despite Curly's most careful attention, he didn't hear her say a thing that would throw any light on the project in hand: why they were speeding to the packing house, who Chuck might be, and why she had called the chief of police.

"Why," muttered Curly under his breath, "she acts like she didn't trust me! The dog-gone stuck-up doll!"

If Curly was all set to hear anything or see anything to satisfy his curiosity at the packing house, he was again badly mistaken.

Dazzy got out of the car, saying he'd be gone just a minute. He was back in less than a minute, with a bulging pocket. The girl swung the car around, heading back toward the downtown section. It was only after they had traveled miles that Dazzy turned around and looked back at the gloomy Curly, so strangely silent.

"Listen, kid," said Dazzy in a soft voice. "You and I have a neat little trick ahead of us. We're going to walk into Slippery Delmer's place at Twentieth and Champa and take a bird by the name of Gorilla Gertz out of there at the point of a gun. I've got the rod. You back me up, hands in your pockets, in the best-approved gangster style, even though you're only using your two index fingers to imitate smoke wagons. We got to nab him. Valerie here will wait in the car, and, when we get him, we got to make a fast fade-away—understand?"

The quick-fire instructions overwhelmed Curly.

"Wait a minute!" he begged. "You mean just us two are going into Slippery Delmer's! Ain't that the tough joint?"

"It is!" replied Dazzy lightly. "But we've been in tough places before, haven't we? I told you I'd have the rod."

"Yes," agreed Curly, moistening dry lips. "You'll have the rod. But what'll I have—a sock in the jaw, a wallop in the eye?"

"You'll have a nasty look on your homely mug and your two hands in your pockets," said Dazzy. "You'll get by. We got to get by, kid!"

Curly wanted to jump out of the car, but he didn't.

"This Gorilla Gertz gentleman?" he asked. "Why do we have to take him out of there? Does his mamma want him home?"

Dazzy, now whispering to Valerie, made no reply. Curly contented himself with a smothered outburst of profanity. What was the idea of kidnaping "Gorilla" Gertz? Who was Gorilla Gertz, anyway? What would they do with him when they got him, if they did? And how did Chuck and the packing house figure in all this? Curly sighed. He couldn't answer a single one of those questions—and Dazzy wouldn't.

Valerie, losing no time, arrived at

"Slippery" Delmer's establishment sooner than Curly had anticipated. He was hardly prepared when Dazzy stepped jauntily out of the car and ordered him to follow. But he followed, managing, somehow, to pull his hat down over his eyes and to jam his hands into his coat pockets, fingers extended in what he thought was a futile hope to fool somebody. Dazzy went up the dark stairs, then through the door of the second-floor "joint," without looking either to right or to left. Curly followed doggedly.

There was a crowd in the place—a motley crowd composed of whites and Negroes of both sexes.

Dazzy walked straight and erect across the dance floor.

Curly, the perspiration on his face, followed.

Dazzy veered, stepped squarely in front of a huge, swarthy fellow, hesitated—and then Curly saw the gun in Dazzy's hand.

The big man, evidently Gorilla Gertz, seemed amazed. But he put up his hands, and Dazzy, maneuvering, whipped a gun out of Gorilla's pocket. He tossed it with lightning speed to Curly, who, scared as he was, nevertheless managed to catch it.

Then the march for the exit began, while a low rumble like distant thunder seemed to roll out on the dance floor.

"Hurry up!" came Dazzy's sharp order as the clamor grew.

They made the door, however, before the storm broke. Dazzy literally pushed the Gorilla down the stairs. Curly leaped after them. Dazzy shoved the prisoner into the back seat of the car. Curly leaped for the place beside Valerie. The car started. At that moment, a split second before a swarm of shadows ebbed down the stairs, Dazzy flung his arm once, twice, thrice, out from the car, toward the sidewalk. Then Dazzy's gun cracked—and cracked again.

Curly, in alarm, squirmed around, bringing his gun up.

"Steady!" cried Dazzy. "We're O. K.!"

Valerie, bent low over the wheel, sent the car spinning recklessly around the first corner, then, a moment later, around another. But there was no pursuit. She slackened speed a trifle.

"Where we going, big boy?" cried the Gorilla, seeming to find his voice. "I don't know you. This ain't a—a ride, is it?"

"Yes," said Dazzy as his gun caressed Gorilla Gertz's ribs, "I guess that's what you would call it, brother—a ride. You'd better enjoy it while you can. And charge it to Spumati! Get that—Spumati?"

CHAPTER V.

GERTZ SPILLS.

IT was three o'clock in the morning. The sonorous chimes in the neighboring church aroused Curly from his cat nap. He opened his eyes to find the scene just the same as when he had drowsed off some twenty minutes before. Gorilla Gertz, flushed, disheveled, still sat in the straight-backed chair, his hands handcuffed behind him and to the chair. Dazzy still faced him, his gun in his hand.

"Your time is up, Gertz!" Dazzy was droning wearily. "I've given you one reprieve after another, but it's three o'clock now, and you don't get any further delay. You'll do as I tell you to do or you'll never see

the light of another day. I'm getting mad, losing my patience, and in another half second I'm lifting this gun."

He started to lift it, even as he spoke.

"Well, I'll talk turkey," growled the Gorilla, still trying to look important, unafraid, but making a sorry show of it. "I ain't promising nothing, but I'll talk turkey."

"I got you pegged as a member of Crip Riley's gang," said Dazzy, straightening, now that he had his man talking after almost five hours of relentless urging, threatening. "And I got you doped as one of the real big guns of that mob. That's right, isn't it?"

Gorilla Gertz nodded. He could admit that easy enough.

"That's O. K.," he answered.

"And it was Crip Riley's gang that kidnaped this bird Williamson the other day, wasn't it?" shot in Dazzy.

Just the look of amazement on Gorilla Gertz's ugly face convinced Curly.

"It wasn't either!" cried Gertz belligerently. "Our bunch never had a thing to do with that. We ain't in *that* racket."

"You haven't any idea who got Williamson?" murmured Dazzy.

"No, I ain't. I don't know nothing about it," cried the Gorilla. "You got a nerve accusing us of that job. Who are you, anyway? You don't act like a dick, but you're trying to fasten something on me that I don't know nothing at all about."

"You know anything about Toad Reynolds?" asked Dazzy.

"Toad?" echoed the Gorilla, scowling. "I know him—yes!"

"He's a member of your mob—Crip's gang—isn't he?"

"He ain't!"

"You're right there," agreed Dazzy pleasantly. "He's a member of Spumati's gang. He was a member, that is. He was bumped off to-night. You knew that, didn't you, Gorilla?"

But the Gorilla shook his ponderous, evil head.

"I didn't know it!"

"Well, he was," said Dazzy quietly, "and that is why you're here, Gertz. We got orders to pick you up and put you away for that job. You're the gun that bumped Toad Reynolds!"

"Me?" screamed the Gorilla, his face contorting with rage. "Me? Me bump Toad off? It's a lie—a black lie!"

"They put the finger on you," said Dazzy firmly.

"Who put the finger on me?"

"Spumati—and some of the boys," answered Dazzy.

A great light seemed to dawn on Gorilla Gertz. He blinked, thrust his dark face forward pugnaciously, and twisted his thick lips into a malicious smile. He understood things now.

"You're with Spumati!" he challenged rather than asked.

"Uh-huh," admitted Dazzy, to Curly's astonishment, "we're with Spumati! You're on the spot for that Toad job, Gorilla, and you might as well admit it and clear your soul before you croak."

The expression on the Gorilla's face was a sight to behold. Dazzy, seeing it, got a kick out of it—and a lot of encouragement. But his poker face didn't betray his triumph. Curly, looking at the Gorilla, wondered who was the craziest of the pair—the accused or his accuser. The Gorilla seemed breathless for a moment.

"You—you say I killed Toad Reynolds?" he asked thickly.

"I didn't see you. Somebody did," answered Dazzy.

"And you're going to rub me out, eh?" asked the Gorilla.

"Yes. Those are our orders," murmured Dazzy.

"Well, what about Crip and the boys? Maybe they'll put you in a hole—six feet deep—feller. Did you think of that?"

Dazzy smiled coolly and shook his head.

"Well," he drawled, giving the Gorilla a very queer look, "maybe they won't. Maybe they might be friends. Maybe I could do them a favor. Maybe I could do you a favor."

"What?" blurted the Gorilla bluntly.

"Maybe I can deal with you, guy," said Dazzy, confidingly, as he leaned toward his prisoner. "Maybe I can sell you back your life if you put me in with Crip. You follow me, feller?"

It was evident that Gorilla Gertz was hopelessly mired. He was all mixed up. He wasn't following any one anywhere.

"What do you mean?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I mean," said Dazzy frankly, "that I'm sore at Spumati. Oh, I ain't one of his regulars. Me and my pal here was imported to do a few erasing jobs for Spumati. We were to get two hundred dollars a job, but we only got seventy-five dollars for the last one, and to-night he says we only get fifty dollars for blotting you, and we got to get rid of the body, too, for that."

The Gorilla actually shivered, but, whether it was with rage or fear, Curly couldn't exactly tell. Dazzy blew a smoke ring at him and smiled.

"So, now," continued Dazzy, "I might listen to reason!"

"I'll deal!" exclaimed Gorilla Gertz quickly, unhesitatingly.

"On my terms," added Dazzy, just as quickly. "If I double-cross Spumati, I can't expect to get away with it if he lives—him and some of his mugs—so the way I deal includes a little help in putting him and his lieutenants to pushing up daisies."

The Gorilla, relieved, nodded eagerly. This was sweet music.

"Did I say 'no' to that?" he asked hopefully, trying to smile.

"Wait," cautioned Dazzy. "I haven't explained things yet. I am not exactly trusting you yet, either, Gorilla. I got to be sure Crip Riley and his gang will go before I let you go. Crip, by this time, probably figures you are dead or dying."

Gorilla Gertz nodded. He had evidently been thinking that himself.

"Those shots you fired in the air ——" he began.

"Yes, in addition to a lot of blood I sprinkled out of a container on the sidewalk as we blew," said Dazzy, grinning. "I got a supply of nice red blood at the packing house before I plucked you, Brother Gorilla. It probably looked like the real stuff on the pavement. Yes, Crip will figure you got yours, sure enough."

Curly, reveling because he had found out the reason for the fast ride to the packing plant, looked at Dazzy in admiration.

"I want you to write me a note to Crip, Gorilla," went on Dazzy, "saying the Spumati gang got you, that you're shot and dying in one of their hideouts, and that you're smuggling out this note to Crip by the only white guy in the bunch, who wants to get even with Spumati for a lot of things. If you

write that, Gorilla, you live. And as soon as I deliver it and see that Crip will help me get even with Spumati, you will be freed. I got to let Crip think you dead or dying so that he'll be all the more ready to go for Spumati."

Gorilla Gertz closed his eyes. He was thinking. He opened them.

"I'll write the note," he announced grimly.

And he did, after Dazzy had unchained him for the purpose. Then Dazzy handcuffed him anew, to the plumbing in the bathroom of the apartment, after Gertz had told him where he could find "Crip" Riley. At length, Dazzy beckoned Curly to the front room.

"I'm leaving you to guard him until I get back—if it's in an hour or a week," said Dazzy. "You know where I am going. You keep your head and this prisoner. I'll answer questions later."

But Curly wasn't to be denied. He had one question he had to ask.

"That Valerie girl brought us here," he cried, "and she knows what happened to-night. Girls talk. What was the idea of ringing her in?"

"I had to have a woman to call the chief of police, Curly," he replied. "I decided I could trust Valerie. Then, as long as she was in and I needed a car and driver, I preferred her to another outsider."

CHAPTER VI.

PURE NERVE.

IT was a sinister gathering in the rear room of the third-floor Welton Street speakeasy. Although it was ten o'clock in the morning, the shades were drawn on the long, old-fashioned windows. One electric light, greasy and fly-specked, cast a sickly yellow glow on the hot faces —and hot heads—around the wabbly, scarred conference table. The mysterious meeting had been on for more than two hours.

Dazzy Boyne, slouched comfortably in a rickety chair, was pulling complacently on a cork-tipped cigarette—the picture of cool confidence on the surface. Beneath the assumed veneer, however, Dazzy's heart was thumping violently, and his nimble mind was racing madly. He was working on pure nerve.

The crucial moment had come. In a twinkling now, he would know whether or not the ill-famed Crip Riley and his assorted crew of cutthroat lieutenants were going to accept him and his harum-scarum yarn at face value or accuse him of duplicity. If they didn't believe him, would his career end right there in the room from which no inkling of his death could ever leak?

Crip, a slender, sunken-cheeked, emaciated-looking individual, with the devil peeking from his restless eyes, held Gorilla's note.

"You think," he growled, looking at Dazzy, "that Gorilla Gertz may still be alive over in Spumati's den?"

Dazzy hesitated. He wanted to strengthen the impression he had sought to make—that he was saying nothing but that of which he was positively certain.

"I doubt if he is alive," he answered finally, looking Crip Riley straight in the eyes. "But there is a chance, of course. He wasn't expecting rescue when he scrawled that note, Riley. No, he was praying for your quick vengeance on Spumati and Spumati's men!"

"And what do you want out of this besides vengeance?"

Dazzy didn't hesitate a moment this time.

"I want a one-fourth share of Spumati's dough," he said quietly.

All the heads came up at that. Here was something new. There had been no previous mention of money at all. An ugly, shaggy-browed man at Crip's left put in a rapacious query that voiced the crowd's anxiety.

"What's Spumati got, feller?" he asked.

"I'm not sure exactly," replied Dazzy, seemingly in deep thought. "But it will exceed three hundred thousand dollars in undivided loot. I want seventy-five thousand dollars of it."

There were subdued whistles from several pairs of lips. But Crip Riley, with triggerlike decision, nodded his wily head.

"You can have it, but where is this do-ray-me?" Crip asked.

"I don't know," said Dazzy, "but it can be had."

"How?"

Dazzy got to his feet slowly. He put his hands on the back of the rickety chair and smiled at the men around the table, but not one of them smiled back at him. Perhaps, they were all too interested in what he was going to say; perhaps, they still suspected him. It was the moment, however, for which the shrewd Dazzy had waited many impatient, nerve-sapping hours. Now he would "spill" his audacious plan —a plan that might jar even the hardened, unscrupulous Riley himself.

"I figured," began Dazzy coldly, distinctly, "that if we play this thing right, Riley, we can get all that Spumati dough quick and simple. I want enough men to swoop down on Spumati's lair and overwhelm him and his mob so badly that they can't fight back. I don't want any gun play to spoil things. I want them all trapped, and then——"

He hesitated for dramatic effect.

"We're going to herd them all into a nice moving van I got spotted and we're going out by-by to the country with them," he continued. "We're stopping the van on the edge of one of them old abandoned clay pits near Soda Lake on the Morrison Pike. Those pits are deep, sixty, seventy feet or more, and full of murky yellow water. Spumati can have his choice then of coughing up his dough or going for a dive in the van, with all his pals, into the clay pit."

There were mingled exclamations of awe, approval, and agreement.

"And after he pays?" cut in the astute Riley.

"The van and its cargo goes into the clay pit, anyway!" said Dazzy fiercely.

There was a long moment of utter silence, and then Crip Riley got up and extended a sinewy hand across the table to Dazzy, who took it. Crip Riley's face was shining with triumph.

"Who did you say you were, anyhow, guy?" Crip asked admiringly.

Dazzy laughed. The tension was relieved. He had won, he knew.

"I didn't say who I was," he answered glibly, "except that I was an imported gun for Spumati, that's all. And he double-crossed me on the deal we made. I'm not standing for that from him—see? After this job and after I get my split, I'm gone again, back to where I came from. After all, names don't matter in a case like this, Crip!"

Curly's tired, drawn face became even more haggard, grayer, it seemed, as he stepped wearily, resignedly, from Dazzy's roadster and

saw the two heavy, low-bodied moving vans parked side by side, behind a west-end warehouse.

"I'm to drive one of them babies?" he asked in dismay.

"You are," said Dazzy, a determined look on his face. "And you're to drive as you never drove before. You'll have to do it. You've got to keep up with a fast touring car."

"Are we going to haul some alky?" demanded Curly, somewhat shaken.

"No," said Dazzy, with an air of mystery, "you're not going to haul anything—but thin air. Whatever is worth hauling, I'm hauling myself. Now, listen, kiddo. These wagons are ready to roll. The watchman is gone, purposely. It cost me a hundred berries. It may cost him his job later, but he's risking that, seeing how scarce hundred-dollar notes are these days. Now lift up your ears, for you got to get these instructions right, see?"

Curly had been through a lot. He had spent the whole day, for instance, guarding the chained and growling Gorilla Gertz in the apartment bathroom. He had been so engaged, reluctantly, when Dazzy had arrived to take him on the truck-driving adventure. Fearing that he might be leaping from the frying pan into the fire, Curly had protested it was unsafe to leave the prisoner alone, even though he was handcuffed to the plumbing. However, Dazzy, as usual, had overruled him.

And here he was, standing behind the van now, getting his orders.

"Go ahead, shoot the works!" Curly advised wretchedly.

"We're leaving here almost immediately," continued the radiant Dazzy, "with me in the lead. You follow. I am going down West Fiftieth Avenue to Curtis Street, then north on Curtis. At Thirty-second and Curtis, you pull off, around the corner to the right, go one block, make a horseshoe turn and come back, so that you are parked on Thirty-second, ready to swing into Curtis. You'll probably have to wait an hour, but it is dusk, the corner isolated, and it's a fifty-to-one shot you won't be bothered, even noticed. Don't have any lights on, either.

"After you turn off, I'm going on. But, as I said, probably in an hour, I'll be back. I'll be coming up Curtis behind a fast touring car. I'll douse the lights and swing into Thirty-second Street, right past you. Instantly, Curly, you must swing into Curtis Street, turning on your lights again the second you've straightened out. You take out after the touring car, maintaining about a block distance behind it.

"I'm praying the light-switching won't be noticed by those in the car. I doubt if it will. After you proceed a mile, which will be Forty-seventh Street, pull to the curb, leave the lights on, and duck for all you're worth. Cut through a yard to the alley, grab a street car, and get back to the apartment. The touring car, finding out you aren't following, will be back, and you've got to be far enough from the van so they won't spot you. Understand?"

"I'll be danged if I do, Dazzy!" groaned Curly miserably.

"I mean the orders!"

"Yep, I got those, but——" began the nervous Curly.

"We're off then," said Dazzy, making for the first van.

Curly, cursing himself for a jackass, climbed into the cab of the second van.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREAT.

IN the dark block between Sixth and Seventh on Curtis Street, Dazzy swung his big van in toward the curb. His headlights picked out a black sedan, without lights, back window shade down, drawn up at the curb ahead of him. There was another car beyond that.

Dazzy, pulling on the emergency brake, heard a voice at his elbow.

"Everything jake, feller?" He recognized the voice of one of Crip Riley's lieutenants.

"Yes," said Dazzy, in a small voice. "Where's the chief?"

"He's in the car ahead," said the shadowy form. "You can slide up there and see him. I'm to ride with you in the van."

"O. K.!" whispered Dazzy, although he didn't mean it. He scrambled down out of the cab, ran past the sedan, and hesitated. Then, seeing no sign from the huddled forms there, he hurried on to the touring car.

"Hello," came Crip's cautious whisper. "You all set?"

"Ready!" answered Dazzy briskly. "You going all the way through in this car, chief?"

"All the way!" affirmed Crip Riley. "But the sedan and its outfit will duck right after we get the mob in the van. But this car will be escort all the time, and I'll be in all the time."

"Good!" exclaimed Dazzy, with mock sincerity. "But I got one suggestion, chief. The man riding with me in the van. I don't think it's wise for this reason. I don't need him either going or coming. If the bulls should stop us, either way, they don't know me—I'm just a moving-van driver. But if they happen to know *your* man, chief, the bulls' examination may be a little stiffer—and embarrassing!"

"You ain't afraid to take all the risk there alone?"

"Afraid?" echoed Dazzy, with a hint of resentment in his even voice. "Nix, I ain't afraid. It's a cinch going over to Spumati's lair. And once we got the menagerie locked in the van, it'll stay. What is there to be afraid of, anyway? The extra man is——"

Crip Riley made another hair-trigger decision, which wasn't so wise.

"You're right. Send that bozo back to this car!"

A moment later, they were under way. The touring car led the way down Sixth Street, over a viaduct, into a thickly settled section where mostly foreigners lived. The sedan, riding on low springs, and packed with gunmen and their guns, followed. Dazzy, a cigarette in his mouth, brought up the rear with the moving van. So far, everything was running smoothly, according to his scheme. He knew, however, that the climax lay ahead, and he prayed that there might be no hitch there, no unexpected resistance from the surprised Spumatites, no battle royal to upset the wholesale abduction plan.

"It's lucky I knew where Spumati was making his headquarters!" he exulted, as he drove along. "I figured I'd have reason to remember that somehow when that ex-henchman of Spumati spilled it to me a week or so ago. Now, if they only haven't moved!"

The two-story red brick building —saloon below and hall above—was lighted, however, as the touring car screeched to a halt in front of it. Two or three loiterers at the en-

trance to the place ducked back in, pell-mell, as the flying shadows leaped from the touring car and poured into the saloon. The sedan, disgorging its cargo of cutthroats, pulled up to make room for the van. Dazzy, jumping down, rushed to the big rear doors of the van and opened them. The occupants of the sedan had already stormed the entrance to the second-story hall. There was a minute or two of wild disorder—shouts, curses, the sound of running feet, scuffling, falling bodies—but not a single shot.

Then Crip Riley appeared on the sidewalk, a bodyguard with him.

"They're coming out!" he cried through cupped hands to Dazzy. "Load fast!"

"Get Spumati?" asked Dazzy.

"Yes, he's in the bunch!"

"Good!"

The "bunch" came out of the building. There were not so many, Dazzy saw. Two, three, five, six, eight, ten, twelve—thirteen—fourteen!

The sheep were quickly separated from the goats. Crip Riley's gun toters, moving fast and noiselessly, ushered their charges to the van doors and shoved them inside. A belated prisoner, protesting vehemently in broken English, was rushed across the sidewalk and in.

"That's all," grunted somebody.

The van doors were slammed and locked. It would be close in the van, with only a small grated window in the front, far above Dazzy's head, to ventilate the moving bull pen. Dazzy sprang into the cab. The sedan, some of its slower passengers still on the running boards, roared down the street, swinging away into the blackness around the first corner. The touring car blared away. Dazzy rumbled out in pursuit, his heart pounding.

"Well!" he exclaimed in a voice tremulous with excitement. "I guess I've kidnaped a whole gang—if that Curly bird is on the job."

Twisting this way and that, the touring car led the way back over the prearranged route. And Dazzy heaved a sigh of relief when the truck and its escort, a block away, swung into Curtis Street again. He had feared that the snap judgment of Crip Riley might ordain a change in the schedule, but there were no revoked orders. Crip's fast car roared on; Dazzy followed as fast as he dared. Any patrolman, seeing the procession, would have sworn it was a booze delivery, and wholesale at that. But, apparently, no officer saw the show, or, if one did, he didn't interfere; perhaps the abbreviated caravan was traveling altogether too fast for the ordinary copper to collect his startled wits in time.

The touring car sped across Thirty-first Street, but here Dazzy slowed down. Then, as he neared the next corner, he shot off his lights and took the turn into Thirty-second Street at a dizzy pace. The dark form of Curly's waiting van loomed. It was in motion almost at once, however, swinging clumsily out into Curtis Street. Its lights flashed. Dazzy, already a half block down Thirty-second Street, could have cried with joy, had he a spare hand to wipe away the tears.

"Good for Curly!" he enthused happily. "He *was* awake!"

Then, bending low over the wheel, Dazzy forgot Curly, the substitute truck, the touring car, Crip Riley and his assassins. Dazzy had but one thought searing through his throbbing head: he had to drive as he had never driven before and get safe beyond the city limits before a tire went down, the engine stopped,

a cop intervened, or any other disastrous mishap occurred.

"Ten to one I make it," he reassured himself optimistically.

And he did, for the gods seemed to be with him, as well as the pounding, kicking, and cursing madmen thrumping around in the van. He flashed over the city limit line, roared down a tree-lined lane, swung recklessly to the left at a crossroads, turned in through an arched gate, and ground to a stop behind a large barn.

A person in white advanced out of the shadows to meet him.

"Hello, Valerie!" he whispered. "You got the car here?"

"Of course, I did," said the girl. "You get the——"

"Yes. Can't you hear 'em squealing?" Dazzy pounded on the doors. "Be quiet in there, you apes, unless you want some gun slugs distributed among you!" The racket died down. "Spumati?" cried Dazzy, getting close to the van doors. "Spumati! The chief wants to talk to you!"

"I hear!" came a guttural, agonized voice. "What you want, eh?"

Dazzy stepped back a pace. He spoke in a changed voice.

"That you, Spumati?"

"Yes. Who speaks, please?"

"Never mind that," went on Dazzy, attempting to mask his excitement. "I want to tell you where you are. You're near Soda Lake, on the Morrison Pike, Spumati. The truck is right at the edge of an abandoned clay pit. It is full of water—sixty feet or more. You hear that, Spumati?"

"I hear," came Spumati's voice again while other voices murmured.

"Well, the van goes over the brink —into the drink—in two minutes, Spumati, unless——"

"What you want?" came Spumati's voice, louder and more troubled than ever.

"We want the fifty thousand dollars' ransom for Williamson, Spumati," came Dazzy's cold, businesslike tone. "We get it—from the Williamson family—when Williamson arrives home safe. Do we get it, Spumati?"

"What you talk—fool talk?" came Spumati's parrying question.

"Jim!" cried Dazzy, pretending to address some one. "Start the truck. Pull up closer! Jump when the thing starts down!"

"Wait! Wait!" came Spumati's terrorized plea while a bedlam broke in the van. Spumati's henchmen were afraid, it appeared. They shouted, pounded, and kicked—a snarling mass of beasts.

"All right, Spumati, what about it?" Dazzy called as the noise subsided. "Do you release Williamson or don't you?"

"I play your game," came Spumati's halting answer then.

"One of your men in the van will be released," explained Dazzy immediately, before Spumati could change his mind. "One of my men will take him into town. He will see that Williamson is freed and sent home. When Williamson reaches home safely, there'll be some one here to release all of you from the van. Now, Spumati, pick your messenger, and blindfold him. Don't tell him to double-cross us. He can't bring help back, because we'll move the van meantime. You understand, Spumati?"

Spumati understood, it seemed. At last, cautiously, wishing he had more help, Dazzy opened the van door slightly, but only after he had spoken in several disguised voices and caused considerable racket around the van to impress the Spumatites that he had many helpers.

A blindfolded gangster squeezed out of the door. Dazzy shot the bolts home again.

Then, a hand under the messenger's arm, Dazzy escorted him to the waiting car. Valerie climbed in behind the wheel, and they were off, leaving the van with its anxious cargo on the deserted farm.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD NIGHT.

IT was shortly after six o'clock the following morning when the telephone bell broke the silence of Dazzy's apartment.

Dazzy, sprawled, fully dressed, in the easy-chair, stirred, then snapped wide awake and reached for the receiver.

"Oh, hello, Lep!" he said, his tone drowsy in spite of himself. "He did, eh? . . . Wasn't harmed? . . . Good! . . . Thinks he can pick the place he was held, eh? . . . Also identify some of the gang? . . . Good! . . . Adios!"

Stretching himself, Dazzy got up and stepped to the bathroom door. Curly, the guard, was asleep on the threshold, but Gorilla Gertz, the prisoner, handcuffed to the plumbing, wasn't.

"O. K., boys," sang out Dazzy cheerily. "I guess the party is over. I'm releasing you, Gorilla Gertz. I think for your own good, you'd better deny writing that note and forget all about ever meeting us—unless you want the cops down on you and Crip Riley. Let Riley think what he wants to, but advise him not to get too gay, for a guy with nerve enough to kidnap a whole gang might come for him, if necessary."

There was a sly look on the Gorilla's tired face.

"You speak wisdom," he agreed softly, as Dazzy uncuffed him. Dazzy helped him on with his coat. Then the Gorilla insisted on shaking hands with both Dazzy and Curly. That ceremony over, the Gorilla, whistling low, departed—a free man.

While Curly stared, Dazzy picked up the telephone.

"Police headquarters?" he asked, when he got his connection: "Say, if you'll send out to the old Brookvale farm, on the Wadsworth Road, near Arvada, you'll find a moving van that was reported stolen this morning, I think. In it you will find the Spumati gang—most of them—the outfit that kidnaped Williamson. . . . Me? . . . Oh, never mind!"

He hung up the receiver and grinned at the awed Curly.

"I promised Spumati to send some one out to get him out of the van," said Dazzy lazily, "so I'm just keeping my word. Maybe he would have preferred staying in the truck than to be rescued by bulls. Now, Curly, before you bust with curiosity, ask that question!"

"Why—er—how—did you——" began Curly, stuttering.

"I'll answer," said Dazzy triumphantly. "We've just won a rather ticklish game, old boy, and I can afford to be frank with you. I figured it was a clever gang kidnaping when we found out how the two gunmen had taken two innocent women along to Williamson's house as decoys. Williamson, I decided, wouldn't have opened the door for the men alone. Why? Because, perhaps, they looked like thugs.

"I wrote the fake ransom note, after getting Williamson's signature card from the library, to make the

kidnapers think some one in their mob was double-crossing them. It isn't hard to do that. I got the signature card after reading in the paper that Williamson had just returned from the library before he was kidnaped. I had Valerie call the chief of police and tell him she was on the inside, and, if the note was released to the papers, it might help solve the case.

"I had Lepley in on the know, of course. I rather expected an early gang killing. I wasn't disappointed. Lepley called me, as he promised, and we went out to see that dead man. Lep and I recognized him as one of the Spumati gang. He had a slip of paper on him with two rude crosses drawn on it—the double-crosser, see? It fitted in with what we knew and anticipated. An outlaw was sacrificed, but he probably wasn't worth saving, anyway! Meanwhile, the Williamson family had received a genuine ransom note, but the police had suppressed it temporarily!

"Then we nabbed the Gorilla, pretending to make a reprisal for the slaying of Spumati's Toad Reynolds. We got Gorilla to spill and write the note that helped us get Crip Riley to aid us gangnap the whole Spumati mob. The two gangs were at daggers points, anyway. Finally, Spumati agreed to release Williamson as the price of his own life—and the lives of the men in the truck with him. I guess that's all."

Dazzy started to peel off his coat, but Curly's face lighted up with a sudden recollection. He grabbed Dazzy by one arm.

"But, say, Dazzy, what about that twelve-hundred-and-fifty-dollar reward?" he cried.

Dazzy shook his head grimly.

"We can't touch it without exposing our part in the play," he answered quietly. "And, anyway, haven't you ever heard, Curly, that virtue is its own reward? We got to be satisfied knowing that we saved a decent citizen from a bunch of crooks and landed the Spumati gang safe in the lap of the police department! And now——"

"Yes?" asked Curly expectantly.

"I'll bid you a fond good night," said Dazzy politely, "for I'm going to bed and catch up on some of that sleep I lost. I'd advise you to do the same, brother!"

"Hell!" moaned Curly. "I can't sleep. I got too much to think over, to figure out, to untangle. Say, let me ask you——"

"Good night," murmured Dazzy, and he closed the bedroom door.

A MODERN NERO

WASN'T it Nero who played the violin from his penthouse while he watched Rome burn? Well, his little act was somewhat duplicated in Gyula, Hungary, recently when a man hired musicians to play for him while he wrecked his store. The reason he wrecked the store was because the man was unable to pay his taxes, which had been overdue for quite some time.

COUNTERFEIT LABELS

By DONALD G. McDONALD

He was hoping to find a wild Irishman, and he found a lot of trouble.

DETECTIVE MURRAY found himself in an unenviable and hazardous position. It was night, and he was crouching in the black shadows of an alleyway, waiting for the "Buttercup" to pass the entrance when he heard a footstep behind him. He turned and peered back through the inky darkness, but could see nothing.

Ten seconds later, another sound reached his ears that he identified as that produced by forcing a window with a jimmy; then came the sudden movement of a heavy body —like a man scrambling over a window sill.

Detective Mason Murray looked at the mysterious sedan parked with its motor running and its driver inside. The machine had been standing there, directly opposite the alley entrance, for the past three minutes. Was there any connection between this auto and the man who had just forced a window into the empty frame warehouse that flanked the alley? Most of all, was there any connection, any tie-up, between the unknown prowler behind him, the Buttercup, and Pat?

Pat, Detective Murray's teammate, had been sent out to arrest the Buttercup eight hours ago, and had not returned or made any report to headquarters. Now it was Murray's job to arrest the dapper little whisky toter and find his own comrade as well. There was little doubt in the detective's mind but that the Buttercup was responsible for Pat's disappearance. But why? The only charge against the Buttercup was that of breaking and entering the Speedway Print Shop but twenty-four hours ago. It was not a grave enough offense to cause the slippery little crook to murder a dick. Nevertheless, Pat was missing.

If a straight line were drawn from Detective Murray's present position to the whereabouts of the Buttercup, it would extend through the width of the warehouse, across a sixty-foot lot where a steam shovel was due to begin excavation on the morrow, and through the side wall of Fink's place, a notorious rendezvous for criminals. Here the Buttercup spent the greater portion of his time. He was there ten minutes ago, as Detective Murray had found out by peering through an unshaded side window. And but for a strong hunch to do otherwise, the officer would have made the arrest then and there. But, no, he had decided to jump the little crook by surprise as the latter walked to his auto, that was parked about a block away.

And now another hunch, equally strong, made him decide to follow up this unknown prowler. It might be "Squash," one of the dapper crook's associates. But no matter who it was, the stealthy entrance of any one into a deserted warehouse that stood sixty feet removed from the Buttercup's customary hangout was decidedly suspicious and worth an investigation.

The officer, staring back through the inky darkness, could see nothing; but he reasoned that he could, if he chose, work his way back toward the direction of the sound without betraying himself to whoever sat in the parked auto. After a brief and final consideration he began a slow and noiseless advance into the deeper shadows, with his hands outstretched and touching the warehouse wall.

All at once Detective Murray's heart skipped a beat as the toes of his shoe came into unexpected contact with a box. Instantly he reached up and felt around until his hand discovered an open window. Then he, like his unknown predecessor, mounted the wooden case, grasped the sill, and, with a quick spring, gained it and scrambled over.

He found himself in a room that instinct told him was immense. There was no light to verify this; at least, he saw none during the first few minutes that he stood motionless and silent. And just when this inactivity began to pall and he was about to turn away from the window and move cautiously into the surrounding gloom of the unknown interior, a pencil beam of light appeared suddenly, focused on a distant, opposite wall.

Instantly Detective Murray knelt and then lay flat on the floor. His revolver came from his pocket, and he held the weapon rigidly in his hand while his startled gaze continued to follow the jerky but methodical movements of the spot of light. The area illuminated appeared to be no larger than a saucer, and it moved from the left to the right of his vision in a series of hops.

Simultaneously the prone detective was positive that the one who

wielded the flashlight was talking either to himself or to an unseen companion, for there sounded in the great room a faint but very real voice. Murray strained his ears to catch something intelligible—something that would give him a clew to the mysterious behavior of the man with the flash, but it was useless. The tone of voice was too low, and the room too large.

Then suddenly a miracle happened. The light went out; a heavy blow sounded, and the man with the flash vanished.

Detective Murray gasped in surprise, waited a prudent length of time, then got to his feet and started forward on tiptoe toward the spot where he last had seen the light. He cursed himself for not having a flash of his own. At the risk of discovery and worse, he struck a match.

The glare revealed two things clearly. In the first place, he was alone. In the second place, he saw that he was in one of the storage rooms of the deserted warehouse—a gigantic shed of a place, rough-boarded, with dirty, unfinished walls.

Before the match went out, Murray tiptoed noiselessly across the floor until, as closely as he could tell, he stood in the same spot where he last had seen the man with the flash. Pausing now, he considered. He went back in his mind and rehearsed the extraordinary movements of the light—the jerky motion, its steady progression from left to right—and the murmur of the voice that had reached his ears. What did it all mean? Above all, what had become of the intruder?

Murray thought he must light another match, but decided against it. Too much of a risk! Too much danger of calling attention to himself! The mystery thrilled him. This business of prowling around here in an effort to learn the questionable business of the man with the flash was exactly to his liking. Here was stark, raw melodrama. Here was the sort of thing he craved.

A random thought flitted through Detective Murray's keen mind. He snared it and gave it consideration. Suppose the man with the light were looking for something! This was not brilliant reasoning, he told himself, but it was a starter, anyway.

Very well! If the man were looking for something, what might it be? An exit? An exit into some secret room, perhaps? Why not? Having gone thus far, Murray felt himself temporarily stumped. What next? How about that hopping motion of the flash? Why—why——

Ah! The answer to that also! The heavy, vertical two-by-sixes were spaced at regular intervals along the walls. Perhaps between a certain two of these lay the exit from the warehouse and the entrance into some hidden room. The voice? That had been a count that had fallen from the lips of the vanished man as he checked off the spaces from some unknown starting point.

Fine! Now everything was clearing up nicely. Just one thing more—the blow. A trapdoor? Could the noise have come from the slam of a trapdoor as it sprang back into place once the mysterious visitor had passed through? Not a bad idea! But how to find the trapdoor? A whale of a job without a flash!

The officer moved closer to the wall, put out his left hand, and pressed cautiously here and there. Rigid boarding, dust, and cobwebs met his touch. He moved a step to the right and repeated the inspection. Still no luck! Some inner

voice began to tell him that he was a fool to prowl around like this on a wild-goose chase after an unknown man who had disappeared so strangely. And the same voice interjected a reminder of the alley surveillance and the parked sedan.

