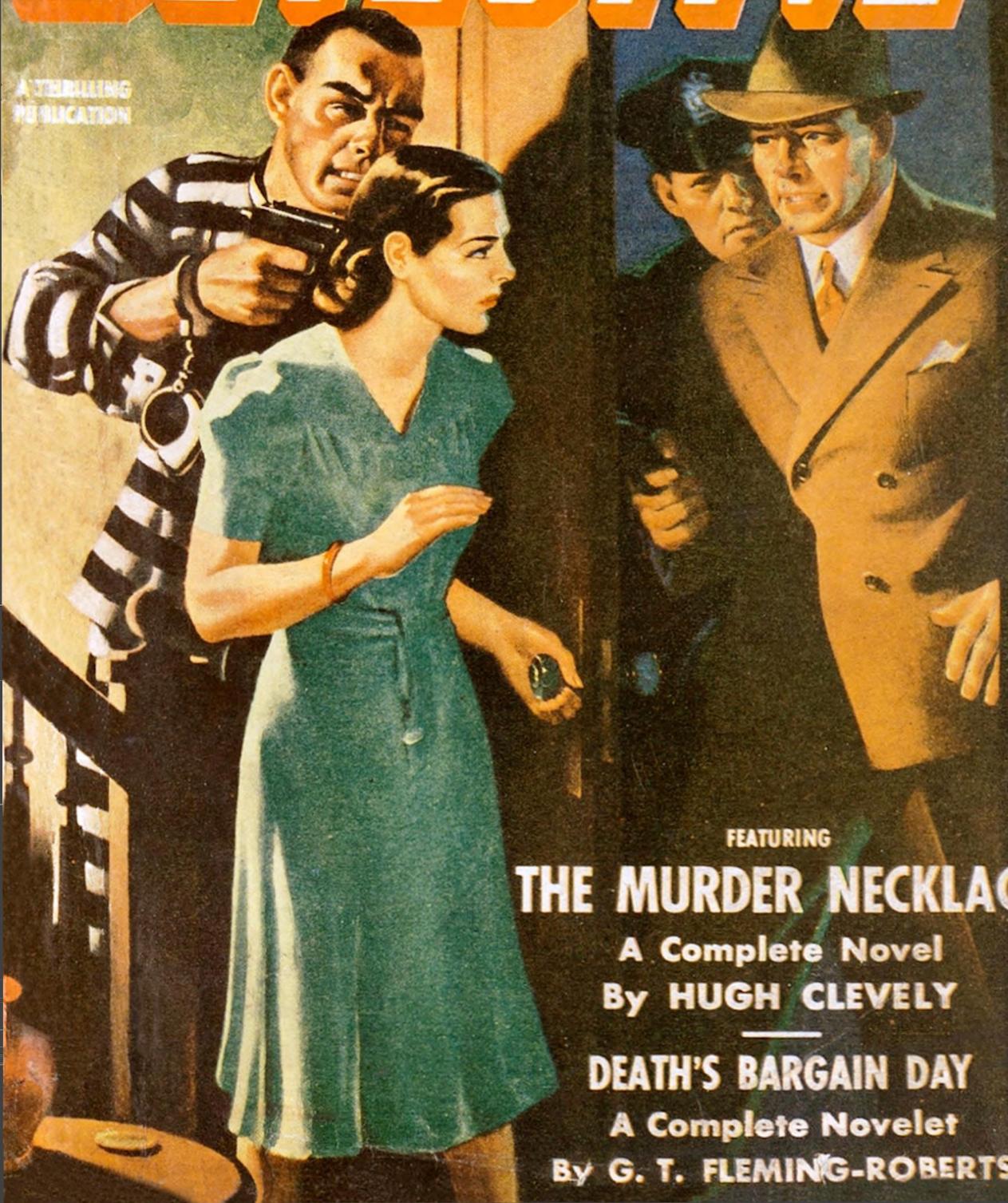


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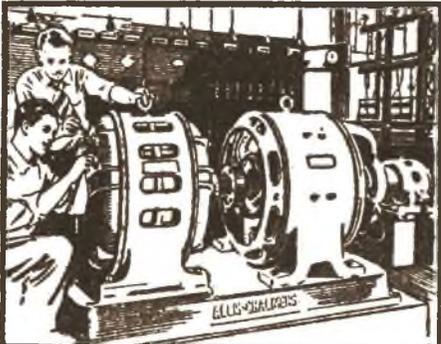
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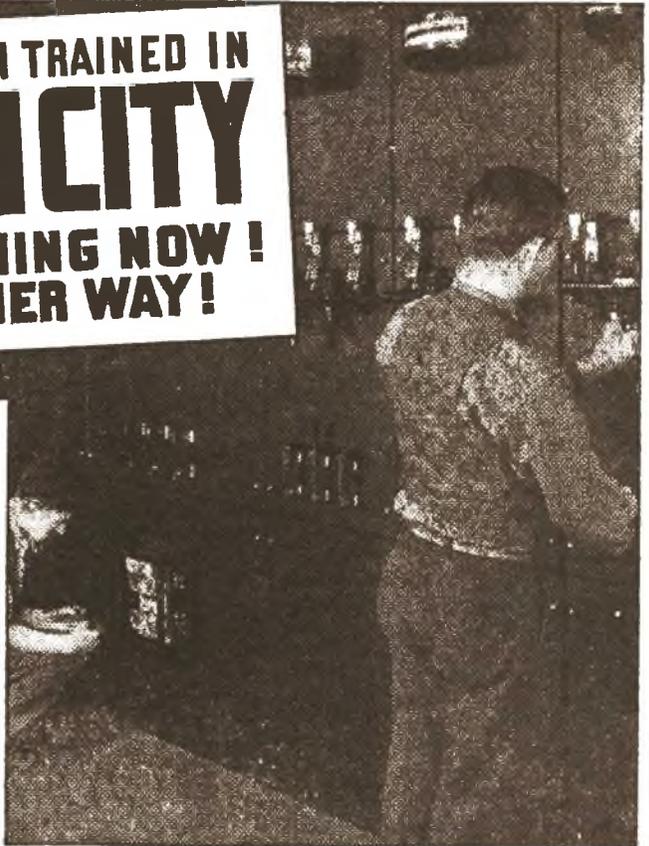


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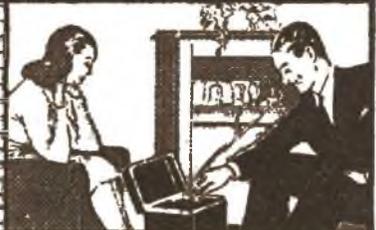


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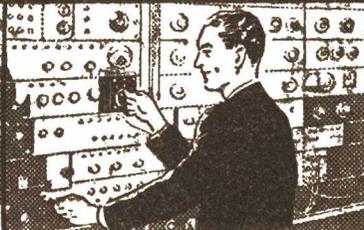
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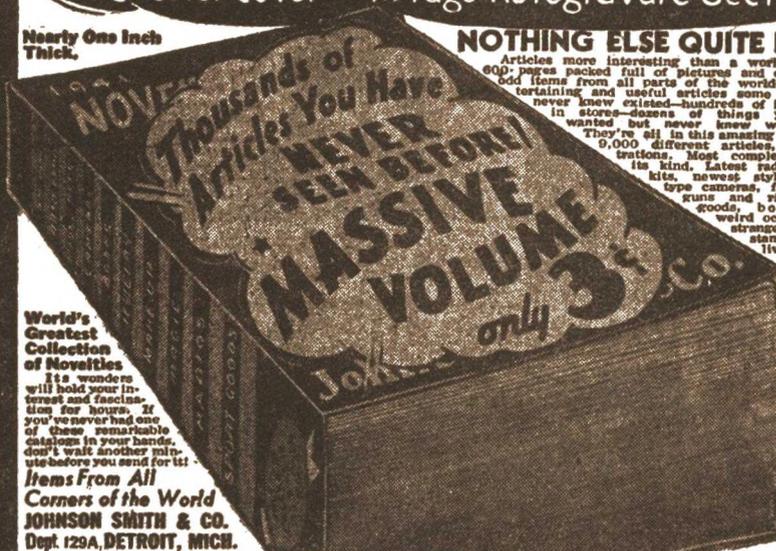
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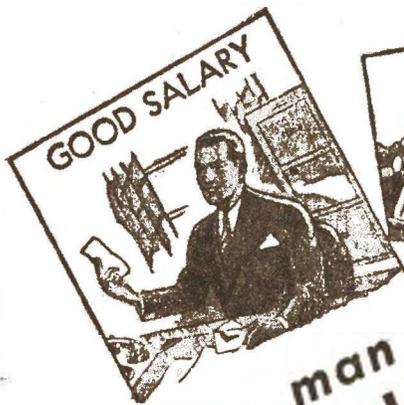
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(Concluded on page 11)

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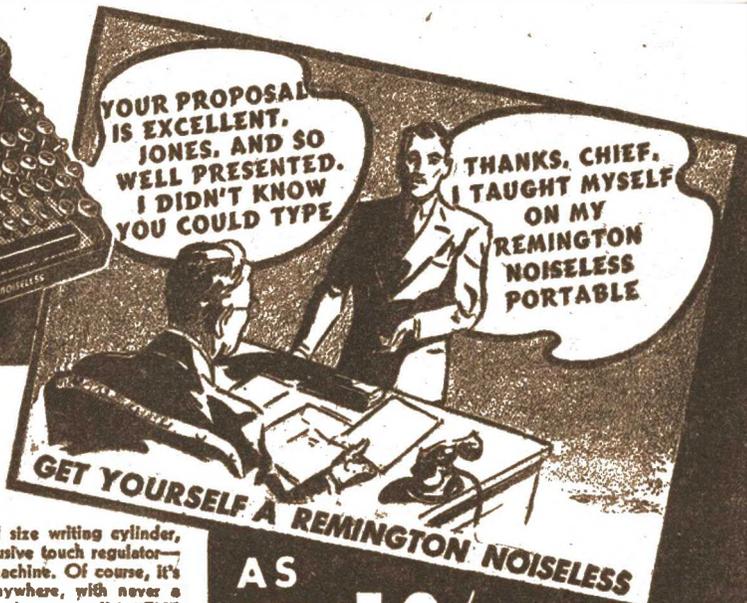
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(Concluded from page 8)

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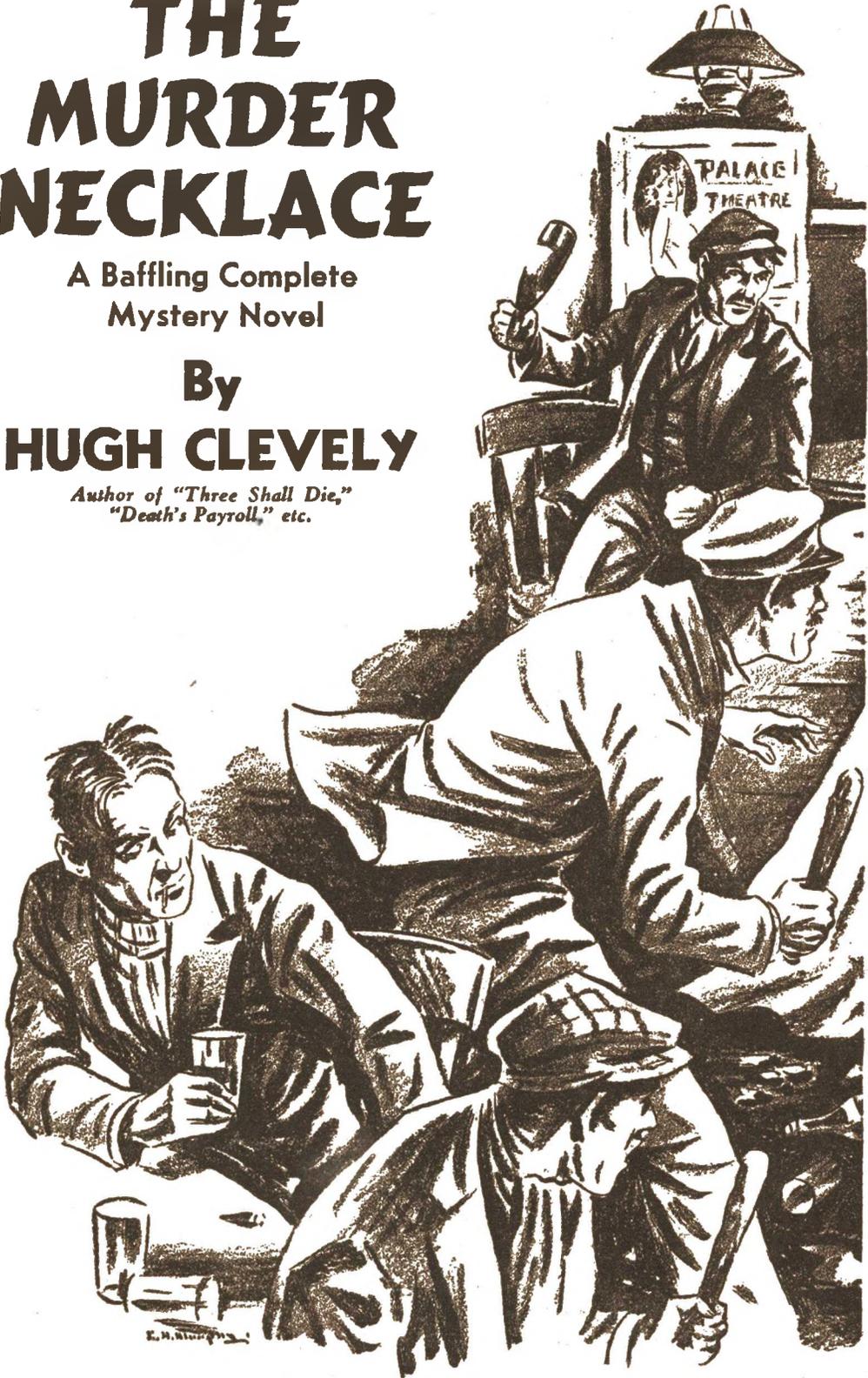
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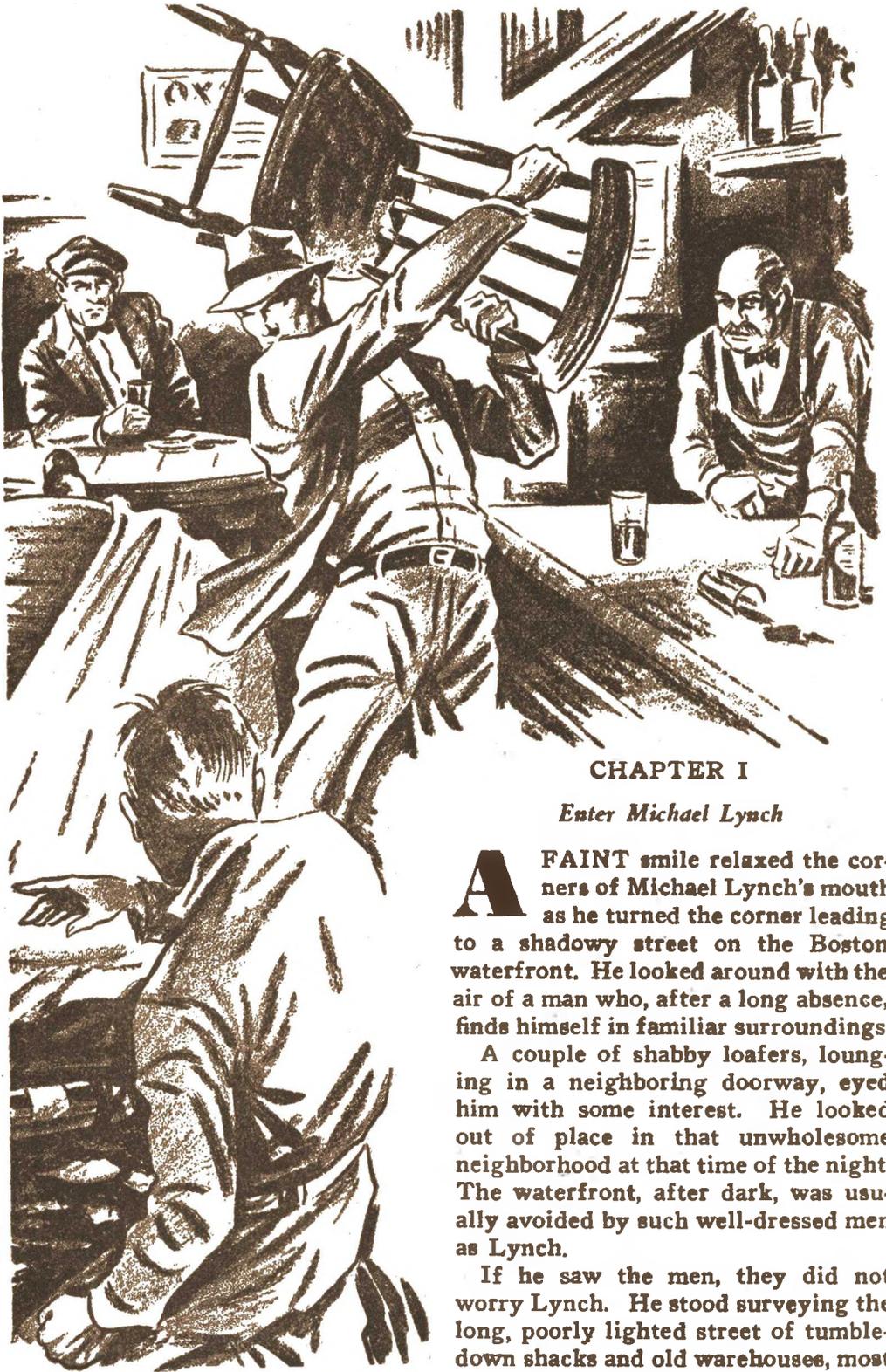
By
HUGH CLEVELY

*Author of "Three Shall Die,"
"Death's Payroll," etc.*



Lynch seized a chair and swung it over his head

Crime Runs Rampant as Michael Lynch Tangles



CHAPTER I

Enter Michael Lynch

A FAINT smile relaxed the corners of Michael Lynch's mouth as he turned the corner leading to a shadowy street on the Boston waterfront. He looked around with the air of a man who, after a long absence, finds himself in familiar surroundings.

A couple of shabby loafers, lounging in a neighboring doorway, eyed him with some interest. He looked out of place in that unwholesome neighborhood at that time of the night. The waterfront, after dark, was usually avoided by such well-dressed men as Lynch.

If he saw the men, they did not worry Lynch. He stood surveying the long, poorly lighted street of tumble-down shacks and old warehouses, most of them black with the grime of years.

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The swinging sign over a tavern, the Neptune Saloon, caught his eyes. He walked toward it.

As he pushed open the swing door, the rumble of men's voices came to him. But as he entered, conversation ceased abruptly. He found himself in a small, low-ceiled, smoky room, where seven or eight rough-looking men stared at him with scowling faces.

It looked as if this tavern were the favorite haunt of some clique who resented the intrusion of strangers. At once he became watchful and alert, though the faint smile did not leave his lips. Then, as he stepped toward the bar, a foot was thrust stealthily from beneath a table in his path.

Lynch was well aware that in many such waterfront joints it was not unusual for strangers to be tripped or jostled, particularly well-dressed ones, as an excuse for picking a fight. The fight usually ended with the stranger, somewhat damaged, being thrown out into the street, minus his valuables. Should a charge be made to the police, no one in the tavern would know anything about it. And more than likely the police would tell the complainant, grumpily, to stay out of such dumps and not go deliberately hunting for trouble.

Michael Lynch did not trip over that out-thrust foot. He stamped on it—hard! Then he turned to its owner with slightly lifted brows.

"Sorry," he said coolly. "Was that your foot?"

The burly tough swore luridly. Lynch, with that faint smile still about his firm lips, was aware that he was the center of hostile interest. There was deadly silence.