"Bosh!" said the detective to himself. "Most likely I only imagined somebody was tailin' me.

"You're crazy, Murray," retorted his small voice. "You ought to be more interested in getting away from here with a whole skin. Suppose you find a trapdoor, or whatever it is! What are you going to do then? Are you going to go clumping into some tighter jam than you're in right now? Remember what the captain told you: 'Don't get caught in any corners.'"

The detective paused in his examination of the wall to give this last argument respectful consideration. It had weight. But what a pity to pass up this golden opportunity! He might learn something very much to his and his missing teammate's advantage.

Great Cæsar!

A thought, rich in the possibilities it suggested, sprang into the detective's mind. It centered about a story he had heard concerning "Blubber" Ernie, a crook who held up a bank, killed the cashier, and got no loot. The "Crying Crook," as he was sometimes called, was hunted by the police for two years, and finally was found and arrested less than half a block from this very warehouse, where Ernie's dad had been a night watchman. According to the story, the police suspected the father of hiding his son, but no charge was pressed.

Ernie himself insisted that he merely had been visiting his father when the cops spotted him. Furthermore, the father, on the day of his son's capture, turned on the gas in a little one-room apartment and terminated his own sorrow. This occurred a year ago. Since then the warehouse had been abandoned for lack of business.

Now the remembrance of this story and the possibilities it suggested made Murray's nerves tingle in excitement. What more natural than that Blubber's dad had constructed a hideout? What could be simpler than for a night watchman to construct some room—underground, probably—in which his son could find refuge? Here the son could sleep, live, and eat the food his father could bring to him each night in his lunch pail.

But, if so, who was using the hideout now? That was the question of prime importance which the detective determined to answer. This uncertainty, his love of excitement, goaded him on. He stood there in the darkness, seething with impatience. He was like a locomotive standing on the siding, all but bursting under a full head of steam, but obliged to remain stationary.

Mentally he pawed the air for another inspiring thought that would be the open sesame to the invisible trapdoor or what not that barred the way. Standing on his tiptoes, he craned his neck and strained his eyes; he crouched close to the floor and felt around, pushed and pulled. He dropped his gat back into his pocket so that he could have the use of both hands that flitted from board to board and from crack to crack. For Murray the temperature had changed from cold to hot. Profusely he perspired, and was all but burning up in the fever of his impatience.

Suddenly he sniffed the air. Smoke! Something smelled like a kerosene lantern. Good! If a lan-

tern were burning anywhere in the vicinity, it ought to give out a glow that he could see through some crack. The old warehouse certainly appeared to be far from light-tight. Then, idly, for no particular reason, his gazed dropped to the floor, and his heart leaped. There it was—the light—coming through the cracks right under his own feet.

Murray was doubly cautious now as he knelt and explored a small area. He was sure he hadn't been heard. If his movements had reached the unknown stranger, that individual would have put out the light.

By and by he found a suspiciously wide crack. He inserted his finger tips and gave a cautious, preliminary tug. That was enough. The wood yielded a bit. He probed deeper with his fingers, got a stronger, surer grip, and this time pulled with the firm intent of opening the trap. Success rewarded his effort.

A section of the floor, two and a half or three feet square, came up until he could squeeze through. The same illumination that had revealed this entrance bathed the interior of the subterranean passageway and made his progress through the opening fairly secure and perfectly silent. His feet crept down several rude steps cut in hard clay. He kept his hands upraised, holding up the small door, until he had gained the floor; then he allowed the boards to settle back slowly into place.

He was in a narrow tunnel cut through mud and clay—so low of roof that he was obliged to stoop, and so narrow that his shoulders brushed the damp, black walls on both sides.

The passage ran straight for possibly twelve feet, then angled just enough to hide from view what might lie beyond. Well, having come this far, he was determined to investigate farther, in spite of the hazard. The murmur of voices reached his ears, but the words were so distorted by confusing echoes that from his present position they were indistinguishable.

Detective Murray edged closer, step by step, his shoes slipping in the slime of the tunnel floor. Presently, when he reached the bend in the passage and could go no farther without revealing his presence, he paused and found the conversation understandable. The first words he heard came from the Buttercup's lips:

"Well, that all depends on what you offer. But I don't like you bustin' in this way. You say you jimmied the warehouse window. That's bad. It's sure to be noticed sooner or later. Tell me, why didn't you come around to Fink's? This place has two ways to get in, you know."

"Because I suspected some guy was followin' me—some guy in a car—so I ducked in at the alley. Aw, forget it, Buttercup. I'm tellin' you I heard how you was goin' to sell out, and that you was havin' Squash come to look the stuff over and make you an offer. What's the idea, Buttercup, of you favorin' Squash? Him, me, and you have all hung out together fer the last year, ain't we? Ain't my jack as good as his?"

"Sure, it is, only I never thought you had enough money to buy me out," said Buttercup.

"Is that so? Well, you'd be surprised if you knew how much I have got. I been savin' my money. But tell me, Buttercup, what's the big idea of you gettin' so excited about movin' to-night? It's funny. Here you been king-pin fer the past two

or three years, and you're gettin' along swell and everything, and then you suddenlike gets this crazy notion to beat it all alone."

"That's my business," said the Buttercup coldly. "I got reasons. Now come on. Let's get down to business. You see the stuff? Of course, you'll either have to take my word that there's three hundred and twenty-five cases or count it yourself. You've sampled it, too, and you know it's good stuff. It's real Canadian."

The other man laughed derisively. "Because the labels say so, I suppose."

"Yeah, the labels do say so," retorted the Buttercup, his voice betraying his anger, "but labels or no labels, any guy could tell this is the genuine article unless all the taste has been burned out of his mouth by cheap hooch."

Reluctantly the other admitted that it was good.

"Then what do you offer?" pressed the Buttercup. "Come, I've got other things to do."

"I'll give you five thousand dollars in cash."

A single, contemptuous snort was the only reply.

"What? That ain't enough? I'll give you seven thousand, then—not a cent more."

"No sale," said the Buttercup crisply. "Come on, we'll leave this way."

"Hold on," pleaded the other. "Just how much do you want, anyway?"

"Fifteen grand."

"Aw, you're kiddin'!"

"That's the price. Cheap, too, and you know it."

"I'll give you ten."

"Quit wasting time!" roared the Buttercup, as if thoroughly out of patience. "If you want it, you can have it for fifteen if you've got the cash with you. What'll it be—yes or no?"

"I'll take it."

Then came to the detective's ears the crisp rustle of money and the exclamation from Buttercup:

"You piker! Squabblin' around over a few thousands when you've got all that dough with you."

The other man ignored the slur and began to count, his voice low and absorbed; suddenly, without any warning, the words ceased and were succeeded almost immediately by a horrible gurgling sound.

Murder!

Detective Murray tensed his muscles for the spring, even as something hard caught him a terrific blow in the back, just above the belt.

"Put up your mitts!" came a snarled command in his ear.

The officer complied, and his gun was seized.

"Now march straight ahead!"

Murray, stunned by the realization that he had been taken off his guard by an unknown man who had entered quietly through the trapdoor, moved on into a large subterranean chamber that, like the passageway, had been dug out of the clay. The place was lighted by a kerosene lantern that threw ghostly shadows, and the cavern was piled high on one side with innumerable cases. In the clear space that remained was a chair, a table, and a collapsible army cot. Directly opposite their own entrance was another tunnel opening similar to the one they had just left. It led to Fink's place, no doubt.

Sprawled out on the table was the figure of the Buttercup's victim. A knife handle projected from the body at a point back of the heart, where the little crook had struck

while the other counted out the money.

The murderer, gun in hand, was facing the detective and his captor as they entered. When the Buttercup recognized the latter and saw that he had the officer covered, he lowered his gun—a service weapon of the type carried by police officers.

"Hello, Squash." The Buttercup gestured toward the body. "Here's a guy that tried hard to beat you to it."

"Serves him right," said Squash unfeelingly. "I saw him go in the alley next to the warehouse, and waited out there in my car until I figured he had gone inside. He was a fool to trust you. Say, know who this fella is?"

"Sure," said the Buttercup, staring hard at the detective. "He's a dick. His name is Murray."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Squash incredulously. "Then we better settle him right now. After he's out of the way, you and I can talk over our own business. Er—by the way, Buttercup—what was your idea in tryin' to sell this hooch to that sap there when you had already sold it to me this afternoon?"

"Aw, that was just a joke on him," said the Buttercup.

"And profit for you," added Squash.

"Listen," interposed Detective Murray, facing his captor, "have you bought that stuff in the cases over there from the Buttercup?"

"You heard me say so," replied Squash.

"Did you give him the cash yet?" asked the detective.

"I sure did—fifteen grand. Why? What's it to you, dick?"

"Only that the Buttercup has trimmed you high, wide and——"

"Drop that gun, Buttercup!" snapped Squash, covering his former chief. "Now, go ahead, dick. What you got on your chest?"

"Doesn't it strike you funny," continued the officer, "that the Buttercup should be in such a hurry to sell out this stock?"

"Kinda. Do you know why he is?" asked Squash.

"Well, I got a strong hunch," continued Murray. "Did you notice, fella, that they're goin' to put some building on the vacant lot that lies between Fink's place and the warehouse?"

"Yeah, but what's that got to do with it?"

"Say, you are dumb. Didn't you see that big excavating machine that's in place on the property—ready, in the morning, to start diggin' right over this dugout?"

Squash's face grew livid. He glared at the Buttercup. "Why, you dirty rat!" yelled Squash. "You knew that machine would come smashin' down into here some time to-morrow. And you figured you couldn't move it in time to prevent it from bein' ruined. You figured, too, that you'd have my money and the kale off this guy you croaked, and to-night you'd take yourself out of our reach."

The fastidious crook appeared to be too terrified to reply.

"Worse than that," supplied the detective. "Last night the Buttercup broke into the Speedway Print Shop. It's reported he didn't take anything, but I'll bet he did, and I'll gamble I know what it was. He hooked a package of counterfeit whisky labels, and the proprietor didn't dare report the theft to the police."

"You are a wise guy!" snarled the Buttercup. "What good would fake labels do me? I didn't need 'em. Squash knows we've got the genuine stuff stored here. Him and me

has been pals for years—ain't we, Squash?"

"Shut up!" said Squash. "We was. We ain't no more."

"The odds are about fifty to one," persisted the detective, "that the Buttercup pulled out the good hooch and what he sold you for fifteen grand were three hundred and twenty-five cases of colored water with fake labels on the bottles." He looked at his captor. "Do you really think that the Buttercup is so dumb he wouldn't think of that? He knows all the stuff is goin' to be destroyed to-morrow, so you'd never know what he did."

Blistering profanity came scorching from the lips of the diminutive gang leader.

"We'll settle that quick," said Squash. "Dick, you've got a job. Go over there to them cases and bring back a few bottles."

"That's silly. He's likely to have some good stuff in front for camouflage. Let me dig out some of the back cases."

Squash assented to this, so the officer busied himself for five minutes while the Buttercup snarled, protested, and pleaded, but to no avail.

When Detective Murray had displaced two dozen or more cases, he returned with three or four bottles chosen at random.

Squash ordered them opened, after which he sniffed at their necks.

"Why, you dirty double-crosser!" he roared at the Buttercup, and without further parley, shot his former chief through the head. Then Squash walked across to the fallen body and helped himself to all the money without letting his eyes leave the detective. "Tough, dick, that you had to be present, but it's your turn now." He started to raise his automatic when a mocking laugh rang out from the vicinity of the cases.

"I got you covered, Squash," said a voice that was strange to that individual's ears. "Move or shoot and I'll kill you! Drop your gun! That's right. Now, Murray, take the gat and keep him covered while I get out of here."

In a moment a round, red face appeared above some of the cases in the rear of the stack—followed by a stocky, muscular body and short but supple legs.

"Pat," said Detective Murray, "if you've got your handcuffs, use 'em. If you haven't, take mine. The Buttercup's got your gun, I think. I'm sure I recognized it. Come on, let's trot this guy right back to headquarters. You've been gone so long, Pat, the captain's worried stiff."

"Yeah, and I'd have been gone for a longer time," said Pat, "if you hadn't come blunderin' in here. Can you imagine what I would have looked like to-morrow when that big steam shovel came crashin' in here and me under all them cases in a space about the size of a coffin?"

"No wonder the Buttercup didn't want you to arrest him! I'm surprised he didn't drill you," said Murray, looking at his teammate with an eloquent relief in his eyes.

"That was his mistake, wasn't it? No, he just socked me on the head when I wasn't lookin'. I only woke up a few minutes before you came crawlin' in among those cases. I was surprised when you looked down at me over a pile of 'em and —winked. Tell me, Murray, were you lookin' for booze, or——"

" 'Twas a wild Irishman I was really hopin' to find," said Murray.

BRASS-BOUND DEATH

A SERIAL

By MARION SCOTT

She went through agony in order to keep her treasure.

CHAPTER I.

"THE BOX, PLEASE!"

SOMETHING told Janifer, as she looked at the woman in the mink coat, that she had come to buy the teakwood chest. She stood very straight and, somehow, terribly determined in the center of the narrow, shadowed aisle of Willis Trent's jewelry store. Trent, moist and apologetic, was behind the counter, making gestures with his pudgy, perspiring hands. Captain Kidd, the parrot, a multicolored flame in the dimness of the shop, preened himself and scolded softly from the high security of his perch.

Janifer, returning from a hurried supper at Miss Malvern's, got the whole picture as she opened the

door. Also, she caught Trent's words:

"You must be mistaken, madame. This chest is teakwood. Brass bound and hand decorated." He leaned across the dusty counter, extending a small, gleaming box, whose smooth blackness caught dully the light from the overhead globe. "It is a very beautiful piece."

The woman stirred so that the rich fur of her coat rippled like the back of an angry animal. She lowered her head, staring at the box.

"I do not like it," she said querulously. "The one I had in mind, the box I wanted——"

Janifer drew a deep breath and slipped behind the opposite counter to leave her dripping coat and tam in the closet at the rear. Her heart was pounding. She felt sure she knew what box the woman in the mink coat wanted. Oh, if Trent discovered what she had done! And why did some one have to appear, demanding *one* particular teakwood box?

She paused in the darkness of the closet, listening. The woman was complaining angrily. Trent was arguing. Trent was a good salesman. Janifer had worked for him nearly two years now, and she knew just how good he was. Fat old Trent, whose father and grandfather before him had owned and operated a jewelry store in Crestone!

Janifer shut her lips hard. She knew plenty about Willis Trent and his dusty, shabby little store: why big limousines drifted up to stop casually in front of it; why expensively dressed women and sharp-faced men called on him, after hours. She knew the secret of his frequent trips to the city only sixty miles away, of the things he kept locked in the old-fashioned safe in his little office at the back of the shop. But the teakwood chest had not been in that category. It had come down in a regular shipment yesterday. Janifer herself had unpacked it.

Trent's voice came to her, purring in satisfaction. "I am sure you will be delighted, madame. It is very lovely."

Janifer breathed a sigh of relief and stepped out. Trent saw her and called to her to wrap the purchase. As she worked, Janifer studied the woman covertly. Not so young, she decided. And, somehow, the rich coat did not seem to belong. Janifer thought she would look more at home in a plain dark serge. She had a thin, sharp face, snapping black eyes set in deep hollows, and narrow, pale lips. And she was so terribly nervous. She kept tapping on the dusty floor with the toe of her shoe, and fidgeted with the clasp of her brown tapestry purse. Once, she said impatiently:

"Hurry, please. I want to catch the 10:17 train to the city."

As it was only eight thirty, Janifer could not see occasion for hurry. She finished the last knot and handed across the package. The woman snatched it eagerly. Trent followed her up front, bowing and smiling. She did not seem to know he was there. She jerked the door open. Cold, wet air slashed through the little room. Rain drummed monotonously on the tin roof. Dead leaves, stripped from the nearly bare trees, careened past the lighted opening.

The woman glanced out apprehensively, hugged the package to her, lowered her head, and hurried out. The door clanged shut after her. Janifer put up cold hands and pushed the heavy waves of tawny hair from her hot brow. Captain Kidd waddled along the counter and plucked at her sleeve. She caressed

him absently, and he screamed his displeasure as he retreated. Janifer, for once, did not heed her feathered friend.

Somehow, the incident had upset her terribly. She hadn't dreamed that there would be a purchaser for the chest so soon. And how lucky it was that there had been two so nearly alike in that shipment. Of course, they were not alike if you saw them together; they were as different as silk and burlap.

Trent was coming slowly toward her, walking in that peculiar way he had, placing his big, flat heels down hard, slapping the boards with the toes of his shoes, so it made a queer *thump-clap, thump-clap, thump-clap*. Janifer's blue eyes opened wide. Her fingers clenched upon the roughened edge of the counter. Her employer stopped just opposite her, smiling with his thick, colorless lips, his eyes set in folds of puffy flesh, cold and unwavering.

"Where," he asked slowly, "is the *real* teakwood chest?"

Janifer's nerve equaled her determination. She had rehearsed her story well. She gave him back stare for stare. "I sold it," she lied coolly.

Trent's eyes narrowed. "Yes?" he inquired. "When?"

She was in control of herself now. "This afternoon," she replied evenly. "While you were at the bank."

"To whom did you sell it?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," she told him. "A gentleman came in, saw it on the shelf, inquired the price, and said he would take it. He gave me seventeen dollars and fifty cents, took his purchase, and went out. I never saw him before."

Trent continued to study her. Janifer kept her fingers locked tight on the edge of the counter. Oh, how she hated him! She hated Crestone and everybody in it. She had spent her entire twenty-two years there, with the exception of one rare trip to California when she was just a child. Her father had died then and left her helpless, lovely little mother faced with the impossible task of trying to make a living.

Her mother was dead now, and Janifer was alone. The job in old Trent's store had been in the nature of a miracle for her. She would have liked it, had it not been for Trent himself. She loved beautiful things, and there were many in Trent's store: fragile bits of old Spanish filigree, rare fragments of jade, lovely necklaces of dull-red stones set in age-darkened gold, and, loveliest of all, for Janifer, the little teakwood chest.

Suddenly, the front door opened with a peal of the bell which always sounded so angry. Trent left off his staring at Janifer and turned to frown down the aisle toward the new customer. It was a man this time, who came in with his head lowered and rain dripping from the brim of his expensive brown hat. Through the window behind him, Janifer glimpsed a great, gleaming car at the curb. She got the feeling that the motor was running.

The man lifted his head, raking the dimness of the shop with eyes which were hidden in the shadow of his hat brim. The lower part of his face was visible where the light struck it. His lips were twitching.

He spoke. "Good evening. Bad night, isn't it?"

Trent was rubbing his hands and bowing. Janifer continued to stand by the counter, tense with a feeling of impending trouble.

"Good evening, sir," Trent said softly. "It is, indeed, an unpleasant night. And what can I do for you, sir?"

The stranger's eyes were darting

restlessly. Janifer's brows straightened in a frown of perplexity. She had seen him somewhere before. Perhaps, he had been a visitor to the shop. But Trent did not seem to know him. Her trips to the city were so rare that she wouldn't likely remember any one she had seen there. Just the same, she was confident that the rather handsome, reckless face of the man before her was somehow familiar. She noted that his hands, like her own small, cold ones, were tightly clenched.

"I want a teakwood case," he said. "That's being direct, isn't it?" He laughed without mirth.

Janifer's eyes flared wide. Another customer for the chest! She *couldn't* be hearing correctly. She stared at the stranger's twitching lips. They were full lips, well-modeled, but there was inherent weakness in them.

Trent's thick shoulders straightened. "Teakwood?" he asked gently. "I have several nice pieces." He lifted down a small tray. The man shook his head impatiently.

"A chest," he said sharply. "So big." He gestured with long, fine hands that trembled. "Very old. It has brass trimmings in a dragon effect. That is what I want."

Pausing, he removed his hat and wiped his damp forehead. He had thick, rather tousled-looking fair hair, thinning somewhat at the temples. There were lines in his face when the light struck it. Somehow, he looked very tired.

"You see," he continued, when Trent just stood there fingering the tray, "my wife saw this chest in a city shop a few days ago. Why in thunder she didn't buy it then, I don't know, but now she's making life miserable for me until I find it. I want it very badly," he said, with a sudden surge forward that put his face close to Trent's. "I must have it. My wife is ill. A lot depends on my getting that chest. Sol Meeker—it was in his shop my wife saw it—said he sold it to you. It only came down yesterday afternoon, according to Meeker, so you surely haven't sold it." He stopped suddenly, and Janifer saw the cords in his throat tighten. He wet his lips. "I want it!" he said hoarsely. "I must have it!"

Trent was standing with bald head lowered, studying the stranger through scant, pale lashes. Janifer could read the thoughts in his mind, and her own nervousness grew.

"What," Trent was wondering, "is so important about this beastly little box?" Aloud, he said gently: "I am very sorry, sir. The box has been sold."

The man's head jerked up. His eyes were suddenly frantic, then they narrowed and hardened to a pale, gleaming gray, like the polished steel of a gun barrel. He stepped closer to Trent and said through his teeth:

"Lay off that line! I'm wise to it. Just your scheme to boost the price. Well, I'm not quarreling about that. I'll give you anything within reason. Yes, anything," he repeated, breathing unevenly. "Only," he added with an obvious effort at control, "I want that box."

Trent's eyes were unreadable. "I'm sorry," he said. "The box was sold not ten minutes before your arrival."

They stood there staring: Trent stolid, unshaken; the stranger's lips twitching, perspiration gleaming on his face. Then his shoulders sagged and lines deepened in his face.

"Who bought it?" he asked dully.

Trent shrugged. The interest in his eyes was growing. He answered:

"This is not a pawnshop. I do not keep a file of my customer's names. I cannot tell you."

The man's lips curled. He laughed shortly. "What'd he look like?" he demanded.

"It was sold to a woman," Trent said slowly. "A woman wearing a brown fur coat." He turned to Janifer. "What kind of fur?" he demanded.

"Mink," she answered faintly.

The man was leaning against the counter. His face had a queer, bluish tinge. He asked thickly: "She—did she—live here?"

"No," Trent said slowly. "She came from the neighboring town of Westhaven, but she was a stranger to me. She had never been here before."

Janifer started. The woman who purchased the chest had stated definitely she was going back to the city. But Janifer did not speak. Something in the set of Trent's thick body stopped her.

The man straightened, mopping his face with a crumpled handkerchief. He stayed some ten minutes longer. To Janifer, it was all like a bad dream. And the questions he asked about the woman who had bought the teakwood chest! How tall was she? How old? What color was her hair? Her eyes? How much did she pay for it? Did Trent think she would sell it?

He went out, slamming the door behind him. The powerful motor whipped to a roar, and the great car bellowed into the night. Janifer sighed and dropped to a stool. She was deeply excited. She longed to get away from the store, back to her little room at Mrs. Grove's—to be alone, to think, to decide why two people so suddenly and demandingly wanted a teakwood chest.

Trent's voice roused her. "Janifer," he said sharply, "what time is it?"

She started and glanced at her wrist. "Nine seven," she answered dutifully.

"Very good. You may go. It is a bad night. There will not be trade on a night like this. Hurry now. I have work to do, and I want to lock up after you."

Eagerly, she ran to the closet for her things. Oh, she was glad, so very, very glad to escape! She tossed a "Good night" over her shoulder and ducked into the storm.

Crestone was that swiftly disappearing institution, the old-fashioned small town. The great concrete highway shunned it on the east. The State road left it isolated on the north. It had altered little in the last fifty years. The same old houses dreamed along tree-shaded streets. Its business places were dusty and dark, displaying, seemingly, the identical goods year after year.

Janifer Marlin was the youngest, most vibrant thing about Crestone, and she stayed there because she could not get away.

She clanged the door of Trent's jewelry shop behind her, drew the collar of her green raincoat tighter, and lifted her head, letting the sharp, biting rain slash at her hot face. The main street was deserted. A blur of light came through the window of Watson's drug store as she hurried past. She was tingling with a queer excitement. There was something that lifted this particular night from the dreary monotony of marching days.

Romance! It had slipped into her life with the unwrapping of that teakwood chest. Mystery, a suggestion of danger, had come to-night with the visit of two people who wanted to buy it.

She laughed softly, head bent against the gusty wind, and plunged down the rickety old wooden steps that led to the road.

CHAPTER II.

GUARDING HER SECRET.

MRS. GROVE lived in the big white turreted house that stood out on the schoolhouse road. It had been a grand house in its time, but that time was long past. Its great, high-ceilinged rooms were dingy. The furniture was massive and black. Long, narrow windows were shrouded with dusty lace curtains that dragged the floor in the billowing flounces. It had a stale, musty smell. Janifer had lived there for three years. To-night its dreariness failed to impress her. She raced up the walk, took the steps in two lithe bounds, opened the door, and catapulted for the steep, narrow stairs leading to her room. The door to the right opened. Mrs. Grove heaved into the hall.

"Janifer," she wheezed excitedly. "There is a gentleman here to see you."

Janifer stopped so suddenly that she nearly fell backward, leaned against the wall, and stared down at her landlady from wide, unbelieving eyes. Mrs. Grove always wore black—bulky dresses, with full sleeves and thickly shirred skirts. She had a large pink face; the skin hung in loose sacks, the points of her stiff collar supporting it beneath her ears. Other places, it sagged loosely.

In the dimness of the hall, Janifer could see her eyes gleaming brightly with interest.

"Come on down, dear," Mrs. Grove said. "The gentleman is in the front parlor."

She pulled the door behind her and stepped close to the railing, speaking up at Janifer. "He's a very fine-looking person," she announced. "Whatever does he want, Janifer, and what have you been doing?"

Janifer came slowly down the three steps to the floor. She looked straight at Mrs. Grove, head tilted defiantly. "I haven't been doing anything," she said flatly, "and I haven't the slightest idea who the man can be." And she hadn't. A man to see her? Nothing like this had ever happened before!

She brushed past Mrs. Grove, opened the door, stepped inside, and deliberately closed it with a decided bang. She did not want Mrs. Grove in the front parlor, and she hoped she made herself clear. She stood there a moment, waiting for the furious beating of her heart to grow quiet; then she walked swiftly across the room to the wide folding doors that opened into the front parlor.

The first thing she saw was an expensive brown hat tossed carelessly to the table; at the same moment, a man turned from the window and came toward her. It was the man who had come to Trent's shop to buy the teakwood chest.

"You'll pardon me for bothering you, Miss Marlin," he said; "but, frankly, I didn't believe what the old man told me. I got the feeling that you knew something you could tell me if you only would."

He stood quite close, and his eyes held hers, desperately compelling. Unconsciously, she backed a step or two. He grasped her shoulder.

"Don't be afraid," he said softly, and Janifer's heart skipped a beat. "I just want to ask you a question.

I got your name and address from the boys in the drug store. Then I came up here to wait."

"What do you want?" she asked faintly.

His fingers were very strong, and she could feel the chill of them through her coat. "This woman who bought the teakwood chest," he said; "she didn't live in Westhaven, did she? The old man lied to me. Isn't that right? You started to correct him. I saw the movement. Now, who was she, and where did she live?"

Janifer frowned before that elusive sense of familiarity about him. Bewilderment grew. Why was he so set on having that teakwood chest?

"I have no idea who she was," she said frankly. "He told you what she looked like. I do not think she lived in Westhaven."

His eyes brightened. "Good. Where did she live?"

Janifer hesitated. Something told her to deny any knowledge of the stranger—to lie, deceive, do anything rather than tell this man that the woman who bought the teakwood chest was taking the 10:17 train back to the city. But his frantic eyes dragged the truth from her.

She told him. His fingers released their grip on her shoulder. He stepped back. There was a hard, tight smile on his lips. "The 10:17 train," he murmured and glanced at his watch. "That's fine," he said. "You've been a big help to me, girlie." He picked up his hat and jammed his hands in his pockets. "Thanks a lot," he said, and, before she could stop him, he lifted one of her hands and pressed a crumpled bill into her palm. Then he was hurrying through the long, dim rooms, and Janifer's angry cry did not stop him. She ran after him, cheeks flaming.

"I don't want your money," she cried. "I don't want it!"

The heavy front door banged in her face. She stood motionless, staring at it; then a wheezing sound roused her, and she turned slowly to meet the startled, suspicious glance of Mrs. Grove.

"Whatever is the meaning of this, Janifer?" her landlady demanded avidly. "Who was that man? Why was he giving you money? You must remember that this is a respectable house. I have allowed you to make your home here since you were thrown, a helpless orphan, on a cruel world, and you owe me something."

"Oh, good heavens!" Janifer cried angrily. "I don't owe you my rent until the first, and you know you always get it. And I don't have to give you an account of everything I do. On top of that, it isn't any of your business. So there!"

Brushing past the palpitating and speechless Mrs. Grove, she stumbled up the steps to her room. She was trembling with anger, and her mind was a whirl of conflicting thoughts. Slamming the door, she turned the key, which Mrs. Grove deeply resented her having, and then flopped on the bed, limp with excitement.

After a moment, she lifted her right hand, which was so tightly clenched that it ached, and stared at the wadded bit of greenish paper which she grasped. Soberly, she straightened it out, and her eyes grew wide and round. The man in the brown hat had given her a twenty-dollar bill.

"Good heavens!" she gasped. "And the teakwood chest was only marked seventeen fifty." For a long time she sat there, staring at the bill, while amazement darkened the

gentian blueness of her eyes. Then, slowly, common sense came to her rescue. She certainly hadn't wanted the stranger's money. She hadn't done anything to earn it, so far as she knew; but, since it had been thrust upon her——

A smile deepened the dimple in her left cheek. She rose, removed her wraps, and laid a fire in the grate. The room was cold and damp. Wind whistled around the high, white turrets of the house, and rain slashed at the narrow panes.

On impulse, Janifer pulled all the curtains. They were of heavy, dusty red rep, and ordinarily she hated them; but to-night they surrounded her with a comfortable sense of security. They shut out the darkness, the rain, the feel of the night. The fire burned cheerily, throwing long, flickering shadows on the walls. Janifer gazed at it thoughtfully.

After all, twenty dollars was a lot of money. And, doubtless, the man could afford it. That car of his seemed to testify to his affluence. Twenty dollars!

She started. "Good heavens," she said aloud, very softly, "it's more than I paid for the chest!"

Hurrying over to the dresser, she unlocked the lower drawer and, from a corner, under a pile of clothing, drew out the teakwood chest. It had been an impulse, this deception she had practiced. When she had opened the packing case in the back of the store and found the chest, something had seemed to reach out of the box itself and grip her very heart. She had stood there, speechless, gazing at it for a long time, while the longing to possess it grew to sheer physical pain.

She had had so little in her life that she really wanted—so little of beauty. There was the lovely lacy fan, yellowed with age, which had belonged to her great-aunt Janifer; then the Wedgewood pitcher and the exquisite cameo pendant, also bequeathed from her great-aunt, which, on the slender, golden chain, Janifer wore day and night. These constituted her inheritance—three things of beauty which she cherished. To them she longed to add the teakwood chest.

Her first reaction was to ask Trent to let her buy it. Then she had realized the futility of that. Willis Trent would never have let her have it if he knew how badly she had wanted it. Trent was like that. She had thought of asking some one to purchase it for her, but there was no one who would understand. At last, she had decided on her plan.

Janifer had secured the money at noon. Seventeen fifty! It had taken a struggle, but the chest had won. Then, while Trent was out, she had wrapped the box, hidden it beneath her coat in the closet, put the money in the cash register, and perfected her story of the imaginary sale. She had not guessed the demands that would be made for the teakwood chest, and Janifer had no illusions as to which chest it was that the woman in the fur coat and the man in the brown hat had wanted to buy.

The second box had been a poor imitation—a pretty-enough thing to look at, but so far removed from the one Janifer possessed that there was no comparison.

This one was of lovely, satin-smooth teak, its rich blackness faded by the years to a soft brown. It had heavy fittings of dull old brass, carved in the shapes of writhing dragons. The hinges carried out the dragon motif, as did the lock, and the little key was a cleverly coiled dragon's paw.

She opened the chest and peered into it. Smooth, brown wood,

scarred here and there! Who had owned the chest? Who had sold it to Sol Meeker, dealer in antiques, with whom Willis Trent carried on business deals? And why were two people so anxious to get it?

She gave up the queries with a little sigh, picked up the chest, then stiffened, her eyes flashing swiftly around the silent, firelit room. Some one was turning the doorknob.

Janifer rose, hugging the chest tighter, startled eyes on the door. Then there came a sharp, peremptory knocking, and the voice of Mrs. Grove reached her petulantly:

"Janifer! Janifer! Whatever have you locked this door for? Open it this minute. I do not like doors locked in my house!"

Janifer's cheeks flushed hotly. She began backing noiselessly toward the dresser, slipped the chest into the drawer, turned the key, and put it in the pocket of her skirt. Then she crossed over and opened the door.

Mrs. Grove's long, fleshy nose quivered as she peered over the girl's shoulder.

"There is another man to see you," she said spitefully. "And I'll have to say that——"

"Who is it?" Janifer asked, nerves suddenly snapping.

Mrs. Grove was still squinting suspiciously behind the girl as though she suspected her of concealing some monstrous thing. She sighed with noisy dissatisfaction. "Oh, it's only Willis Trent," she admitted, and stood aside for Janifer to pass.

Before she could move, however, there was the unmistakable *thump-clap, thump-clap* of Trent's heavy shoes on the floor behind Mrs. Grove, and his voice sounded out of the dimness of the hall.

"Thank you, Mrs. Grove," he said, stepping into the little circle of light that came from Janifer's open door. "I'll just talk to my clerk here—in her room. It will only take a moment."

Janifer made a half-unconscious move to shut the door, but Trent went past Mrs. Grove's fat, palpitating body, stepped inside, and calmly closed it in the landlady's face. Even in her distress, Janifer derived satisfaction from that gesture. She thought she would enjoy spending the remainder of her life shutting doors in Mrs. Grove's large, pink face.

Mr. Trent was breathing unevenly, and rain clung to his full, pale cheeks. He leaned against the door, staring at Janifer.

"What is it?" she asked uncertainly. "What do you want, Mr. Trent?"

"The teakwood chest," he said softly, and smiled at her.

Janifer gasped.

"You see," he went on smoothly, "I have discovered that you lied to me about selling the teakwood chest. I do not wish to employ people who are untruthful, so I am faced with the necessity of discharging you." He paused on that to dwell on the suddenly stricken pain of her eyes, the monstrous dismay that was reflected there. "That is," he amended, "if you do not at once give me the chest."

He nodded slowly to confirm his ultimatum and waited.

Janifer had her moment of desperate panic at the thought of losing her job; then an unsuspected strength surged up in her. Her head lifted. She gave him stare for stare.

"Do as you like," she said simply. "I did not lie to you. I do not have the teakwood chest."

She wondered how she could tell those untruths so calmly. Honesty was a part of her—the most valu-

able thing she had inherited from her charming, impracticable parents. But she felt no shame at what she was doing. It was almost as if something bigger, wiser, stronger than herself were directing her. She leaned against the back of the sagging morris chair and waited.

Trent's face flushed angrily. His eyes turned to gleaming slits in his pale, puffy face. He said:

"Listen carefully, Janifer. Old Dad Burgess never leaves his table all afternoon. He can look directly across the street at my store. He saw me go to the bank and saw me come back. During that time, there was not a single person who entered my place. There was no man who came in and bought the teakwood chest. I have old Burgess's word for that, and he is not mistaken."

Janifer's lip curled. "I am not responsible for what that half-blind old tailor says," she told him in a hard, level voice. "I explained what happened to the chest. I have nothing more to say."

All the time her heart was beating furiously, and, through the back of her head, she seemed to be staring at the locked drawer in the dresser which contained the teakwood box. She kept her rebellious eyes fastened on Trent's; she felt that he would be able to look inside her mind and see what she was thinking, that he would suddenly spring forward, tear the key from her, open the drawer, and snatch the little chest she loved so completely.

"If he does, I'll kill him," she thought suddenly, with such clarity that she wondered if she had spoken the words aloud. She took a moment to marvel at the obsession which the chest held for her.

Janifer did not realize it, but she was clinging to something that had barely touched her life, which she sensed should be there, something which had become concrete in the moment she lifted the brown box from its wrappings and knew that she must own it. Janifer was hanging onto romance, fighting with all she possessed to keep the thing that, without her full knowledge, personified it.

"I'll have you arrested, Janifer," Trent said thickly. "I'll have you put in jail!"

"What for?" she defied him. "What have I done?"

"You have stolen a piece of property which belonged to me. The teakwood box——"

"Stolen!" Her blue eyes went round and wide in the sudden whiteness of her face. "You liar!" she cried furiously. "I did not——" She stopped. He stepped closer to her, smiling a little.

"There," he said, "that proves you have it. You did not mean to steal it, did you, Janifer? You just thought it was nice and you took it."

"You checked the sales, didn't you?" she said with difficulty. "They are correct?"

"No," he said softly; "that is what convinced me, Janifer. The accounts are seventeen dollars and fifty cents short." He shook his head sorrowfully. "I should very much dislike to have you arrested; but, of course, I cannot allow you to cheat me like that. Come now." He laid a moist, thick hand on her trembling arm. "Give me the chest, and we will forget all about it. You can come to work as usual in the morning."

She struck his hand away. "Get out!" she cried passionately. "Oh, I hate you! I know all about you! And if any one is arrested, it won't be me. I read the papers, and I see descriptions of stolen articles, and later find them in your safe. Oh, I

can tell something, too. I know what you are, Willis Trent, and I'll——"

She stopped, staring at his slowly whitening face, his wide, ugly eyes, and realized what a fool she had been. He caught her shoulders, holding them in a fierce, hot grip, and put his moist face close to hers.