THE tough looked up slowly, with narrowed eyes, his hand reaching for a bottle on the table. But as he took in Lynch's broad-shouldered figure, the athletic build, and met the challenging stare of a pair of icy,

menacing gray eyes, he changed his mind.

"Okay!" he said surlily, and tilted the bottle over his glass.

A faint sigh of disappointment went up. Lynch sauntered to the bar, and ordered beer.

With the beer in front of him, Lynch took out his cigarette case, and selected a cigarette. The eyes of every man in the place fastened avidly on that case. It was a gold case, the gift of a friend, but had it been made of leather or gun-metal, Lynch would have carried it with equal satisfaction so long as it fulfilled its purpose.

The barman looked at him with little eyes bulging with curiosity. The others were eying both Lynch and the case keenly. They did not in the least know what to make of him.

His quiet, cultured voice and well-cut tweeds proclaimed him as from another walk of life. But his broad shoulders and hard, tanned face, with its slightly aquiline nose and cold gray eyes, all were a warning that here was a man who knew how to take care of himself. They noticed, too, a faint, wavy pink scar that ran from the corner of his left eyebrow to the rim of his snap-brim hat. Who was he anyhow? What did he want here?

Lynch drank his beer, and put down his glass.

"Do you know what's happened to a man around here named Daniel—Captain Daniel?" he asked the bartender.

The barkeep hesitated, looking at him suspiciously. For two seconds there was silence.

"You mean a tall, red-cheeked old guy with a long beard?" a harsh voice broke in then.

Lynch, anxious to get news of Captain Daniel, turned to the speaker, one of the most repulsively ugly men he had ever seen. The man was short and broad, with long arms and huge, muscular hands. He had a big head with

of a Grim, Baffling Mystery Maelstrom!

a mean and narrow face that somehow was remindful of a snake. His pale eyes were snakelike also, and he had a wide, cruel, thin-lipped mouth. Both face and head were completely hairless, and lobeless big ears stuck out grotesquely. He was better dressed than his companions, however.

"That's who I mean," said Lynch. "Retired from the sea after the war."

"He died about six months ago," said the hairless man, and Lynch caught the twitch of the cruel thin lips as well as the grins on the faces of two or three of the other men. "Seems he got to buttin' in where he wasn't wanted, and got took with a



Michael Lynch

bad case of busted skull one night—from an iron bar." The repulsive man pretended to sigh heavily, and shook his shining bald head. "Nobody could ever find out who done it," he said. "You a friend of his?"

"Yes," said Lynch.

The glances of the two men met. They stared at one another challengingly. The hairless man was first to look away. He yawned and lumbered to his feet.

"Time to be gettin' along," he said.

Five other men arose and trailed out

through the door. At the doorway the bald man paused and looked back, grinning.

"I don't know what you're doing in this neck of the woods, but you'd better do it somewhere else," he said. "That's just a tip, Big Boy."

"Thanks," Lynch said dryly.

THESSE men could not know that the angrier Michael Lynch was, the more quietly he spoke. And he was filled with a black anger now. So Captain Daniel was dead—murdered! Lynch's own unanswered letters had half prepared him for the news of the fighting old man's death. But not for this! For he was as sure as though one of those men who had just left had confessed it that one of them had been Captain Daniel's murderer! And they had laughed about it!

"Who was that man who told me about Captain Daniel?" he snapped to the bartender.

"Name of Gourlock," was the laconic answer. "Big politician. He give you a damn good tip, too. And if you take mine you'll scam from this part of the waterfront while the goin's good!"

Lynch lifted his eyebrows and ordered another beer. Then came laughter and a shrill protest from the street, and a sharp-featured, flashily dressed young man barged through the doorway, frog-marching a boy before him. He gave the boy a push toward the bar.

"Here y'are, Bill!" he said. "What you going to have?"

"I don't want nothin'," wailed the boy.

A brutal-looking man in a blue sweater, who sat nodding at a table, looked up, bleary-eyed, and grinned.

"Well, well, if it ain't young Bill!" he said, in a tone of heavy jocularity. "Thought you'd forgot your old pals, kid. Where you find him, Slim?"

"Sneaking along Charles Street,"

s a i d the sharp-featured tough. "Brought him along to have a few drinks for old time's sake. Hell, would I like to see old Holden's face when this brat gets back soused! He'll know something about his little pet lamb bein' led astray, as he calls it, then!"

"Not bad—that idea," said the blue-sweatered man. "Tiny, give us a double Scotch for my pal Bill."

The barkeeper handed over a double Scotch. The sharp-featured young man took it and showed it at the boy.

"Drink it down, kid!" he commanded.

"I won't!" the boy shouted desperately. "Lemme go, you—you—"

His sharp-featured captor kicked him viciously.

"Drink it, I said!" he growled.

At first Lynch had watched idly, indifferent, since so much else was on his mind. But this was more than he could take. Still apparently indifferent, he reached out, took the glass, flung the contents in the face of the boy's taunter, and slapped the fellow with a force that sent him staggering across the room. In the momentary stupefied silence he led the boy out of the tavern. On the street he paused and produced a handkerchief.

"Wipe your face," he said. "You're too big to be crying like that. Why didn't you kick him in the pants?"

"He'd have killed me!" the boy whimpered.

"Not if you'd kicked him hard enough," said Lynch. "How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Then you certainly ought to have kicked him in the pants. Don't forget to do it the next time you run across him. He'll—"

A clear, feminine voice behind Lynch broke in:

"Leave that boy alone!"

A girl stepped between Lynch and young Bill. In the dim light all Lynch could see was that she was tall and willowy.

"Can't you find anything better to do than bullying children?" she asked scornfully.

LYNCH was irritated. She had a cultured voice, but he objected to being interfered with by mistaken girls. And what was she doing on the Boston waterfront at this time of night? Some young idiot who thought it smart to go slumming alone?

"A little bullying is good for some kids," he said calmly, and he added with unmistakable meaning: "It can at least teach them to think before they speak. Perhaps—"

But at this moment the door of the Neptune Saloon banged open, and three men barged out—the boy's sharp-featured captor, the man in the blue sweater, and another man.

"There he is!" one of them shouted.

There was going to be trouble all right, and Michael Lynch was ready for it, but this was no place for a girl. He grabbed her arm and started her off so hard that she staggered.

"Get out of this!" he commanded. "Go home and stay there! I'll watch out for the boy."

He whirled to face the three men who were swaggering toward him. He did not wait for their attack. Lunging forward, he swung a hard left.

The blow landed with the force of a small battering-ram. The foremost man spun around once, clutched wildly at the air, reeled, and sprawled on the pavement. But already the man in the blue sweater was hurling himself at Lynch, who ducked just in time. The man's fist shot over his head and drove into a wooden shutter behind it with a sharp rap that was not caused by the impact of bare knuckles.

"Brass knuckles, huh?" growled Lynch and waited, poised on the balls of his feet, alert as a cat.

Street doors began to open and curious spectators rushed out to see the fight. But there was not much to it. As the man in the blue sweater swung around to get in another blow, Lynch's

left hand shot out, lightning-swift, caught the hand that wore the brass knuckles, and twisted it sharply. With a howl of pain the man reeled blindly away, holding his hand tightly to him.

"You'll have to wear your knucks on the other hand for a day or two," Lynch said coolly, and pounced on the sharp-featured young crook who was trying to slip away.

Lynch shook him until his teeth chattered, and the crowd howled in glee. Lifting him by the collar then he held him up for inspection.

"Anybody own this?" he asked.

There was a chorus of laughter and exclamations from the crowd.

"It's Slim Sanderson!"

"Hey, Slim, how's the weather up there?"

But nobody confessed to ownership of the young hoodlum.

Lynch gave him a final shake, and kicked him into the crowd.

CHAPTER II

Lynch Finds It Awkward



LYNCH moved away through the crowd, which hastily made way for him. At the edge of the crowd he ran into the girl and the boy called Bill.

"Are you hurt?" she asked quickly.

Probably getting a thrill out of all this, Lynch thought acidly. And she would probably get another thrill out of relating her breath-taking experience to her girl friends in Brookline or on Beacon Hill. She gave him the impression, somehow, that such places were more familiar to her than the waterfront.

"You still hanging around?" he asked a little wearily. "What are you doing down here, anyway? Does the prospect of getting smacked with a brick appeal to you?"

"I live down here," she said defens-

ively. "My uncle, Dr. Holden, runs the boys' club in Judd Street. Now, perhaps you'll tell me if you're hurt. If you are, my uncle can attend to you."

She had moved slightly into a beam of light from an open doorway. For the first time Lynch saw her clearly—and caught his breath.

She was tall, but well proportioned and graceful, with the easy carriage of an athlete. She had a firm, rounded chin, soft curving lips, and clear blue eyes that looked at him levelly. Her hair, showing beneath her small, black hat was chestnut, with reddish tints in the light, and her skin was smooth and attractively tanned. She looked to be a girl who would be alive and happy standing on the bridge of a ship, bareheaded and in oilskins, with a high sea running and a stiff breeze blowing her hair about her face.

Lynch was not easily astonished, but he had not expected her to look like that. For a breathless instant he stood and stared at her—and she returned his stare with cool composure. Then she smiled suddenly.

"Did you say you were hurt?" she asked.

"No, thanks—I'm not hurt," said Lynch.

"Nor am I," she said calmly. "You didn't push me hard enough . . . Come along, Bill. We'll—"

"Miss Holden!" a deep voice suddenly interrupted. "Has there been any trouble?"

A big, good-looking man had moved forward, smiling at the girl. He was smartly dressed, to be found in this neighborhood. His gray lounge suit was cut to perfection, his trousers perfectly creased, and he carried gloves and walking-stick.

"This gentleman's been in trouble with the waterfront gang," the girl calmly informed, and laughed a little. "Or, rather, they've been in trouble with him."

"He knocked Bob Smithers out with one punch to the jaw, and then done

somethin' to Ted Wyman's hand that made him yell blue murder!" young Bill said breathlessly. "And—and after that he shook the daylights out of Slim Sanderson and give him the boot!"

"Oh!" The well dressed man looked at Lynch with interest. "Why did you do that?"

"I guess I felt like doing it," Lynch drawled quietly.

BOTH men were oddly aware that an antagonism had sprung up between them at first sight. And with no reason for it, each was fully conscious of the other's dislike.

The eyes of the man in gray narrowed slightly.

"What are you doing in this part of Boston?" he asked sharply. "It hardly seems your speed."

"Looking around," Lynch said laconically. "Do you mind?"

"We'd better be getting along," broke in the girl. She glanced at Lynch. "And you'd better come with us, or you're likely to show up in the hospital with a broken head. Or worse."

"I'll only have myself to blame," Lynch said good-humoredly. "That should be some consolation."

"Don't argue with him, Miss Holden," broke in the other man. "If he insists on looking for trouble—"

"Good night!" Lynch said, lifted his hat, and walked away.

"I wonder who he is?" the girl said, looking after him.

"A crook," said her companion. "I spotted that as soon as I set eyes on him."

"He's a little too fond of pushing people around," said the girl, her blue eyes thoughtful. "But just the same I hope nothing happens to him."

Lynch had turned the corner into a cross street when he heard a low whistle behind him. He turned quickly, to see half a dozen slouching men emerging from a darkened warehouse entrance. Wanting no more

trouble, he had turned to retrace his steps, when from the other end of the street he saw more shadowy figures approaching. He was trapped between the groups.

He stopped short, softly whistling a bar of "Over There," his private battle call in moments of crisis. He was in a spot, all right. He could hardly hope to get away with fighting twelve or thirteen men.

Before him was a row of grimy houses, and on either side of him the shadowy figures were closing in. Making up his mind on the instant, he leaped across the street, hurled himself onto a window sill, caught hold of a drain pipe, and began to climb with the agility of a monkey, praying that the pipe would hold. It did, but before he reached the roof, pulling himself up hand over hand, he heard angry shouting.

"It's Jake—Jake the Cat!"

"Look at him climb!"

"Get around into Slip Street, some of you! Cut him off! We can't shoot here!"

Lynch hauled himself onto the roof, scrambled across it and shinnied down the other side. He climbed over a high fence, ran across an open space, and out into Slip Street. As he reached Slip Street, running men were turning the corner into the street. A flash of flame split the darkness as the street echoed to the thundering reverberations of a shot. Lynch had not expected that. One of the gangsters must have gone haywire. That shooting would be sure to bring the police.

He ran swiftly across Slip Street, down a blind alley, over another fence and raced down a street not far from Haymarket Square. In the distance he could still hear the excited shouts of his baffled pursuers, and the shrilling of a policeman's whistle. But none of them would catch him now.

A few minutes' quick walking took him to the brightly lighted square where he hailed a taxi and told the

driver, surprisingly, to take him to the Copley-Plaza.

IT was only half-past eleven when he entered the sitting-room of his suite at the Copley-Plaza, and called down for a highball. He drank it slowly, reflecting on the events of the evening, and making plans.

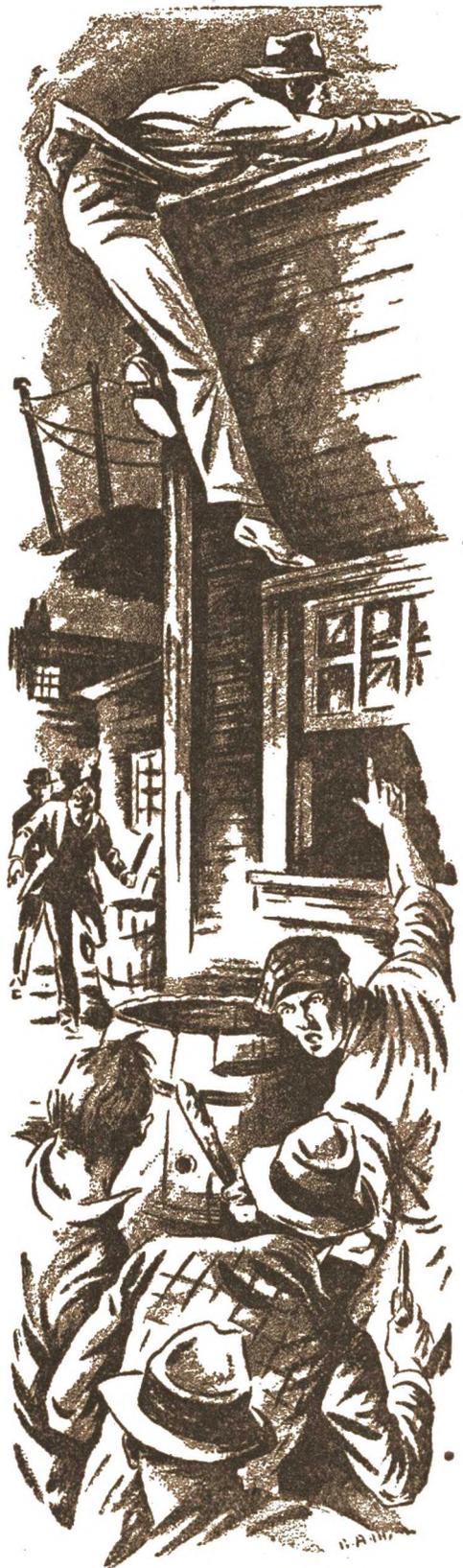
But into both thoughts and plans there obstinately intruded the picture of a tall, calm girl, with blue eyes and a charming smile. He tried to banish her from his mind. Women had never had a part in his scheme of things, and he had no intention of letting one do so now. Yet, somehow, he kept on thinking about her, and when he finally went to bed the same calm, blue-eyed girl was in his dreams. . . .

At nine o'clock the next morning, Lynch breakfasted in his suite, with a *Morning Globe* for company. He took particular interest in the account of the police investigations into the theft of a diamond necklace from Mrs. Otto Van Renseler, a leading socialite.

It was a colorful story, with an interesting twist. Two days previously, Mrs. Van Renseler had taken her necklace from her safe deposit box to wear at a smart ball given in the interest of British refugee children, and sponsored by the visiting Duchess of Hammersmith. Returning to her Beacon Hill home, Mrs. Van Renseler had placed the necklace in a safe in her bedroom, intending to return it to the safe deposit in the morning.

At two o'clock in the morning she had awakened to find a masked man in her bedroom, covering her with an automatic. He had bound and gagged her, and helped himself to the necklace. And he had gloatingly told her then that his failure to get that necklace six months previously in Newport had been keeping him awake ever since, had robbed him of his appetite, but that now he would be able to sleep and eat.

That had been a plain tip-off to Mrs. Van Renseler that the midnight vis-



A voice below bawled: "Look! It's Jake—
Jake the Cat!"

itor was the notorious Jake the Cat, also known as Jake the Climber, jewel thief and gunman. The midnight visitor to the Van Renselers' Newport home, six months before, had tauntingly boasted that he was Jake the Cat, but that the police or nobody else knew who Jake the Cat was, unless someone in the underworld guessed. He had been surprised by servants, though he had escaped after shooting the footman through the shoulder.

This time, though, Jake the Cat had got away with it. And a few moments after he had gone out of the window Mrs. Van Renseler had heard sounds of fierce fighting on the lawn, and then a shot. The beat policeman, arriving on the run, had found four men struggling furiously, and when he had waded in had been cracked on the head with a blackjack and laid out cold. A prowler car had come, siren screaming, just as two cars were disappearing, one in one direction, one in the other.

The chase had been futile and, returning, the two officers had found the unconscious policeman on the lawn, and a man shot through the knee. The wounded man had been identified as William Pink, a waterfront character, but he had insisted violently that he knew nothing whatsoever about any burglary, and that all he knew about the fracas was that he had been walking by, had leaped the hedge to see what it was all about, and a wild shot had got him through the knee.

At a demand to know what he had been doing so far from his hangout at that hour of the morning, he had merely said that he liked to take long walks at night. He was being held, but probably would soon be released, as it was believed he could give no information.

The whole thing was plain to the police. An attempt, whether successful or not, had been made to hijack Jake while he was making a get-away. The newspaper story concluded with the usual announcement that the po-

lice had important clues, and were expected to make several arrests shortly.

MICHAEL LYNCH shoved away the paper with a thoughtful expression on his face, and lit a cigarette. Presently a faint, grim smile touched his lips. He went into his bedroom, took a loaded automatic from a Gladstone bag, and slipped it into his hip pocket.

An hour later he was again sauntering along the waterfront.

Daylight accentuated the squalor of that forbidding neighborhood, but the narrow streets were alive with people—slatternly women doing their penny marketing at the fishing boats, children playing, swaggering sailors from nearby docks, waterfront toughs, and a sprinkling of respectable longshoremen who were unemployed.

Lynch was conscious that he was exciting a certain interest, even an undisguised hostility among some groups. He had come back to learn more about what had happened to his old friend, Captain Daniel, though, and meant to do it.

After something more than an hour spent on the docks, he found out that Captain Daniel had been found lying in a gutter, badly wounded, and had been taken to the office of a Dr. Evans, a young surgeon who had since left the neighborhood. The old captain had died before an ambulance had arrived to take him to a hospital.

That was all Lynch could learn, without going to the police—which he decidedly did not want to do. Probably they could tell him no more anyway. But he was determined to find Dr. Evans, who might be able to tell him plenty. The police had already given up the search for the murderer. It was an unimportant case to them.

As Lynch turned a corner, his attention was drawn to three men who were talking. And near them, apparently waiting, stood the girl Lynch had run across the night before. As

he approached, she smiled slightly, and unconsciously he slowed.

He raised his hat, said "Good morning," and stopped. She touched the arm of one of the three men.

"Uncle," she said, "this is the gentleman Mr. Stone and I were telling you about—that we met last night."

A tall, thin, elderly man, with an absent-minded air and weak blue eyes that beamed from behind a gold pince-nez, turned inquiringly.

"What was that, Sheila?" he asked, and looked at Lynch. "Oh, yes. How do you do, Mr.—"

"Lynch," said Michael Lynch, and they shook hands.

Mr. Stone proved to be the man who had spoken to the girl the previous evening, and the other—of all men!—was the bald-headed, repulsive Gourlock!

Lynch returned Stone's cool "Good morning," but his eyes were twinkling as he stared at Gourlock.

"Sorry," he murmured in mock apology, "but really I couldn't wait last night to discuss things with your friends. It was my bedtime. But I'll be meeting them again!"

Gourlock grinned back mockingly.

"Yeah, I reckon you'll be meetin' 'em again, all right."

There was no mistaking the threat in his voice. Dr. Holden looked a little surprised. Sheila preserved her air of cool aloofness, and Stone frowned slightly.

Lynch had opened his mouth to say something when he was staggered by a heavy hand that struck him between the shoulder blades.

"Tiger!" a bull voice bellowed heartily. "Well, blow me down! Where the hell you been hidin' yourself, sailor? Ain't seen you since—"

Lynch did not need to look around to know who had accosted him. He would know that voice anywhere—the voice of Billy the Ham, a roistering able seaman he had known in his seafaring days.

"Hello, Billy!" he greeted. "How's

yourself? What are you doing in this part of the world?"

CHAPTER III

Waterfront Brawl



BILLY the Ham was fat. He stood five-foot-seven in his shoes, and weighed over two hundred pounds in his bare skin. His arms were like thighs, and his thighs like young oaks. His face re-

sembled a full moon, except that it had more chins. His voice was that of the Bull of Bashan, and he could tear a pack of playing cards neatly in half with one swift movement of his great hands. As he surveyed Lynch, his wide mouth was spread in a grin of pleasure.

"What am I doin' here?" he repeated. "Second mate aboard the *Mary Elizabeth*. Sailin' tomorrer mornin', worse luck. Say, that's a ritzy lot of hand-me-downs you're wearin'. Reg'lar dude, ain't you? How'd you do it? Bust into a bank?"

"Two banks," said Lynch, smiling. "May I introduce Mr. William Skinner—Miss Holden, Dr. Holden, Mr. Stone?" He did not include Gourlock.

"Glad to meet you!" Billy the Ham's voice made his pleasure evident half-way down the street. "Any friends of Tiger is friends of mine. He's the biggest cutthroat that ever raised Cain along any man's waterfront, but I love him like he was me only child."

"How do you do?" said Dr. Holden, a little stiffly, and glanced awkwardly at his watch. "We really must be going. Come, Sheila."

With nods, they moved off down the street.

"Extraordinary people," murmured Dr. Holden. "Remarkable types."

"Criminal types," said Stone shortly.

"I don't know," said Sheila. "The fat man looked good-natured, and Mr. Lynch has an interesting face. I wonder why he is called 'Tiger'?"

"He isn't—now," Stone said quietly. "Nowadays he's called Jake the Cat."

Lynch stared after them until they vanished around a corner, and he was not accustomed to stare after people in that dreamy manner. Billy the Ham's voice brought him back to earth.

"Who's this guy here with the scalped dome and the mush like Gawdelpus?" he was demanding, jerking a thumb at Gourlock. Billy the Ham had always spoken his mind.

Gourlock only smiled, and shrugged.

"Maybe it's just as well for you that you're sailin' tomorrow," he said, and walked away.

"Come and have a drink," Lynch invited, laughing. "I want to talk to you, Billy. I may be going to need you."

"Just a minute, while I hand a wallop to that smart guy!" said Billy.

"Not now, Billy," said Lynch. "You may get your chance—soon."

Billy the Ham yielded reluctantly, and he and Lynch spent the best part of an hour together. Then Lynch set out to find Dr. Evans, which he did with little difficulty. At three o'clock he was shown into the doctor's consulting room.

Dr. Evans, a big, good-natured young man, was glad to tell Lynch all he knew about Captain Daniel. He frankly volunteered the information that he had left the waterfront section himself—he had hung out his shingle there after graduation—because the neighborhood had become so hot for him that he was expecting any night to be knocked on the head.

"They don't like 'reformers', as they called me down there," he said. "I didn't expect to make much in the section, but thought it would be good experience for a young medico. But they're a tough lot down there, and they didn't like me."

"Gourlock's gang?" suggested Lynch.

"Yes. That damn' ward heeler has the whole waterfront under his thumb, and his gang of hoods are poison. I had a row with Gourlock, and he ordered me to get out. So—well, I had my wife and mother to think of, so I got. Though I felt pretty cowardly, knuckling under to a rat like Gourlock."

"How about police protection?" asked Lynch.

EVANS spread his hands.

"What was the use? Gourlock is absolute boss down there, I tell you. Nobody would have come to me, even free of charge, if he'd ordered them not to. It's a damnable situation—but there it is."

"And Captain Daniel, Doctor?" said Lynch. "He died in your office, didn't he?"

The doctor nodded. "Murdered. The gang, of course—but who could prove it?"

"Have you any idea just who did it?" asked Lynch.

"No. He only spoke once before he died, mentioned a name that sounded like 'Raverton'. But there's no Raverton down there. At least the police couldn't find anybody by that name."

With no more information about Captain Daniel than before, Lynch went back to the Copley-Plaza for dinner. But on the stroke of nine he pushed open the swing door of the Neptune Saloon, and entered.

Gourlock's cohorts there were struck dumb with amazement as Lynch sauntered to the bar and ordered a beer. The barkeeper glanced at the bald Gourlock, sitting in a corner, and shook his head.

"You've been told you ain't wanted here," he said truculently.

"That's so," said Lynch, and looked around the room with challenging eyes. "But I always have to be told things three times. Would anybody be wanting to start something?"

The waterfront toughs looked at Gourlock, who nodded slightly. And

then the storm broke. It started when a man across the room hurled a bottle which crashed into the wall beside Lynch's head. Then came a rush.

The foremost man was met by a terrific left-hand jolt on the chin that sent him hurtling backward, tumbling him and the man back of him to the floor. The next hood was met by an equally devastating short right hook that lifted him off his feet and sent him crashing to the floor amid a shower of bottles and glasses from an overturned table.

"Bean him—bean him!" came an angry shout.

Lynch saw the deadly little black-jacks that appeared in the hands of a couple of his assailants. Seizing a chair, he swung it around his head, and let go. Then, hitting out savagely with both fists, he followed it up.

The swing door of the Neptune banged open and, roaring like a bull, Billy the Ham hurled himself into the waterfront brawl. An enormous hand plucked a man who was clinging to Lynch's back as though he had been a raspberry, and flung him across the room. Shouts and curses and a heavy thudding of blows filled the air in that wild, swirling tumult of struggling men.

Then, suddenly, Gourlock's men seemed to have enough. A couple of gangsters tried to sneak out the door, but abruptly it was blocked by a big, red-headed, melancholy sailor, and his grin was not a pleasant thing to see. Lynch saw that man—Shamus Conolly—and grinned as the big sailor waded in. The Irish sailor battled as if this were his first fight since he had left San Francisco—which it was—and he was enjoying every minute of it.

In moments, five men were sprawled on the floor, painfully recovering their senses. Another, in a corner, was being a very sick man. Three more rat-faced men had backed over to Gourlock who had not moved during the fight, nor had his expression changed.

Lynch surveyed the waterfront political boss with slightly narrowed eyes. He jerked a thumb at the bartender.

"THREE beers!" he ordered snappily. "And tell that bald-headed rat in the corner to get out and stay out! He lowers the tone of the place."

"The hell you say!" snapped the bartender, aghast at such *lese majesty*.

"Snap it up!" growled Lynch. "I'm boss around here just now. Bring those beers, and tell that small-time Hitler to hit the trail. His presence contaminates the beer."

Gourlock did not react as Lynch had thought he would. Much of his success had come from knowing just when to use diplomacy, and when to order his men to fight. He arose calmly, with even a touch of swagger, and shrugged.

"Your round, Jake," he said to Lynch. "But the fight's not over yet."

But the dignity of his exit was spoiled by Conolly who, disappointed that the *mêlée* had ended just as he was beginning to enjoy it, gave him a boot in the pants that catapulted him out through the door to sprawl on the pavement. Conolly eased his pain further by kicking the gangsters after their boss, one by one.

"Feel better now, Con?" asked Billy the Ham. "Had enough scrappin'?"

"Sure, and 'twas no scrap at all," said Conolly mournfully. "Why, the last fight I was in in 'Frisco went for three hours straight until—"

"Never mind," said Lynch. "The scrapping along the Boston waterfront may be inferior, but there's nothing the matter with the beer. Have another."

They finished their beers, then walked to the docks for a final drink aboard the *Mary Elizabeth*. Then Lynch left his two sailor friends and headed through the narrow streets for uptown. He kept his eyes and ears

open, though he did not believe Gourlock's second-rate hoods would want to start anything again—not right away.

He did not have too high an opinion of such a waterfront gang as Gourlock had collected about him, which was of the variety that sprang up almost in a night, gained a brief ascendancy over other gangs, and dispersed when their leading members were sent to prison or taken for a ride. There was none of the singleness of purpose, determination, and ruthless efficiency to be found in New York or Chicago gangs. These hoodlums, he thought contemptuously, were home right now, licking their wounds.

His first intimation that he was underestimating his opponents came when he heard a slight *pop*, and felt a sudden, searing pain across his left arm. That pop had been made by a silenced automatic! Instantly he jumped for the shelter of the nearest doorway. But his foot came down on a rotting apple and he went sprawling.

Even as he fell, it flashed into his mind what a target a man rising from the ground would be. To get up at once would be to invite another shot. If the gunman thought he was dead, he might not shoot again. So he lay still, waiting.

It was impossible for him to get the gun in his hip pocket without betraying the fact that he was alive. Seconds dragged by. Then the dim figure of a man emerged from a dark alleyway, peered at Lynch, and silently withdrew. A couple of seconds later, Lynch heard a door shut softly.

He scrambled to his feet in one swift movement, drawing the automatic from his pocket. The wound in his arm was only a graze. Crouched against the wall of the house, he crept softly forward to the alley entrance into which his would-be killer had vanished. Reaching it, and seeing no one, he stepped boldly into it. It ran along the side of a house into a backyard.

LYNCH went softly along the passage into the backyard, and surveyed the house from there. In a second-story window a light was gleaming, but the other windows were dark. Lynch saw an open window on the second floor, and his lips quirked in a grin.

He waited. In a few minutes the light he had seen went out, and the whole house was in darkness. Lynch began to whistle softly, between his teeth, "Over There."

Taking off his shoes, he tied the laces together, and hung them around his neck. Then silently, and as swiftly as a cat, he began to climb the drain pipe leading past that second-story window.

In ten seconds he had reached the window and was kneeling on the sill. From inside the room there came a sound of even breathing. Lynch smiled grimly, and climbed through the window, automatic in hand. Silently he crossed the room as his eyes, becoming more accustomed to the dimness, distinguished the outlines of a bed. As he reached the bedside a floorboard creaked, and the sleeper stirred.

Lynch dropped the automatic into a pocket, made one swift pounce, gripped the sleeper's throat tightly with one hand, and clamped the other down across his mouth.

"Make a sound and I'll choke the life out of you!" he growled.

Suddenly struggling, the sleeper, now wide awake, clutched at Lynch's hands, but could not break his grip. There was a little choking, smothered exclamation—and Lynch started back in utter dismay. He was gripping a woman's throat!

He let go suddenly and stood petrified as a bedside lamp was switched on. The girl he had been strangling was Sheila Holden!

She was sitting up in bed, one hand stretched out to the light, the other raised to her throat. The coat of her blue silk pajamas had slipped in the

struggle, disclosing one white shoulder. Her blue eyes, wide with bewilderment, regarded him gravely. Lynch stared at her, speechless — and could only stare.

CHAPTER IV

A Slight Error

FOR perhaps the first time in his life, Michael Lynch was conscious of being utterly inadequate to the occasion. That this should be Sheila, of all people, was overwhelming.

"I — I beg your pardon," he finally stammered foolishly. "I—I didn't know it was you."

His expression must have struck her as being funny, for a hint of amusement came into her eyes.

"I hope you're not disappointed," she said. "But what's the idea? Did you come here to murder somebody?"

"I came in after a man I saw come in here — I thought," Lynch said lamely.

He could not take his eyes off her. She flushed slightly and pulled her pajama coat up about her neck. Then

she leaned forward, frowning.

"What's that on your hand? It's blood! You haven't—"

"No, I haven't," said Lynch. "He did that. He plugged me with a silenced automatic, then ran in here."

"Ran in here?" she repeated, and shook her head. "You must have made a mistake. This is the boys' club my uncle runs. But we won't argue about that now. Throw me that negligee over that chair, and while I'm seeing what's the matter with your arm, you can tell me what happened."

While she washed and bandaged the slight wound in his arm, Lynch told her what had happened. It was a little difficult, as acutely conscious as he was of her light, cool touch on his arm. Never in his life had he felt such a wild urge to take a girl in his arms and kiss her. It dismayed him.

All unaware, Sheila was interested only in what he told her. She was positive Lynch's assailant had not entered the club.

"He must have gone next door," she said. "He couldn't have come in here. The light you saw burning was in Mr. Stone's room. He often works late. He's terribly interested in the club—has put in a lot of money, you know. Likes to stay down here and have a

[Turn page]

From the
Confidential
Notebook
of Mr. F---



3 Felt like a million when I got up this morning. Ex-Lax worked fine. Just watch me go after those birds today!



1 Muffed two important sales today. Had no pep—just couldn't get going! Wonder if I hadn't better take a laxative—been putting it off too long.



2 Harry said I ought to try Ex-Lax. Took some before I turned in for the night. Say, this Ex-Lax taste is a new one on me—just like chocolate!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



hand in running things."

"Perhaps you're right about this being the wrong house," said Lynch. He could not swear positively that this was the house the gunman had entered.

She put the finishing touches on his bandages, and he thanked her and put on his coat and shoes. Then he hesitated, looking at her uncertainly. Oddly, he wanted to get away from her as quickly as possible — and wanted to stay with her as long as he could. She sat down on the edge of the bed, studying him thoughtfully.

"Don't you think you're rather a fool?" she asked him calmly.

"Often," said Lynch.

"I've heard a good deal about you today," she went on. "I'm told that you want to take a bloodthirsty revenge on Gourlock's waterfront gang because you believe they stole a necklace from you that you'd stolen from someone else. Revenge won't do you any good, even if you get it. And you should know that gang. If you get away with it without being sent to prison, you'll be taken for a ride. Why don't you go to sea again, and stay there?"

"Because I prefer to stay here," Lynch said, and added: "Say, you seem to know a lot about Gourlock's rats—and me!"

"I only know what people are saying," she told him. "Everyone is sure that if the waterfront gang have got that necklace, they hijacked it from you."

"Then why don't the police arrest Gourlock and his strong-arm guys?" asked Lynch.

"How can they—on waterfront rumor? And they would have to find the necklace, wouldn't they?"

"Perhaps your friend Gourlock, the great politician, could tell them who stole it and where it's gone," suggested Lynch.

"Perhaps he could," she answered. "But he's not my friend. I don't bother to speak to him. My uncle and Mr.

Stone have to be civil to him, because after all, he is the district political leader — but mostly because if they weren't nice to him, the club might be wrecked by a bomb some fine night. They don't like Gourlock—but what can they do?"

"Then I should think you'd be glad if I did mop up Gourlock and his handsome henchmen," said Lynch.

"Do you think there's any choice between them and yourself?" she asked scornfully. "No, thank you. We don't need any more crooks down here—even those who don't look the part."

"You seem very certain I'm a crook," said Lynch.

SHE looked him full in the eyes, and there was something in them that she could not fathom.

"Do you deny that you're Jake the Cat?" she demanded.

"Well, since you ask me—no," said Lynch. "But if anybody else should ask that, I'd deny it strenuously. And it would take some proving. The police have nothing on me."

"Except your description," she said quickly. "That you're tall, a good climber, break into houses, and are handy with a gun. Why, I could tell them almost all they need to know myself!"

"Are you going to?" asked Lynch.

"If I ever have another reason to," she said promptly. "I'd have rung the bell beside my bed and given the alarm tonight if I hadn't felt I owed you something for standing up for little Bill last night. We're quits now, but if I ever get another chance to have you arrested. . . . I don't like crooks!"

"I suppose I ought to have strangled you," Lynch said thoughtfully. "If I didn't feel that I owe you something for bandaging my arm, I'd do it now. Oh, well—next time. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me for my own good?"

"Yes!" she said heatedly. "Some-

thing trite and obvious—and true. It's this. If you were half a man, and half as clever as you think you are, you'd quit being a crook, and get a job! At sea—anywhere!"

"Nothing clever about being a crook, eh?" Lynch grinned wryly. "Try it for a month, and see. You'd be in jail in a week."

She made a slight movement of contempt, and rose.

"I'm going to ask Mr. Stone to drive you home. I'm not going to be a party to your winding up in the morgue."

"The devil you say!" said Lynch, and laughed as the humor of the situation struck him. "Do you always have your burglars driven home?"

"I'm going to this time," Sheila announced firmly, "and you can't help yourself! I've already pressed the bell that rings in Mr. Stone's room, and—"

She stopped as footsteps sounded in the hall. An instant later, Stone, in pajamas and dressing gown, opened the door. He glanced from Lynch to Sheila in astonishment.

"What the devil's this man doing here?" he demanded.

Sheila swiftly explained that Lynch had mistakenly come in hunting a man who had shot him. To Lynch's surprise, Stone amiably agreed to drive him home.

"Come along to my room while I slip into some trousers," he said, when they left Sheila. "And when we start, I'll leave you in the hall while I get the car, in case any of that gang are on the look-out for you. As soon as I stop outside, you dash out and get into the back—I'll leave the door open for you—and I'll drive straight away."

LYNCH agreed, and a little later the car had hardly paused at the curb before he was inside it. The car sped away. But Stone had no more than turned the first corner when the engine coughed, and stopped.

"Damn!" growled Stone.

He got out and raised the hood, tink-

ering with the motor. Lynch, hand on gun, was ready if anything should happen. But the street remained quiet.

"Hey, lend a hand here will you?" called Stone. "Nobody's around."

Lynch stepped out of the car, and walked toward the radiator. Stone straightened up, mopping his face with his handkerchief. And as if that were a sign—which it was—there came a sudden rush of feet.

Lynch caught it all, on the instant. He made one lightning move, and had the fierce satisfaction of feeling his fist land hard against Stone's face. Then, back against the car, he was fighting desperately against a mob of assailants who seemed to be coming at him from all sides. At each blow of his fist a man fell. Then something struck him with stunning force on the back of the head. He sagged slowly down to his knees, to his face—and knew no more. . . .

It must have been quite awhile later when Lynch became conscious of a dull, throbbing pain in his head, and a murmuring noise which seemed to start from far away, and to come gradually closer, resolving itself into the sound of human voices. He opened his eyes cautiously, the merest trifle, and immediately shut them again. But that blink had given him a view of his surroundings. He was in a wooden shed, lit by an oil lamp on a rough, round table, about which three men were sitting, talking.

The three were Gourlock, young Slim Sanderson, and an elderly man who, from the sharp resemblance in the sharp features and shifty, cunning eyes, could only be Slim's father. Above the murmur of voices came the sound of lapping water. It seemed to come from beneath the shed and Lynch guessed that the shed was built on piles, probably over the Charles River. This building was more likely to be on the riverfront than facing the busy harbor.

It suited Lynch to remain "unconscious." He wanted to hear what the

men were talking about. Since they had already made two attempts to kill him, it was possible that they were now planning how best to finish the job—and that interested Michael Lynch. Besides, if he should manage to get away, he might now hear something that later might be useful.

GOURLOCK was talking, his voice irritated.

“—thinks he’s too damn smart. He’ll get his, if he goes on.”

Old Sanderson shrugged, and spread his hands.

“He is a little overbearing—but he carries the instructions of the Boss.”

“But just as often he gives orders of his own,” Gourlock growled surlily. “Gives me orders, the louse! And look at the unholy mess he’s made of things tonight!”