"Shut up!" he rasped. "Open your lips again and I'll——"

She smiled at him with cool insolence. "Take your hands away!" she ordered very low. "Now leave this room. I'm not going to make you any trouble, Willis Trent; that is, if you go away and leave me alone. But you'd better not try any foolishness about having me arrested. You know that the cash drawer balanced perfectly, and now you're just trying to frighten me. Get out now, in a hurry. I'm coming to work to-morrow morning, and I'm going to continue to work for you as long as I want to—until I can find something else to do, away from this beastly town and every one in it. I'll keep still about the things I know if you treat me decently. Otherwise——"

She was a new Janifer as she bent forward, put her slim fingers under his nose, and snapped them. The whole thing surprised her tremendously. She had suspected a lot; but, until that mad moment when she hurled defiance at him, she had not allowed her suspicions to take definite form.

"Get out!" she said. "I'm tired."

She leaned against the chair back, smiling as he left, his face still patchy white and twisted with fury. When the door closed behind him, she stumbled across and locked it. Then she stood there in the room which had grown cold. Long, black shadows wavered on moldly walls as she listened to the wind which crept like a restless prowler around the high white turrets. Fear possessed her. She knew her helplessness, realized Trent's power in the village. Who would believe her against Willis Trent?

Feverishly, she began to undress, let her clothes fall around her, and stood there shivering in her thin undergarments. Then she got out her plain, sensible little cotton-flannel nightdress and put it on. Turning back the covers, she crept into bed. She did not turn the light off, but lay there, staring into the shadows, listening to the wild wind, hearing stealthy, creeping footsteps in the patter of the rain. Some one coming! Some one coming! Some one coming to get her teakwood chest!

As terror grew, her fancy heard, in the phantom footsteps, the distinct, sharp *thump-clap, thump-clap, thump-clap* of Willis Trent's thick-soled shoes.

CHAPTER III.

PLOTTING.

TRENT groped his way along the darkened hall, whipped by a baffled fury that made movement wholly automatic. He reached the stairhead, grasped the old, shiny railing, and began lowering his thick, fat body carefully. His feet made no sound on the heavy carpet. He had reached the front door when a voice stopped him.

"Did she give you the box, Willis?" Mrs. Grove asked.

He whirled defensively. "What's that?" he cried. "What did you say?" He saw Emma Grove standing stiff and erect in her shiny black taffeta. Her hair, abundant and strongly gray, was piled on her head like a helmet. He wet his lips.

"It was nothing," he said. "I just wanted to ask the child about a notation she left. She is a good girl, but sometimes she is careless. You understand, Emma. Girls are apt to be careless."

Chattering on, Willis Trent tried to cover his fear and his anger.

Emma Grove's long nose quivered. "Quit trying to fool me, Willis Trent," she snapped. "I know what you wanted—a box, a little black box with some brass fixings on it."

Trent grasped her arm. "Where is it, Emma? Where has she hidden it?"

Emma Grove smiled. She nodded toward the closed parlor door. "Come in here," she invited, "and tell me something about all this foolishness. Then maybe I'll talk to you."

Willis Trent hesitated. He did not have any illusions about Emma Grove. If Trent had been given to conscious analysis, he would have known her as possessing the spirit of a female pirate beneath her stiff silks and her air of pious righteousness. Emma Grove had gifts which she had been unable to use. Opportunity and incentive would develop in her a ferocity that stopped at nothing. She opened the door, and cold, damp air rushed out. Trent almost bolted, but avarice and curiosity drew him on.

He entered the room. She came after him, closing the door softly behind her.

"Now," she said, "let's have it. What's so valuable about this box that two of you have to be pesterin' that girl about it in one night?"

"Two?" He blinked at her curiously.

"Yes. A man dressed swell and wearing a brown hat——"

"He was here?"

"Yes. Waiting for her when she got home. She shut me out, but I aim to know what's goin' on in my house, so I went around through the kitchen and listened from over there." She nodded toward a closed door. "He asked her a lot of questions about some woman, and she told him that the woman didn't live at Westhaven but was takin' the 10:17 train back to town. Then he give her some money."

"Money?" Trent was breathing unevenly.

Mrs. Grove nodded definitely. "Yes, and she ran after him, yellin' that she didn't want it. I was around in the hall by that time, and I tried to make her tell me what it meant, but all I got was a lot of sass."

"Then he left?"

"Yes. In a hurry. She went upstairs and locked herself in. I listened outside, but all I heard was her movin' around some and rattlin' paper and opening and shutting drawers."

"Ah!" Trent smiled. "Then she has it in a drawer up there." He half turned toward the door. She stopped him.

"What do you think you're doin'?" she demanded. "You can't go forcin' your way into her room, and I guess she's got you where she wants you, Willis Trent." She smiled meagerly at his suddenly white features. "Yes," she agreed calmly. "I was listenin' outside in the hall, and I heard everything you two said." She stood back, hands on her hips. "So that's the kind of a person you are?" she questioned, not without a certain admiration. "Well, I always said you was a deep one, Trent. And I ain't sayin' but what I'm for you if you can get away with it, so you needn't be afraid of me talkin'. That is, if you treat me fair. Now, what's all this stuff about

the box, and why is every one so anxious to get it?"

Trent made a swift decision. He would talk to Emma Grove. Better to have her as a friend than an enemy, and he could be careful what he said. He sat down, crossing his thick legs.

"Well, Emma," he began, "I may be a fool and I can't tell you out and out why every one is so anxious to get that little box. I don't mind admitting that I didn't see anything special to it when I bought it."

"Where'd you buy it?"

"In the city, of a dealer that I have patronized for years. Sol Meeker is his name, and he takes in stocks of bankrupt firms, also anything in his line that people want to sell. He gets some nice things and sells them to me fairly cheap. I bought a lot of stuff last week when I was up, and among it were these two little boxes."

"Two?" Mrs. Grove was regarding him suspiciously from her cold eyes.

He nodded. "Yes, there were two. Just to glance at them, they looked quite a bit alike; but one was a lot better than the other, though neither of them was worth a fortune, as far as I know. Well, I shipped the lot down, and Janifer unpacked them and put them on the shelves. I guess I never would 'a' given the boxes another thought, except that a woman came in tonight."

He told her swiftly of the visit of the woman in the mink coat, and of her insistence that the box he offered her was not the one she wanted. Mrs. Grove listened avidly.

"She bought it, though," he concluded, "though she didn't seem exactly satisfied." He rubbed his thinning hair reflectively. "I got the feeling later, Emma," he added slowly, "that she had come here to purchase something which she had never seen, but merely heard about. She didn't think the box I offered her was exactly right; but finally decided, since it was the only one I had, that it must be what she wanted.

"It aroused my interest," Trent admitted. "I knew there were two boxes, and, from what she told me, I figured it was the other one she was after. There is always the chance in my business," he explained, "of accidentally getting hold of something that's worth a lot of money, without realizing it. I'm on the lookout for that kind of a break. So I thought, when she made such a fuss about it, that I'd better check up a bit. I asked Janifer, and she told me a story of selling the other box to a man whom she had never seen before. I proved that story to be false," he stated bleakly, "and, after this man in the brown hat came in and raised such a rumpus about not being able to get it, I decided to investigate."

"And you think she stole it?" Mrs. Grove asked, wetting her lips.

Trent smiled. "She didn't steal it," he said, "but I think she bought it."

"Bought it?"

"Yes. She took the box and placed the money to pay for it in the drawer."

"Why?"

He frowned. "Janifer is smart," he said. "She reads a lot in the trade magazines I get, all about antiques and the like. I think she recognized the box as being valuable. She'll probably dash off to the city and sell it to one of the big dealers up there for a thousand or two."

He paused, sucking at his lips. They sat silent, staring at each other, recognizing their kinship, after all

these years of acquaintance. A slim girl, with tawny hair and gentian-blue eyes, stood between them and something they desired—hard cash that might be realized from the sale of a small black box.

Mrs. Grove drew a deep breath. "She's got it," she announced sibilantly.

Trent surged forward. "Sure?"

"Yes. She came home at noon. She don't often do that. I was curious. She locked her door when she left, but I've got a key." She nodded, smiling hatefully. "I found the thing in the bottom bureau drawer. I ain't snoopin'," she added virtuously, "but I got a right to know what goes on in this house."

Trent's eyes were very bright. "Fine," he purred. "Fine. We'll just make her give it to us."

She sneered her contempt for his obviousness. "We'll do nothing of the sort," she announced. "Now, you listen to me. I'm goin' to spend the day with Liza Spears to-morrow, and, before I leave, I'll get that box. Then I'll make it look like the house has been robbed. Well, what can she do? Suspect me, but she can't prove anything, 'specially as some of my things'll be missin', too. How about it?"

Trent considered a time in silence. It seemed a rather heavy plot, but it would enable him to get his hands on the box without running the risk of Janifer's talking too much. He nodded his agreement.

"But be careful," he urged, suddenly palpitant. "It might be worth a lot."

"And if it is," Mrs. Grove said slowly, "I get half of what you sell it for. Don't forget that, Willis Trent."

His face flushed at the thought of division, then he sighed and capitulated, outwardly. In the back of his busy, scheming brain was a reservation that Emma Grove could not know of.

"Yes," he agreed, "we'll split, Emma."

She accompanied him to the door. The rain had slackened somewhat, but a high wind whipped cold dashes through the darkness, and sodden leaves lay in thick, wet piles on the shallow porch.

Emma Grove remained a moment in the partially open door, after he had gone. There was a sly smile on her lips. Willis Trent was a fool. All men were fools, in Mrs. Grove's opinion. It would be a great deal better to have all the money from the sale of the chest than half.

She nodded in satisfaction at her thought, closed the door, and locked it securely.

Willis Trent was nervous. The darkness, the frigid dashes of rain, the whipping wind, filled him with anxious fear. He wanted very badly to regain the comfort of the little office and the security of four stout walls.

He shoved his hands into capacious pockets and broke into a dog-trot. But the faster he moved, the less progress he appeared to make. More than once he glanced over his shoulder, quivering at what sounded like stealthy footsteps following. Each time, he definitely tied the sounds up with rustling leaves that trailed him like small brown gnomes, but the assurance did not comfort him long.

He was perspiring when he reached dark, silent Main Street, and there was a pain in his chest. He heaved a huge sigh of relief as he made out the dim light burning far back in the dusty interior of his shop. Half a dozen paces now, and he would be inside—out of the night, the darkness, the whining wind.

He lurched into the doorway, keys dangling in his shaking hand. In the darkness, before him, something stirred. There was the rustle of garments, the sound of quick and subdued breathing. Trent's knees seemed to sag beneath his weight. His eyes strained into the shadows and detected a dull blur of deeper dark.

"Who is it?" he whispered shakily.

There was no answer for a long moment; then out of the darkness a cold, steady hand moved, to fasten in a viselike grip over his.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MILLARD PLACE.

JANIFER was sitting bolt upright in her bed, shivering in the chilly room. The radium dial of her watch told her it was close to two o'clock. She had slept for a time, at least.

After Willis Trent left her, she had lain there, straining for sound of the hall door closing, that would tell her he had left the house. Moments stretched endlessly to the nervous, frightened girl, and still the sound did not come. Gradually, she realized what must have happened. Trent and Emma Grove were in conference. They had joined forces against her, Janifer, to secure the teakwood chest. She had cried a bit in her loneliness and desolation.

And after a time she heard the front door close and knew that Trent had gone. Then Emma Grove's steps had come up the stairs. Janifer had leaped out of bed to snap off the light. Mrs. Grove stood a while outside the door. Janifer could hear her heavy breathing, the rustle of her black taffeta, then Mrs. Grove finally heaved off down the hall to her own room situated at the far end.

After that, Janifer supposed, she had fallen asleep. Now she was sitting up very straight and still, and there was a suffocating pain in her chest from the frantic beating of her heart. Some one was fumbling with the lock.

Cautiously, gently, the grating noise came—the sound of a key attempting to force its way into the lock. But Janifer's key was already there, and the intruder could not dislodge it. Janifer read the signs correctly, she thought. Trent had probably bribed Mrs. Grove to secure the chest for him. Janifer had no doubt that her landlady knew where it was. Her snooping was intense and unending. The grating sound stopped. Silence shrouded the room. The rain had slackened. There was only an occasional sound of drippings.

Janifer thought she heard the creak of a board as Mrs. Grove retreated, but she could not be sure. She shuddered down inside the coverings and lay open-eyed, staring into the dark, thinking. She had to do something with the chest if she meant to keep it, and she most certainly did. There was growing within her a stark, stubborn determination to hang onto it. Maybe she had done wrong in the way she obtained it, but she had paid for it and it was hers. She would not be able to keep it, however, if she left it in the dresser drawer. To-morrow, when she went to work, Mrs. Grove would steal it.

She swung her slim white legs over the edge of the bed and stood up, groping around for her clothes. Her mind was made up. She knew what she would do with the box.

Ten minutes later, she stood in the lower hall, the box tightly clenched in her arms. The big house was

filled with shadows, and there were ghostly creeping sounds, like the soft passing of invisible feet, all around her; but determination conquered her nervousness.

Soundlessly, she groped her way along the hall toward the kitchen. She knew every inch of the place from long residence there, and moved without noise.

The kitchen door was bolted, the screen door hooked. She unfastened both and slipped out to the little porch. Again, familiarity helped her, and she hurried along the garden path, through the scraggly little orchard, and at last climbed through the back fence into Millard's field.

The field was a great, level open space, so long unclaimed that its original owner had been forgotten, though his name still clung. In spring, it was gay with dogtooth violets and bright daisies. In summer, hot winds rustled through tall grass. In autumn, it was drifted deep with crimson leaves from maples that fringed its farthest edges. In early winter, at night, under a half-obscured moon, bathed in a cold white mist, it was dismal, forbidding, dreary.

Janifer felt its eerie atmosphere as she stumbled across the uneven, soggy ground. She knew exactly where she was going. The ruins of the old Millard house stood at the far side, near the stream. It was a stanch old place of gray, weathered stone. Its windows gaped; its doors were mostly gone, and its great, echoing rooms were the dwelling place of swallows, owls, and stray dogs.

But Janifer knew secrets about the old Millard place. She picked it as a safe refuge for her beloved chest until such time as she could get away from Crestone.

Just the same, it took all her courage to shove back the sagging front door and enter the yawning blackness of the hall. She was breathing pantingly, and perspiration stood cold on her face. Although she had brought a tiny flash, she was afraid to use it.

Groping her way through Stygian darkness, stumbling now and then over pieces of litter, she paused at last before the great stone mantelpiece in the main room.

Placing the chest on the floor before her, she let the slim finger of light play over the rough, age-crusted surface of the stones. Could she find *it* again? It had been near the top, she remembered, and it was while trying to climb up on the mantel to look into a swallow's nest that she had discovered the secret.

She was looking for the stone that yielded to pressure, pivoting on rusty pegs, disclosing a small compartment filled with dust and bits of rotten cloth. How that discovery had thrilled Janifer! The explanation, of course, was simple enough. Stout old Jean Millard had kept his money there in the days before banks offered a safe repository.

With a little gasp, she felt the stone move. She scarcely knew what she had done to stir it. Then her eager fingers found the lump, apparently set in the thick mortar, that worked the hidden mechanism.

The chest was a tight fit, but it went in, and she swung the door back with a sigh of relief. Her treasure was safe. She cast one final, longing look at the strong hiding place, extinguished the light, and started back for the house.

She stepped from the blackness of the orchard, to stop with a gasp of dismay. There was a light in the house. That meant that Emma Grove had discovered her absence.

Janifer stood in the shadow of a dripping apple tree and faced despair. The light blinked off in the windows of the dining room to appear almost instantly in the kitchen.

Then, to her horror, the back door opened. A thin beam of light shot out, and the stout, formidable figure of Emma Grove appeared in the opening. She came to the little porch and stood there, leaning forward, peering out into the night.

Janifer felt that inaction was maddening. After all, she reflected stubbornly, Mrs. Grove was not her keeper. If she decided to take a walk at three o'clock in the morning, who was to question her?

Jamming her hands in the pockets of her raincoat, she resolutely set out for the house, cutting somewhat to the right so as to avoid the light.

She walked stanchly, planting her feet firmly in the wet grass, eyes fixed on the open door and the woman who stood there. Suddenly, she tripped and fell heavily, with the breath knocked out of her.

It seemed to Janifer that she was stretched there on the soggy ground for a very long time. Her temple had struck a half-buried tree root, and consciousness seemed to leave her. Not entirely, however! She knew that her head throbbed painfully, that dampness was oozing through her clothing. She thought quite clearly that, if she just remained there long enough, Mrs. Grove would get tired and go back to bed. As she wondered what it was that made her trip, she felt something soft beneath her. Full, terrified realization came in a flash.

It was the body of a human being, and just then her groping hand touched cold, damp flesh, and she knew that she had felt death!

Just before Janifer fainted, she screamed.

To be continued in next week's issue.

SOLICITING FOR HIMSELF

AN unemployed resident of New York City solved his own problem, for a time at least, by soliciting donations and pocketing the findings.

But he picked the wrong fellow when he accosted a customer in a cigar store and asked for a contribution to the unemployed fund. Showing a tin badge that read, "Secret Service," with which he had impressed many a victim, he received a quarter from his newest recruit. And to make the transaction appear bona fide, the solicitor drew out a paper with names written upon it and the amount received from each.

In reply to the question asking him for his name, the cigar-store customer answered truthfully. The catch in the name was that it was prefixed with "Patrolman," and the address given was his precinct.

It was quite a shock to the unemployed racketeer to find that he had been showing a phony badge to an officer, but he was obliged to accept the patrolman's invitation to stroll down to police headquarters, where he was booked on a charge of impersonating an officer. It was found later that the solicitor had been paroled not long before from the penitentiary.

Evidently, the time spent in prison had not taught the offender to recognize an officer in plain clothes.

FIGHTING COME-BACK

By LESLIE T. WHITE

Long, tapering fingers had made him smell a rat in the case against the one he loved.

PADDY McCONNELLY, a patrolman, lay sprawled in a chair in the dingy little flat he shared with his nephew, Jimmie Dean. His graying head was buried in his arms across a table where an empty bottle told a silent story, his nerveless fingers still gripping a water glass. A shiver passed over his broad shoulders as ruddy slivers in the eastern sky heralded a steely dawn.

A brisk rap startled the old copper from his drunken stupor. He clumsily raised his aching head and stared at the door with bleary eyes, then he tried vainly to brush away the veil that seemed to obscure his vision.

Again came that sharp knocking, more commanding. Then some one shook the knob. McConnelly swayed to his stockinged feet and tried to maintain his balance, but, at the first step, he stumbled over the chair and crashed to the floor. As he tried to stagger to his feet, a key was inserted into the lock. The grizzled copper glared at the opening door.

Police Captain Donovan and two harness bulls barged into the little room. For a moment, the officer stared disgustedly at the man on the floor, then he turned sharply to his men.

"Search the place!" he ordered crisply.

McConnelly managed finally to catch hold of the chair and push himself up to his full six feet one, then, swaying dizzily, he glared into the set, unrelenting face of his superior. He opened his mouth to demand an explanation, when his eyes strayed toward the bedroom door. He swayed back unbelievingly.

The two uniformed men were reëntering the living room and shackled between them was the pajamaed figure of young Jimmie Dean. McConnelly's mouth sagged stupidly, then his brows came together in a lowering scowl.

"What's the idea?" he cried belligerently.

Donovan frowned grimly. "We're takin' the lad in, Mac," he growled huskily.

McConnelly's great fists knotted around the top of the chair. "And what for?" he bellowed.

"Murder!"

The boy in handcuffs struggled excitedly. "Murder!" he screamed hysterically. "I don't understand!"

Bitterly, the captain shook his head. "Vests Rosenthal was shot two hours ago. You were seen leaving the neighborhood, Jimmie. Better not say anything until you get a lawyer."

Old Paddy McConnelly shoved forward. "You're sure crazy!" he shouted hoarsely. "Jimmie never left the house to-night. I can swear to it." His massive paws balled aggressively.

Donovan glanced at the boy, but the latter's head was bowed. The captain squared his shoulders. "We'll settle that at the station," he said quietly.

"You'll settle it right here!" shrieked McConnelly wildly. "That's my sister's boy you got your dirty paws on!" He charged forward threateningly.

Donovan scowled at the lumbering patrolman, then, as McConnelly lunged at the men holding his nephew, the captain caught him roughly by the elbow. He wheeled McConnelly quickly around and gave him a push in the chest that toppled him into a corner.

"My boy! My boy!" blubbered McConnelly thickly.

Donovan bent over him angrily. "You're not fit to have a boy living in the same house with you, you drunken sot!" he snarled feelingly. "You don't know whether the lad was home or not; furthermore, you didn't care, you and your bottle." He swept the empty bottle onto the floor with a wave of his hand. "All right! We'll settle it right here." He strode across the room and picked up one of the boy's shoes that lay near the bed. Grimly, he plunged his hand inside, then his face hardened.

"Warm!" he exploded. "That settles it. Take him out, boys! I'll be right down." The two bulls led the trembling boy out of the room.

For a moment, McConnelly stared after the vanished figures. He was

slowly sobering as the terrible realization came to him. Jimmie arrested—arrested for murder! He tried to rise, but now his legs refused to support his weight. Donovan was talking to him, so he fell back and listened dazedly.

"It'll be the finish, Mac," the other was saying. "There's nothing I can do but admit you were drunk again in my report. It'll ruin you, Mac, you fool, but you've had more than your share of chances. You chose between the bottle and everything else that's worth while in life, and you took the booze. Some men can take it and leave it when they've had enough, but you're a pig. I can't say I'm sorry for you. You're a fool!" He opened the door and stamped out into the corridor.

For several minutes, McConnelly swayed there on his knees, staring at the closed door. Then, slowly sinking back to the dirty linoleum, he buried his face in his arms and sobbed brokenly.

Jimmie arrested for murder! He couldn't believe it. Charged with killing "Vests" Rosenthal, gambler, racketeer, partner of the notorious "Alex, the Greek," vice lord of the city. He was narrow of eye and slender of figure; the kind of a man whose picture graced the dressing rooms of shady chorus girls. Vests Rosenthal, the man of many waistcoats, was dead, and young Jimmie Dean was accused of killing him.

His big hands closed and he pounded the floor in his anguish. Abruptly, he touched the empty bottle. Dully, he raised his tear-stained face and stared at it. As he paused thus, the weakness slowly faded from his rugged features, and an expression of scorn and disgust came in its place.

Like a crystal gazer, he stared into the glass receptacle and he seemed able to look back over the years. He relived that tragic scene in the hospital ward, saw the tired, wan smile of his widowed sister, and heard again her whispered plea and his own throaty promise to look well over the curly, tow-headed Jimmie and never to touch the booze again.

He saw himself climbing up from the ranks, sergeant, then captain, then into the detective bureau until he finally headed the crack homicide squad. The best they'd ever had, they used to say; Paddy McConnelly, the greatest man hunter of them all.

The scene changed; booze had beaten him back down through the ranks again, step by step, until he was again just a patrolman where he had started twenty years before, and lucky not to have been fired. Now, in six months more, he would have got a little pension, and with it he could have taken Jimmie out into the country. He needed better air, did Jimmie.

His far-away gaze suddenly got its focus, and the crystal became what it really was—just an empty bottle. The veins stood out on his moist forehead, and his hands clenched. If Jimmy *had* done this killing, then he, Paddy McConnelly, was responsible before God and the dead mother of the boy.

His fingers closed around the bottle, and he slowly rose unsteadily to his feet. His reflection faced him out of a wavy mirror. McConnelly snarled, and, drawing back his powerful arm, he hurled the bottle with all his terrible strength. As the image disappeared among the thousands of fragments of splintered glass, Paddy knew one thing.

He was through this time with booze!

Dashing some cold water on his

face, he changed his shirt, and slapped his battered hat on his head. He didn't put on his uniform. Not this morning, with Jimmie arrested for murder! Too impatient to resort to a street car, he took a taxi and ordered the driver to step on it.

As soon as he entered the squad room, the sergeant gave him the dread news. Wanted in the chief's office! McConnelly ran a tremulous hand over the blue stubble on his square jaw, then, bracing his shoulders, he passed through the door into the chief's office.

He saw Captain Donovan sitting at the chief's elbow as soon as he entered, but he wasn't conscious of the civilian sitting across the desk from Chief Hampton until he had closed the door.

At the first sight of the stranger, McConnelly started to back out of the room, but Hampton stopped him. The old copper read the worst in the steely, uncompromising gaze of the two officers, and he braced himself.

The chief shook his head. "Wait a minute, McConnelly. I'm not going to say much; you're through, that's all. In a way, for old time's sake, I'm sorry you couldn't drink like a man without going under the table every time, but you made your own bed, and now lie on it. That's all, McConnelly!"

McConnelly's shoulders began to sag, but he snapped them up grimly. "Yes, sir. But what about the boy? He never——"

Hampton cut in impatiently. "Rosenthal was killed as he walked up the driveway of his home. Two shots were fired, and, a moment later, Jim Dean was seen running away from the porch."

"That's a dirty lie!" bellowed McConnelly hoarsely.

The chief's eyes glittered angrily, then they softened and he shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mac," he said quietly. "But young Jim has confessed!"

"Admitted the murder?"

"Confessed to the killing of Vests Rosenthal!"

McConnelly was staggered; he fought to control the emotions that threatened to unbalance him. He seemed in a trance. Hampton was talking again: "Mr. Ferguson here" —he pointed to the quiet, white-haired stranger—"is a cattleman from Texas. He was walking past the Rosenthal home at the time of the shooting, and he saw Jimmie running away. From his description, and the fact that we know that young Dean was rather interested in Rosenthal's wife, well, Mac, you've enough of the old stuff in you to picture the rest."

The stranger shook his head sympathetically. "Was it your boy?" he asked softly.

McConnelly turned sharply, and his piercing gaze swept the other in a bitter scrutiny. Then, with a sigh, he shook his head.

"My sister's kid. I was raisin' him," he answered automatically.

"You have my deepest sympathy in this hour of trouble," began the white-haired witness gently, but McConnelly stiffened belligerently and cut him off.

"I don't want none of your sympathy!" he shouted in defiance. "Jimmie Dean never killed nobody, and I'll prove it!" He spun on his heel and strode out of the room, chin high.

But once the door closed behind him, his bravado faded away, and he felt very tired and helpless. It looked bad; Ferguson was what the district attorney would call a "beautiful" witness. His quiet dignity

and unassuming manner would not fail to impress a jury.

McConnelly stumbled into the squad room and sank into a chair. Two old-timers with whom he had worked over the years crossed the room and patted him understandingly on the shoulder, but said nothing. They knew what had happened; they knew the futility of words. Quietly slipping out of the big room, they left him alone.

"Jim has confessed!" The words of the chief seared into his consciousness. "Jim has confessed!" That meant that little Jimmie, his sister's Jimmie, had admitted killing the notorious gambler. No, no! It couldn't be! Why, only yesterday, Jimmie was a curly, tow-headed kid! He couldn't kill another man, not over a woman, another man's wife. No, it just couldn't be. He'd go to Jimmie and get the truth. The confession was phony.

But when the jailer quietly admitted him to the lad's cell and left them alone, the boy wouldn't confide in his uncle. McConnelly was desperate.

"But Jimmie, *I* know you didn't kill Rosenthal," he pleaded. "Just tell me you didn't. Tell me where you went last night, and I'll fight 'em all for you. I'll get the truth, lad!"

The boy avoided his eyes. "You don't know anything about it," he retorted sullenly. "You and your drinking. You mind your own business. This is my affair. I told them I did it. Now I want to be left alone."

McConnelly was trembling violently as he reached forward and placed a shaking hand on the boy's knee. "Listen to me, Jimmie! You gotta listen! I know I ain't been much of a pal to you, but this is murder that you're after admittin'. Murder, Jimmie, do you understand that? They'll hang you by the neck, lad, by the neck until dead!" His voice cracked under the strain of his emotions.

The boy shuddered. "Go away!" he urged desperately.

"But, Jimmie!"

"Go away, I tell you!" The voice rose hysterically.

Years ago, a drunken longshoreman had thrust a knife blade into his stomach, but now the words of the boy that had been like a son to him sent a steely stab of pain through his sturdy old heart that was a thousand times more painful than the actual agony of steel.

Reeling blindly to his feet, he groped his way out of the cell and thence to the street. There was a speakeasy directly across from the station, and instinctively his feet led him toward it. Abruptly, he halted before the door. Not this time! He was through. Perhaps, some men could take it and leave it alone when they had enough. He wasn't like that; he always made a fool of himself, not only wrecking his own life, but ruining the life of his nephew.

He felt directly responsible for Jimmie's plight. His massive shoulders squared grimly; he, Paddy McConnelly, once the greatest man hunter of them all, forced back, step by step, to a patrolman's rank, and then fired in disgrace. What good was his great ability now, with his boy in prison, lying in a darkened cell, a charge of murder hovering over him?

He turned on his heel and started down the street. Abruptly, he halted, then strode into the shadow of a telephone pole. The door of the detective bureau had opened, and the figure of Ferguson stepped out into the street.

McConnelly's great brows came together in a lowering scowl. There was the man who said that he had witnessed Jimmie running away from Rosenthal's house at the time of the murder. Slowly, his brain cleared as he watched the broad-brimmed Stetson bobbing down the street.

A real dick has a sensitive nose. Paddy McConnelly sniffed; he didn't like the general odor of this case—not in the least. Quietly, he dropped into position behind the other and slid along on the opposite sidewalk.

Ferguson walked steadily for several blocks, occasionally pausing to gaze into a shop window. At a cab stand, he suddenly appeared to change his mind about walking, for he entered a taxi. As the cab sprang to life and began to slide out of line, McConnelly sprinted across the street and jumped into another machine. He gave the driver a quick flash of his badge.

"Glue this hack to that buggy ahead!" he snapped.

The driver nodded understandingly, and the machine swerved into the line of traffic in pursuit of the man with the wide-brimmed hat.

McConnelly jerked up one of the little extra seats, and, lowering the glass partition, he perched himself up behind the driver so that he might direct operations and see better what was happening.

He was acting purely on a hunch, but his hunches were not foolishly preconceived theories. In a sense, they were subconscious, but they were based on a careful, almost instinctive, study of details. His scowl darkened; Ferguson was the first cattleman he had ever seen with soft, white, tapering fingers, carefully manicured. Maybe it was all right, and maybe it wasn't. Yet the gentleman with the large Stetson was a perfect witness; too perfect, McConnelly decided.

The leading machine suddenly swerved to the curb and halted before a spacious residence. McConnelly's cab skidded to a hasty stop a block in the rear, and the driver turned, a questioning expression on his face. The old copper smiled grimly, a sneer twitching the corner of his mouth. Things were beginning to break; he didn't need to move closer; he knew the house.

Mr. Ferguson was going to visit a certain Mr. Panopoulus, popularly known as Alex, the Greek, vice lord of the city and late partner of the departed Vests Rosenthal. An interesting situation this, McConnelly mused thoughtfully, a very significant situation for the "perfect witness."

The fare in the leading cab spoke to his driver, then moved up the walk. The machine waited.

McConnelly was pleased. "We'll wait," he commented laconically.

Mr. Ferguson was doing very well for a strange cattleman in a large city.

However, it was twenty minutes later before Ferguson reappeared. Something about his buoyant step irritated McConnelly; he would have given a lot to know what had taken place during those twenty minutes. His eyes narrowed.

"Stay with him!" he commanded his driver brusquely.

The chase finally wound up at a small, family-type hotel. The copper sneered; a perfect spot for the perfect witness. He waited until he saw Ferguson pay off his driver, then he whispered hurriedly to his own driver. He pressed a bill into his hand, then he, too, slid out of his cab and after the vanishing figure.

Ferguson was just fitting the key

into his door, when McConnelly barged around a corner of the corridor and followed him into the room. For a moment, the witness seemed to be disconcerted, but, finally, a sad smile crossed his features.

"Oh, hello, there," he said smoothly. "You're the uncle of that poor lad, aren't you?"

McConnelly shoved his hat to the rear of his scraggy old head and nodded.

"Yeah," he grunted. "I kinda thought I'd check around a bit; sorta help the kid." He puckered his chin thoughtfully.

Ferguson watched him warily. "How did you locate me?"

McConnelly looked up. "How'd you think I did it?" he growled. "I still got some friends down at the station."

Ferguson sighed. "Of course, of course. What can I do for you?"

The copper wrinkled his brow in thought. "I dunno exactly. I thought maybe you might think of something. Say, by the way, what part of the West you from?"

"Out Texas way."

Old Paddy McConnelly nodded. "Know anybody in town?"

"Not yet; this is my first visit in your city."

McConnelly shook his head discouragedly. "Well, if you don't know nobody in town, I guess you can't help me much." He straightened his battered hat.

Ferguson seemed sympathetic. "I'm sorry, I'd like to help you." He moved toward the door.

Abruptly, the ex-detective's slow-witted manner fell away, and he gave the other man a quick shove that sent him reeling across the room.

"Now you listen to me, you dirty liar!" he snarled. "That line might be all right for the chumps, but I got your number." His eyes dropped to the slender, white hands of the startled man. "If you're a cattleman, then I'm St. Peter!"

The white-haired witness tried to look indignant, and his restless fingers made a furtive movement in the direction of his armpit. McConnelly halted him with:

"Drop that hand!" His heavy service revolver magically appeared in his rugged paw to punctuate his words.

Striding across the room, he flipped open Ferguson's coat and relieved him of a small, pearl-handled automatic, then he shoved his prisoner back into a chair. Throwing out the clip, he yanked back the barrel and ejected the shells in the chamber, thus unloading the automatic. Finally, he dropped the empty gun into his pocket and tossed the shells into a cuspidor beneath the table.

Ferguson watched the operations, his face expressionless. "Well?" he asked quietly. "Now what?"

McConnelly spread his legs and glared down at the other. "You may be a hot gambler, Ferguson"—he let his eyes wander to the carefully manicured hands of the man in the chair—"but you're just a fool to waltz out of a police station and make any business calls." He chuckled wryly at the fleeting expression of fear that flitted across the pale face before him.

Ferguson recovered his poise. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean."

McConnelly snorted. "You are thick, ain't you?" he sneered. "It don't make no difference, I guess. I'll tell you what to do." He reached out, and, grabbing the telephone, he set it on the table between them. "Now, my friend, you're go-

ing to call up our mutual pal, Alex, the Greek!"

The other man was visibly startled, but the old copper only scowled and went on relentlessly.

"Sure, you're goin' to call Alex, and you're goin' to tell him you been thinkin' things over and you don't like the idea of framin' the kid. You're goin' to tell him you ain't satisfied with the deal, anyhow. Now, fella, grab that phone and start talkin'!

"It don't make no difference to me whether you understand or not. I gotta hunch Brother Panopoulus is goin' to know what you're talkin' about. Now I'm goin' to be listenin' in on the conversation, see, and maybe you understand when I tell you I'll blow your crooked head off if you make a phony move."

Ferguson hesitated; tiny globules of perspiration began to seep onto his forehead. McConnelly, watching him narrowly, could see that the "cattleman" didn't care for the assignment. For a moment, their eyes locked; the witness must have read the utter ruthlessness in the old man's face, for he tried to stall.

"I don't know his number!"

McConnelly balanced his gun suggestively. "That's two bad. I'm goin' to kill you if you ain't talkin' to Alex, the Greek by the time I count ten! One—two——"

Ferguson reached for the instrument, then he gingerly plucked a card out of his pocket and called a number that was scrawled across its surface. McConnelly stopped his counting. He moved around behind the other, and, jamming the blunt nose of the old gun in Ferguson's back, he put his ear near to the receiver. "Hold it out a ways so I can listen in. And remember!" He increased the pressure of the gun.

Ferguson, perspiring freely, got his number; it was a confidential number, and Alex, the Greek answered the call himself. As the two men heard his guttural voice come on the line, Ferguson licked his lips nervously and hesitated. McConnelly gave him a gentle reminder with the gun. With something of a sob, the prisoner said:

"Alex, I've changed my mind. I don't want to go ahead with framing this kid. I don't like it."

They heard the Greek swear savagely, then snarl: "You been drinkin', blast you, Deacon! Keep your mouth shut on that phone!"

McConnelly grinned cruelly and increased the pressure of the gun muzzle. Ferguson, face dripping with moisture, nodded and continued: "I can't do it!" he cried haltingly. "Not on the deal we made!"

The voice on the wire hardened. "You in the room I got for you? I'll be right over." The phone clicked.

Ferguson was shaking. McConnelly jerked the receiver out of his hand and hung it up. His rugged face was twisted into a leering smile of triumph.

"So, my hunch *was* right, eh? Not bad! Not bad!"

The other ran a handkerchief over his face. "I want a drink—bad!" he moaned.

McConnelly regarded him coldly. "Where is it?"

The man nodded toward a hand bag on the floor. The copper inclined his head. "Go get it!"

Under the menace of McConnelly's gun, the man the Greek had referred to as "Deacon," crossed the room, and, with trembling fingers, opened the bag. McConnelly watched him like a hawk, then he flipped open the chamber of his gun. There were six shells in the cylinder.

Ferguson straightened and set a quart bottle on the table, then, tak-

ing a glass from the dresser, he poured himself a stiff shot. It appeared to steady him. McConnelly looked longingly at the bottle. His own hands began to shake, and he bit his lip. Finally, he shivered.

"Give me a snort!" he commanded.

Ferguson squinted at him sharply, then his eyes became thin slits, and he poured another drink; it was a large shot, very large. He pushed it across the table.

McConnelly lovingly fondled the glass. "You got any more of this?" he growled.