“How do you mean, mess?” demanded Slim Sanderson. “We’ve got Jake, haven’t we?”

“Yes,” Gourlock answered grouchy. “But if he’d got him with that first shot, we wouldn’t be where we are. What happens now? We get rid of Jake—sure. But who was Jake with last night? Stone knows, and he can spill the beans any minute he wants to. That girl can tell where Jake was when he disappeared, and that puts his disappearance square up to the waterfront gang he’d been rowin’ with. Listen! Stone’s only useful to us—and to the Boss—because he’s Bretherton’s nephew, and got a lot of dough in a boys club, so he’s above suspicion. Once he’s suspected, he’s no good to us. He lost his head, and his temper, when he found Jake with that girl. He’s nuts about her—the idiot!”

“What’s he going to say happened?” asked old Sanderson.

“That he hadn’t driven far when Jake insisted on going on alone. They had a run-in, and Jake busted him on the kisser.” Gourlock’s lips twisted wryly. “And the girl can’t help but testify that Jake didn’t want to go with him. ‘Course Stone don’t know

a damn thing about what happened after he was knocked for a loop. The thing is, we don’t want Stone mixed up in things like that. The second time, too. Old Cap Daniel had just been to see Stone when he was conked.”

“Daniel had found out something about the Boss,” old Sanderson said quietly. “He had to be dealt with in a hurry.”

“Yeah?” Gourlock said slowly. “I suppose you wise guys was afraid that if I’d known, I’d have got hold of old Cap and found out a few things about the Boss myself.” He surveyed the old man with glittering, narrowed eyes. “There’s too much of this damn funny business between you and Stone, Sanderson. You give orders to my gang—*my gang*—as if it were your own, and you keep me in the dark. I’ve been thinkin’ lately that I’d give you and Stone and the Boss the go-by and work on my own again. I will, too, if you don’t put me next to the Boss and I make my own terms with him. . . . But even if I do stick along, Stone’s got to go! Well, what about it?”

“Be yourself, Gourlock,” the old man said placatingly. “I can’t put you in touch with the Boss. I’ve told you that before. And he can’t get rid of Stone. There are many reasons.”

“Then I break with you, is that it?” Gourlock said challengingly.

Sanderson made a deprecating gesture.

“The Boss is a bad enemy,” he said. “And where would you get your information—such information, say, as he gave you about the Van Renseler necklace? You would never have known our friend Jake was going to grab the necklace, but for him.”

“How did you know I was going to take the necklace?” put in Lynch, suddenly.

Three heads jerked around.

“So you’ve come out of it, have you?” snarled Gourlock. “And gettin’ an earful. Well, that’s not goin’ to do



He pointed a finger at Lynch. "Kill him, Richards! Shoot him!"

you any good—or us any harm."

"You kicked me, you louse!" shouted Slim, and lunged across the room to kick Lynch viciously. "You shook me, too!" He kicked Lynch again. "And here's another for luck!"

Michael Lynch would have given years of his life to have had his hands free for half a minute.

"Lay off, Slim," Gourlock ordered brusquely, and went on to the older man: "How *did* the Boss know what Jake was goin' to do, so he could pass it on to me?"

Old Sanderson hesitated. Then he said:

"It was simple. He was having Jake shadowed. One of his agents overheard Smollet; the fence, discussing the arrangements for getting the diamonds out of the country for Jake. He

knew that Jake's only chance to get them would be on the night of the Duchess of Hammersmith's refugee party, and he just gave instructions to wait outside the Van Renseler house for Jake, and see."

Footsteps sounded on a flight of wooden steps outside the shed. The door opened and Stone entered. He stood for a moment in the doorway, glaring, and Lynch grinned with satisfaction at sight of his grotesquely swollen lips. And at sight of Lynch, ugly triumph distorted Stone's face.

"Not so full of pep now, are you?" he sneered. Then, in a burst of rage: "So you were trying to get in right with Sheila Holden! Trying to make her think you were not the damned crook you are!"

"Listening outside the door,

Stone?" Lynch asked calmly.

"Why not? I got you where I wanted you, didn't I? Had everything all set? You weren't quite clever enough, damn you!"

"Yes, I'd say listening at key-holes was just about your speed," Lynch said quietly, speculatively.

"If you're goin' to row about dames," came Gourlock's insolent voice, "I'm beatin' it. I'm tired, anyway."

Stone whirled on him.

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to?"

"You," said Gourlock. "I've been waitin' for you half an hour — and I ain't likin' it."

He stood eying Stone, that reptilian smile on his lips. And oddly, Stone's bluster died down.

"All right!" Stone snapped. "Get going!"

CHAPTER V

The Man from Pinkerton's



GOURLOCK and Slim Sanderson approached Lynch and twisted a heavy muffler around his face, across his mouth. Around his waist they tied one end of a coil of rope, with the other end se-

cured to an iron ring in the floor. In his coat pockets they placed two heavy lead weights.

Old Sanderson doused the light. Then they dragged Lynch toward the double doors — apparently once used for loading—which Stone was opening. The sound of lapping water came more plainly.

"Good-by, Jake," Stone said, with elaborate politeness. "In about five minutes we'll haul you up and untie you, then throw you in again. 'Found drowned,' will be the verdict, I believe."

Lynch was thrust through the opening. He saw dark water rushing up toward him, then, with an icy shock, the water closed over his head.

He struggled futilely, holding his breath. The weights dragged him down. He could not fight his way to the surface. He tugged frantically, with the energy of a drowning man, but his bonds held. And then he felt a sudden jerk at the rope by which he was suspended. A harder jerk, and he began to rise. With a sense of blessed relief, he felt the keen night air on his face, and took a deep breath.

"Don't make any noise!" said a voice, in an urgent whisper.

Lynch had been hauled up beside a small boat which was moored to one of the pillars supporting the shed. A man, standing in the boat, had fished him out of the water with a boat-hook, and was leaning over the side of the boat, supporting him.

"Keep still a minute," came the whisper. "I'll cut the cords on your wrists, then you can climb into the boat."

Two seconds later, Lynch's hands were free. With a desperate effort, he pulled himself over the side of the boat, fell in, and lay there breathing hard. And again came that whispering voice.

"Here, take this!"

He felt something pressed into his hand—a flask. With a little difficulty he unscrewed the top and raised the flask to his lips. As the whisky flowed down his throat, Lynch felt life revive in him. He took a good, long swig and re-screwed the top on the flask.

"Better?" whispered the voice.

"Much, thanks!" whispered Lynch, and handed back the flask. Then he leaned forward and began to cut the cords round his ankles.

Hardly had he freed his ankles when there came a sharp tug on the rope around his waist. He raised the hand that held the knife, but acting on sudden impulse, he lowered it again and slipped the knife into his pocket.

"Back in a minute—with luck!" he whispered.

There came a hard, steady tug on the rope. He felt himself swung outward, then he was being drawn upward, bumping against the piles that supported the shed, and hanging limp on the rope, as if dead.

He felt the grip of hands under his armpits, drawing him through the door.

"Hurry and get those ropes off him and throw him back again!" Stone exclaimed impatiently.

As his feet touched the floor of the shed, he pushed himself upright, swung his fist, and knocked the nearest man, who happened to be Gourlock, flying. For a breath the others were too paralyzed to move. But Lynch moved with the lightning speed which, in his seafaring days had earned him the name of "Tiger."

OLD Sanderson went sprawling from an uppercut to the chin. Slim was picked up bodily and hurled into a corner, where he lay still. And then, with all the fury of a tiger, Lynch made for Stone.

With one relentless hand he took the man by the throat and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Releasing his hold, a fist caught Stone on the jaw and knocked him flat. Seizing him by the collar, Lynch yanked him to his feet, only to knock him down again.

That was enough for Stone. Lynch leaped for Gourlock who was dazedly trying to get his gun from his pocket. As he leaped, he ducked sideward. The pistol shot echoed, but the next moment the pistol was wrenched from Gourlock's hand, and once more he was sprawling on the floor.

Thudding feet sounded from outside, and the inner door burst open. His gun empty, Lynch hurled it at the first man who lunged in, sprang across the room, and dived into the river.

A swift turn in the water took him underneath the shed. In the shadow

of the bank was a slowly moving dark mass. The boat. A low whistle came from it. Lynch swam toward it.

The man in the boat helped Lynch aboard and, without a word, began rowing. He rowed steadily until he drew up alongside a small landing, and moored the boat.

He chuckled.

"That sure was a neat idea — to play dead and then knock hell out of 'em."

By a street light now Lynch saw his rescuer's face — and gaped with astonishment when he recognized one of the men he had fought in the Neptune Saloon!

"Didn't expect it to be me, did you?" the man laughed. "I owe you one for a nasty poke in the jaw, but—"

"I certainly wasn't expecting to see you," admitted Lynch. "But I'm damned thankful—"

"Forget it!" the man said curtly. "I wouldn't have fished you out if I hadn't a good reason. You and me are due to have a straight-from-the-shoulder talk. My name's Summers. I'm a Pinkerton man. Ever hear of me?"

"No," said Lynch, and grinned. "But I seem to have heard of Pinkerton's somewhere."

Pinkerton's, eh? Who didn't know that famous detective agency! Holding the semi-official position it did, a man didn't need to be a crook to know all about it.

Summers smiled. But the smile of the hard-featured man with light, expressionless gray eyes only touched his lips.

"So you know Pinkerton's, huh?" he said with heavy sarcasm. "Maybe you'll be knowing me, too—and not be forgetting me — by the time I'm through with you."

His tone, if not actually hostile, certainly held threat. But Lynch did not want to quarrel with a man who had just saved his life.

"How could I forget you?" he said good-humoredly. "It isn't every night I get fished out of the river."

"It might be that you'll wish I'd left

you there," Summers said darkly. "That'll be up to you. We'll part here. I'll be at your hotel at ten in the morning."

With a brief nod he strode away.

Lynch looked after him a moment, and shrugged. Then he, too, strode away.

It was three o'clock when he reached the Copley-Plaza. The night clerk, bellboys on duty, and the elevator man looked at his wet clothes curiously, but he made no explanation. He had other things to think about.

He had a stiff whisky and went to bed, but lay awake, thinking of Stone and Gourlock, of the man from Pinkerton's—and of a tall, calm girl with blue eyes and a winsome smile. He tightened his lips. If he didn't stop thinking of that girl she would become an obsession with him. . . .

WHILE Lynch was breakfasting the next morning, Summers arrived. He sat down and lit a cigarette, studying Lynch with his expressionless gray eyes, then came to the point quickly.

"I've come to get that Van Renseler necklace," he said.

"What should I know about it?" Lynch asked innocently.

Summers raised one eyebrow slightly. "So you prefer the hoosegow, huh? Lettin' the cops drag things outa you?"

Lynch laughed. "Fat chance they'd have," he said. "When I don't know anything."

"Oh, yeah?" Summers said wryly. "Well, I know plenty about you—Jake the Cat! Like me to spill what I know—and have 'em prove by your fingerprints that you're the guy who was foolish enough to leave 'em durin' a certain burglary on Long Island? The guy they've been lookin' for, but couldn't find, because your prints ain't on record?"

"Me?" Lynch said calmly. "I never robbed a house on Long Island or anywhere else!"

"Yeah?" said Summers. "Then it'd be hard luck to be sent up for a stretch, wouldn't it?"

A faint frown touched Lynch's brow.

"Is this a frame?" he asked coolly.

"No need to frame you—Jake," said Summers. "I'm just tellin' you. Just givin' you a chance to come clean—and pass over that necklace. Senator Van Renseler is hittin' the ceilin' about it. So's Pinkerton's. It's up to me to produce it. And I'm goin' to—or hand Jake the Cat over to the police. Get that—Jake?"

"Think you can prove I'm Jake the Cat?" drawled Lynch.

Summer leaned forward, elbow on his knee. His voice took on a persuasive tone.

"See here, Jake—or Lynch, or whatever you're callin' yourself—it'll pay to listen to what I'm goin' to put up to you. Maybe you haven't got that ice now. I've kind of an idea Gourlock's waterfront gang *did* hijack it from you, the way you've been actin' since you hit Boston. But you know damn well you can't get it back from them, so all you're tryin' to do now is take it out of their hides. Ain't that so—so far?"

"So what?" murmured Lynch.

"So it wouldn't hurt your feelin' if the whole lot of 'em was landed in the pen, huh?"

"Maybe not."

"All right. So here's what. I hadn't been with the gang long enough to be let in on that necklace deal. I wasn't supposed to know anything about it. Afraid I'd want my cut, I guess. I couldn't find out whether they'd hijacked it from you or not. So now, if you haven't got it, you help me get a line on what they've done with that ice, help me clean up the gang, and I'll forget all about that Long Island job. How about it?"

"How in hell can I help you do that?" asked Lynch. "I told you I didn't know a damn thing about that necklace!"

"Sure not." Summer grinned. "Neither do I—now—but we can find out. Listen! That gang's goin' to split up. Gourlock's sore, don't like the cut he's been gettin', and is hot over it because he's kept in the dark about who the Boss of the combined outfit is. That ward heeler thinks he's somebody, and he's boilin' at Stone and the others that are in the confidence of the Boss—whoever he is.

"Gourlock woulda broke loose from 'em a coupla days ago, if you hadn't showed up. You saw last night how willin' Gourlock was to have you put out of the way. But he'd like it a damn sight better to have you in with him. Those hoods have a lot of respect for the Boss, but they've seen you in action." Summers paused a moment and grinned. "It wouldn't surprise me if Gourlock propositioned you in a day or two."

"So I should join Gourlock's gang, find out where the necklace is, and come running to tell you," said Lynch.

"And land them hijackin' birds in the jug."

LYNCH laughed a little.

"Now that," he said, "rather appeals to me. But suppose the necklace has been broken up, the stones scattered?"

"You just put me on the track of the necklace, and I'll do the rest," Summers said, a little impatiently. "Well? Are you comin' in with me, or ain't you?"

"Give me a day to think it over," said Lynch.

"What d'you want a day for?" snapped Summers. "Do you need a day to think over whether you'd like a ten-year stretch or not?"

"Yes," said Lynch. "Come back at ten tomorrow morning."

Summers gave him a long, calculating look, nodded curtly.

"But you needn't try to take a run-out powder. I've got that fixed."

Lynch laughed. "I wonder," he said, "if I'd be talking out of turn if I

asked how you got in with Gourlock's gang yourself?"

"I don't mind tellin'." Summers shrugged. "Smollet, the fence, busted me in. Told Gourlock I was Bill Slattery, a Chicago gunny. Gourlock knew about Slattery, but didn't know he'd been dead as a herring for two weeks when I showed up. Yeah, I'm a member of the gang, all right, but Gourlock don't trust me too far, because he don't trust Smollet any too far. The only way I find out anything is by listenin' at doors, or pumpin' that dope, Slim Sanderson. Not so safe, either way."

"Do Stone and Slim know Gourlock really means to break loose from the Boss?"

"Sure. And I'm throwin' in with Gourlock." Summers arose. "Well, here's how we'll work it. You stick close to Gourlock, and I'll try to get a line on this guy they call the Boss."

"You haven't any idea who he is?"

"Nope. Gourlock gets the Boss' orders from Stone. Where Stone gets his, I don't know. I've had him shadowed for the past two days, but the only place he goes is to see that rich uncle of his—name of Bretherton."

"There's no chance that he's the Boss, eh?"

"With his rep?" Summers laughed. "Hell, no! He's got more dough now than he knows what to do with. He's known all over the country as a philanthropist. He put up the cash for Stone in the boys club—and he plays heavy society. Him head a gang? Not a chance!" He picked up his hat. "Well, see you in the mornin'."

When he had gone, Lynch laughed. Then he sat down in a deep chair, lit a pipe, and did some heavy thinking.

Summers' threat to arrest him on a fake burglary charge in Long Island did not worry him. Though he felt that Summers would not hesitate to frame him, if that should be the only way to satisfy Senator Van Renseler's demand for action. But Lynch had his own reasons for believing that Sum-

mers could not make his threat stick.

However, he was inclined to fall in with Summers' plans; up to a point. He was willing enough to give Summers all the help he wanted to land Gourlock and his waterfront gang in jail. The necklace was another matter. If it was still in existence, Lynch meant to get it himself.

Then he was remembering Captain Daniel, and the name Dr. Evans said the old sea-dog had mumbled just before he died. Raverton! Who was Raverton? Had the captain meant that a man named Raverton had been his murderer?

Old Sanderson had said that Captain Daniel had found out something about the Boss. And he had been coming away from a visit with Stone when he had been murdered. Had he told Stone he knew the identity of the Boss? And been murdered before he could tell anyone else? Had he meant that Raverton was the Boss?

Or was Stone himself the Boss? No—hardly. Stone was crooked enough, but hadn't the brains to head an organization of thieves and killers—and get away with it as successfully as the Boss of this combination of rats did.

CHAPTER VI

Lynch Makes a Bargain



WHILE Lynch sat smoking, many speculations passed through his mind. At last he got up, arranged for a long distance call to New York for a certain time, and went out.

He took a taxi, but left it near Tremont Street and walked swiftly to Filene's big department store. Here he took an elevator to the fifth floor, walked across, and took a down elevator. On the main floor he left by another exit, and rode a taxi up Huntington Avenue. When

he got out and took a subway back to Haymarket Square, he was certain he had shaken off anybody who might be tailing him.

Walking a few blocks, he paid a couple of calls, and returned to the hotel for lunch and to receive his long-distance call. He spent an idle afternoon and was preparing to go out to dinner when his phone rang.

"Mr. Lynch?" asked a deep voice when he answered.

"Yes."

"*Mmm*—I want to talk business with you. How would you like to have fifty thousand dollars?"

"Honest to Gawd folding money?" drawled Lynch.

"Talk sense, Lynch!" snapped the voice. "Listen! I have had a cabin reserved for you on the *Lancastria*, sailing for Vera Cruz tonight. If you care to catch that steamer, the second steward will hand you ten thousand dollars as soon as you're on board, fifteen after the steamer sails, and twenty-five on your arrival in Vera Cruz."

"Who's speaking?" asked Lynch.

"Answer me, Lynch!" commanded the voice. "Do you take that offer?"

"And I want an answer, too," said Lynch. "Who are you?"

But already Lynch was sure he would recognize that voice, because of a curious little impediment of speech, if he ever met the speaker, face to face.

There was a brief pause, then the voice said:

"*Mmm*—you're speaking to the Boss."

"I had an idea I was," said Lynch. "What about the necklace?"

"I'm offering you fifty thousand dollars to forget all about it, and make no further effort to get it back."

"Nice of you," said Lynch. "But I want the necklace."

When the voice answered, it was raised angrily.

"*Mmm*—you won't get it! You'll never get it! Nobody's going to take it from me! If you try to interfere

with me, I'll smash you—you—"

The rest was incoherent. Lynch was amazed. The voice had throbbed with an uncontrolled, passionate anger there was no mistaking. Who was this Boss who was so enraged by the idea that Lynch should try to get the necklace? And why was he so infuriated? So anxious, too, to get Michael Lynch out of the way that he was willing to give him fifty thousand dollars to leave for Mexico?

"Good smashing," said Lynch, and cradled the receiver.

At once Lynch wished he had called the man "Raverton" to get his reaction. But at least he had made two important discoveries. One was that the Boss had a slight impediment in his speech which made him say "Mmm" at the beginning of many of his sentences. The other was that the necklace was still intact, and unmistakably in the Boss' possession.

When Summers arrived the next morning, Lynch told him about the phone call, but he did not tell of his two discoveries. Should Summers trace the Boss too soon, Lynch's own chances of recovering the necklace were decidedly lessened.

"SO he offered you fifty thousand iron men to lam, did he?" said Summers. "Well, you played wise. There's still such a thing as extradition from Mexico, remember. Say—where'd you go yesterday mornin'? Pretty smart, wasn't you, givin' the slip to the man I had tailin' you?"

"I went to get my hair cut," said Lynch. "I don't like being tailed when I go to get my hair cut."

"How about that proposition I put to you yesterday?" Summers asked curtly. "Are you comin' in with me?"

"Sure."

"Sure," repeated Summers. "You know I've got you where I want you, and what would happen if—"

"Comedy is not included in my act," said Lynch. "Now, where do I go from here?"

"Wait here. I've an idea Gourlock will land here sometime today. He'll want you in with him as soon as he can get you—or have you taken for a ride. You'll hear from me after you've seen the great political boss."

With a brief nod, he left.

And his prediction was correct. It was not long before the phone rang and Gourlock was announced.

"Send him up," said Lynch. He was grinning when he opened the door.

"I've been expecting you," he said to the hairless district leader. "Come in."

Gourlock merely shrugged slightly as he came in and sat down.

"I suppose you've guessed what I've come for, then," he said.

"One guess," said Lynch, "is that you haven't come to push me into the river again, or blast me. Guns are such noisy things in hotels. A better guess is that you want me to join you."

"Have you been thinking about that?"

"Laughing about it. Why should I join your mob? What would I get out of it?"

"Plenty," said Gourlock, promptly. "Half out of what we get out of every job we pull. I'll only take a quarter, and the boys get a quarter to split between 'em."

"Swell idea!" Lynch shrugged. "Why should I work for a half when I can get the whole business by working alone?"

Gourlock leaned forward slightly, and smiled that snakelike, repulsive smile of his.

"How many jobs did you pull last year?" he asked. "Not more than four or five, eh? That bank robbery in Baltimore, say, that everybody in the know is wise was Jake the Cat's work, must have taken months of casin'. Well, workin' with me, you won't have to do none of that yourself, and you'd be put wise to plenty easy pickin's. What's more, you don't have to handle

the stuff no longer'n it takes you to grab it off, and I can always have a sure-fire alibi for you. And another thing. You'll get your cut whether you're in on what the gang pulls or not."

"Too good to be true," observed Lynch, with heavy sarcasm. "So I'm to get half, while you get a quarter. Why all the modesty?"

"I'll come clean with you, Ja—er—Lynch," Gourlock said hastily. "Puttin' all my cards on the table. Fact is, with you in with me I can fight the Boss. Otherwise—"

LYNCH laughed shortly.

"Are you trying to tell me that if you'd succeeded in drowning me that you wouldn't have broken with the Boss?" Lynch asked, in mild amusement.

"Oh, yeah, I'd have broke with him," admitted Gourlock. "But I didn't know then — like I do now — what breakin' loose from him meant."

"What does it mean?"

"Well, today I've had a man tryin' to fence some stuff—good stuff, too. Not one we know will look at it."

"You mean the Boss controls the fences?"

"Yeah, and he controls every damn gang in town, except my gang. I'm not afraid of them gangs. My boys are okay—can beat 'em at any game they want to play. But I've got to get rid of my stuff, haven't I? How else am I goin' to pay off the boys? They're solid behind me now—most of 'em—though they ain't likin' that Boss business. But if I can't hand out the dough—"

"What about that guy you sent around today to see about fencing your stuff?" asked Lynch. "Won't he tell your men what's happening?"

Gourlock laughed shortly. "Nope—he won't say anything. Made one bad mistake—for him. Phoned to tell me about them fences, before he came to report." Gourlock took a long breath. "Intern on the ambulance said he was

croakin' when they picked him up. Nope—he won't worry us no more."

"What you want me to do?" asked Lynch, showing no reaction whatever to Gourlock's sickening announcement. Tough as Lynch was himself, Gourlock's casual discussion of the treacherous murder which had just been committed at his orders was hard to take.

"You got to get Smollet to fence for me," Gourlock said. "The Boss ain't got him tied up yet. He don't do much for Boston gangs, but he's in with some big-shot New York and Chicago crooks that ship him their stuff. And the Boss also found out that he deals with you—er—with Jake the Cat."

"And you think that Smollet and you and I could smash the Boss, eh?" said Lynch.

Gourlock's eyes blazed, and his voice was hoarse with excitement.

"Gawd, if we could only wipe him out!" he exclaimed. "Know what that'd mean? We wouldn't be just the waterfront gang—we'd be runnin' the whole damn town! Undercover, we'd be kings, with power of life and death right in our hands! Everybody would knuckle under to us!"

For the first time Lynch realized the overwhelming lust for power of this snakelike, hairless ward heeler. No petty gangster, Gourlock. Moreover, he was clever, unscrupulous, with one burning ambition, and the courage to stake everything on a single risky throw to realize that ambition. If Lynch had hated the man before, he loathed him now.

"And if we fight the Boss and win?" he asked. "Does that quarter cut for you still go?"

Gourlock's eyes gleamed.

"I don't take you for a sap, Lynch," he said. "Hell, nobody knows how long it will take to find out who the Boss is, much less to gettin' him to pushin' up daisies. Once he's finished, though, you or me—maybe both of us—step into his shoes. What happens

then . . . Well, I'm willin' to take a chance on it."

Lynch puffed meditatively at his cigarette.

"What if I threw in with the other side?" he asked gently.

"You'd be in the morgue or the hoosegow inside a week," Gourlock warned flatly. "If my boys didn't take you, them others would. Stone hates your insides—thinks you're tryin' to cop the girl friend. He's off his nut about that dame."

LYNCH made no comment to that. "I had an offer of fifty thousand bucks last night," he said casually.

"Who from?" demanded Gourlock. "Why?"

"The Boss phoned me," said Lynch. "I refused it."

Relief swept over Gourlock's heavy face.

"You comin' in with me?" he asked.

"Yes. Your proposition suits me better. So—well, what now?"

Gourlock grinned, and became confidential at once.

"Well, first off," he said, "I'm cleanin' house with my gang. Old Sanderson's got to go. He used to be my fence, but he's gettin' in with my boys too good. That boys' club has got to go, too. That girl's buttin' in too much. She called the cops last night while two of my boys was havin' a run-in with her uncle, and when they were taken in the dummies had stolen property on 'em. So they'll go up for a rest cure just when I need all my men. Old Holden and his niece got to be learned a lesson."

He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"We're gettin' at it right off. I've had men busy for the last twenty minutes cuttin' telephone wires. In a couple of minutes a brawl's startin' on the waterfront. When the beat cops and the prowls cars are headed to break it up, another'll start near Sanderson's dump, and another a couple blocks away. That fight'll spread into the club, and while it's goin' on a

couple of men will bust into Stone's room there and give it a goin' over. That club goes out of business right now. So does Stone, if he's there. It's curtains for old Sanderson, too."

Lynch's strong hand reached out suddenly and gripped Gourlock's shoulder.

"Damn you!" he gritted. "If anything happens to Sheila Holden, God help you and your gang!" His voice was quiet, deadly. "I'll see every one of you burn, if it's the last act of my life!"

"So Stone was right," Gourlock said slowly, but his mind worked swiftly. "All right," he said. "We'll have to get down there on the jump. You ain't carin' particular about the club, or Stone, huh? If we can get the dame and her uncle out unhurt, it'll be all right by you?"

"The hell with Stone and the club!" snapped Lynch. "If we get Sheila and her uncle out unhurt, I'll join your gang. If not, I'm on the other side. It's up to you!"

"Get goin', then!" growled Gourlock. "I guess we can make it. My car's outside."

CHAPTER VII

Riot and Fire



MILD surprise was in store for Lynch when they hurried out of the hotel, though at once he realized he should not have been surprised. Drawn up at the curb was a smart Packard. Gourlock opened the car door for Lynch and gave swift directions to his chauffeur. The car sped away.

"Listen, Lynch!" Gourlock said hastily, as the car shot ahead. "In case any cops get to askin' questions about what we're doin' on the waterfront while this fightin's goin' on, I'm takin'

you, a buyer, to see some silk I own in a warehouse down there, see? I hadn't meant to be within a hundred miles of the place, see? Never let the cops get anything on me."

"You live down there, don't you?" demanded Lynch.

"I hold on to the home my folks lived in for years—for votin' reasons. I got a good political pull, see?" He laughed shortly. "But I've got a swell dump out in Newton. What you think I'm headin' a gang for, huh? And I got a good reason for hangin' around the waterfront. Own a couple warehouses. Got to 'tend to business, ain't I?"

"Don't the police ever get wise?" asked Lynch.

"Huh!" Gourlock said complacently. "They've raided my warehouses four times, and never found anything that oughtn't to be there."

Lynch held his breath, and his fists gripped into iron knots until the car skidded to a stop half a block from the boys' club where Sheila Holden did her social service work. The street seemed empty as Lynch and Gourlock leaped from the car, but from the distance came a muffled, crashing sound. From the club!

Lynch and Gourlock raced toward it. The crashing grew louder. Outside the door of the club a crowd was gathering and somebody was yelling, "Police!" as Lynch and Gourlock barged toward the entrance. Three toughs started to bar their way, but dropped back as they saw Gourlock.

The hall was empty except for a Gourlock gangster who stood spraddle-legged, with gun out and ready, at the foot of the stairs. But the main room, off the hall, looked as if a cyclone had struck it. Tables, chairs, book-cases, sports paraphernalia for the boys' use had been tossed helter-skelter and smashed, and the walls bore disfiguring marks from flung bottles which had fallen in a litter of debris to the floor.

After one hasty glance, Lynch took

the stairs three at a time. Above, the sounds of rioting were bedlam. Down the hall, on the second floor, a mass of fighting men were trying to force their way past a hastily made barricade of furniture, behind which stood Sheila, a heavy club in her upraised hands. Her cheeks were blazing, and in her blue eyes was contemptuous defiance. Leaning against the wall was Dr. Holden, dabbing at his mouth with a blood-stained handkerchief.

"Come on out of that!" one of the toughs was shouting. "Or we'll damn well haul you out!"

"Try it!" challenged Sheila, brandishing her club.

An exultant thrill at sight of her shot through Lynch as, with a triumphant shout, he lowered his head in a football rush and hurled himself into the mob with the force of a battering-ram. Then he was beside her, his own eyes shining with a battle light, and a hard, challenging grin on his lips.

"Come on, you rats!" he shouted. "Come on and take us both—if you can!"

"Hell, it's him—it's Jake!" cried a harsh, startled voice.

But that did not stop the onrush of the gangsters at the back of the mob.

"Get him!" another voice bawled. "What you waitin' for?"

BUT the foremost men were in no hurry to get Michael Lynch, as they fell back against the pressing mob. Nobody, apparently, wanted to be the first to attack that big, formidable figure blocking the way. They did not relish the menace in those cold gray eyes.

Again the mob surged forward—and with a terrifying shout, Lynch leaped into their midst, his arms flailing, fists pounding with all the power of his mighty arms.

Before the fury of that attack the leaders of the mob broke—fell back, panic-stricken, and tried to get away. But pressure held them targets for

those merciless, pile-driving fists. For the moments that battle lasted—and it was short and sweet—it was more like a massacre than a fist fight. It collapsed completely when a harsh voice from the lower floor yelled stridently:

"What the hell's goin' on up there?"

Then Gourlock was leaping up the stairs, hurling his gangsters aside. Gourlock was a fighter himself, when he wanted to be, and he showed it now, as he fought his way to Lynch's side. He whirled to face his men.

"What the hell you fellows mean, bustin' up this club like this?" he roared. "Get out! And take these two bums with you!" He jerked a thumb at two unconscious men, huddled against the banisters.

Some surprised looks were cast his way, but the gangsters melted away, tumbling over one another in their haste to get downstairs and out the back way. Already whistles were shrilling out front. The police were coming on the double-quick.

"What's all the trouble, Miss Holden?" Gourlock demanded. "What's been happening?"

"Are you intimating you don't know?" she asked defiantly.

Gourlock showed blank amazement.

"I? How should I know? I was drivin' Lynch down to my warehouse when we heard the row in here and rushed in to take a hand."

His words, his expression, were so bland, though covering a sneer, that it was all Michael Lynch could do to hold himself back from landing a knock-out punch to that repellent face.

"You two were together?" asked Sheila, plainly puzzled, and when Gourlock nodded: "Oh!" she said blankly, looking as displeased as she was astonished.

And it was at this moment that the first wisp of smoke drifted up the staircase, as the front door burst open and two policemen rushed in.

"Fire!" the first one yelled. "Turn

in an alarm, Bill!"

A thicker cloud of smoke rolled up, accompanied by a sharp, high crackling sound.

"Get out—all of you!" shouted Gourlock. "Fast! That fire's got a good hold!" He should have known, since he had set it before following Lynch in to the rescue of Sheila and her uncle.

The crackling, and the increased roar showed the seriousness of the fire. With one heave Lynch toppled Sheila's barricade.

"Anybody else in this place?" he demanded.

"There shouldn't be," said Sheila quickly. "The boys haven't come from school yet."

"I'll take a look! The rest of you get out!"

But when Lynch had hastily looked through the top floor rooms, Sheila was still waiting for him in the blinding, swirling smoke.

"Gourlock's taken my uncle out the back way!" she choked. "I waited to show you where it is."

THEY ran down the back stairs which the fire had not yet reached, and when they rushed around to the front of the club a bright red glow was already showing through the windows. Fire apparatus sirens were shrieking in the distance, and shouting police were forcing back the crowds that poured from nearby tenements and ramshackle houses.

The club was doomed. That was plain, even as fire apparatus clanged up in double strength, since this neighborhood was known to be a dangerous one for fires, crowded as it was with flimsy old fire-traps.

Gourlock forced his way through the police lines to Sheila's side.

"Your uncle's in my car," he said. "He's had a shock, but he's okay. My chauffeur will take you anywhere you want to go, Miss Holden."

Without a word she followed him to the car. Dr. Holden was leaning back

against the cushions, pale and shaky.

"I think we'd better go to Mr. Bretherton's home until we can decide what to do, Sheila," he said.

She looked as if she would rather leave in any way than in Gourlock's car, but got in beside her uncle, and the car sped away.

"That's all right, ain't it?" Gourlock said to Lynch, grinning. "The old guy ain't hurt much. He'll be okay by mornin'."

"Sheila Holden knows you're responsible for that rioting," snapped Lynch, frowning. "She didn't even want to ride in your car."

Gourlock shrugged.

"Maybe," he said. "But she'll have to admit I chased the mob, and tried to save the club. So what?"

"A damned dirty business—all of it," growled Lynch.

"Seems like I've heard you ain't always so squeamish," said Gourlock. "That dame's got you goin', too. Well, anyhow, that damn club's out of business. We don't need no social service clubs on the waterfront. They put notions into folks' heads — the wrong kind. Us folks that know the waterfront can hand out all the ideas that's needed. Come on—let's get out of here. Plenty time to answer police questions when they look us up."

"Now what?" asked Lynch.

"That will depend on the report I get tonight. We'd better meet for lunch tomorrow—at the Kenmore, at one. Bring Smollet with you."

Lynch nodded curtly, and hailed a taxi.

When Michael Lynch opened his morning paper, a front-page headline blazed out at him.

**RIOTING ON THE WATERFRONT
FIREBUGS DESTROY BOYS' CLUB
FOUR POLICEMEN INJURED!**

With narrowed eyes, Lynch read the story. Rival waterfront gangs, it announced, had started fighting in a rabbit warren of small streets and al-

leys off the waterfront. Police had been handicapped by cut telephone wires, and the fire department had been delayed until the club was past saving.

While the police had been occupied with the fire, other fighting had broken out in several nearby sections. Before the riot squads could arrive, the home of John Sanderson, a small jeweler who still occupied his family homestead in the neighborhood, had been looted. Sanderson himself narrowly escaped serious injury when the police had belatedly arrived and sent the rioters scurrying for cover.

The boys' club that had been destroyed had been one of the favorite projects of the well known philanthropist, Roderick Bretherton. Four policemen had been injured, one of them seriously, and a number of arrests had been made.

CHAPTER VIII

The Boss



MICHAEL LYNCH had just finished reading the story in the *Globe* when Summers arrived.

"I want to hear your version of what happened last night," the Pinkerton man said promptly. "You went to the waterfront with Gourlock, didn't you?"

Briefly, Lynch told Summers what had happened, and Summers nodded thoughtfully.

"I've got to hand it to Gourlock for organization," he said. "The whole business was timed with absolute accuracy. And those three men who were arrested were meant to be arrested. They're from Revere Beach, and have proof they got dragged into the fight innocently while on their way to visit a sick relative. All the cops have on them is resisting arrest. Sheila Holden

declares she recognized two of the men who attacked the club, but they've both got half a dozen witnesses to prove they weren't there. Swell stuff, eh? Sanderson hasn't said a word—he knows better. You can take it from me that, as a gang leader, Gourlock can give cards and spades to the Chicago and New York big-shots."

"Have you got your money on his smashing the Boss?" asked Lynch.

"Huh!" said Summers. "The only one I'm backin' is me."

"Found out who the Boss is yet?" asked Lynch.

"Nope. But I'm hopin'."

"What about Bretherton?" asked Lynch. "That name, it seems to me, could sound a hell of a lot like 'Raverton,' the name Cap Daniel, my friend, muttered when he was dying. I told you about Daniel. Tell me some more about this Bretherton guy."

"A lot of hooley, tryin' to tie *him* into that waterfront gang business," said Summers. "Or havin' anything to do with snatchin' that Van Renseler ice, either, even if his hobby is collectin' jewelry—and has he got a swell bunch of it! This ain't no movie plot. Bretherton's a millionaire, but he exhibits his gem collection for pay, and puts the money, with his own dough, into boys' clubs that he helps keep goin' with voluntary contributions. Stone's his nephew, and has been secretary to several of his clubs till they get goin' good. I told you Bretherton gave Stone the cash for the one Sheila Holden and her uncle was runnin'. That was Stone's own pet social-workin' stuff."

"How did Sheila and Dr. Holden come to be connected with the waterfront club?" asked Lynch.

"Well, they knew Bretherton and Stone, and the Holden gal's made quite a rep for herself as a social worker, so Bretherton put 'em in there six months ago. Holden gave up a swell practice—he's gettin' along in years, anyhow. He stands high with Harvard Med and all the hospitals.

Not a chance him bein' mixed up in any gang dirt."

"And you're positive about this Bretherton?" asked Lynch.

Summers hesitated. "Well," he confessed reluctantly, "to tell the truth, sometimes I don't know what to think about that bird. And some of those clubs of his are worryin' me. Every one of them is run by a man and woman of unquestioned rep. But here's a funny thing. The Hoxton Club is run by a retired parson and his wife. But the secretary of that club, a feller that calls himself Donald Barington—ain't. Pinkerton men don't run to the police with everything they know, but I know that guy's right monicker is Richard Taggart — and he's wanted in Cincinnati for forgery."

"Be a swell story if all those clubs were centers of the Boss' organization, wouldn't it?" Lynch said, grinning. "Listen—are Dr. and Miss Holden still with Bretherton?"

"Sure. So's Sanderson. Say, you ought to read the interview Bretherton gave out about the scrappin' on the waterfront last night. He's goin' to rebuild the club. Offerin' five grand reward for information that will convict the ringleaders."

"He doesn't seem to mind invitin' suspicion," commented Lynch, thoughtfully.

"He should worry," replied Summers. "A millionaire like him." He got to his feet. "That'll be all now, I guess. What you doin' today?"

"Lunching with Gourlock at one. Where'll I get in touch with you, if I need to?"

SUMMERS told him, and when the Pinkerton man had gone, Lynch looked up Roderick Bretherton's address. It was in Brookline, and when Lynch had driven there in a taxi he found the Bretherton home to be an estate with a high wall surrounding the extensive grounds.

"Wait for me," Lynch told his

driver as he got out before the heavy iron gates.

Lynch walked up the driveway. A butler answered his ring at the door of the huge Georgian house. He was ushered into a spacious drawing room which was furnished elaborately in Oriental style. He asked for Sheila Holden, and a few moments later she entered.