The Deacon nodded. "I got a quart of rye!"

Paddy McConnelly laid the gun on the bed beside him. "Get it!" he snapped, raising his glass. Ferguson bent over the suitcase.

When he straightened, McConnelly's face had lost some of its hardness. His glass was empty, so another bottle was broken open. The copper filled his glass, then he stared unseeingly at the amber fluid. He looked like a very weary old man as he sat there, shoulders sagging dejectedly.

"Ain't it tough about Jimmie?" he moaned thickly.

Ferguson's eyes glittered and swerved craftily toward the gun on the bed near the officer. "It'll come out all right," he suggested soothingly.

The grizzled veteran shook his head dully; the liquor seemed to have gripped him, and he had apparently forgotten the recent telephone call. "No," he mumbled huskily. "He said he done it, and that'll be the end. Ain't it just too bad, Mr. Ferguson?" His tone became servile.

Ferguson leaned forward sympathetically. McConnelly glanced at him indifferently, cupping both his massive paws around the glass before him. If he saw Ferguson slide his hand toward the gun, he paid no attention to the move.

Abruptly, that tapering hand closed around the worn grip of the heavy revolver. McConnelly made a grab to prevent the impending disaster, but he was too late. Ferguson covered him.

"Keep your hands on that table, you drunken fool!" he snarled savagely. "Now we'll see who's running this little show!"

The shock tended to sober McConnelly, for he glared across the intervening space as though trying to make up his mind to leap at his opponent. But, finally, his broad shoulders relaxed and he sank back.

Ferguson sneered. "Your thick-headed chief was right. You can't leave the booze alone. Well, tough guy, you'll leave it alone when Alex gets through with you!"

McConnelly bit his lip. "You framed——" he began slowly, but a knock on the door stopped him abruptly. Both men started, then Ferguson, still menacing the copper with the service revolver, carefully backed toward the door.

"Who is it?" he demanded softly.

There was an impatient snort. "Open this door!" came the guttural voice of Alex, the Greek.

Ferguson flipped the key, then stepped aside to allow the vice lord to enter. The latter barged angrily into the room. "Say!" he thundered savagely. "What in——" He stopped short and stared unbelievingly at McConnelly, a pasty color supplanting the angry flush on his beefy face. Then his piggy little eyes switched to the heavy gun in Ferguson's hand.

Ferguson chuckled grimly. "Quite a surprise, eh, Alex?" he muttered. "The situation was reversed when I

talked with you on the phone a few minutes ago. This dirty old stew bum was holding the heat on me then, and he told *me* just what to say."

Panopoulus was still staring, then he slowly turned and scowled at the man with the gun. "How'd he know what to tell you, eh? How'd he get in here, anyway? You tell me that, Deacon!"

Ferguson shrugged. "He bust right in behind me," he explained.

The vice lord purpled. "Fool! I told you maybe you got a tail, but you say, 'No, they all fools!' Now, see!" he exploded thickly.

The gambler frowned irritably. "Well, what are you kicking about? We've got him now, haven't we?"

"He's a cop!" the other pointed out.

Ferguson smiled and shook his head. "Wrong! He was a cop, but he got fired when I was in the chief's office. He's just a drunken stew bum. We can bump him with his own gun. They'll find him drunk as well as dead. What'll they think —now, I ask you?" He grinned knowingly.

Panopoulus smiled slyly. "Suicide! That ain't bad, Deacon," he admitted.

"Bad?" sneered the other. "Why, it's perfect!"

The Greek crossed the room and faced McConnelly. "How'd you bust in to everythin', Mac?" he demanded.

McConnelly blinked uncertainly and gazed longingly at his empty glass. "I figured you framed my nephew Jimmie, and I came to make you tell me," he said frankly.

Ferguson laughed raucously, and the Greek bent closer. "Smart, ain't you, maybe?" he sneered.

McConnelly bobbed his head blandly. "Sure, I am. I used to be the best dick on the homicide, and you know it."

"So you figure we done it, eh?"

The ex-cop sneered stupidly. "Not Ferguson here; he ain't got the nerve. I think you done it yourself!" he stated frankly.

"Oh, yeah?"

The copper nodded. "Sure, that's it. You done it. I gotta hunch now that the robbery pulled off at the Owls Club last week was arranged by you to gyp your partner, Rosenthal. I kinda thought it all along, and I suppose Vests caught up with you, so you bumped him."

"Uh-huh?"

"Sure," said McConnelly. "You brought in this guy who calls himself Ferguson—you call him the Deacon—to be a dealer in your gambling houses. When you decided to bump Vests, you figured he'd make a swell witness with that dumb, angelic pan of his."

Panopoulus smiled thinly. "You know more, maybe?"

McConnelly answered willingly. "Plenty. I figured something was haywire when the chief told me this egg was a cattleman. I guess maybe I do hit the booze too much like they say, see, but I'm never so drunk I can't spot a professional gambler when he's got soft, skinny fingers like this dumb cluck!"

"Why, you dirty——" began Ferguson, but Panopoulus stopped him with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Such a smart dick like you can maybe tell us why the boy admitted the shooting, yes?" the Greek asked.

A worried expression stole over the ruddy countenance of the doughty old copper.

"I dunno that," he admitted slowly. "Nobody but Jimmie knows that."

Alex, the Greek chuckled. "Suppose I tell you *I* know, maybe?"

"I'd say you was a greasy liar!" flared McConnelly.

"Be careful what you say! I know, I tell you!"

The copper shook his head stubbornly. "I say you're a liar, Greek!"

Panopoulus purpled. Thrusting his perspiring face forward, he snarled: "I prove it! Jimmie Dean loves that fool wife of Vests. He thinks she done it; she think he done it; nobody say anything. See?"

McConnelly puckered his head thoughtfully. "You mean Jimmie was with her at the time?"

The fat man leered. "No, Jimmie was not with her; Jimmie was standing on a street corner waiting. We sent him a message to meet her. He really thinks she sent it—the fool!"

McConnelly tugged on his cheek. "That was smart," he admitted grudgingly. "Perhaps *you* killed Vests, too, eh?"

The man known as Ferguson frowned. "Look out, Alex," he snapped warningly. "That old coot is playing possum; he's pumping you dry."

Panopoulus looked from one to the other, then, with a coarse laugh, he dropped into a chair. "Maybe yes, maybe no. But you got the gun, ain't you? When we get done with this drunken fool, what he know won't hurt nobody. Kill him if he moves."

McConnelly appeared to be completely wrapped in his own thoughts, for he sat, hands on the table, staring before him. "No, maybe Ferguson killed Vests," he muttered thickly. "Panopoulus, he's too fat and he ain't got the nerve. Ferguson's pretty smart, he is."

Alex, the Greek chuckled sardonically. "It is me that is the smart one," he taunted, slapping his barrel chest. "I did it! Me, I kill Vests Rosenthal. Now, what you goin' to do about it, eh?"

McConnelly sighed and started to raise his glass to his lips, then he slowly lowered it. "I ain't sure just what I am going to do about it, Alex," he answered. "It sort of depends on certain conditions."

"Conditions?"

McConnelly answered slowly. "Sure, you see I followed the Deacon, here, out to your place, then back up here. Well, when I dismissed my cab driver, I gave him a message. If he did right, then Chief Hampton and Captain Donovan are listening at the door."

Ferguson cried out in surprise. McConnelly suddenly went into action. As the beefy Greek started to his feet, the old copper flung the contents of his glass in the killer's face, temporarily blinding him. Alex, the Greek screamed to the top of his lungs in rage.

"Kill him, Deacon! Kill him!"

With a snarl of defiance, McConnelly wheeled. Ferguson braced himself and pressed the trigger of the heavy service revolver.

There was a dull click.

With a curse, he pressed the trigger again, then he seemed to realize that he had been tricked. But it was too late to dodge; the old copper was coming for him.

There was nothing of the drunkard about Paddy McConnelly now; he was two hundred pounds of cool, fighting cop. The other tried to club the big gun, but, before he could swing the weapon, a massive, balled fist crashed into his mouth. His head splintered the door at his back, and he folded to the floor, completely out.

Panopoulus was cursing and swearing in hysterical rage. Men were pounding on the outer door, but McConnelly ignored the sum-

mons; he didn't need any help and he wanted to settle this himself.

The Greek had managed to wipe the liquor from his eyes, and now his gun was out and he squinted around the room for his opponent. McConnelly paused for a fraction of a second and glared. Here was Panopoulus before him—one of the dirtiest of racketeers. McConnelly's big hands doubled into twin ramrods of hard flesh, and he charged forward.

Panopoulus swung his gun around, but, even as he pressed the trigger, McConnelly knocked the gun from his hand. Then McConnelly struck two very cool and deliberate blows —one with each paw. The first flattened the flaming, bulbous nose over one greasy cheek. The victim screamed with pain. McConnelly, smiling thinly, brought up his left, sinking it in the midsection of the vice lord. With a wheezing of collapsing lungs, the big man fell gasping to the floor, where he lay twitching, like a great decaying jellyfish.

McConnelly stared down at him. Now let a jury turn him loose if they would! At least, he'd bear the mark of this meeting. The pounding on the door became frantic. He grinned wryly, then, wiping his hands gingerly as though he had touched something unclean, he sauntered across the room and unlocked the door.

Hampton and Donovan, closely followed by the taxi driver and a couple of harness bulls, charged into the room. For a moment, there was a pause as the newcomers surveyed the pair on the floor. Finally, Hampton looked up, and said:

"Well, Mac, we got your message; we were listening at the door, and we heard it all," he said quietly. "But it's a wonder to me you weren't killed, man! Why didn't you try and unlock the door so we could have gotten in?"

McConnelly straightened his hat. "I didn't need no help to handle these swine," he growled tersely. "A couple of wise mugs is all they are. I flipped the shells out of my six-shooter when the Deacon went for the first bottle of liquor, and I poured my drinks in the cuspidor when he was worrying about more drinks to get me drunk. I hope you chaps are satisfied." He turned toward the door.

Chief Hampton watched him a moment, then his eyes strayed to the men on the floor and then to the empty bottle. "Wait a minute, Mac," he called quietly. "Don't be too hasty. We all get that way at times, though." He followed the old copper across the room and stuck out his hand.

Paddy McConnelly took it; he couldn't speak. That grip revealed a lot; it told him he was still on the force; it told him he was still the old man hunter, the best dick the homicide ever had, and that he'd have more chances to prove it. And best of all, his Jimmie would be freed.

THE RUBBER MASK

A SERIAL

By F. L. STICKNEY

A lie well told, a crack on the head—and the Mask was on the rampage again.

A SLIPPERY creature, nicknamed the Rubber Mask, who is being hunted by the police, enters the shop of Heinie Muzdek, a fence, and insists on getting fifteen thousand dollars for some jewels. The fence refuses, and the Rubber Mask tortures him until Muzdek complies with the other's demands.

The Rubber Mask's next act of depredation is to despoil Caprillo's gang of their money and jewels. Later, Caprillo gathers some men from the streets and offers them money if they will get the Rubber Mask. When they agree and file out of the room, Caprillo is faced by the Rubber Mask, who says that he was among the men he had hired. The Mask then empties Caprillo's pockets and soon after is able to make his escape.

The Mask's depredations that follow bewilder the police. In one instance, he leaves his finger prints on the neck of a decanter. These, police discover, match the prints of Charles Manvey who had broken from prison some years back.

Finally, several reporters get together with the police and thresh out the problem. Detective Bob Swenson takes special notice of one of the reporters, Jaffery. It happens that Jaffery finds a clew that will always lead to the whereabouts of the Mask. It is the hair tonic that the Mask uses which is out of the market, but, which he is able to secure by putting an order in a drug store. The law does finally capture the Mask and handcuffs him. However, the killer gets away, aided by a hidden weapon that he had in his sleeve.

After some very trying times, the Mask gets ready to pull a big coup. He sends a note to Ted Jaffery, threatening him if he continues in his hunt. Jaffery, reading between the lines, fears for the safety of Nancy, his wife. Jaffery and Swenson go out together to see if the Rubber Mask will follow them.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE TROLLEY.

BY means of a little skillful manipulation with a long screw driver, the Mask soon freed the jam between his starting gear and the flywheel of the engine. He chuckled as he tossed the tool onto the floor of the coupé and climbed in.

"That's once that a jam proved useful," he said softly.

The Mask had lately fallen into the habit of thinking aloud. People who work alone often do. The Mask always worked alone. He had been so suspicious during the past weeks that he had been shy of even casual conversations. When a man feels the pressure of the pack closing in on him, he is wary of all.

He smiled as he thought of the two spotters following uselessly along after Swenson and Jaffery, and rejoiced in his narrow escape. His good luck was holding, but he must be more careful in the future. No one, who could give him the trouble that those two had, could be so foolish as to overlook the possibility of his trailing them around. He must be a lot more circumspect in his future operations. He had been doing altogether too many foolish things lately.

It had been his intention to drive along behind the reporter and the detective. Such a proceeding would certainly have resulted in his being noticed. By laying a winding trail, the two men could have made it almost certain that any one following them would be easy for the two plain-clothes men behind to spot. Whoever continued to take the same turnings would make himself an object of suspicion, and such a process would soon narrow down the list to the one man they wanted—provided, of course, that he was there. The Mask would not be—not this time.

He made a definite resolution not to fall into any similar trap. It was so simple that he had neglected to think of it. From now on, he would try some other way. They were evidently on their guard. He also decided to get himself another car. The next jam might not be so lucky for him, and the fault was a common one with the make of car that

he was driving. He should have remembered before he bought the thing. The next one would have no such faults. He felt that, under the circumstances, the best course would be to abandon his idea of shadowing Jaffery and lie low for a few days until suspicion had quieted.

Despite the severe frights that he had experienced through the reporter's evident ability to find him, he considered that, for some time, he was secure. Since leaving Des Moines and killing the taxi driver, he had seen to it that no one was following him.

The authorities knew now that he was in the city; again, he regretted having sent that letter, but they could never guess how he had got there or in what character. A check-up of strangers throughout the entire city would yield them nothing, for he was living elsewhere and had just driven in. His plan was to keep unobtrusively on the move until he had accomplished his purpose.

In the middle of the afternoon, he drove up to a ramshackle structure located on a desolate country road. The place appeared deserted, but the short lane leading to it showed signs of recent and fairly constant use. He drove around to the back of the building, after making sure that no other cars were in sight, and stopped. There was still no sign of life, but he strode over to a heavy door that led into the basement of the barn, and kicked at the stout timbers. He had to wait for some time, and he had the feeling that some unseen person was looking at him. Finally, there were sounds of heavy feet within.

A man in overalls opened the door—a black, greasy figure with a lopsided face. His evident anxiety showed even through the thick layer of black oil that covered his features. He peered out in all directions, taking care to expose himself as little as possible, and keeping a firm grip on the edge of the door all the while.

"Anythin' wrong?" he demanded hoarsely, his squinting gaze cold and forbidding.

The Rubber Mask shook his head and pushed his way inside. The dirty man was surprised at the action and even more surprised at the cool, assured bearing of his visitor. He was used to having people be very careful in their manners toward him. He had a reputation.

"I want another car," said the Mask curtly. "That one's a junk."

The basement of the big barn was dark, but the outlines of cars could be seen all around. The man in overalls spoke into a mouthpiece beside the door. "It's all right," he said, "but keep your eyes open. If I catch yuh bein' careless, I'll croak yuh." That ought to impress this cool visitor. He turned back to the Mask.

"Lookout on the roof," he explained, "and the boys upstairs. Strangers make 'em kinda nervous. Go up that way." He flashed a torch and showed a narrow flight of steps. "I'll bring the coupé in; you go on up and wait. One of the boys will meet yuh." He opened the heavy door and went out as the Mask groped his way up the stairs.

Another overall-clad figure was waiting for him. Narrow eyes looked him up and down in the glare of a flash. The man stuck out a hand as though to feel for weapons but stopped as he noticed the tense crouch that the Mask went into.

"Butch knows you?" demanded a sharp voice.

"Sure," said the Mask easily,

"known me for years. Keep your hands to yourself. I don't like that."

"No offense, brother. I was just playing safe. Come on! Butch will be up again in a second."

The owner of the sharp voice opened a door and let in a flood of light from the next room. He stared curiously at the Mask but evidently could not place him. The Mask followed him through the doorway. The room, a fairly large one, was built in the center of the main floor of the structure and had no windows. It was brightly lighted and contained four automobiles in various stages of assembly. Tools were lying on the floor, and benches were against the walls. Several husky chain-falls hung from the square beams overhead. Two more mechanics gazed curiously at him. His companion told him to wait where he was and joined them. A few low words, and they all went back to work. Shortly after that, Butch came in.

"Didn't cha like the can I sold yuh?" he inquired with a lopsided grin. Butch had evidently been a boxer, and a poor one to judge from the condition of his face. The effects of past batterings showed, even through the greasy dirt. One ear, miraculously clean, was twisted and bunched in a perfect cauliflower.

"It was all right," the Mask returned, "but I want something faster and bigger. Thought I'd drop around and see what you had."

"Yeah?" said Butch. "And how did yuh know where to come?"

The Mask was vague. "Oh, I hear things."

"That's why we're movin'."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yeah. These four cans is the last we've got to work on. This place is gettin' known too much, so we figger on pullin' out. That's the way this game goes. Always on the move. We've got another location all fixed up. Any special make you was wantin'?"

"No," said the Mask, "but I want a good one, and one that isn't too noticeable. I don't want everybody staring when I go by."

"Ready to pay real money?"

"Of course."

"Come on then." Butch led the way out of the bright room and guided the Mask down the stairway once more by flashlight. He crossed the basement and directed his torch toward a dusty car.

"What's your line, feller? Dope?"

"Maybe," said the Mask coldly. He was beginning to dislike this tough guy. A false move on Butch's part, and he would get bumped off. You can't trust these thieves.

"'Scuse me," Butch mumbled. "None of my business, anyhow. Here's a nice enough wagon fer any one. And it ain't showy by a damn sight. Think that'll suit?"

"Is it fast enough?" the Mask asked doubtfully.

Butch laughed scornfully. "Is she fast! Don't worry over that, feller; she'll trim anything in the place. I run her myself. A neat job, too. I did most of it myself. It'd take a racing car to catch it, and a good one, too. I stepped the high speed up a couple of points and put her in a class by herself. You won't have to worry about any one catching up to you. It'll set you back just three grand."

"That's all right, if the car is."

"Give you my word on it, feller," said Butch solemnly.

"All right. Hold out the light while I count your money."

"Lord!" ejaculated Butch as he saw the contents of the Mask's wal-

let. "Don't want a partner, do yer?"

"Not to-day. How about license plates and papers?"

"Plates all on it and the registration in the pocket by the driver's seat. Good enough to get you by without a pinch. If you get in a jam, you know enough to fade out of the picture and leave the car, don't yuh?"

The Mask laughed gratingly. "Don't worry."

"Don't you, feller. I ain't," grunted the auto thief. "Hold the light and I'll get this buggy outta here for yuh."

During the three weeks following, the Mask trailed Ted Jaffery intermittently. Somehow, he felt that Jaffery would be more apt to give the whole scheme away than Swenson. And he hated the reporter. Ever since Felix, the Cat, had named the man as the real cause for his trouble, he felt a longing to put over some coup which would reflect on Jaffery alone. Swenson was a policeman and, in trying to checkmate the Mask, the detective was only doing his duty. The Mask expected it and experienced no ill feeling because of it. But for Jaffery to butt in was a straw too much. It was not playing the game, and the fellow deserved to have his fingers burned.

The Mask intended to use his car in trailing Ted Jaffery, but soon realized that the scheme was of no value. He came to depend on his feet or on taxis. He exercised the utmost care to be sure that he, in turn, was not trailed. He studied the reporter's habits and picked him up here and there along routes that he continually took. The Mask wanted something badly, but not badly enough to put himself into actual danger. He varied his clothing and appearance each time he took up the shadowing.

A man skilled in the art of disguise can work wonders with the proper materials. He used hair, mustaches, eyebrows; changed his complexion and stuffed his cheeks. He padded his body and practiced facial expressions. Only his eyes remained the same, and he used glasses to offset that. Ted Jaffery had no idea that he was being followed.

As the Mask's self-confidence grew, he made it a point to get close enough to hear the reporter talk to various people, rather than actually shadowing him all the time. He wanted desperately to overhear certain things. When those things would be discussed, he could not know, but he intended to stick until some chance conversation gave him the hint he wanted. He felt sure that sometime he would get it.

Until he did, he could never be certain that he was safe. If he only knew what the clew was that had enabled the police to locate him in short order, he could effect measures to offset it. Finally, he scented what he thought might be a valuable chance to listen in.

The Mask had found that Ted Jaffery usually left the apartment earlier than his father and used the surface cars as a means of traveling to the *Journal* offices. Ted's custom was to buy a morning paper at the corner south of the apartment house where he lived and board the trolley that passed within two blocks of his home at approximately twenty minutes of nine.

Whenever possible, the reporter sat in the rear cross seat on the right-hand side of the car and read his paper during the ride to the center of town. The Mask began to make a point of catching the same car several blocks farther out and

sitting just behind that seat, and making himself obscure behind a paper. Twice, Jaffery had met acquaintances and held desultory conversations, to which the Mask had listened with eager ears, but without any gratifying results. Evidently, these friends knew nothing of the reporter's connection with the police.

On the morning in question, one of Jaffery's friends showed up again. The men sat together just ahead of the Rubber Mask, and discussed items from the morning paper—among other things, a certain motion picture which was advertised. The friend had seen it and praised it highly.

"I guess," said Ted Jaffery, "that I'll drop in on the way to the office and get a pair of tickets. I've been keeping my wife in the house lately and I guess I owe her an airing. There really isn't much amusement for young married couples during the winter, unless you join in on the booze and dancing parties. The wife doesn't drink and I'm a rotten dancer, so we're limited to the movies."

The friend, also young and evidently married, agreed.

"It's sort of dull for us, too," he told the reporter. "Why don't you two drop around some night and we can play a few rounds of bridge or all go to the movies together?"

"That would be great!" exclaimed Jaffery, with the enthusiasm of a man who intends to do no such thing.

Flicking over the pages of his own paper, the Mask found the advertisement referred to. He noted the theater at which the picture was being exhibited and rose to alight at the next stop. Jaffery still had many blocks to ride on a none-too-speedy trolley car. This might be worth following up.

The Mask knew nothing of the reporter's wife. Without letting her suspect anything, both Ted Jaffery and his father had done their best to keep Nancy indoors during the past weeks. When she did go out, her husband or father-in-law tried to be with her. If she used the car, Toti insisted on driving. But with the lapse of time, suspicion was becoming less pronounced.

A taxi shot the Mask to the vicinity of the theater long before Jaffery was due to show up there. After a little mental mapping, to decide the route by which the reporter would approach, the Mask entered a convenient cigar store and bought a smoke. He stalled around, made a few remarks to the clerk, and kept watch on the sidewalks. When Jaffery finally appeared, the Mask went out and managed to enter the theater lobby just behind him.

Jaffery asked for tickets and specified the location that he preferred. As they were pushed out through the window of the box office, half out of their small envelope, the Mask craned his neck and noted the number and letter printed on the top ticket. Luck was with him.

Jaffery walked away, and the Mask bought a ticket for the next day's performance. He asked to see a seating plan of the theater. The box-office attendant pointed to one that hung in the lobby. Jaffery's top ticket had been marked, "H-22-Center."

The plan, a fairly large one, showed that the theater had two main aisles. There were three groups of seats, right, center, and left. The first eight rows were marked by double letters. From the eighth row to the rear, the letters of the alphabet ran singly. The seats

were all marked with even numbers and the plan showed that they were staggered: that is, each chair had in front of it the juncture of two others. The Mask went out.

Ten minutes later, the box-office attendant received an inquiry by telephone, for seats in the seventeenth row, center.

"Yes, sir," he told the voice, "the entire row is available."

The mask chuckled. "I'm not going to bring my entire family along," he said, "but will you save seats 20, 22, and 24 in Mr. Peterson's name, for this evening's performance?"

"Yes, sir, until seven thirty. Seats 20, 22, and 24 in Row J. Thank you."

"Hey, wait a second," cried the Mask. "I asked for seats in the seventeenth row."

"J is in the seventeenth row, sir. We have no row marked I. It looks too much like a figure 1 and causes confusion. Thank you, sir."

The Mask hung up the receiver and grinned. "More knowledge, every day," he said aloud. This might prove a fruitful evening.

The box-office attendant slipped the required tickets into an envelope and marked it, "Peterson."

"Wonder who the wise guy is that's telling folks to sit in row I. I'll bet we've had a hundred inquiries for seats there during the last month."

The bobbed-hair bookkeeper in the adjoining alcove shook her head. "Who cares?" she said, yawning. "Oh, I was out late last night!"

The Mask got his tickets during the afternoon. That evening, he waited until the performance had been in progress twenty minutes and then went in. He presented the ticket for Seat 22. The stubs for the others were in his pocket. He crawled across the laps of those ever-present fat women who, as usual, made *soto-voce* remarks about, "people who come in late," and settled into his chair. He could see from the outline of the head and shoulders on his right front that the reporter was already in his seat.

A news reel was showing some fine scenes of winter sports at Saranac. The audience was very silent as the dark blotches, that were ski jumpers, soared against the white background. Jaffery was flanked on both sides by women. The Mask waited for some sign that would tell which one was the reporter's wife.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOTI SUSPECTS.

THE watcher did not have long to wait. Jaffery's head and that of the woman on the right inclined toward one another as they exchanged some whispered remarks. The Mask waited for a moment and then slid over one seat so as to be between them. The couple in the next chairs disengaged their hands from the interlocking grip that they had been practicing and glared at him in the semidarkness.

Another ski jumper soared on the screen, dropped like a plummet to the steep landing, and teetered down the runway as he strove to maintain his balance. A long sigh rose from the audience. The Mask leaned over to collect his hat and overcoat, which he moved into the empty seat beside him. Then he settled back to wait for more developments.

The news reel finally flickered out, to be replaced by a rather doubtful

comedy, which, to the annoyance of the Mask, Jaffery enjoyed. The watcher stirred impatiently as the news reporter chuckled. This would never do. He wanted the couple to talk. He hoped the rest of the show would be awful so that they would lose interest in the pictures.

Nancy stared at her husband in surprise. "Why, Ted, that comedy is terrible! What are you laughing at?"

The Mask, straining his ears to the utmost, could hear the low-spoken words easily.

Jaffery chuckled again. "That bald-headed guy with the baby face is familiar, Nancy. He looks just like the old buck that Bob Swenson and I chased out of Bradford Falls. If that shiny spot gets tapped, I'll bust."

It did get tapped, and Ted Jaffery let out a joyous hoot that made him the focal point of the section. Nancy became industriously engaged in pretending that he was a complete stranger. She risked a shame-faced glance over her shoulder, as if to apologize for the childishness of her escort. The Mask's face, lighted by reflection from the screen, looked angry. He was glaring at her husband. She was embarrassed and turned her head back again. Ted was the nicest man she ever knew, but he always acted like a big kid.

The Mask, his ears almost flapping with eagerness, gazed sorrowfully at the screen. His double was hopelessly entangled with the superstructure of what had once been a lemon meringue pie. The Mask considered the resemblance very slight. The man on the screen was remarkably homely. He continued to watch the two people in front of him, alert for any remark that they might make.

The comedy gave way at last to the feature for the evening. It was based on a melodramatic crook play and accompanied by a talking device. The novelty of the thing held the interest of the audience. Even the Mask found his attention wandering from his immediate purpose. He realized this with a surprised start, and forced his faculties back to the subject in hand. This was too good an opportunity to spoil it through lack of attention.

Jaffery's earlier faux pas had been forgotten or forgiven. He and his wife were crushed against one another, their backs inclined from the perpendicular in that position which young people so often assume in movie houses. It is far from comfortable, but deliciously intimate. A fine situation for whispering! The Mask leaned forward and hoped for the best.

The movie must have been disturbing Nancy. At this precise instant, the detective in the picture seemed to be in the gravest danger.

"Oh, Teddy," the Mask heard her whisper, "you'll be careful, won't you?"

"What?" inquired her husband vaguely. He had been interrupted in an entirely different line of thought. The meaning of his wife's sentence finally seeped through, and he whispered back, "Oh, sure."

A moment's pause, then the girl again:

"Are you and Mr. Swenson up to something new?"

"Hush, Nancy! You'll disturb some one," was Jaffery's evasion.

Nancy had no intention of hushing. She dropped her voice so low that the Mask could no longer hear it, and whispered some more. The Mask stooped over and pretended to be feeling for something on the floor. Carefully, he twisted his head

until one ear was just behind Jaffery's shoulder. They were still whispering. He thought that he heard the word, "Mask."

Then Jaffery, evidently protesting against a charge of unfair secrecy, said, "But haven't I told you everything as it has happened? I'm not holding out on you, honey. You know all there is." He was lying, with an ability surprising in a man so recently married. His protest seemed to convince Nancy. They stopped whispering.

The Mask sat up again and regarded the outline of the girl's head with new interest. So here was another possible source of information. His trailing and his cautious listening had been ineffective up until the present moment. The methods that he had used had in them a certain portion of danger, too. He strove to make out the red-headed girl's features in the reflection from the screen. Already, he was forming plans for tapping his fund of knowledge. She ought to prove an easier source than her husband had. He leaned back in a more comfortable position and began to formulate a new campaign.

Toti was wiping over the furniture in the living room of the apartment. He worked as quietly as possible so as not to disturb his mistress, curled up on the davenport before the shallow fireplace. It was mid-afternoon. Ted and Jaffery, Sr., were not due back until six thirty. Nancy found the magazine that she was trying to read extremely boring. Time hung heavy on the girl's hands during the dull, winter days. She fastened on the little brown man as a possible diversion.

"Toti," she said suddenly, "have you got a girl?"

"What, please?" gasped the surprised Japanese.

"Have you a girl, a sweetheart?"

"Er—not many," he faltered. "Very hard thing for a Japanese man to find."

Nancy sat up. This promised more amusement than the magazine. She teased Toti often. When she lighted on him as a fit object for torture, he wriggled, stammered, and lost his usually precise English—and he loved it. He adored her.

"Oh, come on and tell me, Toti. Haven't you even got one?"

"I think," sputtered the little man, with a desperate glance around the room, "something burn in the kitchen." He fled headlong for his sanctum, where the cold gas range gave him the lie.

Nancy sniggered and stood up. She stretched luxuriously and then walked over to the nearest window. A cold mist had dampened the streets and hung in ragged, depressing streams against the building opposite.

She had started back again toward the davenport when the buzzer sounded and she veered about to answer it. Toti beat her to the door of the apartment. She heard a voice with more than a hint of brogue in it say, "Is Mrs. Jaffery here?"

"Here I am, Toti," she called, glad to welcome any one at all rather than return to the boredom of an afternoon alone.

Toti ushered in the visitor and stood off a bit at one side to give him a critical inspection. Toti had orders. They were old ones and had not been renewed for some time, but, as far as the little Japanese was concerned, they were in force until countermanded. The visitor seemed unconscious of Toti's scrutiny.

Nancy saw a stocky, middle-aged

man in a heavy blue overcoat. His right hand was deep in his coat pocket. In his left, he held a derby hat. His face, round and ruddy, was crowned by a shock of hair so red that Nancy's seemed a light-blond in comparison. His eyes were blue and kindly. His expression was one of ill-concealed embarrassment, as though he was at a loss for a way to begin. His shoes were black, well polished and heavily soled. A clever touch!

He glanced about the small hallway keenly, withdrew his hand from his pocket, and began to twirl the derby in an embarrassed manner. Toti noted that the first finger of the right hand had been badly mutilated. The scar on it had the angry appearance which indicates a slow-healing, painful wound. At some time not far distant, about half an inch of finger had been torn away. The stub was blunt and bulgy and the nail was a tiny claw, just beginning to grow. The man's hands, rough and reddened by the cold, clutched nervously at the brim of the derby. He seemed to grow more ill at ease.

"Mrs. Jaffery?" he inquired, and bobbed his fiery top.

Nancy felt a certain spasm of nervousness come over her. His voice and eyes seemed so full of pity.

"Is anything wrong?" she blurted out in a scared voice. She raised one hand slightly in a vague gesture of protest and appeal.

"It's about your husband, ma'am. They're bringing him to the hospital now." The caller fidgeted and shuffled his feet with apparent reluctance to proceed. He dropped his gaze to the rug.

"Oh! What's the matter—an accident?"

"A shooting, ma'am. I'm awfully sorry. Detective Swenson is with him and he told me to get you."

"And Ted is hurt?" A tinge of hysteria had crept into her voice. The man's manner made it all too plain that something serious indeed had happened. She could not bring herself to face it clearly. For weeks, she had had an intuitive feeling that something was in the wind.

The stocky man nodded miserably and kept his gaze on the floor. "Yes'm. He's pretty bad, I guess. He asked for you, and I've got a car outside."

Nancy dashed away to get her coat.

"I'll be ready right away," she flung over her shoulder.

Toti, his face expressionless, eyed the man in the dark overcoat. The Japanese was deeply stirred over the news, but he had a feeling that there was a false note present. He could lay his finger on no incongruous point, however.

"This is hell!" muttered the caller audibly.

Nancy rushed back into the hallway. Her hat was perched awry on the top of her head, and she was struggling to pull on her coat. Her eyes were wide and staring with fright. Toti helped her with her coat.

"I will call up the station first, Mrs. Ted," he said softly, so that the stranger might not hear. He picked up the phone from its stand beside the door.

Nancy had not heard the low whisper clearly. She was too perturbed for inconspicious details to penetrate her fear. She wrenched open the door. "Tell them I'm coming," she said, and she started off toward the elevator. Toti stared wretchedly at the open door as he gave the operator a number. He was troubled and very uncertain.

The messenger clapped his derby onto his bright hair and dropped his right hand into his coat pocket. Toti had just got his connection.

"This is Mr. Jaffery's home," he said. "I am calling——"

The Mask had drawn a pistol from his pocket. He reversed it with a quick flip of the wrist and brought the butt down on the butler's unprotected head with a crack. Toti crumpled to the floor, and the phone tumbled from his nerveless hands. The Mask slipped outside and closed the door. Down the hall, Nancy was fuming at the delay of waiting for the elevator. He joined her as the cage rose.

The special protection that had been ordered for Ted Jaffery's family had long since been withdrawn. The Mask's letter was over a month old now. Those who knew of it had come to regard it as an empty gesture. So far as they knew, its author was hundreds of miles away and safely under cover. The Mask had spent a careful week in reconnoitering the building that held the Jaffery apartment. The possibility of special protection had come to his mind when he first decided to abduct the red-headed girl. Painstaking, inconspicuous investigations had convinced him that no one was on the watch before he made his effort. He led Nancy to a dingy sedan at the curb.

"This is the car, ma'm," he said and helped her in. He ran around behind and got in from the opposite side.

Nancy, staring off vacantly and numb with dread, failed to notice the unusually smooth action of the engine. The car started.

They had gone perhaps half a block when the Mask, satisfied that all was well, raised an arm and pretended to settle the front of his overcoat. Then his hand dropped heavily on the girl's unprotected wrist. Nancy felt a sharp jab in the skin. She jumped and uttered a low-pitched scream. The Mask's left hand was clenched to knock her out if necessary.

"'Scuse me, ma'm," the driver mumbled. "Clumsy of me."

Nancy nodded and kept staring ahead. She was so preoccupied that the incident had made no impression. Her sudden start and scream had been involuntary.

"Hurry, please!" she urged.

The Mask hid a grin in the collar of his coat and pulled the car around a corner. He drove carefully, stealing glances at his companion from time to time. They had gone three or four blocks when she began to sag wearily in her seat. She straightened up with an effort and shook her head, as if to clear it.

A queer, puzzled frown contorted her face, and she slumped against the Mask's shoulder. He laughed, and braced her so that her condition would not be too apparent. The effects of the heavy shot had reached her brain and heart. She was safely quieted for hours. She stirred uneasily for a moment, then relaxed. The Mask turned another corner and then, following back streets as much as possible, headed for the city limits!

Toti's senses finally returned. Still prone, his face buried against the rug, he raised his hands and clasped his throbbing head. The butt of the Luger had raised a cruel bruise and laid open a small portion of the scalp. The wound was painful but neither serious nor gory. Swaying uncertainly, the Japanese rose to his knees. Lights were flickering before his face, and he felt nauseated. His eyes spotted the

phone lying on the floor, the receiver off to one side.

Everything came back at once. He grabbed the instrument and lurched to the floor. Lying on his side, he poured a flood of Nippon talk into the mouthpiece. No response. His head cleared some more, and he began to click the receiver bracket up and down. He gave the number that he had called before and hunched himself into a knot.

The person who received Toti's call at the station had difficulty in understanding the little man's thick speech. It was some time before the anguished Toti was connected with Swenson.

Swenson recognized the voice at once. He listened with growing horror to the garbled account that came over the wire to him. To him, the Mask suddenly became a loathsome thing, a renegade beast to be hunted down and killed with absolutely no mercy; slimy outcast who need expect no less than swift extermination if Swenson should ever get his hands on him.

Until this time, Swenson had more or less regarded the Mask as a case, a problem to be solved, more difficult certainly than others he had encountered, but in the end only something to be solved and passed on. He was on terms of cordial friendship with both Ted Jaffery and his father and had seen enough of Nancy to be genuinely fond of her. Now the capture of the Mask became truly the major aim of his life. He did not come any closer to catching the criminal because of it, however.

Toti was aware of the necessity for speed and told his story as simply as he could. Swenson's face was haggard when he finally instructed the Japanese to wait at the apartment until further notice. The detective was positively sickened. An ordinary criminal would be bad enough, but the Mask! Heaven only knew how far that one would go to gain his ends. And he must have some purpose in such a move as the kidnaping of Ted Jaffery's wife! Swenson prayed that it be no more than blackmail or a demand for ransom.