"I came to see how you and your uncle are," Lynch said, a little awkwardly. "I hope neither of you is any the worse for last night."

She looked at him steadily, contemptuously.

"I knew you were a crook," she said bitingly, "but I didn't know you were a hypocrite!"

"Meaning?" Lynch's eyebrows lifted.

"Are you going to pretend you had nothing to do with that attack on the club last night? Do you think I don't know that you and Gourlock organized it? And then to have the nerve to come here and inquire after me and my uncle!"

She shrugged, as if to indicate that he was hopeless.

"I had nothing to do with that attack on the club!" Lynch burst out hotly. "As soon as I heard it was to be attempted, I raced down there to try to stop it!"

"With Gourlock." Sheila shrugged again. "I suppose he didn't know anything about it, either."

"I'm speaking for myself," Lynch said stubbornly. "And I did rush down there to help you."

Flushing slightly, Sheila looked him straight in the eyes.

"I don't believe you," she said. "Why should you try to help me?"

"Because I love you," said Lynch simply.

The color in her cheeks deepened, but her eyes did not leave his face.

"You—you have the impudence to say that?" Her eyes flashed then. "If you could love anybody—except yourself—you wouldn't be a crook. That

club you and your friends destroyed was doing fine work, teaching a lot of boys to be decent, to keep away from men of your kind, and to go straight. You were afraid we were getting to have too much influence. And you couldn't fight fair, so took that way of getting rid of us! I—I despise you! Utterly despise you!"

Lynch had borne a lot, but there was a limit to his endurance. When he laughed, there was a savage note in it.

"You talking about fighting fair!" he said acidly. "Is it fighting fair to be nice and polite and friendly to Gourlock, because you're afraid of him, and then say behind his back what you haven't the courage to say to his face? Why didn't you tell Gourlock to go to hell? I'd have had more sympathy for you if you had."

"I don't want your darned sympathy!" she burst out angrily. "And I didn't pretend to be friendly with Gourlock! I wanted to fight him. But the others wouldn't let me."

"How nice it must be for you to realize how much nobler and braver you are than the others running the club," said Lynch. "I wouldn't boast about it, though, if I were you. People might make the mistake of thinking you disloyal—rather conceited, at the best."

"Don't you dare call me disloyal and conceited!" she cried stormily, and the next instant had slapped his face soundly.

FOR a moment there was dead silence, except that Sheila caught a sharp breath as if horrified by what she had done. And a light of stubborn resolve was gleaming in Lynch's eyes.

"There's only one answer a man can give to a blow from a woman," he said quietly, took a step forward, and swept her into his arms. "This!"

She fought him, but could not break his hold. His left hand tipped up her chin—and he kissed her on the lips, hard.

When he released her, he expected

an angry outburst, but it did not come. She stood quite still, something in her expression that he could not understand.

"You—you heel!" was all she said.

Lynch thought she was going to hit him again, hoped she would, for he would have kissed her again. But at that moment the door opened, and a tall burly man, with black hair turning slightly gray, dark eyes, and a square jaw, came in.

"Ah, Sheila!" he said in a deep voice. "Hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Oh, no. This is Mr. Lynch, the man we were telling you about."

"*Mmm* — you don't say," said the dark-eyed man. He looked Lynch up and down as Sheila left the room. "So you're that blackguard, are you?"

"I'm Lynch—yes."

"*Mmm* — otherwise known as Jake the Cat."

Lynch did not miss that "*Mmm*."

"And you're Bretherton, the famous philanthropist, I take it?" he asked suavely.

"I am."

"Otherwise known as the Boss!"

CHAPTER IX

Hijacking Party



ODERICK BRETHERTON'S joviality dropped from him abruptly. Of a sudden he looked what he was—dangerous.

"*M m m* — a n d what makes you think that?" he asked Michael Lynch.

"I don't think—I know," Lynch said coolly.

"You do, eh?" Bretherton said softly, and his smile was vicious. "And what do you propose to do about it?"

"I might inform the police," suggested Lynch.

Bretherton laughed, and lifted a deprecating hand.

"I give you credit for a little more intelligence than that. You know they'd only laugh at you. Richards!"

From behind a Japanese screen stepped the butler. In his hand he held an automatic. Lynch grinned.

"Enter human skeleton with gun," he said. "Swell melodrama. Now touch a secret button and let the ceiling drop, or have the floor open and swallow me up."

"Not just yet," Bretherton said smoothly, and his lips drew back as he leaned forward. "You'd like to have that necklace, wouldn't you?" he asked, almost in a whisper. His eyes gleamed evilly, and he chuckled. "I'll show it to you."

He went across the room and opened a door in the wall. There was something in the man's actions that Lynch did not understand. But as he watched, Bretherton opened a safe, pulled out a tray, and lifted from it something that sparkled in the sunlight. The Van Renseler necklace! He let the shining jewels run through his fingers.

"Wouldn't you like it?" he asked in a hoarse, jeering whisper.

He stroked the jewels with crooked fingers, and suddenly Lynch saw that he was squinting. Illumination came to Lynch in a flash. Now he saw what it was that had puzzled him. Bretherton was a lunatic, obsessed by a passion to hoard jewelry! He knew it as Bretherton took another necklace from the safe, then another, holding them to the light.

"*Mmm!*" the man crooned. "All mine. Lovely—lovely!"

He glanced at Lynch, then with feverish haste replaced the jewels in the safe, closing it and the door in the wall as well. His face distorted with rage, he turned and pointed a trembling hand at Lynch.

"Kill him, Richards—shoot him!" he shouted. "He wants to take them from me!"

If Lynch was surprised, Richards was shocked.

"I can't do that, sir—not here," the

butler expostulated, his eyes wide.

"Are you disobeying me?" roared Bretherton.

Then, as quickly as the spell had seized him, the madness passed. His fingers straightened. His eyes became normal.

"I believe you're right, Richards," he said calmly. "We shall have to make other arrangements for his demise. Show him out."

That was surprise number two, and Lynch was hardly able to realize it until he was in his taxi, speeding away.

"The man's nuts," he told himself. "And there's only one answer—a raid. With him on his guard now, even if it's left till night, nobody will ever lay hands on that Van Renseler necklace."

By one o'clock Lynch was sitting in the study of Gourlock's elaborate home in Newton. He'd had lunch with Summers, and had discussed a plan whereby that astute detective might combine the recovery of the various stolen articles in Bretherton's possession with the arrest of the leading members of the waterfront gang.

LEAVING Summers, Lynch had gone straight to Gourlock and told of his experience with the Boss. Right now, he was discussing another plan.

"What I want," he said, "is a limousine with half a dozen men, masked and armed. We've got to raid that place and make our get-away before the Boss starts looking for us. We don't want any shooting unless it's necessary, but once we've got the jewels we'll be all right. Bretherton will know who we are, but he won't dare spill to the police—because we're only hijacking stolen stuff. I guess you can find us alibis, anyway, Gourlock."

Gourlock laughed exultantly.

"And how!" he said. "I'll have everything fixed up, and be on the job with the boys myself. This job's too

big for anybody else to handle. Are you coming along with me now?"

"We've got to get rid of the stuff quickly, and we haven't got a fence," said Lynch. "I'll go see Smollet. Pick me up in three-quarters of an hour near Bretherton's dump."

"But I'm taking charge," Gourlock said stubbornly. "I'll be seeing Smollet myself before anything is handed over."

"Okay," Lynch said carelessly. "There's one more thing, though. That Van Renseler necklace is mine. You can have the other stuff, but I take the necklace as my cut."

"Take the damned necklace," said Gourlock sourly. "If those other jewels are what you say, we won't be missin' it."

When they parted, however, Lynch did not go to see Smollet. He phoned Police Headquarters, and asked if Pinkerton's man, Summers, was there.

"Just left here," he was told. "You the guy he was expectin' a message from?"

"Yeah. Tell him the time we arranged is okay. Two-fifteen, sharp!"

At three minutes to two that afternoon a limousine driven by a liveried chauffeur stopped outside the door of the Bretherton home. When the butler opened it, a gun was thrust into his stomach.

"Stand as you are, rat!" the holder of the gun whispered.

Half a dozen masked and armed men sprang from the car, Lynch and Gourlock leading them. They pushed hastily into the house.

Two of them hurried at once into the Oriental drawing room which contained the safe. Lynch and another man made for the kitchen quarters. Gourlock and another ran upstairs. Within five minutes the whole house had been searched, and everybody in it, except those in the drawing room, were herded into the kitchen under the guard of one of the masked men.

Bretherton, Stone, Dr. Holden, and Sheila had been sitting in the draw-

ing room drinking coffee after lunch. They were now standing, faces to the wall with their hands above their heads, menaced by two guns.

Lynch crossed the room to the hidden wall safe. Gourlock made a brief motion, and a man came forward from the doorway, carrying an oxy-acetylene torch with which he promptly got to work upon the safe door. In five minutes it was open, disclosing a series of trays placed one upon the other.

On the first tray, pulled out by Gourlock's eager hand, and bedded against a background of green velvet, were three diamond necklaces—and the Van Renseler necklace was the least magnificent of the three! Gourlock looked at Lynch, and behind the black mask his eyes were shining with triumph.

"The Hampton dame's ice!" he exclaimed in awed tones. "And the Cudford necklace. Hell, them alone must be worth a flock of grands!"

"Yeah—a nice little collection," Lynch said coolly, stretched out his hand for the Van Renseler necklace, and put it in his pocket.

THE eyes of the masked men were looking so greedily toward the safe that even the men guarding the people against the wall had turned away, oblivious to everything except the riches disclosed.

"Hands up!" said a sharp, clear voice suddenly from the doorway.

Standing there was a tall figure in a long raincoat. A black mask covered his face and black gloves covered his hands, each of which held an automatic fitted with a silencer.

"What the —" began Gourlock, stupefied. "Who the hell are you?"

"They call me Jake the Cat," said the newly arrived masked man mockingly.

"Jake the Cat!" cried three astonished voices—one of them a girl's. Sheila had turned and was looking from Lynch to the man in the doorway, the utmost bewilderment on her face.

Gourlock whirled on Lynch with blazing eyes.

"Then who might you be?" he demanded fiercely. "What's your game? You a stoolie?"

"Nope—not me. I'm just Michael Lynch."

Though Lynch spoke calmly, he was as astonished as the rest. The appearance of the real Jake the Cat had been outside his plans. What was Summers doing? He and the police were supposed to surround the house and enter at two-fifteen. It lacked just five minutes of that time now.

"Shut up!" commanded the man in the doorway briskly. "Drop your guns, all of you, and kick them under the table! Don't try to get smart. I like target practice."

There was a sudden flash and a puff of smoke from one of the stranger's

[Turn page]



pistols, and Gourlock's gun was shot from his hand. The ward heeler yelled as blood spurted from his hand.

"That gun of yours was pointing in the wrong direction," barked the stranger.

The other guns were instantly dropped and kicked under the table. That stranger's argument commanded respect.

"To start with, I'll have that Van Rensler necklace," said Jake the Cat, indicating Lynch. "You were pretty wise, but I'm wiser."

Lynch laughed shortly. "Oh, yeah?" he drawled. "I knew about that necklace as soon as I saw it. Paste—like all this other stuff."

He knew that was untrue, but his words had a startling effect.

"Paste?" shouted Jake the Cat in angry amazement.

"Paste?" echoed another voice shrilly, punctuated with high-pitched laughter. "My beautiful jewels—paste?"

Ignoring guns, Bretherton shambled forward, grotesque, crouching, his features hideously distorted, with little flecks of foam at the corners of his lips, and his fingers clawing at the air.

"It's a lie! A lie! My beautiful jewels! They're not paste!"

"Stand back, you!" ordered Jake the Cat.

CHAPTER X

Lynch Explains



JUST for a moment the attention of the newly arrived masked man was concentrated on the dreadful figure in the middle of the room. Lynch seized his opportunity. In one movement he grabbed a heavy Oriental vase from its pedestal, hurled it, and fell side-

ward on toes and fingertips.

Jake's pistol flashed a fraction of a second too late. The heavy vase struck him full in the face, staggering him back. One of his guns dropped, and before he could recover his balance, Lynch sprang.

His right hand darted out in a short, chopping movement, knocking the second pistol out of Jake's hand, while his left hand tore the mask away. He almost lost his advantage then from surprise—because Jake the Cat was Summers, the Pinkerton detective!

The other crooks were scrambling madly beneath the table for their guns. Lynch leaped for his own.

"Get your uncle out of here!" he shouted to Sheila, just as a gangster began yelling:

"The cops are comin'! Beat it out the back way, boys!"

Through the window a plunging line of police could be seen advancing toward the house. A man ran to meet them—Summers, alias Jake the Cat! Somehow he had got away!

Gourlock headed the rush for the doorway to get away. Within five seconds Lynch was alone in the room save for Bretherton, who had sunk into a chair and was muttering feebly.

With a short laugh Lynch tore the mask from his face, picked the remaining guns from the floor, and laid them neatly on the table. He knew that the house was surrounded by a sufficient number of police to insure that none of the crooks would escape—or only one of them, Summers.

He had just laid the last gun on the table when Sheila marched back into the room.

"The house is surrounded by police," she announced.

"Oh, yeah?" said Lynch.

"So you're not Jake the Cat," she said. "Who are you?"

"Michael Lynch."

She made a little movement of impatience.

"Yes, but—but what are you? A policeman? What were you doing with that fellow Gourlock and those—people?"

"One of my objectives was the Van Renseler necklace." He drew it from his pocket, and let it run through his fingers. "Isn't it worth it?"

"Please don't let them find it on you!" she begged. "Give it to me—please?"

Lynch laughed. "Certainly," he said, and handed it over.

She replaced it on the tray, then turned to him again, and suddenly

headlines with evident disgust.

They were black, and unmistakable.

MILLIONAIRE TAKES A HEADER INTO THE UNDERWORLD!

A whole column was devoted to Lynch—a description of his career as the son of a stevedore on Boston's own waterfront who had stowed away on a cargo boat at fourteen, and had sailed all over the world. After that, he had gone to a famous university for three years, making his way by being sparring partner to various heavyweight

Ben Hardesty, Insurance Detective, Takes the Trail of a Jewel Mob Case in the Paris of Yesterday!



DEATH MASQUERADE

A Baffling Complete Mystery Novel

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

PACKED WITH SUSPENSE—ACTION—SURPRISES!

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

color flooded her face.

"I—I'd help you if I could," she said.

Lynch took a step toward her, his eyes shining, just as a bluecoat barged into the room.

"Here's one of 'em!" the officer shouted.

Grinning, Lynch held out his hands for the handcuffs. . . .

THE next morning Michael Lynch, out on bail after being held three hours, glanced through the front-page

boxers and giving boxing instructions to undergraduates. After leaving the university, with a degree in engineering, he had prospected in South America and discovered the Rio Negro oil fields, from which most of his wealth was derived.

Then followed the account of how he had learned of the death of Captain Daniel, an old sailor who had befriended him in his boyhood. Combining the waterfront for the killer, he had become involved in the affair of the stolen Van Renseler necklace, and

had recklessly disregarded danger to bring that matter to a climax. Now, due to Lynch's exploits in the underworld, one of Boston's most notorious sections was being cleaned up.

Lynch flung aside the paper and picked up a letter that had been waiting for him when he had got back to the hotel. It read:

I reckon luck was on your side. If it hadn't been for that madman, the Boss, and the police showing up too soon, I'd have had the necklace and the other stuff all right. I suppose you told them two-fifteen, when I'd already told them two-forty-five. I'd reckoned that there was just time between two-fifteen and two-forty-five—the time I was expecting them—for me to snatch the ice and meet the police with it in my pocket. It was a swell idea, but it didn't work out. I don't need to resign as a Pinkerton man.

All that talk about framing you and getting you sent up was bluff, of course. I knew it wouldn't worry you, because I knew who you were. I wanted you to think I believed you were Jake the Cat. I was afraid you might suspect that I was, and I was mighty relieved when I found you'd made some phone calls to the New York office and discovered I was a Pinkerton man.

Well, I guess you've made them pay for the murder of your friend Daniel. That was what you were really after, wasn't it? And you've got the necklace. Better look after it carefully, though, or I'll be around and snatch it some dark night.

Jake.

Lynch smiled. Somehow he could not find it in himself to be sorry that Jake had got away. The man's cool audacity appealed to him. And the calm way in which Jake, after he had been unmasked, had gone out of the house to meet the police, waved them on, and then departed, had appealed to him also.

THE phone rang, and a faint flush touched Lynch's face as he answered.

"Please ask her to come up," he said.

A few seconds later Sheila greeted him coldly, refusing the chair he offered her.

"I've brought back your necklace," she said. "The police sent it to me by mistake."

Lynch took the package she held out.

"I'd like to make you a present of it," he began, "but—"

"I don't want any of your gifts," she said emphatically. "And I think it was beastly of you to let me think you were a crook, and want to help you, when you were only a millionaire enjoying a silly joke. I—I hate you more than ever now."

"And I love you more than ever," said Lynch, and looked straight into her eyes. "Why did you want to help me?"

Her eyes fell before his steady gaze.

"Why did you pretend like that?" she said in a low voice. "Were you afraid I'd tell Stone? Was the necklace worth more to you than my good opinion?"

"The necklace wasn't my real reason for impersonating Jake," Lynch told her. "But when I discovered that for some unknown reason the waterfront gang were sure that I was Jake the Cat, it worked in fine. That night I first met you, I'd gone to the waterfront to look up a friend of mine—a Captain Daniel who had treated me like a father when I was a miserable little stowaway, and taught me seamanship. I found out that he had been murdered by Gourlock's gang, and, of course, I'd known for years that Gourlock, the miserable ward heeler, was a gang leader. I swore to get the whole gang for killing Cap Daniel, and I did."

"The necklace goes back to Mrs. Van Renseler, of course. Bretherton found out that Jake the Cat had lifted it, and his men did some clever hijacking. Mrs. Van Renseler was broken-hearted about the loss of her necklace. She's a friend of mine—I first met her through the private detective agency I run in New York—so I told her that I'd take a try at getting back her diamonds. It gave me a still stronger reason for fighting the Boss and his gang. I hated for you to think I was a crook, and that the necklace was all that I was after."

"I—I never wanted to think you were a crook," Sheila said wistfully.

"That was why I was so indignant. It—it seemed such a pity that—that you weren't straight. It made me miserable."

Lynch stepped forward quickly and took both her hands in his.

"You haven't answered my question," he said. "Why did you want to help me, thinking I was a crook?"

Color suddenly flooded her face, and she tried to turn away.

"I—I don't know," she said faintly, and then: "No—please—you mustn't!"

But Lynch's arm was drawing her

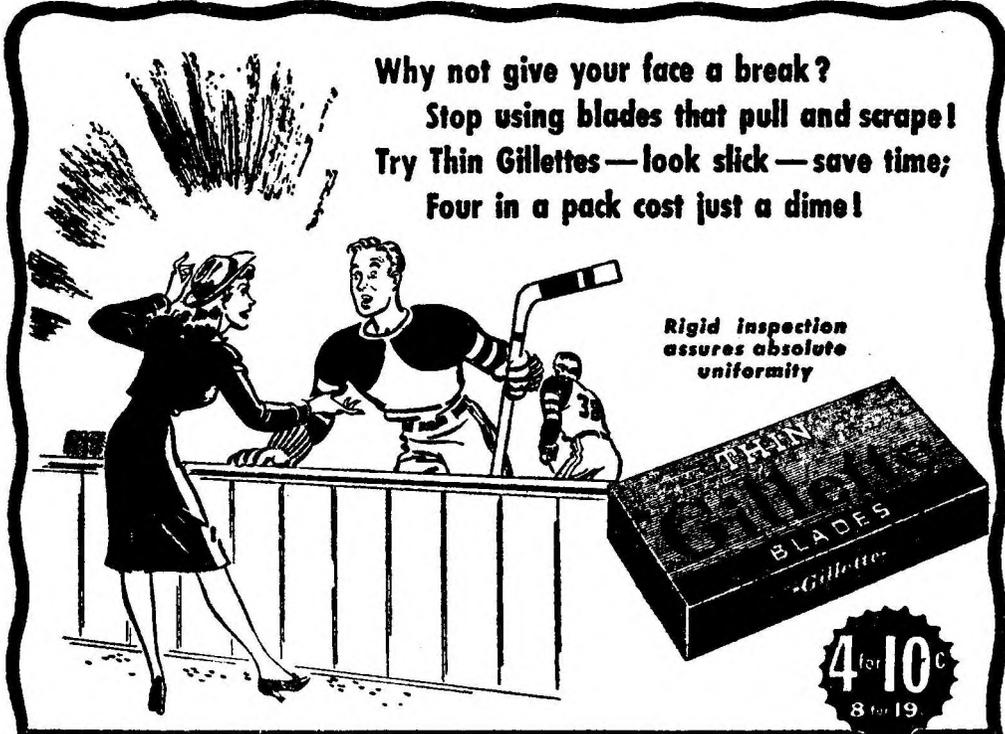
close. With a deep sigh, she yielded to his kiss. There was a long pause.