He turned to the house phone and gave a description of Nancy and pictured her clothes as Toti had described them to him.

"Get every available man out looking for her," he shouted into the mouthpiece, his voice shaking and his body twitching with nervousness. "And if any one finds her with a stocky, medium-sized man in a dark overcoat and a derby, shoot first and ask questions later. I'll be responsible. It's the Rubber Mask!" He added more instructions and directed that Ted Jaffery be located and notified to return home at once. Then he ran from his office.

The door of the Jaffery's apartment was ajar when Bob Swenson dashed down the hall from the elevator. He pushed it wide and stopped short. Toti was seated in an easy-chair, his head in his hands. He was moaning, long low sighs that ended on a rising note. Before him, arms akimbo, an irritated, puzzled frown on his face, was a uniformed policeman, who glanced up with relief at the prospect of a newcomer.

"What's this?" demanded Swenson.

The officer recognized him and saluted. "I got a call, sir. The light was flashing, and, when I pulled the box, the sergeant told me to come here. Some one had called the station and then dropped the phone without hanging up. I come up to see what's wrong and I find this Jap

sprawled on the floor, rubbing his head. The phone was all right and I can't get anything out of this bird. He's crazy, I guess. Some one's given him a dirty crack on the bean."

After a single glance at the befuddled Toti, Swenson waved the officer to sit down. "You stay here," he directed. "I'm going to question the elevator boy and the doorman. Hold any one who comes in until I get back."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAD PURSUIT.

NO one reported even a trace of Nancy or the Mask after they left the apartment house. The newspaper played up the abduction of the girl, and, through them, all sorts of people came forward with imagined clews. Nothing came of them, and most of them were patently figments of the imagination. From the time that the car rolled away from the curb, no sign of it, that could help the baffled police, had been found. By forcing Toti to go over his part in the affair time and again, Swenson worked up a fairly good description of the Mask's appearance. The elevator boy and the doorman were able to add but little.

The elevator boy remembered taking them to the ground floor. He had paid no particular attention to them and could only describe the Mask as a short man in a derby and dark coat. Immediately on discharging his passengers, he had answered a summons from above and had not seen them go out of the door. Neither of his passengers had said anything as he took them down; at least, he could recall nothing.

The doorman was very little better. He had held aside the portal to let them pass through. He remembered it distinctly because Nancy had failed to respond when he greeted her.

"She always had a smile for us and called us by name," he explained. "This time, she didn't even see me. I thought maybe she was mad about something. She looked funny."

He had watched puzzled, as the Mask had helped the girl into the car and driven off. He remembered the make but had not noticed the number. He had heard the Mask say, "This is the car," or something like that. Nothing more. His description was only slightly better than that of the elevator boy. He remembered the Mask as a stocky man, round-faced, and light on his feet. He could describe the clothes better and had noticed the red hair. The car had headed south.

Swenson had added to the instructions of the force out hunting for the girl at once: the make and model of the car, and what few additional points he had gleaned about the Mask's appearance. No one picked up the trail. The *Journal* and one other paper put out an evening extra in an effort to spread the alarm. Every report that this brought in was useless.

Jaffery had returned to the apartment, vastly alarmed by the curt summons from headquarters. When he learned the reason, he became so overwrought that he was of no use at all. Every trace of his customary coolness left him and he raged around the rooms, imploring the already despairing Swenson to do something. Swenson did a great deal, but nothing came of it.

At last, to the huge relief of the detective, Jaffery dashed out, to spend the next three days and nights driving about, searching vainly for some sign of his wife or the Mask. It was a senseless thing to do. He found nothing and got into all sorts of trouble. He returned late the third night, exhausted, trembling, and in a serious state of nerves. He had covered repeatedly every street in the city and had made himself obnoxious in every suburb.

Jaffery's father stood up better under it. He tried his best to help Bob Swenson, but, of course, could do nothing that brought results. He managed the publicity for the affair and used what influence he could to get additional men put onto the hunt. The police in all cities of the State had been notified; everywhere, people were on the watch. But nothing happened. No one sighted the girl or the criminal.

Mr. Jaffery, Sr., finally managed to rouse Toti from the despondent mood into which he had fallen. He placed no blame on the little Japanese and so comforted the poor fellow that thoughts of suicide as a means of wiping out dishonor faded from his mind. But Toti was one of the unhappiest men in the world, and he had the greatest hatred of any of them for the Rubber Mask. Murder was in his thoughts constantly. The doctor, who had fixed his head, pronounced his wound not at all serious. The blow had glanced off.

So they all had to sit around, chafing with impatience and the uselessness of their few activities, growing more nervous and irritable as time went on. The continued loss of sleep had effect. All were jumpy and had reached the stage when they would snap at each other at the least provocation.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Mr. Jaffery, Sr., had to make a trip from the apartment to the *Journal* office. Ted was in bed and under the care of a physician, so Toti, bundled to the ears in a bearskin coat, acted as chauffeur. The side curtains had been put on the car because of the cold.

The very silence during the ride showed the feelings of the two men. Mr. Jaffery, Sr., as a rule was a light-hearted, voluble man. He and Toti were always on the best of terms and chattered away like magpies whenever they were together. To-day neither said a word. They stared in stony silence and were as miserable as could be.

After a few hours had passed and no word of the missing girl had been received, it had become obvious to them that the Mask was once more the victor. Soon, all lost hope that he would be taken and came to believe that some sort of ultimatum would come from him.

That he had taken Nancy simply to cause misery was hardly to be considered as a logical view. It was a possibility, of course, but they had too high an opinion of the criminal's mentality to believe it. Looked at sensibly, it seemed clear that he had some end to gain in running the risks that he had—an ultimatum demanding freedom from molestation and pursuit, or possibly a demand for ransom. All were ready to agree to anything if it meant Nancy's return.

So many owners of sedans the same make as the Mask's had complained of being stopped and subjected to indignities that that part of the police orders had to be rescinded, and, as the days passed, the vigilance of the men died out. It was bound to be so. Even at that, it is a puzzle how the Mask ever

dared to go about again in his freak car, but he did.

Toti dropped Mr. Jaffery, Sr., at the office and received instructions to do some errands that promised to keep him busy for most of the afternoon. When they were finished, he was to pick his employer up again and take him home. The little Japanese was in decidedly low spirits as he drove about, fulfilling the missions on which he had been sent.

At about a quarter of five, he was driving back to the office when a traffic light turned red against him. A car drew alongside, and Toti glanced casually at its occupant past the collar of his fur coat. There seemed something vaguely familiar about the man, but, at first, the Japanese had no idea of his identity. The man wore a soft felt hat and a brown mixture overcoat. A bright scarf was around his neck. His face was dark and very fat, and he wore a heavy walrus mustache. He was smoking a cigar.

Toti glanced again through the isinglass of the side curtain. The man raised his ungloved right hand and removed the cigar from his mouth. Toti frowned, puzzled. Then the light went green, and the dingy sedan beat the Langley off the mark. Toti swung in behind. He clutched the wheel and the muscles of his neck stuck out in stringy cords.

The right forefinger of the driver ahead was scarred and bulgy. It was the same finger that had grasped nervously at the brim of a derby four days before. That detail had faded from Toti's mind. He had not recalled it when Swenson was questioning him, but now it was the guiding light in his memories of the red-haired man at the apartment. For a second, a crimson film dimmed Toti's eyes. To get his hands on that man was his only thought.

The sedan turned to the right and, a little later, to the left. The Langley followed, half a block behind. They were on an east and west boulevard now that led straight to the city limits and had no traffic lights. Toti had to step on the gas to keep up. Another car, traveling at a high rate of speed, tried to edge past the Langley. There was plenty of room, but the newcomer crowded in as he began to draw ahead.

Toti had visions of being pocketed. He pulled away and increased his speed, but the stranger continued to edge over. With a Nippon curse, Toti deliberately crashed fenders and sped ahead. The road hog dropped back. The sedan had gained. Toti opened the throttle wide and zoomed down the avenue in pursuit. He closed the gap to fifty yards and then hung doggedly on the tail of the unsuspecting sedan.

As the Mask entered the suburbs, he slowed down considerably. The blocks were shorter now, and the boulevard had narrowed down to an ordinary street. Toti, fearful of losing track of his quarry, had not slackened speed. He found himself close up on the rear of the sedan. Wondering whether the Mask would notice that he was being followed, the Japanese eased up until he was a block behind. It was growing dusk, and both cars switched on lights. Toti put on nothing but the weak cowl lamps.

The residences began to thin out, and intersecting streets gave way to occasional laneways. They were fast getting into the rural districts. A single car would be more apt to attract the Mask's notice now, so Toti dropped back until the red tail light ahead was just visible. Both

cars were traveling at a good road speed once more. This kept up for almost twenty miles.

Toti suddenly found himself close up on the sedan again. The Mask was slowing to take a side road. Before the Langley could drop back, he swung out and entered a narrow, poorly surfaced way. Toti swore whole-heartedly. If he followed now, the glare of his lights would be sure to attract attention. He switched off everything and put on the brakes as the sudden darkness hid the road.

By the time he had coasted to the turning, his eyes were accustomed to the dark. He pulled into the side road and sighed with relief as he sighted a red light ahead. It bobbed up and down as the sedan, moving slowly now, rocked over the uneven surface. With no lights showing and his engine throttled low, Toti crept along behind. The difficulties of driving under such conditions made him a lot of trouble, but the car ahead moved so slowly that he was able to keep up. The road began to twist and turn, so the grim-jawed little man drew in closer.

At last, on rounding a turn, he failed to pick up the red beacon. He stopped short. He could not afford to run the risk of coming up with the sedan. The outlines of the tops of the trees that bordered the road told him that no turns were immediately ahead. The sedan must have stopped or turned off onto another road. He drew in close under the trees and got out.

Hastily, he pattered along the road, keeping as much as possible in the shadows. He had progressed about a hundred yards when on his left there loomed up the black mass of a big barn. No lights were showing in the huge structure. He paused uncertainly and then stared about. A door slammed somewhere in the darkness. Toti jumped. He was on edge.

The sound had come from the direction of the barn. Stooping over and stepping cautiously, the little man explored until he found the lane. He fairly crawled along it until he reached the barn. Then he flattened into the shadows that surrounded the building. There was no noise, nothing to indicate that any one else was about. Toti crept along the side of the barn. His heart was pounding so that he thought his ribs would crack. He was scared. Somewhere near was a murderer, a man who would stop at nothing, certainly armed, who would show no hesitancy in firing at a lurking figure. Toti slipped off the heavy bearskin coat and shivered.

Slowly, he began to creep along the building, feeling ahead with his hands to make sure that he would run into nothing. He encountered several heavy rocks but nothing more. The front part of the building was blank. He could find no opening of any sort in the heavy sheathing. He peered cautiously around the corner.

Ahead was the sloping runway that led to the main door. He felt his way along until he reached it, and crawled up to investigate the door. It was massive and surprisingly close fitting, and fastened with a heavy hasp and padlock. Toti explored the door's surface in search of a smaller entryway, but found none. He climbed down off the brow and started along the building again. As he rounded the corner, he dropped flat on his stomach and peered, startled, into the murky shadows. The sedan that he had followed was parked at the back of the barn.

Toti hugged the ground and tried vainly to pierce the inky shadows

about the car. He could see nothing more than the outlines of the machine, which was in close to the building. He could make out the position of the windows of the automobile but could not be sure that the seats were unoccupied.

Common sense told him that no one would be sitting there in the cold. He slid forward on his stomach. The thick dead grass was heavy with frost and chilled his hands as he extended them before him. He rose carefully and peered into the darkness of the car's interior. There was nothing there. He grunted with satisfaction and chafed his cold hands.

Then he spotted the door in the side of the barn. It was hardly more than a black blotch on the dark building, but the sudden realization that it was there startled him. Suppose the Mask, gun in hand, was watching him from the shadows, ready any minute to put a bullet through him! Toti crouched hastily beside the sedan. Nothing happened. He forced his courage up again.

When, finally, he tried the door, he found it fastened on the inside. It gave ever so little before the lock stopped it. Toti stepped back and scrutinized the side of the barn in search of a light. None showed. The windows, all high up on the side of the building, stared blankly back at him. He trotted around the next corner and examined the one remaining side. It revealed no more than the others.

Going back, he examined the door again, but soon realized how futile it was to hope for an entry there. He leaned against the side of the door frame to consider his next move. He was completely at a loss as to how he should proceed. His hand encountered a heavy cleat, nailed to the sheathing of the barn. It was one of a series, leading up to the hay door in the peak of the roof. Toti climbed a few rungs, and then dropped back.

He knelt beside one of the front wheels of the sedan, and presently there was a gentle hiss of escaping air. When the tire was flat, he turned away and swarmed noiselessly up the side of the barn. The hay door was easily accessible because of its wide sill. Toti perched there precariously in the darkness and tried the doors. They, too, were locked. The little man crouched against the frame, undecided as to his next move. From within the barn came a short, high-pitched scream. Then silence for a moment! Then another scream, long drawn and throbbing! Toti was so startled that he barely saved himself from pitching headlong into the shadows below.

Then he noticed the heavy timber that projected beyond the eaves of the barn above the door. It was the arm for the pulley of the hay hoist. He stretched up a hand tentatively; it was far beyond his reach. He felt around for the cleats by which he had ascended. They continued up to the eaves. Toti climbed to the ridge of the barn, without much difficulty. The darkness was an aid. It kept him from seeing how high up he was.

The gambrel roof sloped down blankly on both sides of him. It looked black and smooth, and the rotted shingles were slippery with moss. The little man hunched along, astraddle of the ridge pole, toward the decrepit cupola in the center of the roof. The slats, of which its sides were made, had almost all fallen out. A dim radiance showed within. Toti stuck his head in, and shuddered as another scream rose

from below. Then he slid hastily inside.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FIGHTING A FIEND.

WHEN the Mask left his dingy car in the shadow of the barn, he locked the door behind him and went up to his sleeping quarters. He had been living in the old structure since shortly after the auto thieves had departed. Everything in the old place had been taken away by Butch and his gang, and the Mask had no fear of a sudden raid. He had several possible exits, and the booby traps that he had laid would give him ample warning if any one forced an entrance.

His predecessors had made a sort of bedroom of a narrow little harness closet. Two rough bunks had been knocked together against one wall, and a small table and mirror were opposite them. The single window was carefully covered by several thicknesses of blanket. The Mask lighted his gasoline lantern and switched off his flashlight. The room was very cold. His breath drew a thin jet of fog as he exhaled.

He removed his overcoat and hat and proceeded to rid himself of the bushy mustache that adorned his upper lip. He grunted as the pull of the spirit gum hurt his face. He lifted the dark wig from his bald head and began to wash with cold water from a bucket. Tiny fragments of ice in the water burned against his cheeks, but he scrubbed vigorously with a wet towel until the last vestiges of his disguise had been removed.

The white fringe of hair above his ears stood out in sharp contrast to the vivid pink tint that his Spartan ablutions had given to his face. He rubbed his hands to remove the chill. He looked a very gentle and grandfatherly person as he fished a package and an ugly automatic from his overcoat.

The package contained two boxes of tablets and a hypodermic syringe. They were the reason for the Mask's trip to town. When he planned to abduct Nancy, he had stocked the old barn with everything that he would be apt to need. He intended to stay there with the girl until he got just what he wanted.

Yesterday, however, he had broken the needle of the syringe that he was using, and, since he must go to the city for a new one, he had also taken the opportunity to replenish his supply of drugs. He could not yet see the end of his efforts. The girl had proved much more refractory than he had counted on. He was certain that she knew what he wanted, and he was determined to get it, if he did not kill her first. She was displaying a really marvelous vitality.

He mixed a charge for the syringe and filled the shiny little instrument. Then he took a tumbler of water and proceeded to dissolve two tablets from the other box. It was slow work because of the low temperature of the liquid. He stirred industriously.

When the mixture was ready, he set the tumbler down and took a folded piece of thin rubber from the table drawer. It was a hood, such as made up the main feature of his business dress. He donned it and tucked the edges carefully inside the collar of his shirt. This was nothing more than vanity. The girl had already seen his face, and the sight of the hood could add nothing to the terror that he had already in-

stilled in her. He had made it clear to her that she would die unless she divulged the secret which he wanted. She would die when she did reveal it, but he had not told her that.

He put the case containing the syringe into his pocket, picked up the lantern and tumbler, and was about to leave the room. The light glinted on the blocky outline of the automatic lying on the table. The Mask hesitated, but his hands were full, and there was no need of it anyway. He shrugged and walked out.

The flame of the lantern lighted up the huge loft as the Mask came to the head of the stairway. The rafters and their supporting posts cast heavy, wavering shadows on the distant walls and high ceiling. Bare was the place, long since swept clean of the fragrant piles of hay that it had once contained. The cracks of the rough, uneven floor were thick with a pungent-smelling mixture of dust and old hayseed.

Swiftly, the Mask walked to the center of the floor and started up a ladderlike stairway that wound up past the rafters to the roof, where a room had been built, just below the cupola. Pausing on the narrow landing, he listened before he set down the lantern and opened the door. He picked the light up again and went in, leaving the door wide.

The lantern failed to light up the high peak of the ceiling, but the rest of the room was bright. It was about twelve feet square and bare as a cell, except for a cot, covered with a lumped-up mass of blankets, and a single chair. It was not warm, but a fat kerosene heater, glowing brightly in the far corner, kept away any actual chill. The air was very fresh and a draft came from the opening above.

Placing the lantern and tumbler on the chair, the Mask leaned over the cot. The light gleamed on Nancy's hair as he laid back the blankets. She was huddled in the same position in which he had left her. Her bright head was pillowed on one arm. The other arm was stretched out and fastened, by a handcuff on the wrist, to the head of the cot.

This arm, bare to the elbow, was dotted with tiny red marks where the syringe had punctured the flesh. The angry red swellings about some of the dots showed that they had begun to fester. The Mask had not foreseen this long resistance on the part of the girl and had been anything but careful of her health. He removed the cuff and pulled the girl up into a sitting posture on the edge of the cot.

Nancy looked to be in a piteous condition. Her thin, transparent skin had lost all its color and taken on a yellow, waxy shine. Her clothes were torn and pulled awry. They were stained and dirty, as was her skin. The bare arm was bruised, and there was a dark welt on the side of her neck. Her hair, of which she was always so careful, was snarled and matted. As the Mask raised her up, her eyes half opened as if the lower lids were too weak to stay in place. Her head rolled against the man's shoulder. She was practically unconscious.

The Mask pushed up one of her eyelids and stared through the holes in his hood at the glossy eyeball. It was fixed and bloodshot. The abnormal pupil showed how heavily she was under the influence of drugs. The Mask pushed her head up roughly and reached for the tumbler.

Part of the liquid ran from the corners of her mouth and soaked into the rumpled dress, but he

pressed hard and forced the rim of the glass between her teeth. He made sure that she swallowed some of the drink. When the glass was half emptied, he set it down and shook her cruelly, then bent his head to listen for her heart action.

Nancy's bright hair rolled drunkenly back and forth, but, at last, the muscles of her neck stiffened. She raised her arm with a weak effort and laid it across her captor's neck in an unwitting embrace.

"Ted," she mouthed thickly. "Teddy."

The rubber on the man's face stretched sideways as he snarled. He grabbed the tumbler and fairly slammed it against her pale lips. She swallowed easily and drained the liquid without trouble. He began shaking her again. Her eyes snapped open as the heavy dose took effect. She became almost rigid with the agony of her overloaded heart and tried to focus her gaze on the whitish blotch before her face.

Her mind cleared for a second, and she realized where she was. She threw her head back and screamed. The thin wail that almost startled Toti, crouching on the lofty sill of the hay door, into crashing to the ground. The Mask jerked her to her feet and began to drag her about the room in an effort to keep her from lapsing again into unconsciousness. She roused once more and screamed, then screamed again and collapsed in his arms. The Mask flung her roughly onto the cot and began to swear.

He applied every epithet in his misbegotten vocabulary to the girl and finally began to talk raspingly at the unconscious figure before him. His voice was brittle and harsh, and, in his anger, he ran his words together.

"You'll squeal, will you, you little wench," he cried. "Squeal and be damned! About two more shots, and you'll never feel the needle again. Hold out on me, will you, and keep saying, 'Ted'll get you. Ted'll get you!'" Unconsciously, he mimicked the fear-ridden tones that the girl had used. "I'll get your fool Ted and Swenson, too, if you kick off without telling me. How did they trail me? You'll tell or——"

There was a crash behind him and he whirled, his right hand darting like a snake beneath his coat.

Toti had dropped like a rock from the cupola above and landed, sprawling, on the floor. He gathered his knees beneath him as the Mask gazed, dumfounded, at the sudden arrival of the little Japanese. The Mask withdrew his clenched fist from the empty holster beneath his arm and rapped out an oath.

As Toti scrambled to his feet, the rubber-shrouded head ducked forward, and its owner swung a hard right for the little man's jaw. Toti swayed, and the blow caught him just below the shoulder. Had it landed on his unprotected face, it would have ended the fight before it started. As it was, the whole of the Mask's strength banged his upper arm. Toti's body was too light to resist the shock of the blow. It flung him in a heap against the wall.

Toti drew his legs up instinctively to protect his stomach, and just then the Mask dived forward. It was a clean dive; he left his feet and shot through the air. Toti braced his elbows and drove his shoes at the expressionless hood. His shoe heels smashed into his assailant's face.

The Mask dropped to his knees and grunted. A dull red smear began to spread beneath the rubber, and a thin stream trickled from the hole over the mouth. Toti got to

his feet and closed in warily, his hands hooked and clawing for a hold.

Hurt though he was, the Mask fought him off. With hands, elbows, shoulders, and battered head, he kept the extremely eager Japanese away, while he tried to shake the stabbing pains from his broken face and rid his eyes of the red blood that clouded them. Toti ripped the hood from the Mask's face.

From the crown of his bald head to the torn neckband of his shirt, the Mask was literally oozing blood. It dripped from his smashed nose and crumpled gums and spurted from the broken flesh. He had taken flush in the face all the strength of the Japanese's wiry legs and the force of his own hurtling weight. It was a wonder he could get up, although the blow did not land on his jaw. It had gone home just above his teeth. Two hard leather heels against his nose and the ridges of his eye sockets!

He cleared his eyes with the back of his hands and waited. Then Toti got in too close. The Mask encircled the thin body with his thick arms and crushed. They toppled to the floor. The little man gasped as the Mask brought the full powers of his shoulders to bear.

Toti's flexed back began to give way under the pressure. There was death for him in that bearlike hug.

He fumbled at the corded throat that strained against him. His fingers, sharp and clawing with the strength of terror, could do no more than scratch the skin over the taut muscles. He felt for the more lightly protected hollow just above the collar bone.

At last, with a strength beyond his true powers, he forced through the tense cords and had the bone in the curl of his wiry fingers. The Mask screamed—a bestial, agonized howl—and hugged all the harder. Nancy, half conscious on the cot, peered with sightless eyes at the twisting, straining figures on the floor. Then she buried her face in the dirty blankets and began to sob softly.

Pains like knife slashes were tearing at Toti's back. He squealed as the vertebrae ground against one another and the ligaments stretched. But he held on and worked his fingers deeper into the nerves of the Mask's breast.

Unable to withstand the numbing torture that was paralyzing his chest muscles, the Mask screamed once more and flung the Japanese from him, tearing loose and rolling swiftly to his feet. Toti was on him in an instant. Brown hands with steel-strong fingers closed on the bleeding man's wrist, and the little fellow twisted into a punishing jujutsu hold.

A small bone snapped as the Mask tore loose again. He backed away from his diminutive opponent, panting heavily. His right hand was limp. He cleared the blood from his eyes with his left and tried to dodge as Toti followed up. A wild swing, and the broken hand banged against a blood-smeared brown cheek. Toti staggered back, his head reeling, and his legs collapsed.

The Mask, his stomach filled with the punishment which he had suffered, jumped for the open door! Toti grabbed and managed to trip an ankle as he leaped past. The Mask lost his footing and drove head-first into the darkness of the high loft. There was a sharp splintering of wood as he crashed through the railing which bordered the narrow landing, a piercing yell, a cruel crack as his head struck the corner of an eight-by-six rafter, then

a heavy thump that shook the flooring of the loft. The Mask was through!

Toti rose to his knees, crawled over to the cot, and collapsed. His strained back was paining horribly. One arm was flung protectingly across the shaking body of the girl.

"Mrs. Ted!" he choked out. "Oh! Mrs. Ted!" And then he fainted dead away.

His usually precise clothes were a wreck. Blood from the Mask's wounds was smeared all over his hands, head and chest. His breath whistled through his windpipe in painful bursts as he sank down prone. The light of the lantern glistened in the blood spots on the floor.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOME AGAIN.

IT was after eleven when the door at the back of the old barn finally opened, and brilliant light shot out. After an interval of almost a quarter of an hour, two dark figures lurched out together. Toti, already near the limit of his strength, lowered Nancy's limp form to the ground and tottered off around the barn. He found his discarded fur coat and, managed to get the semiconscious girl into it. Rolling it about her as best he could, he braced himself against the fender of the sedan. He berated himself for having flattened the tire. He could never get the girl as far as the Langley and he hated to leave her while he went for it. There was no other way, so he staggered off.

Time and again, he had despaired of ever getting the sick girl down from the lofty room under the roof. Even her slight body weighed more than his own, and he did not dare risk a trip down the steep stairs with her on his back. He was tired and shaken when he regained consciousness and had been forced to wait for a return of strength before he even dared try the stairs alone. He went down with the lantern, growing ever more terrified because of the sharp angle at which they descended.

On the floor of the loft, he had found the Mask's body. No one could ever identify it now except by its finger prints. Toti's heels had broken the face; contact with a beam had smashed in the skull. The dust, which the shock of the man's fall had raised, had settled over the body, and dirt and chaff were mixed in the congealed blood that covered what had once been a head. Both legs and one arm were broken and twisted beneath the trunk. It was a horrible sight, but Toti gave it but a passing glance. Horror was commonplace to him now. He climbed wearily back for the girl.

Then began the painful process of getting her to the level of the loft floor. She was helpless, but just conscious enough to stir and wriggle at unexpected moments. He had been forced to leave the lantern below in order to have both hands free to grasp her. There was no places on those ladderlike stairs where he could rest. He found her in the dark, and half dragged, half carried her down. The full strain came down onto him every second, and he dared not pause for breath. Indeed, he could not. Once started, he had barely strength enough to keep them both from hurtling down to the floor below. He could only check the fall of the girl's body and pray that by some chance he would not miss the next step.

It seemed hours before he got her

to the main floor and had to leave her in order to find the way out. At last, he got to the basement, only to find the door locked. That had meant a painful climb back to the loft to rifle the dead man's pockets. The body had stiffened already in the cold. Again and again, he wondered if he would ever get his mistress home. Help, a doctor for her, played no part in his mind at first. He was too battered himself to consider much more than the bare facts of returning Nancy to his beloved Mr. Ted Jaffery. At last, he got her from the barn.

He was reeling and staggering by the time he reached the Langley, parked in the deep shadows beneath the trees. His back was torturing him abominably. He swore weakly in Japanese as he tried to start the motor. It was cold and resisted his efforts for a long time. At last, to his relief, it was purring smoothly. He drove into the laneway and around the barn.

Nancy lay just as he had left her. He could hardly drag himself from the car, but, somehow, he got her propped up in the front seat and started off. He drove with painful care over the rough road. On the ground beside the door of the old barn, the pressure lantern flared and began to dim. The door slammed shut in the breeze that had come up.

After the car had reached the smooth main road once more and Toti had enough time to spare from his driving to take notice of his human cargo, he became alarmed. Nancy lolled limply against the back of the seat. The dash light revealed the ghastly pallor of her face, and her lips were almost without hue. Her lower jaw sagged, and her even teeth were exposed by her loose lips.

Toti's heart almost stood still. He stopped the car and felt to see if her heart was beating. It was—faintly. He gasped and stared wildly about. What could he do? He had no idea of what would benefit the girl, spur up that lagging heart and bring the blood back to that flaccid gray mouth. The cold was fatal in her condition, and she looked as though death were not far off. Sobbing aloud, he threw in the gears and started in a mad race for the city.

The accelerator was floored and the big car gathered speed. Toti kept the throttle wide. The speedometer dial revolved—seventy, seventy-five, eighty, and on. The rear wheels skipped and bounded about on the road. Even the slight lumps at the joints in the concrete surface were enough to set the heavy machine to swaying wildly.

Toti, his own discomforts forgotten, drove like a madman. Yet it seemed ages to him before the first lights of the city flashed by. Before he realized, he was in the center of town. The brakes began to squeal a whole block away from the first turn. Happily, he encountered no traffic. The shiny car swayed and rolled dangerously as he forced it around the corners. The brake drums shrieked a wild protest as he slid to a stop before the tall apartment house.

The night porter stared in open-mouthed amazement at the sight that met his eyes. A bedraggled, blood-stained little fellow staggered into the foyer with a body draped over his shoulder. As the porter hurried forward, he recognized the Jaffery's Japanese servant.

Hell had broken loose once that evening when the little fellow had failed to show up on schedule. And now he was reeling through the doorway with a grim figure on his

back. The red hair of the body suggested Mrs. Jaffery. The porter snapped out of his astonished stupor and hastened to relieve the little man of his burden. Toti pushed the boy away from the elevator controls and shot the party upward at top speed.

As the doorbell of the apartment rang, Jaffery, Sr., and Swenson jumped. They had longe since ceased to discuss their troubles and were sitting despondently, hoping for some word of the missing Toti. Mr. Jaffery had waited until late at his office, wondering uneasily what could be keeping his chauffeur. At last, he had called the police and started an inquiry to all the hospitals, in case the car had been in an accident. At ten thirty, Bob Swenson had come to him at the apartment with the evil news that a police dragnet had been unable so far to locate any sign of the car or its driver.

At midnight, there was still no news. It seemed senseless to think that the Mask would kidnap the Jafferys' servant and steal such a noticeable car as a Langley, but what else could have happened? Both men had given Nancy up for good, though neither had dared to put this thought into words. Swenson dashed for the door. A strange sight met their eyes.

The big hall porter had Nancy in his arms—a dirty, disheveled girl, who bore no resemblance to the lost Nancy except for a mop of tangled red hair that snarled about her dangling head. Beneath the accumulated grime, her face resembled gray putty. Her breath came and went in spasmodic gasps, each accompanied by a painful tensing of the muscles of her back, which would rise in a stiff arch and then go limp again. Clinging to the porter's arm was Toti. His eyes were glassy in an expressionless face.

Without a word Swenson took the girl from the porter's arms and carried her to the davenport. Jaffery, Sr., after one horrified look at the drawn face and bloodless lips, was demanding a doctor. His voice, hushed and full of fright, woke the operator below to sudden action.

The door of the bedroom swung open.

"Nancy!" cried the reporter, bounding across the room. He fell to his knees beside the davenport and stared with wide eyes at his wife. "Nancy! Nancy! Kid, what's the matter?"

Swenson pulled him away. "Easy, Ted. She's alive. Don't disturb her till the doctor gets here. Brace up, old man!"

Toti would have slumped to the floor but for the support of the wide-eyed porter.

"Boss!" he gasped as Jaffery, Sr., took him in his arms.

"Are you hurt, Toti?" demanded Ted's father.

"No—boss," stammered the little fellow, his face trembling, and tears beginning to start. "It's just my back."

Swenson came over. "Was it the Mask, Toti?"

The Japanese nodded.

"Where is he?" Swenson's voice was cold and level. His hands were clenched tight, and he was trembling from head to foot. "Tell me where he is, Toti!"

Swenson was startled by the look of utter hatred that came into Toti's face. The Oriental's narrow eyes became mere slits. His teeth were exposed in a whistling, catlike snarl! "Dead! I killed him!"

The face became vacant again, and the little man closed his eyes wearily. Mr. Jaffery was lowering

him gently into a chair when the door opened. It was a doctor who lived in the same building. He had on slippers, and a pair of trousers over his pajamas. Silently, Swenson pointed to the unconscious girl.

After a brief examination, the doctor called for water and began fumbling in his bag. "I think so," he said shortly, in response to their mute question, "but it will be a close shave."

Ted Jaffery was kneeling beside Nancy's head, gazing with wide, horrified eyes at the form of his wife. The heavy fur coat had been laid back, and beneath the rumpled folds of her filthy clothes her breast was laboring in rapid jerks.

In the old barn, a pair of ghostly eyes were shining through the blackness that filled the loft. A great gaunt tomcat, wild and wary as any forest creature, and attracted by the scent of blood was creeping on his stomach. Forward he went, inch by inch. His long ratty tail waved behind him like a snake. Suddenly, it stiffened and stood rigid! The animal outlaw sprang.

The Rubber Mask was done.

THE END.

HARD TIMES FOR BANK ROBBERS

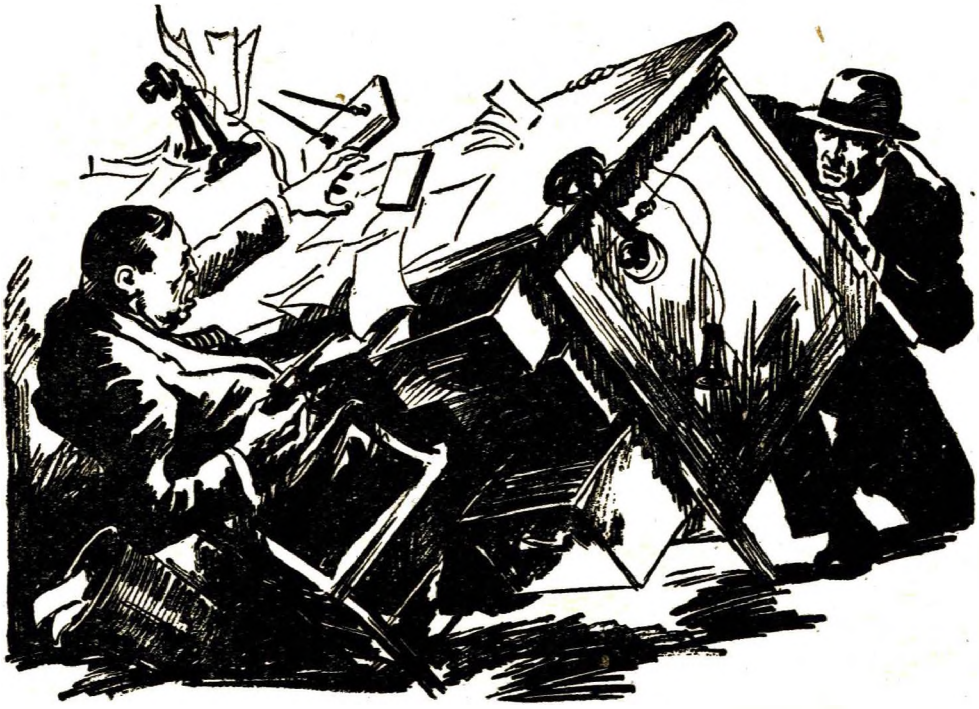
BANK robbers in Illinois have not been having very successful careers since the crime prevention bureau of the Illinois bankers' association took a hand. Its head, R. C. Saunders, was once a chief of police of Des Moines, Iowa, and has spent the greater part of his life running down bank robbers.

According to a recent report, since January 1, 1930, six bandits have been killed, ninety-seven sent to the penitentiary, three electrocuted for murder during robberies, and one electrocuted for killing two policemen while being arrested by them.

Through the crime bureau, the robbers who participated in the Lincoln, Nebraska, National Bank & Trust Co., were caught, and, aided by Chicago's Secret Six, five hundred and eighty-three thousand dollars in negotiable bonds was retrieved. The six kidnaping robbers who specialized in kidnaping a bank president from his home and forcing him to give them entrance to the bank vaults, were caught through the efforts of the Illinois bankers' association.

Another band of terrorizers was the nitro gang who entered banks and threatened to drop a vial of nitro which would blow up the place, if instructions to hand over money were not complied with. The penitentiary holds this gang now.

One of the most important factors which has made Illinois a place bank robbers are keeping shy of, is due to the coöperation between the bankers' association, the police, sheriff, and the Illinois State highway police force. It is the only method by which crime violence will be put down forever in this country. Coöperation is the greatest building factor in any business.



WASTED SHOTS

By FOSTOR HAYES

The crunching of bone against bone gave him a satisfaction for which he had longed.

FROM beside the body of Joe Orsatti, where it lay sprawled in the dust of the alleyway, Kurt Willis arose. He brushed clinging yellow powder from the right knee of his plain black trousers.

"So Joe went visiting. And you say you didn't hear the shots?" Willis asked.

The big-knuckled strong fingers of Patrolman Flannery awkwardly twisted a silver whistle. He tore his eyes away from the dead man to meet, frankly, the cool blue ones of the detective.

"No, sir. I was doing traffic duty right out there." His eyes returned to the body at their feet. The dead man's hat, upside down, lay against the steps, where it had rolled. Between the shoulders of his gray suit, blood was being absorbed. "I didn't hear either of the shots."

"There were six shots," Willis corrected. "They wished the whole gatful on him."

His right hand pinching his jaw until, between his thumb and forefinger, his lower lip jutted forward in an ugly arch, Willis stood for a full moment contemplating the gro-

tesque, huddled heap that had been Joe Orsatti.

A brace of bullets, not three inches apart, had torn into Orsatti's back. Orsatti's right foot lay on the bottom step of three that led to a building door in the alleyway.