"Darling," whispered Lynch, "you'll let me buy you another necklace, won't you, as a wedding present?"

"I suppose so," she murmured, and hid her face against his shoulder. Then she raised it again, looked at him, and smiled. "You're such a boy," she said softly. "And I know boys. I'll be able to do just what I like with you when we're married."

Lynch only laughed, and kissed her again.

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CRIME BY CHART

By
HARL VINCENT

Author of "Alibi Mike," "Death Plant," etc.

Jerry Cochran Traces a Sinister Murder Pattern and Spikes a Wily Killer's Design for Dying!

JERRY COCHRAN never kidded himself about his dependence on the Hercules Life, Casualty and Indemnity Company. Without them for a meal ticket, he'd have to take down his private sleuthing sign and close his small office for keeps.

But, sometimes, they handed him the screwiest assignments you ever heard of. At least they'd look screwy in the beginning. Then, all of a sudden, you might find you really had something big on your hands. Ferd Dudley, the half-pint Hercules claim adjuster, had a nose that would smell fire when there wasn't even any smoke. Only he never went near the fire himself; that was where Cochran came in.

Take this business of the Chauncey MacDermott policy. When he first heard about that, Cochran thought Dudley was having another of his titanic brain waves.

"I want you to grab the next train for Philly, Deacon," Dudley's thin squeak came over the wire.

"Philly!" yelped Cochran. He had planned going out that night.

"Yes, Philadelphia. Ever hear of it?"



Jerry held the dead girl close to him for a moment

"Sure, spent a week there one Sunday. But why Philly now?"

"Chauncey MacDermott died today."

"So what?" Jerry snapped. "And who's he?"

"He was General Super of the DeLacey Pump Works, just outside of Frankford. And he had a straight life coverage for fifty thousand bucks. For six months he held it, and now he's supposed to be croaked by an accident in his own shop. Double indemnity, too." Dudley's voice became almost hysterical at the end.

"Don't cry about it," said Cochran, sighing. "So I suppose there's a one-year suicide clause in the policy. And you want to prove he bumped himself off, is that it?"

"Anything you can learn, Deke," Dudley said. "It's fishy, somehow—a hunch of mine."

"How's he supposed to have been rubbed out?"

"A machine blew up in his face or something. I tell you, with a policy like that and the ink hardly dry on it, there's—"

"Would a guy knock himself off by running into a machine? You're nuts, Ferd."

The claim man's chirp became apologetic now.

"Well, that's the way it is. So, get down there right away, will you?"

"Okay. Who's the beneficiary?"

"His wife. Lives out on the Main Line, in Ardmore. That's all I can tell you, Deacon."

SO that's how it happened that Jerry Cochran was on the six o'clock Philadelphia express out of Penn Station. Seeing him with his bony knees tucked almost under his chin where he'd doubled up in the parlor car seat, you'd never take him for a private investigator. With his long face, thin lips and solemn blue eyes, you'd be more likely to think him a mortician, which is high-hat for undertaker. That's why Fred Dudley

and a privileged few called him "Deacon." It was an advantage in this racket. Widows fell for it, especially.

And there were plenty of times he hob-nobbed with honest-to-God morticians, at that. . . .

Sylvia MacDermott was a dream in chic black. She had an assortment of baby-stare eyes, full red lips, honey blond hair, and soft youthful curves that, item by individual item, *might* have been equalled elsewhere. All her features were assembled in a way that was far beyond anything Cochran had ever seen. The completed product was a knockout.

He was glad the corpse wasn't here in this snooty suburban home. Chauncey MacDermott, he was told, lay stiff and cold in a closed casket in the best funeral parlor in the burg. And there wasn't anything stiff and cold about his young widow.

"I represent the Hercules Insurance people," Cochran told her.

"Oh," said Sylvia MacDermott softly. "Oh." She dabbed at her rosebud mouth with a ridiculous bit of black-edged lace. "Must such things as money be discussed at a time like this?"

Jerry put sympathy into his tones.

"No, Mrs. MacDermott. That can wait, if you like. The Company wants to express its condolences through me; that's all. I'd like to ask a few questions about your late husband—if you don't mind."

The girl sighed feelingly.

"I suppose it must be done. Will you sit down?"

She led him into a rose and gold drawing room, where he sat on the edge of a spindle-legged chair that he was afraid would fold up under him. This Sylvia, on a thirty foot divan, crossed a pair of legs you could have insured for a warm—not cool—million. She looked at him sad-eyed now.

"Just a matter of routine," Jerry said gently. "It's tough having to question the bereaved ones so soon, I know. But it has to be done. Your

husband was in good health and of sound mind?"

A pitiful little catch was in the girl's voice.

"Oh, yes."

"He hadn't any important worries? Like money or anything?"

The girl's eyes widened. Her forehead was boardered in thought.

"No-o," she said, thinking hard. Of course, he'd lost some in the market. "But"—those screen-starry eyes swept the luxury around them—"we had everything we needed. Do you mean . . .?"

"Oh, nothing implied, madam," Cochran said hastily. "I have to ask you these things. You're fully convinced it was an accident?"

"Why—why, of course." The dazzling widow stood up. "But you can find out about that at the Works. Everyone knows about it there. I don't understand it, naturally. There was a mistake of some sort and one of the pumps went to pieces. Poor—poor Chauncey was—"

Jerry was genuinely sorry.

"I know, I know," he said, soothingly. "And I've hated to do this."

"Oh, it's all right." The vision in black suppressed a little sob and turned toward the door.

JERRY COCHRAN knew when he wasn't wanted. On the way out he cursed Ferd Durley and the Company impartially. Any guy with a place like this and with something like this Sylvia in it would be a crackpot to take a run-out powder the hard way.

And now he had to stay over in Philly for the night so he could go out to that plant and ask more fool questions. . . .

The DeLacey Pump Works was a whale of a big place. A fine modern office and a dozen huge factory buildings sprawled around inside a mile square of high fencing. It was situated way out in the middle of what used to be a huge swamp before it was

filled in with cinders and stuff. The place was going full blast when Jerry got there next morning.

He didn't know where to begin, so he got an unlimited pass in the executive offices and started roaming about. His credentials were good.

MacDermott's private office was his first stop and here he met up with another shock. Feminine again. If the dead man's wife was something to look at, so was his secretary. And how!

Marie Coppola, her name was. She was a vivacious little black-eyed package of obvious Italian extraction and a regular Madonna. Just the opposite of Sylvia MacDermott in coloring but, if possible, of even more appeal to a guy's eyes and senses. Cochran began to be glad he'd come on this wild goose chase now.

She looked up at his six feet of stooped solemnity with sort of a scared fluttering in those big eyes of hers. Jerry saw dark lashes an inch long bat down on her peaches-and-cream cheeks, then up—and he was ga-ga from the lights underneath.

"I want you to tell me all about the day before yesterday," he told her. "When your boss was killed."

"Do I have to?" the girl asked, kind of panicky.

"It'd be better." Cochran's eyes narrowed, noting the girl's confusion. Maybe Dudley's hunch wasn't so bad after all. "And, tell me first about him personally. You worked for him a long time?"

"Three years."

"Good boss?"

More color came into the girl's face.

"The best ever," she said. "He was the best and kindest man I ever knew. He did everything in the—" Suddenly, Marie Coppola was sobbing uncontrollably, her head down over her typewriter, her smooth shoulders heaving.

"So that's how it is," thought Jerry. He patted one of those nice shoulders. "Sorry," he said aloud. "I know you must be hit hard, girlie. Must have

thought a lot of him."

The dark head came up defiantly.

"I loved him," she blurted out through the tears. "And I don't care who knows it now. There wasn't anything wrong, but there was some talk. It worried him, too. I—"

"If I were you I wouldn't tell that to anyone else."

She dried her tears, steadied herself.

"Why?"

"Ever stop to think his death might not have been accidental?"

All color fled abruptly from the cameo face.

"You think someone—"

"I didn't say that. Get yourself together, Miss, and tell me what you know. Everything."

The inherited Latin temperament sprang to the fore now.

"She drove him nearly crazy," she said angrily. "His wife, she's no good. Playing around with another man always. I know who; everyone knows about it. And she had the nerve to be catty about me."

"Wait a minute, girlie. Wait a minute. You don't have to blow off like that. What's it got to do with his death?"

COLOR flooded back and the girl's look was contrite.

"Oh, I'm so ashamed," she said. "But it's true—every word of it. Mr. MacDermott was so upset I don't think he cared whether he lived or not."

"Now, we're coming to it," Jerry said, beaming. "Do you think he did it himself?"

Red lips made an "o" around the pearly teeth.

"Suicide? Why, that would be impossible. No, it was an accident. It was a big coupling between the test floor motor and a new pump. A draftsman's error called for cast iron coupling halves instead of cast steel as they should have been. Iron wasn't strong enough and when the pump was nearly up to speed the coupling failed.

A chunk of it tore— Oh, I can't say it. It's too horrible!"

The girl was going to cry again.

"Now, now," Cochrane soothed her, "you don't have to go into that. Who was the draftsman that made the error, and the checker?"

"Charlie Petersen and Joe Lindquist," Maria said, controlling herself. "And they both feel terrible, of course."

"Of course." Jerry wrote down the names. "That's all for now, Miss Coppola. And thanks a lot. I'll see you later."

Cochran rose from beside the girl's desk to leave. Then she was on his neck in a flurry of emotion. Soft young arms crept around him and her body pressed against his, trembling. Being only human, Jerry pulled the fragrant dark head down to his chest, holding her close for a moment. He tried to make it seem fatherly.

"I—I was a fool," the girl was whispering. "Please, Mr. Cochran, don't say anything about what I told you; about Chauncey and me. My brother'd kill me if there was any more talk."

So it was Chauncey! Jerry disengaged the girl gently before he had a chance to lose his head. This one had what it took, and no fooling.

"Don't worry," he said, grinning. "You're as safe as if you confessed in a dream."

In the hall he took a deep breath and stood a minute to cool off before going to see the chief engineer. He had a lot of things to wonder about now. . . .

Luke Borden, the chief engineer, was a tall athletic looking guy with a Charlie Chaplin mustache. He was energetic, keen, almost too young looking and handsome for this responsible job. A ladies' man, Cochran figured. The kind either Marie or Sylvia might go for. But he seemed to be okay and was deeply concerned about the drafting room.

Jerry had him call in the two men

from the drafting room, sitting there folded up in Borden's chair like a jack-knife to question them. The first one, Petersen, was a little round-faced guy with a flabby mouth and a green eyeshade. Lindquist turned out to be a big Swede with a mop of yellow hair straggling down over his eyes and a tobacco-stained Vandyke. Both first-class men, the chief told him.

Petersen was almost weeping.

"I can't understand it," he said, moaning. "My calculation book is correct. The maximum stresses figured twelve thousand pounds to the square inch. Too high for cast iron. I marked the book for cast steel. How it came out specified cast iron on the drawing I'll never know. It haunts me; I haven't slept since."

"Suppose it was correct on the drawing, wrong on the tracing," Cochran asked. He hadn't studied engineering for nothing some years ago.

"There wasn't any drawing, only a tracing," Peterson said. "You see this was only a modification of an older design. I drew in soft pencil on tracing cloth pinned over the original one of the old coupling. There were only a few minor changes in dimension. Then this soft pencil tracing was inked."

"Could the tracer have made the mistake?" Cochran questioned him.

"Not much chance. The tracer was a girl who doesn't know cast iron from brass. She only follows what's there. Besides, Lindquist checked it."

THE big Swede could hardly talk at all. He couldn't understand it, either. And he was just about sick over it, too. He wanted to quit his job and go die some place in peace. Cochran asked for the tracing.

Holding it to the light and looking through the pale blue stuff, he couldn't see a sign of erasure or change. There it was, in the bill of material square in the upper right hand corner—C.I. Not C.S. as it should have been. Petersen and Lindquist identified their own

signatures at the bottom. All the shop prints had been struck from this.

"That's all, fellows. Thanks. And I wouldn't feel too bad about it," Cochran told them. "Anyone can make mistakes."

He looked idly through a stack of other tracings on the chief's desk as they slow-footed out.

Borden was morose and grouchy about it all. He couldn't figure it out, either. It was reflection on his department, he said. But he couldn't fire the men; they were too good. The Company needed them. And there were no other bad errors in their records from years back.

"It was just one of those things," he summed it up. "They do slip though sometimes, however careful we are. Usually, it's only a matter of scrapped material and money lost. This time it cost a human life and a valuable one. It's a damn shame. Mac was a swell guy and a go-getter."

It even had Cochran down. He went out into the shop.

In Number Three shop, he found them cleaning up the mess around the test block where it had happened.

The motor was still there. And the pump, with the upper half of the casing removed and the rotor out and resting on horses alongside. It was the biggest pump he had ever seen. A centrifugal, of course, designed to run at nine hundred turns a minute and pump seventy-five thousand gallons of water a minute against thirty foot head. It took a six-hundred and fifty horsepower motor to do the job. And that needs a pretty husky coupling to hook the two together.

Where the coupling had been, there wasn't anything but smashed flooring and twisted girders underneath. There was a big hole in the brick wall behind, where they said a hundred pound chunk had bulleted through and landed two hundred feet away out in the yard. Another chunk, about the same size, had just about torn off MacDermott's head. Funny, he happened

to be there just at the right time.

The test floor supervisor was an obliging gent and told Cochran all he knew about it, which wasn't much. John Riley, his name was, and he breathed hard through his nose when he wasn't talking. He reeked badly of cheap whiskey. He was always dropping a folding rule out of his pocket and grunting when he picked it up.

"The Super often came down here?" asked the investigator.

"No, hardly ever," Riley said. "Queer, too. This time he came hot-footing up the main aisle just as we'd finished the scheduled ten minute run at half speed. We were just bringing her up for the full speed test when he stuck his nose right in the middle. Then, bam! She let go. Almost like he smelled it coming and was here right on the dot asking for it."

"Hm! Anyone down here send for him?"

"Not as I know. Anyhow, even if they had it in for him, why should they? How was anybody here to know the coupling was weak?"

"Didn't anyone down here know it was cast iron and should have been steel?"

Riley snorted and Jerry backed away from the strong whiff he caught.

"We all knew it was cast iron, sure," Riley said. "Hell; lots of them're cast iron, them that ain't stressed too high. But how in hell do we know what the stresses are? We ain't designers."

A DARK and husky, sullen-eyed mechanic was hanging around. Getting an earful of this, Cochran figured. He jerked a thumb toward the man.

"Who's that?" he asked Riley.

The test man grinned.

"Mike Coppola. He works in my crew. He's kinda steamed up about this. Didn't like the Super much. Damn fool actually laughed when he saw it. But he's harmless."

"Coppola? That his sister, the Super's secretary?"

"Yeah." Riley's dropped eyelid said plenty.

The mechanic had lost himself in the maze of machinery that cluttered up the test floor. Jerry decided to let it drop here.

Out in the yard, he looked over the big plant appreciatively as he started toward the office building at the other end of the property. It was the last word, all right. One long main assembly shop with material receiving at one end and shipping at the other. Five huge manufacturing shops feeding into it at an angle to get the utmost in assembling efficiency. The foundry, forge shop and power house were all set way back from everything. Long ago, Cochran had dreamed of working in a place like this. But his wanderlust wouldn't let him.

"Hey, you!" The snarled words were almost hissed in his ear.

The investigator whirled to walk right into a vicious punch that caught him under the chin and snapped his head back. He saw a million stars and sat down abruptly. A kick in the ribs tipped him over. It was this Coppola guy!

Cochran's long lean body was very deceiving. It looked like a reedy, awkward thing. Actually, it was all springs, wire and solid as steel. His head clearing, he was springing up like a monkey. His long right lashed out and Coppola cursed as he spit out a couple of teeth. A crashing left caught him in the middle and doubled him up in pain. But he came back like an enraged tiger and Jerry had his hands full.

A whistle blew shrilly then, up on the bridge where the main gate of the plant was located. The officers up there had seen what was happening.

The mechanic bored in slugging. And he packed a punch, no fooling! Jerry took one in the ribs that almost stopped his heart beating and made everything go black for an instant. He backed away from a tattoo of jabs that had him swallowing for air. What was

the matter with this guy anyway? If he'd killed MacDermott, this wouldn't get him anywhere.

Cochran blinked through a red haze and took careful measure. One-two. And his fists cracked like rifle shots against a hard jaw. Coppola's arms dropped loosely at his sides. His eyes glazed. But the cops from the bridge were there in time to keep him from falling.

"Lock him up," said Jerry, panting. "I'll prefer charges." He showed a card that had gotten him lots of places—and things.

Sore in body and mind, he went on to the office building. Things were beginning to shape up a little. Just a little. MacDermott hadn't gone the suicide route; he'd been murdered! Just how and by whom was something else again. It looked to Jerry like Coppola had a good reason. But how could he have phoned the blueprints when the original tracing was wrong? It didn't make sense. And yet—

HE speeded up and went straight to the Super's office as soon as he was inside the building. Marie Coppola smiled uncertainly up at him.

"I'd like to look over the boss's desk," he told her.

"Why—why, of course. I haven't been in there—couldn't go. No one else has gone in, either." She showed him the door to an inner office.

Cochran went in and took a look around. There were a couple of book-cases full of technical books and magazines; a broad mahogany desk with a swivel chair behind it; a conference table with a dozen straight backed chairs. A good quality rug covered the floor and pictures of big and little pumps in all stages of construction plastered the walls. It was the desk Jerry was interested in.

Ever see the scribblings and crazy designs a guy often marks down on the nearest surface when he's talking on the phone if there's a pen or pencil handy? Sometimes they mean a

lot, sometimes not a thing. It was something like this that Cochran was hunting for. He hardly expected to find words. But he did.

On a calendar pad by the desk phone there were a lot of angular figures scribbled. Showing an upset mind, according to some psychiatrist.

But there was also:

Vibration. No. 2 and No. 3 bearings. S.O. 1717-3.

Shop Order 1717-3 was the unit where the coupling had let go! And number two and three bearings were the ones straddling the connecting portion that had snuffed out the Super! Someone had called him just at the psychological moment, sending him down there to his death. It was as plain as the nose on your face.

Cochran stalked out into the girl's office so abruptly she jumped three feet out of her chair.

"Did anyone call your boss on the phone just before he went down to the shop that day?" he demanded.

The girl wrinkled her smooth forehead just a little, between those swell eyes.

"All his calls came through you, didn't they?" the investigator prompted.

"Yes. I took them first. I'm trying to think."

"Well, think hard, girlie. Someone sent your Chauncey to his death. I know that now. And it was whoever made that last call."

Suddenly the girl's worried face brightened.

"Yes," she said brightly. "I remember. It was—"

They went into a huddle. This was a girl for you.