It was evident that, at the time he had been shot, Joe Orsatti had been standing in front of that door on the top step. The bullets plowing into his back had twisted him as he slumped, slid down the steps, and landed in the dirt at their base.

The door, a heavy green rectangle of wood in the solid red ugliness of the building, had a buzzer button in the doorway frame to its right. Orsatti must have had his hand on that button when those murderous shots from the back got him.

Shoulder-high in that door were four bullet holes. A circle, four inches in diameter, would have inclosed all of them. Kurt Willis, still caressing his chin, stared thoughtfully at the bullet holes in the door. Flannery followed the detective's gaze, then shoved his cap back on his head, scratched his scalp and murmured, "Well, I'll be damned."

Willis grinned and asked: "Well, what do you make of it?"

"Those first two shots rubbed him out and dropped him."

"Yes," Willis said softly.

"Then why did they waste the other four in the gun? And if they had to empty the gun, why didn't they lower it and pump them into this mug where he lay instead of shooting 'em into the door?"

"Good boy," commended Kurt. "You won't be tied to a traffic post long."

Partly through curiosity, partly to hide his pleased embarrassment, Flannery asked: "What did you say his name was, sir?"

"Orsatti. Joe Orsatti."

Flannery emitted a soft whistle and a respectful grunt.

"Yeah," murmured Willis, "Joe was a pretty big hunk of cheese half an hour ago."

The policeman's long, horselike face was blank.

"So's Monte Figuro," he said. "And this is Monte's playground. Those boys didn't mix it well. Wonder what Joe was doing over here."

"It looks," Willis admitted, "like Joe Orsatti was invited over to attend his own farewell party. Tell me what you saw."

Flannery shrugged his shoulders. "It wasn't such a lot, sir," he said, and grew thoughtful. He nodded fifty feet up the alley that had as its dead end the building in front of which they were standing.

"That's Wilton Street out there. Merrick Avenue's half a block to the left. I was at the intersection of Merrick and Wilton. Wilton was clear of traffic for a block on either side of me, and I was just signaling cars on Merrick to come through when I heard a woman scream.

"I ran down here to that news stand you see right at the entrance of the alley. Almost knocked down the fellow who runs it. He had a stack of papers—returns, I guess—that he was handing to a truck driver who'd pulled up and was parked just beyond the alley."

"Let me get this straight," interrupted Kurt Willis, his shaggy eyebrows snapping down close over narrowed eyes. "This news-stand dealer had stepped out onto the sidewalk with a bundle of papers. There, he gave them to the truck driver."

"Right, sir."

"And that truck was parked several feet away from the entrance to the alley and on this side of the street," continued Kurt Willis.

"Yes, sir."

"So that," concluded Kurt Willis, "if the truck had been a phony distributor's truck, still it was parked away from the entrance far enough so that any one hiding on the truck still couldn't have got a shooting line on Orsatti, here."

"No, sir, they couldn't have."

The detective clutched his chin again and said: "Good. Then what?"

"When I got to the alley entrance, the woman who screamed was running toward me, hugging the side of the warehouse there, and was as white as a sheet. I could see this fellow"—he nudged the dead man with one foot—"lying here. I grabbed the woman and blew my whistle."

Flannery nodded his head in the direction of a second patrolman, who stood now at the alleyway entrance, denying admission to a big crowd eager to look upon a murdered man.

"Patrolman Horton, there, and I questioned her. She swears that she was walking toward Wilton Street when she heard bullets whistle by her, close. Said she heard 'em whine and that there was a popping noise. Said she heard 'em strike behind her, too. She turned around just in time to see Orsatti here fall and roll over on his face."

"Where is she now?" asked Kurt Willis.

"They're keeping her for us in the restaurant out there. On ice, I guess," the policeman said, with a grin. "She passed out on us after everything was over."

"You know her?" Willis wanted to know, and then frowned.

"Name's Martha Walsh. She's half cracked and liable to be walking in anybody's alley."

Kurt Willis raised his eyebrows and said: "Oh, that kind!"

"Yeah," replied Flannery. "She makes a devil of a witness, but it's a cinch she isn't connected with this, anyway, and I believe for once she told us the truth. She was too scared to lie."

"Well," Kurt Willis said, with a shrug, "what she says ought to be important. She was walking right near the bullets that had Orsatti's name on. What did she see?"

Flannery's words tumbled through a wry grimace that his thin young lips were making.

"That's just it, sir," he muttered. "She should have seen the whole business. But she swears that there was no one in the alley but her, that there was no one in the entrance, and that there was no one on the other side of the street when she heard the lead sing past her."

Small knots stood out on either side of Willis's cheeks at the hinges of his jaw.

"Well, somebody must have seen something," Willis said. "The news dealer's your next best bet. How about him?"

Flannery shook his head sadly and muttered: "Nope, he's out as a witness. He says he didn't hear a thing, and I know he didn't see anything because he's blind—blind as a bat."

The detective stared down the alleyway whence the bullets had come. He looked thoughtfully at the corner of the news stand that projected out sidewise from the street into the alley entrance. When he spoke, there was a hint of steel in his tone.

"A swell set-up. Orsatti's bumped off in broad daylight by some gunman who used a silencer on his rod. If your friend Martha heard the slugs singing and the gun pop, she must have been a little more than halfway up the passage."

"Yes, sir," Flannery replied. "That's what she told me." He pointed and continued:

"Right up there where you see that tin can. About thirty feet from here."

"And on the side of the alley opposite the news stand?" Kurt Willis asked quizzically.

"That's right."

Willis shot staccato questions now.

"That places Martha, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And it places the murderer, too, doesn't it? He must have been about fifty feet from here, near the news stand. Right?"

"I guess so, sir," Flannery answered.

"But he wasn't in the street or you'd have seen him?" persisted Kurt Willis.

"Yes, sir. I'd have seen him—and I didn't."

"And he wasn't in the alley crouched next to the stand, or Martha would have seen him, wouldn't she?"

"I'd say she would have, sir."

"What's the news dealer's name?" asked Kurt Willis.

"Peter Brancato."

Silkily consoling was Kurt Willis's tone as he kept up his barrage of questions. His eyes were averted, his face expressionless as he asked softly: "There's a lot of graft in this precinct, eh, officer?"

Flannery, answering automatically, now, said: "Yes, sir." Then he checked himself and looked suddenly startled. "I mean, sir——" He stopped and gulped.

The eyes of Kurt Willis were unsmiling, his voice flat.

"You mean just what you said. And you can forget that I asked you."

The traffic cop looked confused, tugged at his left sleeve, and said: "Yes, sir."

"You didn't see the murderer. Martha didn't see him, and the blind news dealer, Brancato, didn't hear him. Therefore, he must have been unreal, eh?"

Flannery blushed and answered: "It doesn't make much sense, does it?"

Aloud, half to himself, Kurt Willis said: "An invisible one."

Excitement leaped into the young patrolman's face.

"That's it, sir!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"What's what?" Willis demanded.

"The Invisible One. That's the one who would have ordered Joe Orsatti bumped off. That's who gives orders to all of 'em in the fourth precinct here, from Figuro down."

Mild interest lighted Kurt Willis's eyes. "And who is this Invisible One?"

"No one knows—not even Monte Figuro, they say—the Invisible One, but he collects the money from the racketeers who have this place tied up. Figuro has it tied up. Orsatti was trying to cut in. So was Salvatore Muni, another gangster. And Orsatti ran into the Invisible One."

Kurt Willis chuckled and glanced thoughtfully down at Orsatti's reddening back. "Well, there's nothing invisible about the ammunition he uses."

Willis looked at the green door where the bullets had struck. High in one corner, a cobweb had formed between the door and doorway. Directly over the frame were the numerals, 333.

"Whose joint is this and what is it?" he demanded.

"Used to belong to Salvatore Muni. Was a gang hangout and speakeasy. But it hasn't been used

in months. They called it the Three Treys."

"There was no love lost between Muni and Orsatti," Willis said.

Voices floated to the two men down the alley. At the entrance, the patrolman on guard was admitting half a dozen men. Two of them were patrolmen carrying a stretcher; one of them, a little short man in civilian clothing, an assistant medical examiner. The remaining three were in plain clothes.

In the court formed by the buildings, Kurt Willis could catch the voice of the patrolman at the entrance as he said: "Good afternoon, Inspector Armstrong. He's back there."

Willis kept his eyes on the inspector as he came back to where the dead man's body lay. The inspector paid no attention to Willis or the traffic policeman beside the body. He stared at the dead man and looked pleased.

"It's Joe Orsatti," he said to the detectives who were with him.

The inspector was a huge, broad man. His florid face was covered with a graying stubble. His eyes were small and dark. Fat swelled in layers above his collar as he bent his head to look at the slain man. He turned from his inspection to focus gimlet eyes on Kurt Willis's companion.

"Patrolman Flannery, sir," the traffic policeman said, introducing himself.

The inspector's head swung until his eyes stopped full upon Kurt Willis. "Who is this man?" he asked in a cold voice.

Willis stepped forward, extended a hand, and said: "Detective Kurt Willis is the name. I'm on a roving commission out of the central office. Happened to run in on this, while wandering in your district, Inspector Armstrong. If I can give you a lift——"

The pudgy hand which Inspector Armstrong stuck out was limp and unfriendly.

"Thanks," he said icily, "but you're just wasting your time. We can break our own cases in this district. You can go back to headquarters and tell them that Salvatore Muni is the guy who bumped off Orsatti here, and we've got Salvatore locked up over at the station now."

Willis, in a bored, flat tone, said: "Sorry. Didn't mean to butt in. But I didn't know it was as simple as that."

"Sure," grunted the inspector. "Open and shut. We picked up Salvatore while he was trying to get away. It's open and shut, so you can go home."

Anger blazed for a moment in Kurt Willis's eyes before he said evenly: "Thanks, but I'm sticking around."

"Suit yourself," snapped the inspector and turned to the medical examiner who now was bent over the body. "When you get the bullets dug out, doc, send 'em in for a test. I think I know where to lay my hands on the gun that fired them."

As the inspector, motioning to his two precinct detectives, walked away, Kurt Willis trailed along behind. They went into a restaurant and came out with the woman Patrolman Flannery had said screamed in the alley at the time of the shooting. She was a bedraggled, wretched-looking creature well past middle age.

"We're taking you along, Martha," the inspector was telling her.

For a moment, he questioned her outside, and, in that moment, a man in a light-gray cap stopped in front

of Willis. "Got a light, partner?" Then he fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette.

"It's O. K., Dale," Willis said.

The man in the gray cap grinned, relaxed, and asked: "What's up, Kurt?"

"Joe Orsatti's been shot," said Willis. "Stick around."

The inspector walked past Kurt Willis and the man in the gray cap, who was Kurt's partner, Dale Sommerset, to the news stand. The two detectives put the woman, who struggled between them, into a squad car parked at the curb.

"Hear anything about half an hour ago, Brancato?" the inspector asked the blind news dealer.

"Not a thing, inspector," the news dealer said, handing Inspector Armstrong a copy of an afternoon paper.

Willis watched as the inspector and the news dealer talked softly for a moment. Then he said to Dale Sommerset: "Come on," and walked over toward the stand.

"Taking him along as a material witness, too, Inspector Armstrong?" asked Willis.

The inspector turned disapproving eyes upon Kurt Willis, tucked a package that the news dealer had given him under his arm, and said: "What good would a blind witness do us?"

Willis, looking curiously inside the newspaper booth, asked: "Why a phone in a news stand, Brancato?"

The inspector turned and walked away.

"Are you a detective, sir?" the blind man asked.

Willis walked around, let himself in the stand, and placed the news dealer's fingers upon his badge. As the man ran thin, sensitive fingers over it, Willis struck a match and waved it slowly before his staring, sightless eyes. They did not waver.

"You're blind, all right. But why the phone?" asked Willis.

The news dealer's voice was pleading.

"Frankly, sir," he explained, "I take a few bets here. On horses you know. Just small bets. That phone is a direct line to the bookmaker's office."

Kurt Willis, down on his knees inside the stand, apparently looking at some magazines piled against the back of the booth, grunted.

"Don't you know that's against the law?" snapped Willis.

"Yes, sir," the blind man said as Willis poked an exploratory finger through a hole in the boards that formed the back of the booth. "But I scarcely make enough, sir, on the papers. I have a wife."

In a matter-of-fact tone, Willis spoke to his partner, Dale Sommerset: "Call a wagon. When it gets here, have this man taken over to the twelfth precinct station house."

"Have a heart, Willis," Dale pleaded. "Don't take it out on this poor guy because that inspector burned you up."

"Shut up," said Willis, "and do as I say."

The blind man's voice rose in a pleading wail as Dale Sommerset walked to a box.

"But my papers, sir? I've got to sell my papers."

In a more kindly tone, Willis said: "My partner will handle your stand while you're gone."

When Dale Sommerset returned, he asked: "What next, Willis?"

"Stay here," Willis said, "and try to sell lots of papers."

Kurt Willis walked back into the alleyway. The body of the slain Orsatti was being removed as he reached the scene of the crime. The medical examiner, through with a cursory inspection of the body, was

about to leave when Willis reached his side and identified himself.

"The bullets went in at a funny angle, didn't they, doc?" he asked.

The medical examiner, a jovial little man, removed his pince-nez, turned Willis around, and prodded him in the back with them.

"One went in here," he said. "Another here. Both of them ranged slightly upward. Until I probe, I can't be sure, but I think they must be .45s."

"Thanks, doc," said Willis. "Tell me, could they have been fired from a second-story window?"

The doctor grinned broadly and said: "Not unless Mr. Orsatti was standing on his head at the time."

"Not Mr. Orsatti," Willis rejoined. "His specialty was standing coppers on their heads." The detective's face grew serious. "But there's a little problem in angles I wish you'd figure for me, doc, as soon as possible."

In brief, Detective Willis explained what he wanted. When he had finished, the doctor said: "Certainly. I'll call you. Where can I reach you?"

"I'll be in Inspector Armstrong's office," Willis replied.

For a time after the medical examiner had gone, Willis stood there. Then he went to a neighborhood store and purchased a ball of twine and a tape line. For nearly three quarters of an hour, he was busy.

When he had finished, he knew the distance from the alley entrance to the step on which Joe Orsatti had been standing when the two bullets pierced him. He knew, too, the height of the bullet holes in the door from that top step.

He went out of the alley, turned to the right, continued for half a block, and turned to the left. Then he walked for half a block more and turned to the left, ascended a short flight of steps, and entered the Clinton Street station house.

"Well?" a uniformed lieutenant at a desk behind a railing asked.

"I'm Detective Willis from headquarters. Where's Inspector Armstrong's office?" Willis queried.

"Up the stairs, last door to your left at the end of the corridor," the policeman said. "But he's back in the lock-up, now."

Willis sat down, lighted a cigarette, and said: "I'll wait."

It was half an hour later that the inspector came into the office, breathing heavily through thick lips. There was a look of displeasure in his eyes, but only a meaningless flatness in his voice as he turned to Willis and said: "Still with us?"

Willis flipped his fifth cigarette across the floor, stuck his hands in his pockets, and leaned back.

"Still with you, Inspector Armstrong," he said as the police official sat down on the bench beside him.

The puffy half-moons beneath the inspector's eyes rose to meet drooping lids as the inspector said: "I'm sorry about this afternoon, Detective Willis. Didn't mean to be nasty. But a man resents an outsider, no matter who he represents, coming into his district to tell him how to conduct a murder investigation. You know how it is."

"Yeah, inspector, I know how it is," Willis said softly.

The inspector pulled a heavy pistol from his hip pocket. He broke it. It contained the shells of six cartridges that had been fired.

"There's the murder gun," he said.

Kurt Willis ignored the weapon that was extended toward him.

"Yes," he said.

"Sure," said the inspector. "Got it out of a side pocket of Salvatore Muni's car. He admits he drove by

the alley where Joe was shot this afternoon."

"That's not a confession, inspector," Willis said.

"No," the inspector admitted. "But we'll get that. Half an hour more, and he'll sign all the papers we can draw up. It's the clearest case I've ever handled. He wanted Orsatti out of the way so he could take things over. It's open and shut."

"Maybe it just looks that way," murmured Willis.

The inspector was on his feet, his eyes flashing hotly.

"Just who the hell are you, and what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Kurt Willis grinned and said in a hard voice: "Take it easy, inspector. If you want to know who I am, call the commissioner. If he isn't in, call Simon of the Hornwell legislative committee investigating dirty politics in this man's town. They'll tell you to treat me gently, inspector—even take orders from me."

The inspector's face was purple. "Before I kick you out of here," he said, "you can tell me what you're snooping around for."

"You're not kicking any one around this afternoon," Willis assured him evenly. "There's a man in this district who runs things. He's called the Invisible One. He ordered Orsatti shot this afternoon, and I'm looking for him."

The inspector's lips curled in a sneer.

"You believe everything you read in the newspapers, don't you? I suppose the guy who shot Orsatti was invisible, too?"

"Sure," Kurt Willis answered. "Ask Martha."

The inspector turned angrily on his heel.

"Just a minute," said Willis. "I took the liberty of telling some one who will phone me here that they could get me on your phone. Don't mind, do you, inspector?"

The inspector glared and said: "I suppose it's all right."

"Good," said Willis. "Another thing. I want to talk to Salvatore Muni, now."

"Go ahead," said the inspector. "But don't let him do the invisible act on you and slip out through the bars."

When Willis had been led into the large cell occupied by Salvatore Muni, he looked the racketeer over carefully. What he saw was a man of medium height, dressed in a neat brown suit. The man was young. He had curly black hair. His skin was swarthy, his eyes large.

"What's the trouble, Salvatore?" Willis asked.

Salvatore glared at Kurt Willis. "Go to the devil!" he said, and looked away.

Willis grinned. "I'm your friend," he said softly.

"Go on," said Salvatore. "Go into your dance. I know. Your just a big brother. These other cops rubber-hose me till I drop, then you come back and cry. Yeah, you feel sorry for me. So what? So I'm supposed to tell you all about it. Well, I've said all I'm gonna say right now."

"Don't be an idiot, Muni. You're a slam guy. I'm not from this precinct, and I know who bumped off Orsatti and how it was done. There's just one question I want answered. How did you happen to be over here this afternoon?"

Salvatore Muni lighted a cigarette. Words and smoke tumbled from between his curled lips.

"I just came over to pick violets," he said.

Muscles flexed in his face for a moment, then Kurt Willis said: "I'm shooting for big game, Muni. I'll give you proof that you didn't shoot Orsatti and you can tell your lawyer."

"I'm all ears," said Muni sarcastically.

"Well, I hope you have enough between them to get this," Willis told him. "Joe Orsatti was plugged by some one who shot at him six times. Two of those bullets were in his back, three inches apart. They went in on an upward slant. The last four hit the door of your former joint, the Three Treys. If Orsatti had not dropped, they'd have been in his back not more than an inch or so from where the two first ones hit him.

"In other words, Muni, the hand that held that gat was steady, too steady. There are two reasons why you couldn't have been the trigger man. In the first place, you couldn't have shot that many bull's-eyes that fast from an auto sixty feet away in the street; in the second place, had you been shooting Orsatti, you would have followed him down with the gun as he dropped, instead of shooting over him into the door."

Muni sat up in his bunk and crushed his cigarette against the wall.

"And there's probably a third reason," Willis went on. "I haven't a report yet, but, if those bullets were fired at the angle I believe and from the distance of the street, they would have had to be fired by a gun not more than a foot from the ground. And the woman who heard the bullets, who was in the alley at the time, didn't see any one in the street. Tell that to your lawyer and watch him spring you."

"You're giving it to me straight?" Muni asked hoarsely.

"Straight as they come," said Willis.

Muni sat silent for a moment. When he spoke, he said: "I was called over here by phone this afternoon. Some one said a friend of mine—I won't tell you his name—wanted to see me. I was told to be there at a certain time and drive around the block. I did—three times. It took me by this station house.

"The third time I go by here, out rolls a squad car full of dicks. I gave 'em a swell chase, but they nailed me and locked me up. Then they came back here and said I killed Orsatti. They flashed a gun on me I never saw before and tried to make me say it was mine."

Willis grinned and rapped on the bar for the turnkey. "You'll be out of here. If you got a date to-night, don't break it."

When the turnkey had let him out, Kurt Willis walked toward the front of the station until he came to a stairway. He turned, climbed the stairs to the second floor, and walked straight back to a corridor until he came to a door marked "Inspector's Office—Private." Without knocking, he turned the knob and walked in.

Inspector Armstrong, seated at his desk, wheeled about in a swivel chair.

"Sorry to bust in," said Willis. "Any call for me?"

The phone rang and Inspector Armstrong took it up and said, "Hello." Then he held it out. "Here you are," he muttered.

"Thanks," Kurt Willis murmured, and began a monosyllabic conversation. After a while, he said: "Can you give me an estimate on the sixty-foot distance?"

During the two minutes that he waited, he paid no attention to the

inspector. He was staring, with fascinated eyes, out the window. Then he spoke into the phone. "Much obliged," he murmured and hung up.

"Well, Willis," began the inspector, motioning the detective to a chair before the desk, "got any theory about the big murder mystery and the Invisible One?"

Willis replaced the phone he had been using beside a second phone on the inspector's desk and took the chair.

"You mean, do I know who shot Joe Orsatti, why he was shot, and how he was shot?"

The inspector leaned forward. "That's what I mean."

"The answer is 'yes' to all three questions," Willis said.

"I've plenty of time," the inspector said. "I wouldn't mind hearing——"

"You're going to hear," Willis interrupted. "The situation was something like this. Joe Orsatti and Salvatore Muni were ambitious racketeers who wanted to get a hand on your territory here. That wouldn't make them very friendly, would it?"

"Of course not," agreed the inspector. "That's why we've got the goods on Muni."

"You're forgetting some one," Willis said. "Monte Figuro is the big shot in this district. That makes it a triangle."

"You're all wet, Willis," the inspector said. "Figuro's just a small-time gambler."

"We'll skip that," Willis said. "I say, and the newspapers say, that Figuro is the gent with the toe hold in this district. Orsatti and Muni were the small fry who were trying to cut in for control.

"They stepped on Figuro's toes, and Figuro, who is paying an official in this bailiwick to keep other racketeers off his toes, beefs to this official who is known as the Invisible One."

"Still sticking to that invisible nonsense?" asked the inspector.

"Yes," said Willis. "It was a nice set-up this afternoon. Orsatti gets a call to come to the Three Treys, and, while he stands at the door, he's shot down. Salvatore Muni gets a call to drive over there at the same hour, and he's picked up on suspicion of having murdered Orsatti.

"That gets two points of the triangle out of the way. Orsatti is shot to death; Muni is put away for the shooting. Figuro holds this territory and keeps paying graft to a corrupt official called the Invisible One and every one's satisfied. Every one, that is, except the Hornwell legislative committee that detailed me to find out who the Invisible One is."

Inspector Armstrong looked at Kurt Willis through eyes that were narrow slits.

"Assuming this fantastic story is correct and that Muni is innocent, then who is the murderer, Willis?"

"Peter Brancato," Willis answered.

The inspector leaned back in his swivel chair. His loud guffaws filled the room. Then the chair clacked as he snapped forward.

"Why, man!" he shouted incredulously. "Orsatti and Muni were underworld competitors. Orsatti is killed at the door of a place that used to be Muni's speakeasy. Muni is cruising around in the neighborhood at the time of the killing. He drove by the alley where the murder was committed and shot as he drove. He was within sixty feet of Orsatti. And you expect a jury to swallow your story that a blind man fired the shots that killed Joe Orsatti—that a stone-blind news dealer is the murderer?"

"Why not?" Kurt Willis asked evenly. "I examined the news stand. The left corner of it projected from the side of a building into the alley. A hole was drilled at a special angle nine inches from the ground in the backboard of that news booth just where it stuck out into the alley. The gun had been firmly wedged into that hole in advance. The hole held the gun so that it was aimed directly upon the door to the Three Treys."

"And I suppose," snarled Inspector Armstrong, "that Joe Orsatti got there on the dot of an appointed hour, and that an alarm clock rang, and the blind man stooped down behind the magazines and pulled the trigger of the gun?"

Willis watched the inspector with careful eyes. "Nope, it wasn't quite like that. The man who ordered Orsatti's murder stood at a window that gave him a clear view of the Three Treys. When he saw Orsatti arrive at the door, he rang Brancato on a direct phone. That's why Brancato had a phone in his booth. And when he heard it ring, he began pulling the trigger. He didn't attempt —didn't have to attempt—to aim the gun. It was already set to score a kill.

"That's why he fired four shots—four useless shots—over Orsatti's head. He couldn't see, naturally, when his man dropped."

"I'll stick to Salvatore Muni," the inspector said.

Kurt Willis smiled a hard smile. "Better forget him, inspector. That call I just got was from the medical examiner's office. They determined the angle of the bullets in Orsatti's body. I gave them the distance of the gun from the body and the angle at which the hole held it. And they told me how high that hole had to be in the backboards of the news booth. Nine inches. You see, it checks, inspector."

The inspector's voice rasped: "The ballistics expert will show that the gun I took from Muni's car is the murder gun. Where will that leave your case?"

"Right where it was. Because that gun didn't come from Muni's car. You got it from the blind news dealer after the shooting and tried to plant it and the Orsatti murder on Muni."

Inspector Armstrong's arm suddenly went inside his open blouse. Kurt Willis shoved himself forward out of his chair. The gun blazed as he suddenly dropped behind the desk.

Squatted on his haunches, Willis heard the gun crash a second time. Then, hands against the desk, with all the strength that was in his legs, he came up. The desk came with him, toppled noisily over on its side, and pinned the inspector against the wall.

As he straightened out to his full six feet, Kurt Willis swept his left hand down. The gun clattered out of Armstrong's grip. Willis swung with his right and felt the satisfying sting of bone upon bone as he crashed home upon Armstrong's chin. The inspector's head bounced against the wall with a sharp thud. He slumped to the floor.

Kurt Willis reached over and picked up a phone. A voice said: "Number, please," and he hung up. He picked up a second phone, held the receiver to his ear, and heard nothing. Then he located a push button on the overturned desk. He pressed the button just as he heard the noise of footsteps in the corridor.

Some one was pounding on the door of Armstrong's office as Willis heard the voice of his partner, Dale

Sommerset, coming to him over the wire from Brancato's news stand.

Willis said into the phone: "You can lock up and go home now, Dale."

Dale's voice said: "Getting anywhere with the Orsatti shooting, Willis?"

Willis, rubbing his cheek with the mouthpiece of the phone, looked out of Inspector Armstrong's office window. From where he stood, he could see the rectangle that was the door of the Three Treys gleaming green in the rays of the afternoon sun.

"Sure, Dale," he said softly into the phone. "This Orsatti thing's a pipe. It's open and shut."

HAS HIMSELF KILLED

THERE is great mystery concerning the death of a Hungarian wine merchant who was recently found murdered in the compartment of a train near the city of Kecskemet. The man's head had been bashed in by a hammer, and, when police stumbled upon him quite by accident, he was not entirely gone, but did not recover consciousness before he died.

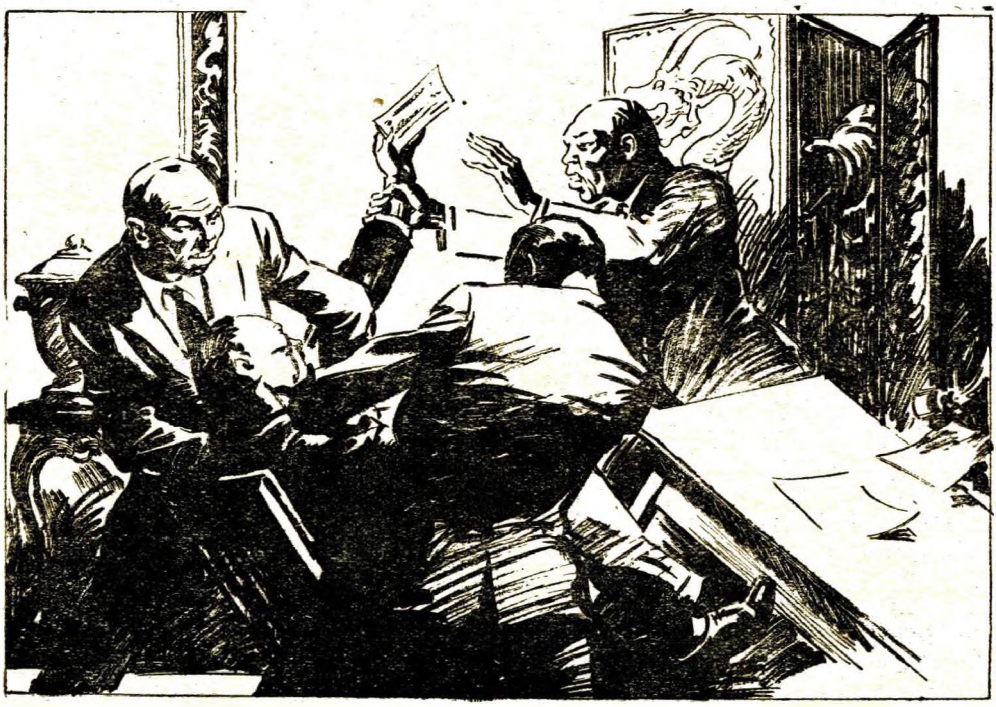
Looking into the man's life, authorities found that he was in financial difficulties and had, not long before, taken out an insurance policy for one hundred thousand dollars in favor of his family. The agent who made out the insurance policy said that the wine merchant had offered him several thousand dollars if he would kill him on the day the insurance contract was signed. The agent could not believe the merchant was serious and thought he had a peculiar sense of humor.

The only thing that had been taken from the murdered man's person was a gold watch which had been in his family for many years. Money was left intact in his pocketbook. While the police were busy trying to straighten out the tangle, a young man who had formerly been secretary to the wine merchant, arrived at the Soviet legation in Vienna and presented the gold watch of the merchant, saying he had come for his money and ticket to Moscow.

The story which the young man told was that he was a Communist and had been arrested several times, that his employer had had secret connections with Soviet Russia, and had instructed him to appear at the legation with the watch when he would receive five thousand dollars "after he had completed a certain job." He went on to say that the certain job was the murder of the merchant, but that he had not been able to help himself, since his employer had hypnotized him so that he had committed the deed, knowing what he was doing but being unable to desist.

Two prominent alienists have examined the young man and disagree in their verdict. One believes the man is crazy, and the other believes him to be sane and that he deliberately killed the wine merchant for money. The testimony of the insurance agent, however, would seem that the merchant had strange ideas, and bears out to some degree the hypnotic theory.

It is generally conceded by mind specialists that no one can influence another to kill unless that person has already thought about and planned the murder while in a conscious state.



THE FALL OF CHUM YOW

(A True Crime Story)

By CYRUS CHAPIN

How a former victim of Chum Yow got him in the place he least expected.

TIN BOW toiled for five long years in the rice fields near Marysville before he repaid Chum Yow the price of his passage from China to California. After paying the rice farmer, Mow Lee, for whom he worked, for his rice and tea and a corner of the hay barn in which to sleep, he found himself possessed of a stake of three hundred dollars.

"I have been robbed by that villain, Chum Yow," said Tin Bow to his farmer boss.

"You have," Mow Lee responded, "but you still have youth. You are but twenty-three and have innumerable moons to travel before the final count. From this day, I will

pay you fifty dollars per month and give you a generous share of rice and tea and a place to sleep. In fifteen years, you will have enough to return to our native land, marry, and retire to a happy life of tranquillity."

Tin Bow reflected. To his youthful mind, fifteen years was an age. And he had emigrated to America expecting to find much gold for the taking in the hills of California.

"I thank you for your offer," he told Mow Lee, "but I cannot accept it. I shall take my small capital and journey to the Oroville district, where I will wash out the placer gold."

"May good fortune attend you!" answered Mow Lee. "One word of advice from an old man. Secure the hands of others to toil for you. This is the secret of success. Many of our countrymen are broke because of gambling and drink, and sometimes opium. Their misfortune may be your gain. Secure small plots of ground by lease on the royalty basis, and stake others with provisions and tools, and give them half the gold they wash from the sand and gravel."

Tin Bow traveled to Oroville and tramped around the surrounding country. He saw huge dredgers at work, eating their several ways through the outlying districts of the town, like monsters, belching forth countless tons of the rocky soil, for a reward of a few cents per cubic yard in—gold! Tin Bow gleaned certain accurate data from his countrymen, and finally selected three small plots of ground, on royalty leases.

One of these plots he would work himself. The other two he soon found workers for—fellow countrymen who jumped at the chance to get all the rice and tea they could eat, and tools with which to work, on a fifty-fifty basis. Across each plot of ground, a narrow mountain stream wound downward into the valleys.

The first day's work was celebrated in Tin Bow's makeshift cabin, where he regaled his two workers with a feast of shark fins, roast young pig, rice, tea, and a modest amount of China gin. But, though he said nothing to his two guests about it, Tin Bow knew himself to be broke. He had equipment and provisions enough to run his men and himself a month. If, at the end of that time, a fair amount of virgin gold would not be wrested from Mother Earth, Tin Bow's sun would set in darkness. It was at such times as this that he thought of the villain, Chum Yow, and how he had defrauded him of not less than one thousand hard-earned dollars.

To the extreme delight of Tin Bow, at the end of thirty days he had, as his share of the placer, the sum of one hundred and eighty American dollars. He again loaded up with a store of provisions, and left over a hundred dollars on deposit with the Oroville bank to which he had sold his gold dust and a few small nuggets. In this work of mining, there was always the fascinating possibility ahead, of striking a large nugget or a pocket.

The second month's work ran about the same in profit as the first one. Tin Bow, from this time on, gradually extended his operations. He added other plots of ground on royalty leases and hired more men to work them. His success was in the ascendant. At the end of the year, the Oroville bank held to his credit five thousand dollars in cash. In Oroville's Chinatown, he was looked upon as a rich man, and one

upon whom the Goddess of Fortune smiled as upon a favorite son.

Success did not go to his head, for Tin Bow still worked his own plot of ground himself. It became his pleasure to buy a few acres from the fruit and olive grower who owned the ground, and build a snug log cabin thereon. Here he made it a practice to entertain his workers, now numbering more than a dozen, at a monthly feast. At the end of his second five years in California, he went to San Francisco, stopping at the rice farm near Marysville to see his old friend and employer, Mow Lee.

"I have heard of your wonderful success," said Mow Lee. "I presume you are now on your way home to China."

"No," responded Tin Bow. "I am taking but a few days' holiday and visiting San Francisco's Chinatown, of which I have heard wonderful tales. And, while there, it will be my pleasure to look upon the face of that evil Chum Yow who took advantage of my youth to make me sign that paper which robbed me of at least four years of toil."

Mow Lee shook his ancient head. "Revenge is for the gods alone," quoth he. "There is an English quotation much similar to one of ours, which reads: 'The mills of the gods grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.'"

"I see no reason," responded Tin Bow, "why one should not help the gods when an occasion presents itself. However, I go not to the city for purposes of revenge. I go but for my short holiday, and, should I meet Chum Yow, I may but look upon his vile face and nothing more, or perchance I may see fit to pass some remark which will make him envious of my success."

Arrived in San Francisco, Tin Bow boarded a Sacramento Street cable car which led westward and up the hill through Chinatown. He carried a suitcase containing his best suit. He alighted from the car at Grant Avenue and walked up and down various streets and alleys, his eyes alight with pleasure at seeing so many things that reminded him of his own country. He took his time about securing quarters for the night, for the day was still young. He stopped before one building of four stories, with a pagodalike roof. The front of the structure had been done in Chinese fashion and displayed gay colors and signs done in red and black and gold leaf.

"I would be perfectly happy if I owned a building like that," he remarked to a strange Chinaman standing close to him. He had spoken to this man because he felt the need of talking to some one in his native tongue. A few friendly remarks passed between the pair.

Now, though Tin Bow knew it not, a tall man of fifty, dressed in the latest American-tailored clothes, who stood across the street, had instructed Tin Bow's chance acquaintance to get on as friendly terms as possible with the visitor carrying the suitcase. The Chinaman in the fine clothes had not recognized Tin Bow, after a lapse of ten years, but he had seen in the countryman with the suitcase one who might be inveigled into a gambling den and through other questionable means relieved of his savings. He—for it was no other than Chum Yow—had certain satellites ever on the watch for Chinese farm hands who visited the city to spend their carefully hoarded wages.

It developed that the man with whom Tin Bow conversed was one Lee Goon. They exchanged intro-

ductions. Lee Goon's offer to pilot Tin Bow to a hotel for the night was accepted. They went together to the Red Moon Hotel on Grant, diagonally opposite from the building Tin Bow had so much admired. When Tin Bow told Lee Goon his name, the latter remembered having heard of the rich Chinaman of the Oroville district.

"I have heard of you many times," remarked Lee Goon, "and, if it is your desire to own the building across the street, it may be easily acquired by the payment of a modest sum. You are rich, and it is for the rich to possess all that pleases them."

Tin Bow laughed. "Though I am from the country and know nothing about the city, I feel quite sure that such a grand palace of a building as the one across the way can never be mine. It would cost far too much. I have only——" He hesitated; but, being inexperienced, thought it was safe to talk to the friendly Lee Goon, who was respectably dressed and looked innocent enough.

"How much?" asked Lee Goon innocently.

Tin Bow made a rapid mental calculation. From his total capital, he subtracted the amount he considered enough to support him in affluence, should he decide to return to China in the next year. "I have, in case I should see fit to buy property in San Francisco," replied Tin Bow, "twenty-odd thousand dollars in cash in the Oroville bank."

"A good round sum," responded his new friend. "I know that the building may be had for less than it is worth, but I will have to go and find out the exact price. I will return, and, no matter what happens, you are to lunch with me at the Shanghai Low Café." The pair agreed on the hour of one p. m. as suitable for them to meet at the café, and Lee Goon left the room.

"He will not be able to buy for me any such building as the one across the way for twenty thousand dollars," mused Tin Bow. "Nor have I made any promises as yet. I shall make inquiries."

Tin Bow took a bath and changed into his new raiment. He then descended to the street and accosted a friendly looking police officer. He spoke to him in the best pidgin English at his command.

"I have look-see San Flancisco first time here. I mine gold Oroville way. I have few dollah. Maybe so I buy me place here." He pointed at the building in question. "How much you think him cost?"

"I dunno," replied the policeman. "I see a sign in the window saying Landry C. Babin has it for sale. It's all rented. The owner just died. I'm guessing at it, but I should say, if I had a hundred thousand dollars, I'd buy it in a minute. But, mind you, that's only a wild guess. You'd better see Mr. Babin. He's honest, and is agent for most of the Chinatown stuff."

This wise policeman did not take it carelessly for granted that, because a man was a chink, he could not have the cash with which to buy a building. One never knew.

"T'ank you much," answered Tin Bow. "You likee cigar?" The policeman accepted the invitation, and Tin Bow treated him to three twenty-five-cent cigars at a near-by stand. They parted friends.

At one p. m. Tin Bow met Lee Goon at the entrance to the Shanghai Low Café. They went upstairs and lunched at a private table. They ate plentifully of roast duck, pork, rice, and tea. They then went

to Landry C. Babin's office, 423 Kearny Street. At the entrance they were met by a young, dapper fellow who shook hands with Tin Bow and handed him a card of the firm.

"I am Mr. Babin's right-hand man," said he, "and my name is George Fletcher. You may have that building for twenty thousand dollars, which is a ridiculously low price. But you must act quickly. At once—in fact, before the day is finished. Say we meet at the Shanghai Low, in one of the private rooms, at eight to-night, and be sure you have the money if you don't want this fine chance to slip."

Tin Bow wanted to buy the grand building, but he told Lee Goon his money was in the bank at Oroville. Lee Goon took him to the Canton Bank, who at once telegraphed the Oroville bank asking if it would honor Tin Bow's check for twenty thousand dollars. A reply came at once with a perfectly satisfactory O. K.

"We will meet to-night as agreed," said Lee Goon. "Meanwhile, have your check ready and signed, and be sure it is made out to cash." The pair then made a short visit to the building Tin Bow was to purchase, and the new owner was delighted with everything.

At eight p. m., Tin Bow was ushered into one of the private rooms —overlooking St. Mary's Park—in the Shanghai Low Café. He again met Mr. Fletcher and Lee Goon. He was handed an official-looking document purporting to be a deed to the building in question, and he was about to give his check for the twenty thousand dollars to Mr. Fletcher when the curtain across the door of the room was thrown back and the huge figure of Chum Yow appeared.

"I will take the check," said he, reaching out a hand for it. "As Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Lee Goon are aware, I am the heir who now owns the building, and I have already paid the agent, Mr. Babin, his commission. I thank you." He had no recollection of Tin Bow as a former victim.

But his thanks were premature. Tin Bow started to thrust the check inside his pocket, but he was at once pounced upon by the three conspirators, who took the check from his grasp. They then tried to pacify him. He thought of his new friend, the policeman, and he decided to outtrick Chum Yow and his sycophants. "I did not understand," said he apologetically. "I thought the man who came in was some robber."

Once outside the place with the deed in his pocket, he sought the policeman who had been friendly to him. He was told that he would not be on his beat until the following morning. Tin Bow had never heard of stopping checks. Besides, he still believed the purchase of the building to be a bona-fide transaction. However, as long as Chum Yow was connected with the matter, he determined to have nothing to do with it, if there was any way out. After a restless night, he found the policeman on his usual beat in the early morning. He told his story and showed the officer the paper which he took to be a genuine deed.

"The whole thing looks fishy to me," said the policeman. "The Canton Bank is not yet open, but we will get in the side door. That paper they gave you is some kind of a deed, all right, but it's probably a fake. Anyway, you couldn't buy that building for anything like twenty thousand dollars. That's a

cinch. So we will have this Canton Bank stop the check and hand it over to you. We'll need that for evidence."

Once inside the bank, the policeman was waited on by an official who gave the tellers certain instructions. The bank man then phoned Mr. Landry C. Babin, who declared that the whole thing was a fake and no man named Fletcher worked for his firm. He also would make a good and willing witness. When Chum Yow entered the bank, he was accompanied by Fletcher and Lee Goon, both of whom wanted their share. Tin Bow's check was promptly side-tracked by the teller to whom it was presented. Then this rascally trio, who had everything prepared to flee the city after this last coup, were arrested by the friendly policeman and the watchman employed by the bank. The trials were of short duration, and all three were convicted and given long sentences in prison.

Tin Bow stopped off to see his old friend, Mow Lee, on his return to Oroville. Mow Lee propounded some ancient Chinese philosophy:

"Fools for luck should never strain the patience of the gods of chance."

THE HAND OF DEATH

SOMETIMES, stranger things happen in real life than is depicted in fiction. For instance, there is the old stone which bears the imprint of a bloody hand which is all that is left of the slave mart which stood for many years in Augusta, Georgia. A cyclone hit the spot shortly after the close of the Civil War, and nothing was left but one stone pillar.

An evangelist, passing through the city at that time, aroused his listeners by saying that "whoever touches the pillar of the hand of death, shall be stricken dead." Only a few people of Augusta were superstitious enough to believe the dire prophecy, but, when two Negroes were ordered to move the pillar, they both dropped dead before the stone had been taken a block. It is probable that the two were so filled with fear that they overexerted themselves and taxed their hearts beyond human endurance. At any rate, it made the city stop and think.

So, for a number of years, the stone was left standing. In 1901, the city decided to place it in front of the City Hall as a memorial. Two white men tackled the job this time, but, before the work had scarcely begun, a thunderstorm broke out and they were struck by lightning. Since that time, no one has ventured to contract moving the pillar, until very recently, a contractor in New York City has offered to take the job. He insists that the deaths of the four men "just happened," and that no one in this day should allow superstition to stand in the way of any work to be done.

Some one has suggested that it would be a novel method of capital punishment, providing the curse still remains over the hand of death. The ancients often determined the guilt or innocence of a person by methods no less ridiculous.

CHAINED FAST

By DONALD VAN RIPER

From his place of shame, he was conducting a momentus task for justice.

THE room of Commissioner Hildebrand, refurnished at his own expense, certainly was the prize office in headquarters. A fine rug underfoot, easy-chairs invitingly ranged about the center table, pictures on the walls gave something to the general air of luxury. In any other place than police headquarters, the layout would have been in good taste. Tom Hendry did not like it. Of course, Detective Sergeant Tom Hendry's ideas on that score didn't really matter. Commissioner Hildebrand had wealth, power and prestige, and all Tom Hendry had was a job he must protect. Between them, there was very real hostility.

Tom Hendry was not deceived by the smile on Hildebrand's fleshy countenance. The latter's offer of a good cigar and the sergeant's acceptance came in the nature of routine preliminary. They would talk calmly, for that was Hildebrand's way. The commissioner was outwardly mild and easy, but, under that smug, smiling exterior was the menace and cruelty of an ambushed tiger.

"I've got a special assignment for you," began Hildebrand as Hendry seated himself. "An assignment that may take a long time—years, per-

haps—but I've decided you're the one man for the job."

Hendry nodded. A premonitory nervousness stilled his tongue. Hildebrand was again at his old trick of masking the worst under velvet words.

"I've taken it up with your chief, Inspector McQuarry. He objected at first. Said you were as promising a man at detective work as could be found in the department. But, when I explained that you were not to be 'de-rated,' that you were not actually to be transferred to the uniformed branch, he yielded. However, as far as the general public will know, you will be a flatfoot in the traffic work. You'll be in uniform—sergeant's uniform, of course—and you'll do traffic duty on the corner of York and Trevor Streets. What the public won't know is that you will be there on special assignment—still actually a sergeant in the detective end of the force."

"Special assignment?" Hendry's voice cracked with incredulity as he spoke. "You mean I'm to go in uniform and do traffic duty?"

Hildebrand now smiled broadly. "You're just the man," he said. "Fact is, it was your own action in sticking a summons card on my car that made me think what a splendid traffic officer you would make."

Hendry's lips moved stiffly as he checked over each word before he spoke. He must guard his speech. Hildebrand only waited for a chance to strike more directly. "When I tied the summons card on your car wheel," said Hendry slowly, "I did it for one reason. You yourself had just the day before told the plain-clothes and detective division that they must especially see to certain traffic violations. You mentioned the danger of cars parking alongside fire hydrants. Your car was in such a position. I didn't recognize it as your car."

"A little later," reminded Hildebrand, "you were told who had received that summons. And, still later, you were advised not to appear in traffic court against me."

"You didn't send for me yourself," protested Hendry. "And you had said in that same traffic talk that there would be no more forgotten or torn-up summons tickets. You had even said that a man who forgot or tore up an issued ticket was liable to dismissal from the force."

Hildebrand smiled, but his voice was hard and grating as he spoke. "You clung to that complaint out of sheer spite. You never did like it that time when I told you to lay off my friend, Ben Mondon. You wanted to humiliate me on that traffic summons. But, of course"—he paused, and his smile now was a goading sneer—"of course, I wouldn't humiliate you. Instead, I'm giving you a special assignment."

With an effort, Hendry steadied himself. "I'm to be put in uniform and direct traffic. Why?"

"There's a tip," said Hildebrand, "that a mob has planned to stick-up robbery of the Industrial Trust Co. With your remarkable memory for faces and traits of crooks, you will be in position right in the middle of that corner to spot any suspicious people hanging around the building of the Industrial Trust Co. Of course, it may be a long time—years even—before the mob decides to strike. But, meanwhile, you'll be there, looking and acting like a traffic cop and really being a detective all the time."

Hendry rose and stared down at his superior. "You needn't be so careful of your words, Hildebrand.

We're alone. Why don't you speak plainly? Why not say that, as a plain-clothes operative, you think I might cause trouble for certain of your friends in the Yorktown section? You're the police commissioner. Politics and all that goes with politics put you where you are. You can reach in and do what you will with the force. Fellows like me —we have to take it with a smile."

Hildebrand raised a pudgy hand in warning. "Better be careful of your tongue, Sergeant Hendry. Fact is you better be careful in every way. You've given me warning. I'll do the same. I can't just have you *heaved completely off the force* without a charge that'll hold water, but I can wait—and I will—until you make a slip. Just a mistake—and then you'll be dropped. Unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Hendry.

"Unless you can take a hint," snapped Hildebrand. "As you say, we are alone. So here's just one bit of plain speech. You do what you're told, obey orders, and don't cross me again. And in particular, you can lay off Ben Mondon and his friends. And now"—the harshness faded from Hildebrand's voice—"just run along to Inspector McQuarry and he'll give you the official orders."

Hendry did not linger as Hildebrand, rising, bowed him to the door. He swung on his heel, and, hands tensed to fists, chin squared and high, swung down the corridor while the door behind him still shook from the slamming which he had given it. But, somehow, in the length of the corridor, he took a new grip upon himself. There was nothing to be gained from blind and futile rage. The same old rule held in the force, as elsewhere in life. You either stuck to a thing or you quit, and, if you hung on, you must play the game. And Hendry wasn't the kind to quit. It would take more than the commissioner's trickery to make Hendry get off the force.

In a score of paces, his tension snapped and the hard frown shifted to a rueful grin. He would take his cleverly masked punishment like a man. That bank robbery talk of Hildebrand was the bunk. What it amounted to was that Sergeant Tom Hendry was being chained fast to traffic duty at the corner of York and Trevor Streets. Flimsy reason or not, the fact remained that Commissioner Hildebrand was spotting Hendry for ridicule and humiliation.

The wise guys in the Yorktown section would be giving Hendry the horse laugh when he took on his new and unpleasant assignment. Let them laugh! The best laugh rarely came first. Hendry would grin and take it. The day might come when it would be Hendry's turn to laugh. If only he could more than even the score with Commissioner Hildebrand!

The Yorktown section was one of the oldest and toughest in the city. The main stem from which the section derived its name was York Street. Squarely in the middle of things was the intersection of York with Trevor. That was the very heart of the neighborhood which was Ben Mondon's favorite stamping ground.

Ben Mondon was the king in affairs of booze and rackets in the Yorktown section. He had a working agreement with Conny Burk which left him in undisputed control of Yorktown as long as he did not try to crash any stuff in the rest of the West Side of the city. Within his own little world, Ben Mondon set out to be a big shot cut on the pattern of Conny Burk.

He grew a mustache, dark and

close-cropped like Burk's, and had his clothes made by Conny's tailor. He learned, too, the knack of deceptive indifference of manner, the hard-clipped manner of giving orders, the generosity in small things, the mercilessness in important matters which characterized Conny Burk.

Ben Mondon liked it all. He had been a sniveling gutter rat, and now he was the big shot of Yorktown section. He could, and did, laugh at the spectacle of Tom Hendry back in harness on a traffic post.

"One thing," he jeeringly assured Hendry, "at least, you've got a swell build to show off a uniform."

Hendry grunted. "Go on, Mondon. Keep moving."

Mondon grinned. He liked to grin. He had snappy white teeth that showed up well under the dark little mustache. Moreover, he especially liked to grin mockingly at Tom Hendry. They had been enemies since boyhood. And now the fact that Hendry was an officer and Mondon a racket man only gave a deadlier zest to the old feud.

"Sure, I'll keep moving," he chuckled. "Don't you wish you could, too? Must be nice parking here in traffic all day. Just a swell job for an active young fellow. And every one thought you was doing so grand. Sergeant and detective, and all that! And here you are, back on your feet—and plenty of it."

Hendry watched him go. No belated bit of quick-witted response came to him. The truth was that Ben Mondon had rubbed just a little bit of extra salt into the open wound of Hendry's humiliation.

Hendry's return to uniform and his appearance as traffic officer at York and Trevor Streets had been a seven days' wonder, but life in the Yorktown section was one such wonder after another. He dropped into the routine of traffic work, and all Yorktown proceeded to forget that once he had been Detective Sergeant Hendry. On the surface, at least, he was just another traffic copper.

Ben Mondon did not forget. It was a month after the queer transfer of Tom Hendry that Hildebrand held a secret conference with Mondon. Secret conferences with Ben Mondon were easily managed. All that Hildebrand needed to do was to drop in at Mondon's grillroom. There were private dining rooms there. Into one of these, Hildebrand would go. There was nothing strange in Ben Mondon, as proprietor, drifting in there to see how such a distinguished patron was faring.

Hildebrand, secure in the knowledge of soundproof walls, wasted no breath in preliminaries, and his whispering was purely instinctive. "It's time to step you up, Ben. And that means that Conny Burk's due to step down."

"Conny? Conny Burk step down?"

"You know what I mean," said Hildebrand as he leaned over the little table between them. "If you want to get any higher, Ben, you'll have to see that Conny's bumped off."

Ben Mondon's silence had nothing to do with surprise. It did, however, make clear the fact that he was puzzled.

After a moment, Hildebrand spoke again. "I thought you'd be delighted. Why so puzzled, Mondon?"

"Oh," sighed Mondon, "I'm not trying to figure out why you're through with Conny. I'm just thinking what a tough guy he'll be to get. Why, there's hardly a second of the day or night that Monk

Stoneway isn't just waiting to bump off any one that makes a queer move near Conny Burk. The guy that gets Conny Burk isn't going to live long enough to laugh about it."

"Well, what of that? What do you care as long as you don't get hurt?" demanded Hildebrand.

"There isn't a killer I'd trust," answered Ben Mondon, "that'd take the job. Conny alone would be tough enough, but, with Monk Stoneway as his bodyguard, the wise boys leave him off their list."

"Of course," drawled Hildebrand, "in lots of ways, it would be better if you tended this job yourself."

"Me?" Ben Mondon jerked his gaze up to stare at Hildebrand. "Maybe I could. It's a cinch that the only time Conny does without Monk Stoneway's services is when I'm with him. Conny Burk had me for his bodyguard before Monk. And, even now, Conny gives Monk time off whenever Conny and me step out together."

Hildebrand nodded. Interest and excitement had put some of the old-time ruddiness back in his overly fleshy face. "Along which line," he whispered, "I have a scheme. I was just waiting till you could see that it was strictly up to you to do this killing yourself."

Ben Mondon's jetty little eyes bored back in answer to that challenge in his chief's every expression and tone. "Let's hear the scheme, chief."

"You remember," began Hildebrand, "that cousin of yours that was in here eating one day. You said that he was in a pretty good racket up in the northern end of the State."

"That's Ralph. Yes, he's my cousin—and a tough egg. But wise! You couldn't get him to tackle a tough killing job on a bet. Some easy bump-off? That'd be different. But this knocking off a fellow like Conny Burk! He'd say 'nothing doing' so fast it'd make you dizzy."

"Who said he was to do any shooting?" Hildebrand grinned wickedly. "The main point is that he looks almost enough like you to be your twin. Of course, he doesn't wear a mustache, but that could be taken care of. He could impersonate you with a little practice good enough to fool any one."

"Impersonate?" Ben Mondon echoed the unfamiliar word. He mistrusted the idea at once. "Say chief, impersonating is the bunk. Back of the footlights maybe, or in the movies, it can get by, but in real life—nix. Ralph'd walk half a dozen steps, and some wise bird'd say: 'That isn't really Ben Mondon,' Or if he said a couple of words, some one would know it wasn't really me. I get the idea. You figure I import my cousin into town on the quiet and that he impersonates me for the alibi while I'm knocking off Conny Burk. You figure Conny would give Monk Stoneway time off if he was going with me—say, to the races or something. And, meanwhile, Ralph could show himself here and there around town."

"Just so," agreed Hildebrand. "It'd take an hour each way—two hours in all for you to get out to the races. If Conny Burk gets killed say, at three o'clock, and then at half past two and at half past three, and maybe once in between, your double is seen right here along York Street—don't you see, it would be a perfect alibi?"

"But it wouldn't work."

"In a car," said Hildebrand triumphantly. "Back of the wheel. No need for your cousin to walk or talk. Just drive along. The only

hitch would be to make sure that some one noticed him."

It was then that Ben Mondon remembered Tom Hendry. He leaned forward excitedly. "Like you say, chief, in a car that cousin of mine could fool any one. Put a mustache on him, dress him in my clothes, and let him drive my car. And, as for making sure that some one notices him, what about Tom Hendry?"

Hildebrand laughed—softly at first, and then louder and louder. "Say," he wheezed at last, "what a joke that would be! Old eagle-eye Hendry! What better man to have proving an alibi for you! He's known on the force as the man who never forgets a face. They say he's got every little trait and mannerism of every crook down pat. If a man like Hendry could say you were cruising up and down York Street at the very time Conny was bumped off, what could be safer?"

Ben Mondon laughed. "What could be safer?" he echoed. "Nothing. And what a hunch it was when you had Hendry yanked out of plain clothes and put to doing traffic! There he is—as good a dick as there is on the force and chained fast. And he's being shown up for a boob every day that he stands there giving the old stop-and-go signal to traffic. And now we've figured a way to use him to put over a swell alibi. What a hunch, chief! What a hunch! You giving him that traffic assignment."

Tom Hendry's nerves jumped as a horn sounded raucously almost at his elbow. He swung about to see the derisive grin of the driver, the gleaming show of white teeth under the little black mustache. His hand raised in a salute which, for all its flourish, was a prodding taunt. An eye flicked shut in a mocking wink.

For several days now, Ben Mondon had been blasting that horn at Hendry as he drove past. There was nothing for Hendry to do about it. You couldn't arrest a man for blowing a car horn. To speak to a wise guy like Ben Mondon on such a score would only make matters worse. As usual, it was traffic cop's luck. He would just have to stand and take it.

Hendry glared after the gleaming perfection of the roadster. He was vaguely aware that there was something which didn't quite click correctly in that fleeting, voiceless encounter with the jeering, smirking Ben Mondon.

He knew Ben Mondon since their kid days. A whisper warned Hendry that there was something quite different about Ben Mondon to-day.

Twice, within a quarter of an hour, Mondon had driven past. If he came back again, Hendry wanted to check his every move and gesture—unless, meanwhile, he could figure out just what variation from the usual there was about Ben Mondon to-day. There was something wrong. What was it?

Motor-cycle Officer Jim Purcell eased his motor cycle to a halt beside Hendry in answer to the traffic man's signal.

"Any minute now Mondon's big blue roadster is apt to come by here, Jim."

"Yeah. Why? What about it?"

"Just this. The man at the wheel looks like Ben Mondon, but I have a hunch it isn't."

"Looks like Mondon and isn't," gasped Purcell. "Say, Tom Hendry, where'd you get a wild notion like that? Who else but Ben Mondon would be driving that swell roadster? Doubles and disguises aren't in Ben Mondon's line."

"Maybe I'm wrong," admitted Hendry. "Yet——"

"Yet—what?" growled Jim Purcell. His look and tone clearly indicated that he thought Hendry was getting a bit queer in the head.

"There would be just one reason," confided Hendry. "That'd be an alibi. Mondon trying to be two places at one time!"

"And what am I to do about that?" Jim Purcell still was obviously skeptical about Hendry's budding theory.

"Just stand by. And keep your motor cycle running." Hendry talked fast. He thought he glimpsed the big blue roadster again up the street. "That car's been giving my coat tails a brushing, and whoever's driving it has been giving me the well-known razz. And so I'm going to give a good imitation of getting knocked down. And that'll be your cue to grab the driver."

"Grab the driver? Give Ben Mondon the rap?"

There was no time for Hendry to answer. With a quick sidelong glance, Hendry saw the big blue roadster already entering on the intersection.

The horn blasted and blared. Hendry stepped back a little. He twisted and spun and fell—away from the roadster.

Jim Purcell stared. This whole business was a bit over his head. If that wasn't Ben Mondon, it certainly did look like him. The driver's jetty little eyes went wide.

"Hey!" gasped Officer Purcell.

The big blue roadster gave a surge, and the motor burst into roaring power. The car leaped ahead. Jim Purcell gave a startled look to the suddenly speeding car.

"After him!" yelled Hendry. "Get on that motor cycle and ride! You've got to get him, Jim."

The motor cycle went into action. Already, the big blue roadster was a full block away and going faster every second.

The siren horn on the motor cycle shrieked for the right of way. Ahead, the blue car swayed and wove, grazing by a miracle just clear of destruction, and in back came Purcell fighting to gain on his quarry.

Luck was against Purcell. There were scurrying pedestrians to be given a chance for their lives. A truck was awkwardly stalled across the second crossing. In five blocks, the blue roadster had actually doubled its lead.

The roadster swerved and lurched as it took the turn into Second Street. It was heading toward the Second Street Bridge and toward the open country beyond. Over that bridge went the screaming, roaring motor cycle, gaining now at every turn of the wheels.

It ended a mile beyond the bridge. At the ill-banked turn of the highway, the driver of the big blue car pushed just a shade too hard upon the gas. There was a wailing howl of the tires, and the car shook and trembled.

Purcell, coming up in back, had eased off his speed for the turn. He saw the flash of the big car's wild leap from the road. The dirt showered and sprayed like so much explosive smoke.

By the time Purcell had swung around and started back, the dust was settled enough to reveal the twisted ruin of the roadster. Purcell dismounted and ran across the uneven ground, scurrying and stumbling as he made toward the crumpled figure thrown clear of the wreck.

The man did not have much chance. A glance told Purcell that. A closer look at the fellow proved

that Tom Hendry's guess had been right.

The mustache had been a clever fake, but it was smeared now across the pain-racked mouth. Purcell bent low as he saw the lips twisting and twitching in speech.

"I'm a goner—licked."

"Who are you?" murmured Purcell.

"Ralph—Ralph Mondon. You know Ben Mondon's cousin. You know——"

"Better talk fast," urged Purcell, "whatever you got to say."

"Nothing—nothing to say."

Purcell stared down at him. In a few moments, he would be dead.

"Now, talk fast," cried Purcell. "There's no chance left. You're going. Anything on your mind, you better spill it now."

"Talk? What about? Ben? Ben's out to the race track. That's all. Me—I'm just using his car. What's wrong with that?"

Purcell blinked as the voice stopped. Death had come at last like a bullet. It was Purcell's duty to phone in to headquarters. After that, it would be time to send for the dead wagon.

Hendry had been relieved from duty. Having started to fake an accident, he might as well carry it through. Right now, of all times, he wanted to be free of the work that held him at York and Trevor Streets.

As fast as he could do so, he was in civilian clothes and hobbling about headquarters. He had just entered Inspector McQuarry's room when the phone message from Jim Purcell came in.

McQuarry repeated the message over after Purcell. Tom Hendry stood there intently listening.

"You hear," cried McQuarry. "There's something doing. Say"—he jumped up, startled, as Hendry sprang toward the door—"I thought you had a bad leg."

"It's better," yelled Hendry.

Hendry had his hint. It lay in the words of the dying man: "Ben's out to the race track."

If that statement were true, Ben Mondon would not be keen to have any one detect him there. He, Hendry, would start for the track at once.

Downstairs, the desk sergeant called to him. "Big news, Tom. They just found Conny Burk's body on one of those little side roads near the track. Edgemere Road, they call it."

Edgemere Road! Which way would Ben Mondon choose for a getaway back to town? This business about Conny Burk being bumped off explained why Ben might have wanted an alibi. If it was Ben who had plugged Burk, just how would he get back to town?

He would stay away from the main thoroughfare. The quickest route would lead him by a lonesome dirt road. "Black Oak Road!" He was outside headquarters calling the words to a passing cab driver.

Where Black Oak Road made its final swing in toward the city, Hendry stood waiting. Hidden by the cab, he crouched and watched the car driving briskly toward the curve.

He timed his appearance from back of the cab to make perfect the element of surprise. The car hauled up smartly as the raised arm gestured the driver to stop. Hendry sprang forward then, was at the car door before Ben Mondon could utter his first word of dismayed surprise.

"You! Hendry!"

"The same," answered Tom Hendry. He yanked open the rear door and took his place back of the driver.

A gun was in his hand as he ordered Ben Mondon to drive slowly on toward the city.

"Headquarters," he added, "is our first stop."

"Headquarters," croaked Mondon. "Say, is this a rap?"

"In a way," replied Hendry. "I'll tell you about it when we meet up with Inspector McQuarry."

It did not take long to break through the defense Mondon had to offer. He did not know what to say about his shattered alibi. The gun, which Hendry had located in the car pocket, was the clincher for the case against Mondon.

"I've a hunch," sighed Inspector McQuarry, "that the bullets in Burk will prove to have been fired from this gat."

It was not long afterward that Mondon broke, cracked under pressure, and whined like the whipped cur that he really was.

"Give me a break, inspector," he cried. "I'll wise you up to plenty. I don't want to die. I'll tell you some things that'll open your eyes. There's Hildebrand. You guys would like something on him."

Tom Hendry's hour of triumph had come. The words babbled from Mondon's craven lips. The case against Commissioner Hildebrand was blacker with every word. In the corner, a police stenographer took down the hysterical confession.

Inspector McQuarry smiled at Hendry as Mondon dropped wearily back in his chair. "Enough to send this one to the chair. And enough to rid the force of that crook, Commissioner Hildebrand."

"And get me away from that traffic job," added Hendry.

"I won't make any promises," sighed Inspector McQuarry, "until you tell me how you figured that out about the man in the blue roadster not being Ben Mondon. According to Mondon, the imitation was perfect. Officer Purcell said the same. But you——"

"Me!" Hendry laughed. "I've known Mondon all my life. It happens that the impostor winked as he gave me the razzing howdy-do. He winked the wrong eye. I happened to remember that when we were kids, Ben Mondon always winked with his left eye. He couldn't ever wink with his right. Lots of folks are that way. Can wink one eye and not the other. And so, when I saw the man who was supposed to be Ben Mondon wink with his right eye, I knew the wink couldn't be a fake but that the man must be."

Inspector McQuarry looked at Mondon. The fellow's face was wrinkled and strained as he tried to wink his right eye—in vain.

"So I had to break whatever it was up. And if it was worth while, I had to get off that traffic post. So—well—as Purcell has told you, the accident was a fake. That and a little luck! See?"

BODY RIDDLED, LIVES

A REPORTER for an Ohio newspaper, who had been waging a campaign against organized crime, was shot at when about to enter his home, recently. One hundred bullets entered the reporter's body, and yet he lived to tell the tale. Six years previous to this, the editor of a Canton, Ohio, paper was killed because he, too, had come out strongly against the gangsters.

Lady In Lower 11

By AINSWORTH MORGAN

The favor he had granted seemed to be turning sour.

THE Twentieth Century glided smoothly out of the Grand Central Terminal. James Montague Holt III turned the pages of the paper he was reading and glanced at the person sitting opposite him. It was a woman of about thirty-five, but she was so obviously made up, that it is doubtful whether she would have admitted more than twenty-six. And it made the youthful, unworldly James Montague Holt a little bit uncomfortable to find that his section companion was staring directly into his eyes. To hide his embarrassment, he straightened the paper and read and reread an intensely uninteresting article on foreign exchange.

But like all people who are being stared at, it is virtually impossible to help stealing an occasional look at the person who is doing the staring. So young Mr. Holt looked at the woman again. This time, her attention was fixed on his suitcase, and she seemed to be trying to read his name on the tag. She was apparently successful, for she lifted her eyes and almost smiled—half to herself and half at James Montague Holt III. James reddened and glanced across the corridor by way of ignoring her.

In the opposite section, there was

an old gentleman with a red, bulbous nose and white hair. He was on the verge of falling asleep and gave James one of those expressionless looks characteristic of a half-conscious mentality. Soon, his eyes closed, his mouth opened, and he started snoring.

James crossed and recrossed his legs, for he knew the painted lady was again staring at him. He felt it, like one would feel the heat from a near-by electric-light bulb.

Suddenly, the lady was taken with a paroxysm of coughing and, indirectly, this was the undoing of James. She coughed so violently that her purse fell off her lap. With instinctive politeness, James reached down and picked up the purse. He handed it back to her with a self-conscious bow.

"Oh, thanks," said the lady between coughs. "Thanks very much. I've—I've got a rotten cold."

James agreed sympathetically that her cold sounded quite serious, and made a few inane remarks about colds in general.

"I'm sure I caught this one on the train the other night," continued the lady. "Sleepers are such drafty places, aren't they?"

James supposed they were, merely because the question was too unimportant to warrant an argument. In an attempt to halt any further conversation, James looked out the window, but the absurdity of looking out a window upon the black nothingness of a tunnel forced him to look back again.

The old gentleman across the corridor was now snoring with sonorous regularity. The lady made some remark about its being a pity he hadn't had his adenoids removed as a child. James laughed for politeness's sake. Then the lady grew suddenly and alarmingly personal.

"Wasn't it your father," she said, "who helped rebuild devastated France?"

That his identity had been established annoyed James. But it was foolish to deny a fact. The name of James Montague Holt III on his bag had definitely branded him as the son of the great philanthropist, James Montague Holt II.

So James said: "Yes, I guess it was."

"And didn't he endow a Children's Hospital in New York?" asked the lady.

James admitted, uncomfortably, that the "old man" was that way.

There was a moment's silence during which the lady may or may not have been appraising the older man's wealth.

The snoring gentleman across the corridor knocked a sluggish fly off his nose and opened his eyes just long enough to watch the fly depart in the direction of James.

Feeling that the lady was about to ask another personal question, James attempted to rise and escape to the smoking car. But the lady's mind worked faster than James's legs, and the question was out before he was up.

"Don't go," she said. "I was just going to ask a favor of you. That is, if you promise not to think I'm either rude or crazy."

James sat down again. He wondered if the lady was going to ask him to take her in to dinner. He hoped not.

"What is it?" he murmured warily.

The lady blew her nose unattractively. Then she said:

"It sounds ridiculous, I know. But I have this rotten cold and I feel the slightest draft. I was just wondering if you'd mind letting me take your upper. There's no draft from

the window up there. I'd appreciate it lots, if you don't mind."

James felt relieved, to say the least. It was certainly a strange sort of request, but a harmless one.

"Why, of course," he said. "You're more than welcome to it. As a matter of fact, I hate the upper, but couldn't get a lower the last minute. Sure, by all means, use it."

The painted lady smiled gratefully. James returned her smile, equally grateful, stepped over her ankles, and disappeared in the direction of the smoking car.

Being of an innately courteous nature, James felt it was the proper thing to allow the lady sufficient time to get well established in the section before turning in himself. Therefore, after dinner, he lingered a good two hours in the smoker. He toyed with a glass of grape juice, read the newspaper, and watched the bulbous-nosed old gentleman who had been snoring in his car, doze off again over a copy of a law magazine. In fact, the old gentleman left the smoking car about half an hour before James himself decided to turn in.

When he returned to his Pullman, he noticed the sign saying: "Quiet Requested." Quietly, he made his way to Section 11, pulled his suitcase from under the berth and retired to the men's room. When he came back, clothes in one hand and bag in the other, the lights were out. He could hear the old gentleman snoring across the corridor. He slipped the bag under the lower berth. Kicking off his slippers, he opened the curtain, and threw his clothes into the dark void. Then, with a stretch and a yawn, he ducked his head and hopped in the lower berth.

There was a yell! To James's astonishment and horror he had landed on something very soft and warm.

"Help! Help!" cried a female voice.

Sharp nails dug into James's cheeks. He struggled to break loose, but he was held in a death grip as the woman continued shrieking for help.

The lights in the car were switched on, and hands from somewhere tugged violently at James's legs. Finally, the woman released him, and he fell in a heap on the corridor floor. Speechless, he looked up to meet the censoring glares of a porter and a conductor.

Curious heads poked from upper and lower berths. Strangers gathered around him. Every one talked, and no one listened until the conductor held up his hand and asserted his authority.

"Everybody quiet now!" he ordered. He then faced the lady in Lower 11 and addressed her as the porter helped the disfigured James to his feet. "What's th' trouble, ma'am?" he asked.

The lady sat bolt upright on the edge of the berth. Her silk nightgown was torn from her shoulders. Her eyes were aflame with rage.

"That man! That creature!" she cried, pointing an accusing finger at James Montague Holt. "He tried to steal——"

"It's a lie!" shouted James. "A monstrous lie! The lady—that woman asked me to trade berths with her. She wanted my upper one. I——"

The conductor measured James with frowning eyes.

It was obvious that popular opinion was all for the woman; all against James Montague Holt.

"But I tell you it's the truth!" said James, red with anger.

The conductor asked to see the

tickets. The lady, waving hers in her hand, resumed her attack.

"A likely thing that I'd trade a lower for an upper," she said sarcastically. "Look! Here's my ticket. Lower 11! Ask that creature to show you his." She handed the ticket to the conductor. The conductor examined it and then looked at James.

"That's a pretty weak story, young man," he said. "It's types like you that make traveling unsafe for womenfolks."

The curious group of onlookers nodded their heads in agreement with the conductor.

"What's your name and business?" he asked James.

"James Montague Holt. And I'm a student at Harvard. And that woman's a liar!"

But there followed a salvo of accusations from the onlookers which checked any attempt James might have made to defend himself.

"Throw him off the train!"

"Maniac!"

"Poor woman!"

Then something within James Montague Holt snapped.

"The whole thing's a frame-up," he shouted. And a quick thought came to him. "She's nothing but a dirty blackmailer!"

"Save that gag for the courtroom," said the conductor. "I'm turning you over to the police at Cleveland."

Once again, the onlooking prosecution opened fire on the helpless defendant. James was cornered. He was about to surrender, about to give himself up as a victim to injustice and wire his father for legal advice and assistance. But, like fresh forces appearing at the critical moment of defeat, something happened.

The old gentleman of the bulbous nose stuck his white head out of the opposite lower.

"Listen here, conductor," he said. All eyes immediately turned toward him. "I'm Judge Rankin of the surrogate court of Trenton, New Jersey, and I just want to tell you that I *heard* that woman ask the defendant to trade berths with her. So take *that* if it'll help matters any!" The old gentleman said no more. With the same suddenness he had appeared, he disappeared.

James Montague Holt III resumed breathing. The glares of the onlookers switched to the woman. The conductor assumed a new air of authority.

"Well, lady," he said, "what you got to say about that?"

The lady appeared stunned. She looked from one face to the next, across to the closed curtains of the opposite berth, and then fixed her eyes on James.

"Well?" said the conductor. "Let's hear it."

"I refuse to speak!" she answered angrily. "Go away—all of you! Quit staring at me! Do you hear what I say?"

Like magic, the batteries of accusation changed their objective.

"Vat a doity trick. Setch a wimin!"

"Poor guy, he doesn't look like the type who'd——"

"Nothin' but blackmail, pure and simple."

The lady flashed curses from her eyes. She pulled her torn nightdress close about her throat. She turned on her heels, swished open the curtains to Lower 11, disappeared into the darkness, and closed the curtains in fury. In a moment, the curtains opened again, and James Montague Holt's clothes were hurled into the corridor.

Then comparative quiet followed.

Passengers returned to their respective berths amid mumbled comments. The conductor gave whispered orders to the porter, and James climbed into Upper 11, sore in mind and body, but acquitted of any criminal suspicion.

At seven thirty the following morning—after a sleepless night—he rang for the porter.

"Where's that woman?" James whispered into his ear.

"She done skipped off dis heah train befo' Ah was up dis mornin'," the man answered. "Ah guess she's playin' precautious!"

James dressed hurriedly. His foremost thought was to find the kind old gentleman with the bulbous nose and thank him from the bottom of his heart for his great kindness in coming to his assistance. He finally located him on the rear platform of the observation car. He dropped into a chair beside him and extended a hand rigid with gratitude.

"Judge," he said, "I want to thank you for what you did for me last night. Why, if you hadn't come to my rescue, if you hadn't admitted you overheard that woman ask me to trade berths with her, I——"

But the old gentleman interrupted James.

"Overhear?" he said, "why, I never overheard a thing! But I had to get some sleep and, besides, I liked your face and your father's an old friend of mine."

What Handwriting Reveals

Conducted By Shirley Spencer

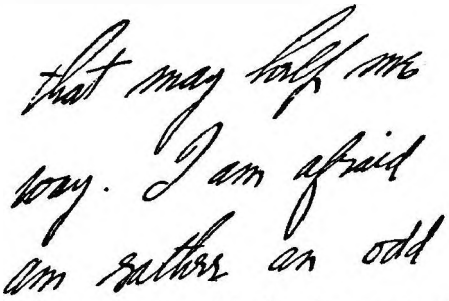
If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to 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.

B. E. T., New York City: Being odd is no crime. In fact, this would be a very uninteresting world if we were all cast in the same mold. It might seem that I was advocating a standardized form or character because I criticize anything that is not an asset. The truth is that I love having every one just a little different, and the more unusual the writing the more interested I am in the writer. I dislike anything that smacks of standardization, and, if it were possible, I would always do a thing differently no matter how many times I was called upon to do it. Unfortunately, mass production in this country seems to be the law at the present time. I should have lived in that past century when handcraft was at its best.

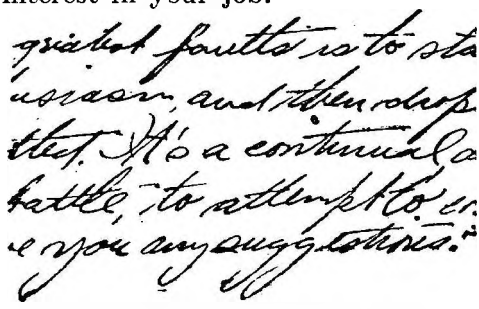


The great trouble is when people suffer because they feel the difference too keenly between themselves and those around them. This causes complexes. If the individual type of person is strong enough to stand alone, he makes his own niche and

can be a happy and useful person—probably not according to the rules laid down by the majority.

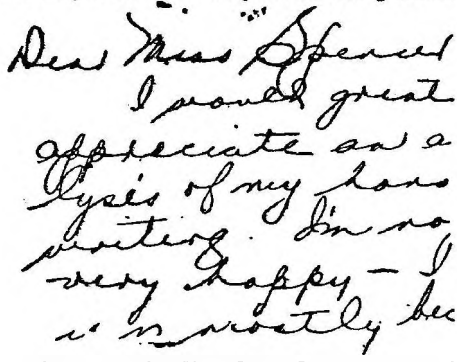
Those very tall upper loops that slope forward show that you are idealistic and visionary—impractical, and yet the lower loops and heavy pressure indicate interest in those things that appeal to the five senses. You are exclusive, independent, secretive, proud, intuitive, and probably intrigued by the occult. Temper, some old-fashioned ideas along with some very radical ones, and some eccentricity make you a little hard to understand readily. But don't worry about being odd—just so long as you are positive and not a negative oddity.

F. W. W., Pennsylvania: You didn't need to tell me that you start a thing with great enthusiasm which soon peters out. It is shown very decidedly in those long, but gradually thinning *t*-bars. Your force wanes. To conquer this, you would have to hold in check your natural quickness to start a thing on first impulse. Cultivate caution, make yourself do all the routine and unpleasant details first, while your enthusiasm is high. Then, when the part you were eager to do really comes around, you will still have interest in your job.



Your whole writing indicates restlessness and an active, alert mind, but it also smacks of superficiality. Because of your great ease of expression, your imagination and dramatic sense, you ought to be able to finally make the grade with fiction writing. Don't give up the advertising work until you are very well established in the other, though. Lack of concentrated, steady application is your greatest difficulty.

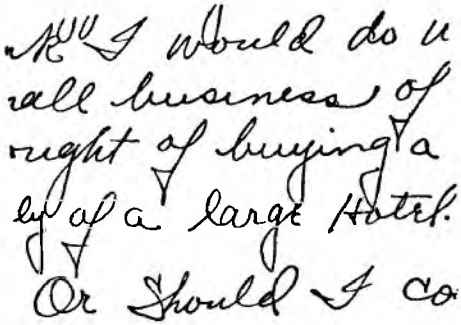
N. O., New York: You shouldn't have much difficulty in understanding yourself. There isn't anything complex about your nature. Your soft, rounded writing with a forward slant and light pressure, reveals you as a very normal person.



You are inclined to be too sensitive, and this is why you are unhappy. These moods are brought on by your own lack of adjustment to a materialistic world. You should lead as sheltered a life as possible and will find marriage a solution providing you choose the right man. You have a sweet, gentle nature, but like money and are inclined to be vain. A seeming contradiction is that you are modest and not very confident. You wish to be loved and appreciated. I hope just the right man will make you happy.

M. B., Oregon: Yes, I do think you could manage a business of your own. In fact, I think that would suit you better than becoming a laboratory technician. You have the generous, friendly, and pleasant

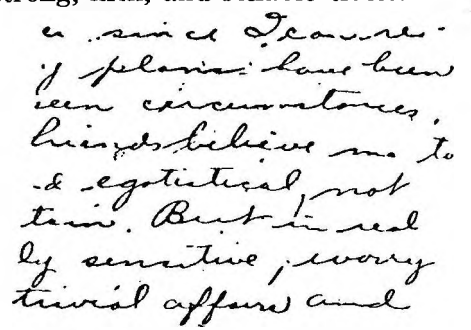
nature which will be an asset in dealing with the public, and you have enough judgment and sense to develop more practical business ability.



You are the type of woman who makes a good manager of either a house or business. Your greatest handicap is in being too generous and too trusting.

F. G.: I think your choice of nursing as a profession is an unfortunate one. In the first place, you are not robust enough, and, in the second, you are entirely too sensitive and delicate for such work. Your nerves are not strong enough to stand the strain, and you are not the type that would like the associations and atmosphere of a hospital. Those fine strokes and formations tell me that you are tender, kind, sympathetic, but the uneven base line and half-formed letters show how moody and unreliable you are.

Your friends are right about your being uncertain, but I don't agree with them that you are egotistical. They probably think that because you are always thinking of yourself —worrying and fretting over details that really are unimportant. You concern yourself too much about yourself, and this leads to selfishness. Nursing calls for capable, strong, firm, and reliable traits.



You ought to have skill for artistic handwork. Develop this and don't scorn housework. There is great art in making a harmonious home as an environment for children. Your small son needs your care more than you realize. Your duties as a mother should not be taken lightly now that you have assumed them.

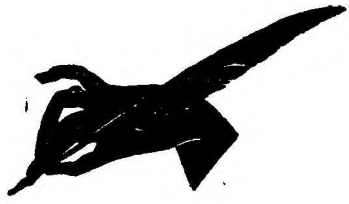
Did you forget the stamped, self-addressed envelope?

Handwriting Coupon

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name.....

Address.....



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.

SUMMER'S come for sure now, but we fans keep on puzzling just the same. Another enjoyable evening is in store for you. We'll give you an easy one to start off with. At least, that's what G. A. Ferrell, 821 First National Building, Montgomery, Alabama, says about his concoction.

1. A B C D E F G H I E C - J J K C L G J C J C M , N B C O G J C P J C C D . L C C Q K D P F O H R - D N J G M K H N R J O ; D C S C J N B C F C L L N B K L K L F K N C - J G F F O N J T C .

It's always a treat when we see a crypt from the pen of D. C. Walker, Elkhorn, Montana.

2. I N G B W Q U E N G X E X G Y X B S O Y X U R X U D H M Q U T S O K D N G O Y S G X M M U - P O K Y S Q S I N S G Y D G H E W X U P H E B - R U B O Z B R W .

"Not so difficult but rather odd," says James G. Zachary, Box 3091, Knoxville, Tennessee.

3. V O W E L S X O A O I W A O I W , Z O L E L E O - K L S K O T E A O I , A O R R U Q O Q L S U R - O W E L R S U O T A U R S V O I A U O I U O H O I A S I O W E L U .

Edward E. Turner, 2703 Kirkbride Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, thinks that this long-division

Note: Underscored words represent proper nouns.

problem might prove to be a tough one.

4. A T E) F E M D E M (O M L

F U A T

R L O E

R F U L

M A R M

M A R M

For Beginners:

Your letter-frequency table will help you solve this crypt sent to us by Phyllis L. Jarvis, Fly Creek, New York.

Remember that E is the most used letter of the alphabet. What letter should stand for E? Fill in your E's. Then make a list of your three-letter words. THE and AND are the most frequently used three-letter words. If you work along these lines, you will soon be able to unravel cryptograms.

5. C R O Y U R P R I V A T E S D R R T X R V Y M R , C R P Q U R J Y Q D I X R K R T S A Y T R N J Y Q U O I S D R U I T N K Y S D R U I T N G D I S S D R J M V I T S Y N Y S D A P P Q K K R U .

Answers to Last Week's Puzzles:

An initial contribution from T. McMahon, Box 237, Cobourg, Ontario, Canada.

1. Eleven unusual avalanches occurred alongside Mount Everest, and inimitable Llewellyn left via zigzag route towards Morocco.

You have no doubt noted that there were no "E's" in this crypt composed by Frank E. Murphy, 5524 South Racine Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

2. Sly young pygmy, spying shy nymphs by yon styx, chants mystic lyric hymns. Spry young nymphs shyly don stylish jupons.

Josephine H. Kelly, 15 Ninth Street, Salt Lake City, Utah, is responsible for this clever three-letter word sentence.

3. Boy saw big rat eat his pet hen. His sly old tom cat ate the rat and his red hog ate the cat. Rat, hen, cat, and hog now are ham.

A long-division problem by Carl L. Lembach, Finance Office, Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

4. PLAYTHINGS.

Beginners should have been able to solve this quotation sent to us by Monroe C. Silvester, Cropseyville, New York.

5. "Zealots are much more dangerous than criminals; their zeal blinds them to truth." D. S. M.

—o—

For the month of April fourteen fans made a perfect record, solving all of the twenty puzzles correctly. Come on May!

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

SOLVED 20: **John Q. Boyer, 2034 North Fulton Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland. Frank E. Murphy, 5526 South Racine Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. L. M. Todd, John Marshall Hotel, Richmond, Virginia. Bill

** A 100% record in 1930 and 1931.

Duval, Box 361, Cohoes, New York. Mrs. Anna M. Page, 73 Ashfield Street, Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts. R. P. Woodman, 173 Harriet Avenue, North Quincy, Massachusetts. Mrs. J. B. Wells, 362 Summit Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio. Robert Hardesty, 21 East Fourteenth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio. G. A. Ferrell, 821 First National Bank Building, Montgomery, Alabama. Fred E. Miles, 1525 La Salle Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Walter Trawczynski, 5015 McDougall Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Henrietta Hough, 410 North Taylor Avenue, Kirkwood, Missouri. Doctor H. W. Conrad, Guthrie, Oklahoma. A. E. A. Bronson, Hulmeville, Pennsylvania.

SOLVED 19: Joe Fava, 8302 Carbondale Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

SOLVED 17: Edward O'Connor, 24 East Street, Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts.

SOLVED 16: Josephine H. Kelly, 15 Ninth East, Salt Lake City, Utah. Jayel, Canton, Ohio. P. B. Morehouse, 1726 Nineteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

SOLVED 14: John J. E. Martin, 42 Welles Street. Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Plantagenet, Paterson, New Jersey.

SOLVED 12: Mrs. C. O. Wounters, 1807 Sixth Avenue, W., Seattle, Washington. Sir Orm, Detroit, Michigan.

SOLVED 11: Mrs. Victor Munroe, 601 North Lafayette Boulevard, South Bend, Indiana.

SOLVED 9: Mary A. Kennedy, 21 Imrie Road, Allston, Massachusetts. W. H. Owen, 4312 North Figuero Street, Los Angeles, California.

SOLVED 8: Mrs. George Schreader, 36 Rumsey Street, Seneca Falls, New York. R. G. S., Cincinnati, Ohio. Mrs. M. W. Anthony, New Holland and Fern Avenues, Reading, Pennsylvania.

SOLVED 7: James G. Zachary, Box 3091, Knoxville, Tennessee.

SOLVED 6: Samson Paulk, Battery B 13 C. A., Fort Barrancas, Florida. A. Lincoln, 15 Court Street, Newark, New Jersey.

SOLVED 5: Edward H. Schlader, 7754 South Union Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

SOLVED 4: Joseph Dahlia, 3116 North Necnah Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Mary A. Hlavaty, 525 East Seventy-second Street, New York, New York. August Kehr, Jr., 2205 Lynch Street, St. Louis, Missouri. George LeFevre, 703 Maryland Place, Columbia, Missouri. Irene Laun, Washington, D. C. L. O. Stafford, 304 Continental Trust Building, Baltimore, Maryland.

SOLVED 3: J. P. Buenemann, 2458 Greenleaf Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Mrs. Emily Leader, Box 88, Mottville, New York. Jay E. McLouth, 2517 Victor Street, Bellingham, Washington.

SOLVED 2: Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oregon. V. G. Train, 286 Laurier Avenue, W., Ottawa, Canada. Stephen Kujawa, 8339 Mackinaw Avenue, South Chicago, Illinois.

SOLVED 1: Hugh B. Rossell, 733 Twenty-second Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

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.

COUPON

How to Solve Cryptograms and Long-division Problems.

If you would like to have the above information, please fill in coupon and mail it to Gerard Holmes, care of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York, and full instructions will be sent to you free of charge.

Name ..... Address .....

City ..... State .....

Headquarters Chat

IT is proverbially true that hindsight is better than foresight. But our foresight should improve, and unquestionably does improve, with experience.

A tragic kidnaping case recently stirred the sympathy and emotions of the nation. It attained wide publicity because of the prominence of the parents of the kidnaped infant. From our experience, and from our hindsight observation of the case, it is quite obvious to us that a great mistake was made on the part of the parents in saying anything about it and notifying the police for some time at least. Had we been present when the infant was found missing, we would have implored the family to say nothing, to sit tight and wait. It is possible that we might have suggested driving to New York and informing the head of a large detective agency, consulting with him as to what was the best thing to do.

In the majority of kidnaping cases, the motive is for financial gain, the kidnaped person to be held for ransom. The motive of revenge and the desire to possess the kidnaped one because the person was liked, are comparatively rare. But we have worked on kidnaping cases in our newspaper days where these were the motives. We remember one which had to do with the latter of the two motives, where a woman kidnaped a baby because she had what is known as the "mother complex," the female's natural longing to possess an infant.

The great danger in all kidnapings is what happened in this case; the kidnapers become alarmed if the pursuit becomes too hot, and they kill the kidnaped person and dispose of the body in some manner. That is the reason for our declaring that, in all such cases, it is better at first, if you do not know the motive for the kidnaping, to remain quiet and wait for the kidnapers to communicate with you. If, after a reasonable time—a week or ten days—no communication comes from them, then, of course, other methods can be adopted.

We know that, when a man steals something and he is pursued, his first impulse—and in the circumstances it is a wise impulse for him—is to dispose of the stolen property in such a way that he cannot be connected with the theft. Possession of stolen property is in itself evidence which will convict the person of having stolen the property unless he can convert this evidence to show that he came into possession of the property in a way other than by stealing it.

The pickpocket, hotly pursued, will try to throw away what he has stolen. He tries to do this in a manner that will not be observed, for he knows that, if he is caught "with the goods," he is in a bad way.

In some States, kidnaping is punished by the death penalty. We agree that kidnaping should be so punished save for one reason: It makes the kidnaper much more apt to kill his living loot than he would be were the penalty for the crime a comparatively light one.

Take, for example, a kidnaper on a boat in a harbor with a child that he has stolen from its parents. He sees police officers approaching in a launch. The approach is of such a nature that he feels sure that they are coming to his boat and that they will search it. He is in a State where the penalty for kidnaping is death. It is obvious that his best move is to kill the person he has stolen and get rid of the body, probably throw it overboard. Of course, by doing this, he commits two offenses, kidnaping and murder. But it is obvious that you can't execute a man twice. The murder which the kidnaper has committed will do him no injury if he is convicted of kidnaping.

On the other hand, if the penalty for kidnaping was, say, twenty years imprisonment, the kidnaper might hesitate at adding murder to his one crime.

We realize that some may think we are presumptuous for offering the advice that we have given, in connection with kidnaping, by stating that it is sound advice to sit tight and say nothing when kidnaping is discovered if you don't know the motive. Start no hue and cry, and do not make death the penalty for kidnaping, for reasons that we have given above.

A friend and reader for "over fifteen years," Nihil O. Good, Aviation Corps, Kelly Field, Texas, has "found it again" and feels that we are just as strong, vigorous, and diversified as ever. May his tribe increase and multiply!

It is in this manner that Mr Good addresses us:

"Dear Editor: To begin with, I must state that I have been away, 'out of it all,' for many, many months. This will account in part for the fact that I have not read an issue of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine for almost two long years.

"Occasionally, when near a news stand, it had become a habit with me to seek out my old favorite, Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine; but, somehow, it was never there. Because of numerous personal problems, few inquiries were made of a young attendant not overly familiar with his stock, and it invariably ended by my walking away empty-handed.

"On April 16th, while awaiting my bus, a young lady stepped from the corner news stand with your April 23rd issue, and I knew right then and there I was back in the fold once more.

"After securing my copy, I noticed that only the week previous you had begun Wallace's last story, so I missed my bus while insisting that they look for an issue of the previous week.

"After reading the two installments and also 'Out of the Pit' by Hector Gavin Grey, a stranger to me, I noticed your announcement for the next week regarding a story by the good writer, Paul Ellsworth Triem—and on the very next page a Johnston McCulley story.

"The next thing I did was to read Headquarters Chat—with all the old gang still on the job.

"And after that came the blow that stunned. Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine to sell for ten cents! One thin dime! I don't believe it yet.

"You are correct; we, the detective-story readers have lost a talented friend and should momentarily bow our heads in memory of a writer of mystery stories who had few equals—Edgar Wallace."

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.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "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 unsuitable. 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.

NOTICE.—I was born in or around New York City, July 11, 1878. My mother's maiden name was Kate Cunningham. She had a sister Annie, whose married name was Mrs. John Brown, and an aunt, Mrs. Mary Clark, at whose home she died. After my mother's death, I was placed in a Catholic foundling home by her cousin, whose maiden name was Jane Gunn. My parents had parted before I was born. Would be pleased to hear from my father, or any one who knew my parents. Address Mrs. Jennie P. Rosenbrook, 831½ Evesham Avenue, Toledo, Ohio.

COGHLER, FLORENCE and **CHARLIE.**—Were in California in 1917. Please write to E. and Chat, Box 205, Paso Robles, California.

CORN, HOWARD.—Last heard of in Utah. Please let us hear from you. E. and Chat, Box 205, Paso Robles, California.

BACKUS, MAY and **JOHN.**—Were in Fullerton, California, about 1918. Your old family pals would love to hear from you. Address E. and Chat, Box 205, Paso Robles, California.

BISHOP, GRANUEL N.—Would be about fifty-five years old. Last heard of thirty years ago, at Boise, Idaho. Was a medium-sized man, and not very strong. Light-brown hair. Brown eyes. Any information regarding him, past or present, will be welcomed by his sister, Mrs. Edward Dills, Stonington, Kentucky.

DuBOIS, RHEA.—Native of Waterloo, Iowa, where he has always lived. Disappeared Thursday morning, March 17, 1932, 5 a. m., when on his way to work. He is seventeen years old, and big for his age. Hazel eyes. Brown hair. Tumor on top of head. Double-jointed thumbs. Will any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate at once with his sister, Laura DuBois, 333 Albany Street, Waterloo, Iowa.

STANTON, DAVE, or **ANDERSON, H. "ANDY."**—Formerly of Panama Canal Zone. Why did you stop writing? I am still the same, and still care. Have missed you and your letters. Write me at old address, or send your letter to Jess, care of this magazine.

PEARCE, EDWARD G.—Was in Virginia in February, 1932. Probably looking for work in printing or dyeing shops. Important news awaits him. Word as to his whereabouts appreciated by Russell P. Lyon, Hibernia, New Jersey.

WILLIAMS.—In the early days my grandfather, Berry Williams, moved from Clem, Georgia, to Talladega County, Alabama. Two years before the Civil War he went to Arkansas, died, and was buried between New Lewisville, Arkansas, and Shreveport, Louisiana. He left three brothers back in Alabama. If I remember correctly, their names were Marion, Jasper, and Henry. During the Civil War communications were slow and uncertain, and these brothers were never heard of again. Can any readers give me information regarding them or their posterity? Address W. T. Williams, Box 442, Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

FITZNER, CHARLES.—Lived in Third Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, sixteen years ago. Please write to K. Bower, 592 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

HATHAWAY, RUTH.—Why don't you come up to see me? Ned Boas, 108 West Eighty-fourth Street, Apartment 3 E, New York, New York.

RYAN, MARGARET.—Disappeared from 262 Washington Street, Binghamton, New York, night of December 7, 1926. Sixty-two years old. Five feet eight inches tall. Auburn hair. False teeth. Small mole on right side of face, close to nose. Scar on neck. Protruding eyes. Large hands. May be working as housekeeper. Any information appreciated by her aged husband, who would like to communicate with her before it is too late. Address E. L. Ryan, 262 Washington Street, Binghamton, New York.

LAWRENCE.—I don't remember your last name. You worked at the Asbestos Company, on Fifth Avenue, between Second and Third Streets, Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1927 and 1928. I worked at the J. N. Collins Candy Company there. You always came into the little Italian cafe on the corner at noon. I don't know if you remember me. If you should see this, write to Blond Myrtle, care of this magazine.

SPEER.—Would like to locate any of my grandfather's people. His name is thought to have been Elkin Speer. He married Mattie Becket about forty-four years ago, and they had one son. A brother settled in Kansas or Missouri. Information thankfully received by Idaho, care of this magazine.

BECKET.—My grandmother, Mattie Becket, had three sisters—Mary, Ellen, and Emma; and three brothers—Joe, William, and James. About sixty years ago Joe and William went to Texas, while James went to California. Mattie is buried at Liberal, Kansas. Ellen married John Fain, at Brookfield, Missouri. Any information regarding my grandmother's relatives or their descendants will be highly appreciated by Idaho, care of this magazine.

REDFORD, KENNETH and **GEOFFREY.**—Last heard from in West Virginia. Please write to your old friend, Bud. Address Harry Holby, 486 Jackson Street, Rochester, Pennsylvania.

WOFFORD, MRS. NORA, nee **REED.**—First husband's name Will Bryant. Has two daughters and one son: Ella, Pearlie, and J. W., the latter usually called "Dub." Left for Kemp, Texas, in 1912. Forty-six years old. Five feet two inches tall. Brown hair, gray eyes. Her brother would be glad to receive news of her or her children. Please communicate with Gordon Reed, Sagertown, Haskell County, Texas.

KNIGHT, MARGARET EMILY.—Twenty-three years old. Formerly of Charlestown, Massachusetts. Very good news awaits her if she will write to J. T. Fitzpatrick, 148 Liberty Street, Lynn, Massachusetts.

KNIGHT, WALTER and **MAYE,** nee **KELLY.**—Left Charlestown, Massachusetts, for California, in 1922. Would appreciate hearing from them, or from any one knowing their whereabouts. Address J. T. Fitzpatrick, 148 Liberty Street, Lynn, Massachusetts.

CORCORAN, MARGIE.—Last known address was 206 West Sixtieth Street, New York, New York, where she lived in 1922. Some of her friends called her Sadie. Word from or about her will be welcomed by Earl G. Cummings, Jr., Det. Quartermaster Corps, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from ex-service men who served in Battery D, Eleventh Field Artillery, from November 1, 1918, to June 21, 1919, when the good battery was broken up at Camp Mills, New York. Please, buddies, don't overlook this. I am in great need of your assistance in connection with my claim for disability compensation. Address Louis Eugene Hill, Route A, Box 140 J, Zolfo Springs, Florida.

BALL, LAWRENCE, ROY, and **FRANK.**—It will be to your advantage to communicate with L. H. Innis, Attorney, 328 Seventeenth Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

MOORE, W. G.—Last heard of in Western States. Please write to Mrs. Gailberth, 25 West Sixty-eighth Street, New York, New York.

OSBORNE, J. DALLAS.—Carpenter. Last heard of in 1928, at Houston, Texas. Forty-five years old. Nearly six feet tall. Brown hair, turning gray. Please write to your brother, Otto, at State Sanitarium, Arkansas.

GORACKE, GEORGE.—Missing for five years. Was in Kansas City, Kansas, when last heard of. Any one knowing him or his whereabouts, please write to his sister, Miss Ida Goracke, Route 2, Wilder, Idaho.

HALLWORTH, HARRY.—Would like to hear from him, or from any one who can give me news of him. Kindly address M. I. W., care of this magazine.

SAPP, MARY.—Formerly worked at Hancomb's, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. My bungalow is beautiful. You are welcome any time. Still live at same address. I think of you often. Write to your friend Amer, care of this magazine.

COURTNEY, ARTHUR A.—Last heard of in 1923, at 2022 Poplar Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Any one knowing his present address, or that of his mother, Mary E. Courtney, or brothers Harry and Raymond, please communicate at once. His twelve-year-old son is seeking him. Address all letters to Alta Evans, Sherwood, Oregon.

DAY, JAMES WILLIAM.—Born January 11, 1900. Left Kansas City, Missouri, for Chicago, Illinois, about eight years ago. Information greatly appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Lizzie Flowers, 2609 Cumberland Avenue, Waco, Texas.

DETWILER or **SMITH, MRS. BESSIE.**—Red hair, gray eyes. Left Missouri six years ago. Her daughter would welcome any word regarding her. Address Mrs. Eula Williams, Shoshone, Idaho.

DETWILER, BILLY and **LELA.**—Fourteen and eleven years old, respectively. Any one knowing their whereabouts, please write to their sister, Mrs. Eula Williams, Shoshone, Idaho.

HACK, ETHEL.—Remember your old chum at Wayside College? Would love to hear from you. Write to Dolly, care of this magazine.

SASS, LILLIAN.—Please write to your friend Dolly, care of this magazine.

MANNING.—Would persons of this name kindly communicate with the advertiser? I am anxious to locate my relatives. Address Dorothy Manning, care of this magazine.

GORDON.—Joe, Louie, Charles, Blanche, Jean, Emma, Donald, Alexina: please write to your brother, James Gordon, 37 North Bank Street, New London, Connecticut.

MOSS, H. C., or **family.**—Last heard from in Fresno, California, nineteen years ago. Information of any kind gratefully received by Mrs. Belle (Pecher) Benson, R. R. 7, Dowagiac, Michigan.

TOUCHATT, WESLEY, FRANK, and **ERNEST.**—My cousins, who formerly resided in Brownsfield, Missouri. News of them welcomed by Mrs. Belle (Pecher) Benson, R. R. 7, Dowagiac, Michigan.

BAU, GEORGE.—Would be grateful for any information whatever regarding this party, who is a relative of my father's. He was last heard of in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1905. Kindly address any communications to Charles Bau, 309 East Ninety-fifth Street, New York, New York.

LINDSEY, MABEL.—Twenty-two years old, five feet six inches tall. Brown hair and eyes. Fair complexion. Scars on face. Last heard of in Nashville, Tennessee. Word from or about her appreciated by Hallie Crawford, 634½ North Main Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

RUBY, HELEN.—Left Powder River County, Montana, for California, accompanied by her mother. Information requested by E. P. W., care of this magazine.

PURVIS, INA.—Limps slightly. About five feet tall. Weighs one hundred and ten pounds. Blond hair. Blue eyes. Was in Sacramento, California, in August, 1931. Please write to me, Ina. I need you. D. D. Markham, Route 9, Box 2010, Sacramento, California.

TUCKER, H. C.—Was on the U. S. S. "Whipple," stationed at Manila, Philippine Islands, when last heard from. Any assistance in locating him will be thankfully received by his friend, Jimmy Childress, 537 North Beaton Street, Corsicana, Texas.

WESTFALL, HENRY, ANDY, CHARLES, and **JASPER.**—Born in Pendleton County, West Virginia. Last heard of twenty-four years ago. Charles fought in the Spanish-American War. Their lonely half brother would be glad to hear from them or persons having information regarding them. Address Ira W. Wilfong, Rosemont, West Virginia.

BARTLETT, HARRY G.—Please let your wife know where you are. It is very important that I hear from you. Have tried to locate you before, but failed. I still love you. Mae, 644 Pavone Street, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

PALMER.—Would like to hear from relatives of my mother, whose maiden name was Ida Palmer. She married my father, Martin Ruhl. Her sisters were Fannie, Rose, and Mrs. Richard Conrad. Please write to J. M. Ruhl, 131 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

RUHL.—My uncle Charles, who formerly lived in Louisville, Kentucky, has three sons, Charles, John, and George, and two daughters, Jessie and Marie. Information as to their present whereabouts welcomed by J. M. Ruhl, 131 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

DENNISON, A. G., JOHN and **ETTA.**—Formerly lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Goldsboro, Maryland. Any help in tracing them will be appreciated by J. M. Ruhl, 131 Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

GELLERMAN, AARON.—Of medium height. Weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Black hair. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Lois has forgiven you, and wants you to come back. Please write to Virginia Morling, care of this magazine.

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.—My dear lost sister, last seen about forty years ago, working in a confectionery store in Detroit, Michigan. Married a man who lived in Buffalo, New York. Any information deeply appreciated by Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 7, Jackson, Michigan.

ANTHONY, GEORGE.—Of Lancaster, Ohio. Please communicate with the advertiser, regarding George Opperman. Address Mrs. Jos. Heibel, Plymouth Road, Route 3, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

LEE, ELMER JACKSON or **JACK.**—Disappeared twenty-five years ago, leaving wife and two children. Forty-eight years old. Black curly hair. Brown eyes. Dark complexion. Kindly send any information to Mrs. Fred Edwards, Route 1, Prescott, Arkansas.

ATTENTION: LEGATION GUARDS, MANAGUA, NICARAGUA.—Would like to hear from any of the marines who served in the Legation Guard at Managua from 1915 to 1917. Write to wild Irishman, care of this magazine.

DANIELS, WALTER.—My father, last heard of in Kennett, Missouri. Will any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly write to Mrs. Lucille Jones, Mangham, Louisiana.

BRAY, FRED, HARTLEY, WODDARD, MADGELEAN, and **OCIA.**—Last heard of in Blytheville, Arkansas. Their cousin is anxious to get in touch with them. Address any information to Mrs. Lucille Jones, Mangham, Louisiana.

HAMILTON, ALFRED SEYMOUR.—Nicknamed "Sandow." Born in England, about April 14, 1872. His son, Henry W., and daughter, Louise E., have not seen him since he left Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1901. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, where he worked for the fire department from 1905 to 1910. Was a patient in Crocker Street Hospital, Los Angeles, in December, 1910. Believed to have a brother, William, in South America. His children have tried for years to find trace of him, and would be deeply grateful for any information concerning him. Address Henry W. Hamilton, care of this magazine.

SMITH, FRANK G.—Also known as Frederick Robertson. Worked on a merry-go-round. His home was in Providence, Rhode Island. Information requested by Mrs. Olive Newman Smith, 46 Ash Street, Spencer, Massachusetts.

JIMERSON or **JAMISON, M. T.** or **MACK.**—Tall, slender, blue-eyed, and slightly bald. Age, about fifty years. Pleasant appearance and good talker. Works as salesman. Last heard of in San Antonio, Texas, in 1925. Any one knowing his present address, or anything at all about him, please write to his daughter, Mary Jamison, 1419 Virginia Boulevard, San Antonio, Texas.

ALLEN, JOHN MILTON.—My son, whom I found at Plankington, South Dakota, about thirty-nine years ago. He was then ten years old. I told him at that time that his real name was Jacob Fuller. When last heard of, he had been sent to Danville, Illinois. Any word from or about him will be deeply appreciated by Mrs. M. F. Fuller, Route 1, Miami, Oklahoma.

STANLEY, BOB.—Machinery sales engineer, last heard from in Alabama. It is very urgent that he be located. Any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate at once with D. D. W., care of this magazine.

BAILY, JIMMY.—Contractor for a painting company in Dallas, Texas, where he was last heard from. His present address appreciated by Macie Stockton, 1420 Roosevelt Street, San Antonio, Texas.

STOCKTON, DOCTOR J. W.—Last heard of in Oklahoma. Your brother's daughter would like to find you. Please write to Macie Stockton, 1420 Roosevelt Street, San Antonio, Texas.

PANCHISHIN, PAUL W.—Twenty years of age. Left home in June, 1930. Was in Buckley, Washington, until April, 1931, and later went to Seattle, where he was last heard from. Plays Hawaiian guitar. His brother would like to learn whether he is living or dead. Address any information to Steve W. Panchishin, Gronlid, Saskatchewan, Canada.

YOUNG, TOM.—Meat cutter by trade. Six feet tall. Weight, about one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Brown hair. Blue eyes. Stooping shoulders. Last heard of in Denver, Colorado, about eleven years ago. Wife's name Bertha. Children, Alvin, Flossie, Mary, and others. News of family welcomed by W. T. Young, 1439 Copeland Avenue, S. W., Atlanta, Georgia.

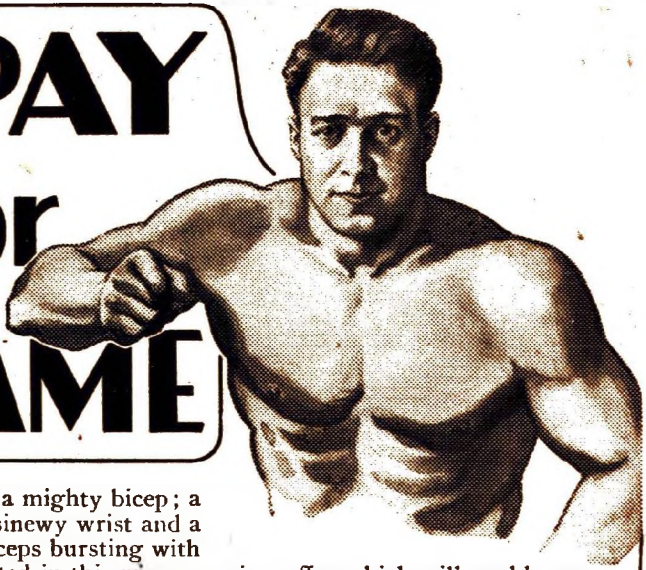
RANDALL, JOSEPH L.—Missing seven years. Last known address was 222 Linden Street, Scranton, Pennsylvania. Of medium height, with black hair and dark-brown eyes. His father died recently, and his mother is in failing health. Will he, or any one knowing him, please communicate with his only daughter, Mrs. Rose Randall Allen, 1711 East Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

WHITE, HARRY.—Twenty-six years old. Tall and slender. Dark hair and eyes. His home is in Kansas City, Missouri, where he was last heard from about three years ago. His father, T. J. White, and his brother Harvey at one time lived in Denver, Colorado. Information of any kind highly appreciated by Mrs. Kathryn Rouseau, Kelseyville, California.

HARRIS, ALBERT R.—Left Norfolk, Virginia, in October, 1930. Last heard from in Port Arthur, Texas. About five feet ten inches tall. Weight, one hundred and fifty pounds. Blond hair. Light-blue eyes. It is very important that he communicate with his wife, Mrs. A. R. Harris, 261 West Bute Street, Norfolk, Virginia.

SCOTT, MRS. GLADYS.—About thirty years old. Last seen in Lafayette, Colorado. I am anxious to hear from you. Please write to Ethel Heller, Mount Harris, Colorado.

I'LL PAY $1.00 for your NAME



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Making big men out of little, scrawny, muscleless men is my specialty. I delight in packing their bodies with nerves of steel and in building on their chests, backs, legs and arms great slabs of iron-like muscles. All you need is the "dare to do" ambition, the spunk to get started. In a short time that spineless back will writhe with new energy, the flat chest will surge from throat to stomach like the swell of a wave. You will get a herculean, Samson-like body, powerful beyond your wildest dream.

Make your dreams of possessing a body of dynamic, powerful muscles like mine come true. Stop being a wall flower. For the love of Mike show you are a man by being true to that craving in your heart. I won't fail you. I will *make* you succeed. I'll give you the kind of muscles that will always be strong. That's why they call me the Champion of Champions. I never fail to help. Thousands have benefited from my teachings. I changed them from weaklings to strong, husky, healthy giants just as I can change you if you will let me. You can be next if you are sincere an ambitious —if you will let me work with you for just 90 days.

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Do not send me a single cent. Just send your name and address and I will send absolutely free, by return mail, postage prepaid, my book titled "The Thrill of Being Strong." I want you to have this book to read and to keep. I want you to see and read about the job I have done for others—I want you to read and know the job I can do for you. To learn all this costs you nothing but the 2c to mail me the coupon. If you act at once I will enclose a coupon worth $1.00. This coupon has a genuine value of $1.00 to every man who becomes one of my students. I will write you more about that after I hear from you.

An offer like this, that makes it possible for you to mould a perfect body, may never be made again. You have a duty to yourself to take care of that body of yours, to build it and do the best job you can with it. If you do, and I know you want to, you will reap your reward in your enjoyment of a strong, herculean body and years of good health. SIGN YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS TO THE COUPON NOW! And be one of the lucky ones to make and save an easy dollar.

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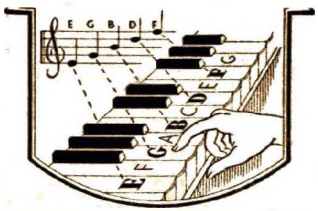

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