After she'd spilled everything she knew, Jerry didn't have the heart to tell her about her brother. But he left the plant and went over to the local hoosegow to talk with the sullen Mike. Then he went back into Philly, to his room in the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, and made a few telephone calls of his

own. The last was to Ferd Dudley.

"You can quit worrying about the MacDermott policy, chiseler," he told him. "You won't have to pay up."

He cut off on Dudley's excited squealings and went down to grab a cab for Ardmore. . . .

Sylvia MacDermott was just as much knockout as she'd been the night before. Between here and the big plant, Jerry was getting dizzy from being close to so much feminine oomph. He assumed his undertaker bearing now.

"Madam," he told the young widow. "Sorry to bother you again but I learned something important from going through your husband's papers and my inquiries around the plant. Great guy, your husband."

The baby stare never wavered but you could see the dame was angry.

"I suppose you learned about his office wife?" she said bitterly.

"Marie Coppola? Yes, I learned a lot about that. You think it possible that someone bumped off your hubby on account of her?"

NOW he was getting results. Her big eyes flashed fire.

"Why," gasped the girl. "I never thought of that. Her brother, maybe? It was a scandal around the place, really, and I heard he was wild with rage. Oh, Mr. Cochran, you don't think it was that, do you? Poor Chauncey; whatever he may have done, he didn't deserve that."

"I wasn't thinking so much about that," Jerry said. "What I wanted to talk to you about concerns some papers I found in his office safe." Both of which were lies.

"A—a will? You found a will?"

"Yes." Another lie. "A will."

"Oh, I wouldn't be surprised if he left a good deal of money to Marie," she said warmly. "But that has nothing to do with the insurance, has it?"

"Not directly. But we have to have everything straight about all the circumstances of his estate. And there

are some other papers there you'll have to see before I go back to New York. That's why I came."

"Did you bring the papers?"

"I couldn't. You see, I can't take them without a court order. And you really should have them anyway. Will you come out to the plant with me to get them; then we can talk it all over?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that. Wives never go there; at least not wives of those higher up. I'd be mortified to death."

"We can go after working hours. Tonight. Okay?"

"Yes, if it's so important."

"It is, believe me. Suppose I call for you at eight."

"Very well, Mr. Cochran," she said smiling. "The chauffeur will drive us out in my car. That's the easiest way."

That was that.

At the door, the widow sighed feelingly and said:

"Oh, I'll be glad when this is all over. I'm going abroad to forget it all. And please, Mr. Cochran, please don't let anything happen to blacken poor Chauncey's name, will you?"

"Not if I can help it," Jerry assured her.

And he meant it. . . .

The big drafting room was deserted at DeLacey's when they arrived. They had to go through it to reach the front offices. A few cleaning women were around, scrubbing amongst the covered tables.

"How intriguing," said Sylvia MacDermott. "I've never been here before. Of course, Chauncey's told me about it. But—"

"Here we are," said Cochran, shoving open a door and nudging her through.

"But this isn't Chauncey's office," she objected, seeing the name lettered on the door.

"No, it's Luke Borden's," he said. "Come on."

Dragging back slightly, she went

through with him to where the big, dark-mustached man stood in shirt-sleeves over a drawing board.

"Sylvia!" exclaimed the debonair chief engineer, paling swiftly. "What are you doing here? How'd you know I was working late? And you, you—" He turned wrathfully on the investigator.

Jerry grinned.

"Surprise," he said. "She didn't know you were working, Borden. But I did. I checked up."

The door opened again and Marie Coppola sidled in, flushing. She was pretty as a picture in the scornful look she tossed at the other woman.

"But the papers," Sylvia was saying wildly. "Mr. Cochran, where are the papers?"

"There aren't any papers, lady," snapped Jerry. "This is the pay-off."

HE walked over to Borden's drafting table. Leaning down, he yanked the roll of tracing cloth from the brackets at its end. Just then, the Frankford cops walked in with Mike Coppola in their midst.

Marie threw herself on her brother, sobbing softly in surprise.

"Sorry, Sis," he muttered. "It was for you. There was talk—"

"What's all this about?" said Borden angrily. "Get out of here, all of you. Except you, Sylvia."

"Forget the dramatics, Borden," the investigator snapped. "You too, Sylvia MacDermott. You're a pair of murderers, the two of you. It was you who killed the Super, Borden. And she put you up to it."

Borden laughed easily, almost naturally, plopping into the chair at his desk. Sylvia stood still, the baby-stare wider than ever. The cops said nothing, but they had let loose of Mike Coppola, who had an arm around his sister.

"You're crazy, fellow," said Borden, snarling. "Who do you think you are, anyway? You've got nothing on me."

"I'm the undertaker," said Jerry,

mournfully. "The guy who finally caught up with you. I've got something all right—learned a lot here and a lot from your precious Sylvia."

"It's a lie!" screamed the widow. "I never told—"

Borden was looking at her coldly, as if he'd never seen her before. His hands gripped the desk edge in front of him. He thought she'd spilled the beans, as Cochran had anticipated.

"Shut up, you!" yelled Jerry as Sylvia started whimpering. "Borden, being an expert engineer, you're also an expert draftsman. You traced that original drawing line for line, even copying the signatures. Then you destroyed the original, the one that had 'C.S.' in the corner the way it should be. How do I know? Because this tracing cloth you use here in private is different from that in the drafting room. It's a better grade.

"You knew the test schedule for that pump; knew to a second when the ten minute half speed test'd be finished. You knew it'd take the Super almost exactly eight and a half minutes to walk from here to the test block; you'd timed it a dozen times to be sure. So you phoned him just at the right instant to get him there when they were beginning to come up for the full speed run.

"Being an engineer, you knew that that coupling stress would be four times as great at full speed as at half—way beyond the tensile strength of cast iron. Also the vibration that appears at full speed does not at half. You knew Mac'd want to feel around those bearings for the vibration you'd lied about for a minute or so anyway. He'd wait there for the full speed vibration. But the coupling wouldn't last up to full speed.

"So you had him just where you wanted him when it ripped itself to hell. And he got his, poor devil. Also it was you who argued the Super into that big insurance policy in the beginning. You had this planned for six months. And Sylvia was in on it with

you. You've booked passage on the *Empress of India*—with her. You were counting on that hundred grand from Hercules to—”

Quick as lightning, Borden's hand flicked up from the middle drawer of his desk. In it was clutched a stubby automatic. Cochran flung sidewise toward Marie Coppola just as the gun barked—twice. It was Sylvia MacDermott who screamed. A crimson fountain cascaded up from the low cut neck of her black dress as she slumped down. But Jerry's gun was already out. He fired just once.

LUKE BORDEN, with a neat round hole in his temple, laid his head very slowly and deliberately on the desk. It jerked once and was still. Then Jerry bent down and held Sylvia close to him to see if she was still alive. But she was quite dead. He stood up then.

“Cripes!” gasped one of the coppers. “That was quick. We didn't expect anything like this when they told us to bring Mike over. But maybe it's better. Saves the state a trial.”

Strangely, Jerry found he had both Coppolas in his embrace. He pushed Mike away gently but kept his other

arm around the girl. He got a big thrill right now, feeling her palpitate against him, sensing her eventual calming down. Poor kid! This killing was brutal.

“Mike,” Jerry said, grinning, “take good care of this swell sister of yours. But don't go around all your life bopping guys on her account. It'll keep you too busy and too often in the hoosegow.”

“Withdraw your charges, Cochran?” asked one of the cops.

“I did already. All you have to do now is ring for the morgue buggy.”

Starry black eyes looked up at Deacon Cochran, who didn't look or feel at all like a deacon now.

“But how did you know all those things?” the girl asked admiringly.

“Some of it I guessed,” Jerry admitted. “But mostly it was your memory that helped me. I'd hate to have you taking my phone calls.”

Impulsively, he bent down and kissed her on those ripe, carmined up-turned lips.

Mike growled deep in his throat.

“Forget it, Mike,” advised Cochran. “This little girl is aces. And she was meant to be kissed. Kisses'll never hurt her.”

NEXT ISSUE

BOMB SQUAD

A Story of Sabotage by NORMAN A. DANIELS

MAD



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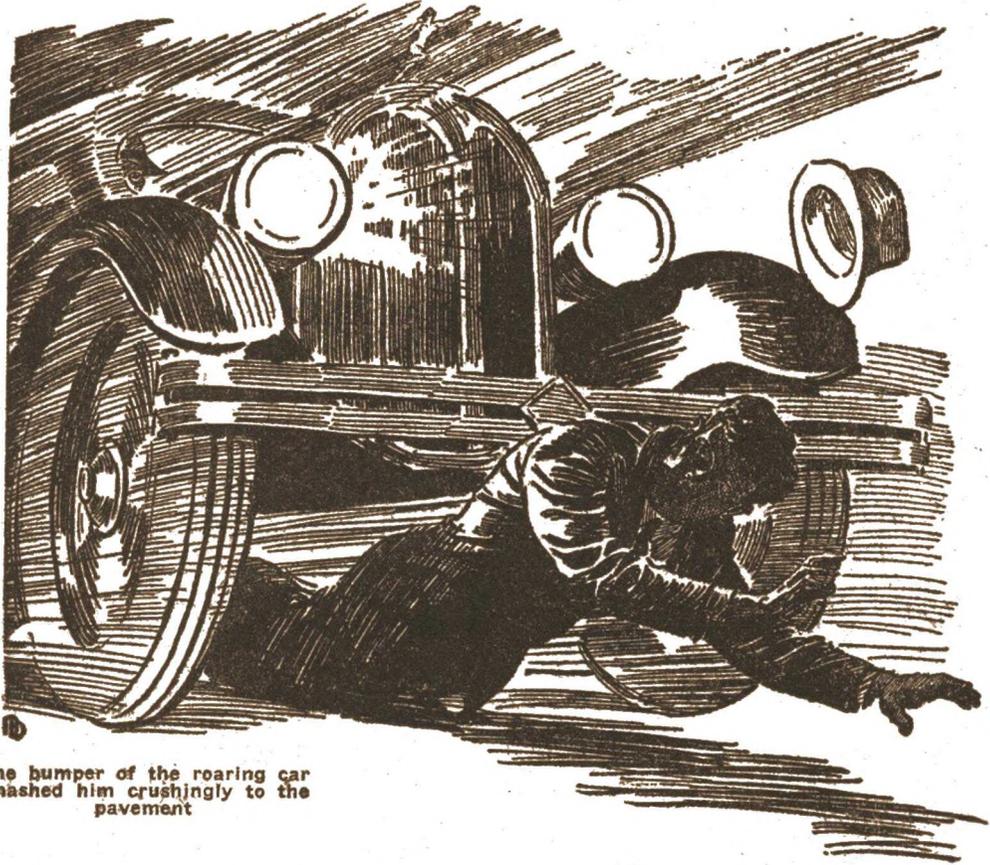
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MURDER ON WHEELS

By LEO HOBAN

Author of "Thirty Hours," "The Lop Pays Off," etc.



The bumper of the roaring car smashed him crushingly to the pavement

AT FIRST glance the accident seemed but another hit-and-run casualty of the everyday variety.

Valia Cacchione was just stepping from the curb of the sidewalk when the big sedan raced down the street to intercept his path. Cacchione's face was white and startled as he made a desperate attempt to leap behind the protecting framework of the El column, across the way.

The sedan, tires screaming under the abrupt twist of the steering wheel, swerved madly from its course. It headed directly for the helpless pedestrian.

Cacchione never had a chance. He threw his arms over his face a split second before the bumper of the roar-

Detective Ruppert Did All His Sleuthing in His Armchair—But It Took More Than That to Send a Killer to the Hot Seat!

ing car smashed him crushingly to the pavement. He was killed instantly.

The sedan, swaying wildly from the impact, held its path on the narrow street until it reached the corner. There the panicky driver, depending on a skid to take the car clear, cut too sharply, crashed into an El girder. There was the scream of rent metal, clash of steel against iron, and the left side of the car caved in.

Through the broken windshield a dazed figure crawled painfully out onto the hood. He slid down into the street, wavered on his feet for a few moments, then staggered on into the protecting darkness of the avenue.

A ROUTINE hit-and-run accident shouldn't have interested First Grade Detectives Arthur Ruppert and Luke Wise. But, grim-faced and furious, they were interested.

For both were still squirming from the bitter tongue-lashing the inspector had turned upon them earlier in the evening. He had had them on the carpet for more than twenty minutes. Five fatal hit-and-run accidents within their district during the past month. And thus far, not a single arrest!

They had just begun their routine check-up of the previous accident reports, with the heavy black sedan mentioned in three of them, when the flash announcing Cacchione's accident came in at Headquarters.

It was dapper Detective Wise, agile and blunt-spoken, who checked the license plates of the abandoned sedan. They proved to be phonies, which fact, strangely enough, was highly encouraging.

For the fictitious plates seemed to bear out the inspector's contention that the "accidents" hadn't been accidents, but wilful murders—murders competently executed.

It was the senior member of the sleuthing team, Detective Ruppert, ponderous, gray-haired and efficient, who ordered chemists to restore, through acid application, the engine number of the sedan. A chisel had been used to obliterate the number, but the job had been bungled. An hour's work under lights in the street, and the chemists announced their findings. A quick check-up with Records finished the job.

The sedan had been sold to Peter Annel, unemployed. He had a petty criminal record as long as a gorilla's

arm and a puny mind the animal would have scorned.

Detective Wise was optimistic, as usual, when driving Detective Ruppert to the dismal rooming house address on Vine street, Annel's last known address.

"It's a cinch," he said. "This monkey, like all jail-simple punks, suddenly goes wacky and vicious and gets even with all his enemies. But he don't do it, man-to-man. Protected himself, he just has his hack mow them down. A safe way and a cowardly way that'd be just like him and—"

"But done too efficiently for Annel to figure out by himself," Ruppert pointed out. "There's something much bigger here than appears on the surface. And where did a punk like Annel get the sugar to buy the sedan?"

Detective Wise pulled at his small mustache.

"I guess, as usual, you're right, chief. Only this thing is screwy."

"I hope that is all it is, but I've a hunch it's another Murder, Inc.," Ruppert said ominously.

It was early dawn, but, strangely, there was a small crowd gathered near the curb of Annel's rooming house. A hefty Swede, with handlebar mustache and a short flannel nightgown that ballooned in the mild breeze, was gesticulating wildly. He kept swiveling his head and looking up the street as if expecting unwanted trouble.

Wise braked the car and was out of the coupé and peering up at the Swede before slow-footed and paunchy Ruppert lumbered forward.

The Swede put his hand against Wise's chest and pushed him aside. He walked directly to Ruppert.

"You a cop?" he asked. That was Ruppert for you; he wasn't only a first-rate officer, but one who took his job so seriously that his profession had left its indelible imprint. Ruppert was a walking billboard that

screamed "Law."

"Yes—detective," Ruppert said. "What goes on?"

"Murder!" the Swede grumbled. "And in my rooming house, too. I run a respectable dump and some tramp sneaks in the second floor rear room and—"

WISE bounded up the brown-stone steps. Ruppert took the Swede by the arm and propelled him into the smelly corridor.

Annel lay supine, tongue protruding, glazed eyes bulging. One of his socks had been placed around his throat and twisted into a knot that still remained a tangled mass of loose skeins at the back of his neck.

Death had come silently—and efficiently.

The room had been ransacked. The three drawers of a bureau had been carefully placed one atop another after their contents had been spilled on the floor.

"Who turned on the lights?" Ruppert demanded.

The Swede looked vague.

"I dunno. That's why I came in. I wanted to ask this guy if he thought he was in some hotel that don't mind people burning lights until dawn. I found this."

The bed on which Annel's body lay showed no signs of a struggle. Only a deep depression where his head had been pressed against the pillow was indicative of violence.

Wise had been prowling around like a caged mountain lion, strangely quiet.

"Any other entrance to this room?" Ruppert asked.

"No," the Swede said, "and no way into the building except by the front door. The back door got warped during the last rainy spell and won't open for nobody no more."

Two cruisermen entered the room. Seeing Ruppert and Wise, they looked relieved.

"We got a call there'd been a bump-

off," one said. "Sure glad to see you men here. Now we—"

"You can take over and have the morgue Maria move up," Ruppert said lazily. "We've checked. We'll go over your reports later. Come on, Wise,"

"But, chief, there's something missing," Wise said.

"I noticed. Come on."

Riding in the coupé again, Wise turned his head.

"Annel's pants are missing," he said. "Why shouldn't them trousers of the punk's been around?"

"I don't know." Ruppert was frowning in concentration. "But we got more important things to check than looking for a lost pair of britches. We're going to go back over all these hit-and-run cases and we're going to find out why people have been getting run down by this sedan."

"I knew it was murder," Wise said enthusiastically. "Why, this Annel really was doing a wholesale business an'—"

"What we got to find," Ruppert said glumly, "is who he was doing the killing for. There's gotta be a good reason to explain why Annel himself got knocked off when he had to leave the sedan behind him. Whoever hired him knew he was a punk that would talk under pressure. So Annel got bumped."

"And his pants are gone."

"Yes," Ruppert echoed softly, "and his pants are gone."

THE first hit-and-run victim had been Sam Locke. He had widowed a buxom woman and seven children, neighbors said. After the accident, the widow and her family had moved away from their tenement apartment, leaving town. Money from somewhere had stilled the flow of the widow's tears.

The second hit-and-run victim had been Thomas Carter. His widow, gay and smiling, had remarried. She and

her new husband had opened a sour smelling tavern near the docks on the insurance money left her.

The fifth victim had been Grandici. His modest home was neat and clean, his widow young and pretty. He left nothing. The widow now worked in a five-and-ten.

In each of these cases, witnesses reported, the black sedan had been the death car.

"We'll take these three and come back to the other two cases if we have to," Ruppert said. "Now, let's go eat."

Wise had the reports before him, spread across his desk. He was shifting the vari-colored papers of the first, second and final reports, making neat piles of them.

"You go eat," he said shortly. He sounded excited. "I'm going to get the reports on those other two cases. Something is adding up here."

"Sometimes," Ruppert said, "you act like a cub newspaperman. Always getting het up and seeing spooky little men that aren't there. And sometimes I wonder how you ever made first-grade."

Wise grinned. "Because we crack these cases, chief. I look them up; you figure the angles out; and then we bust them wide-open together. I go too far at times; you don't go far enough at times—so at all times we got balance."

"That isn't what the inspector thinks," Ruppert said glumly. "He sorta intimated we were unbalanced for overlooking these hit-and-run cases, and that maybe the Department would prosper if our rating fell off from first-grade."

"I don't think," Wise said, "we're going to fall off this one. We'll probably get decorated for cracking it so fast."

"Yeah, we'll get decorated with Bronx cheers." Ruppert moved ponderously through the doorway. Wise made his way swiftly to the Records room.

When Ruppert returned, Wise had his fedora pulled far down over his eyes, his back flat against the chair, his legs extended. When he looked up, his dapper mustache was drooping in discouragement.

"I should have ate, too," he said glumly.

Ruppert let it go at that. He was accustomed to Wise's moods—flying high one moment, in the depths the next, then bouncing back again to abrupt exuberance.

NEXT night, going on duty, Wise popped into the detectives' lounge, frantically signaling for Ruppert to come outside.

He was excited, trying to keep his voice confidential in the crowded corridor.

"The morgue just released Annel's body to Pettricio's Mortuary. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yeah," Ruppert said, "it means that the punk is gonna be planted."

"But you don't understand," Wise said. "Going through those five reports this morning, this Pettricio's name kept cropping up. He received three of the bodies. Then everything comes down when two of the five bodies don't go to his mortuary, but to Clenegers'."

"So what?" Ruppert snorted. "They're the only two decent morgues in that district."

"And both cheap, neither charitable."

"Right."

Wise punched his index finger against Ruppert's broad chest.

"That's what makes this look phoney. The three hit-and-run knock-offs who got insurance cash got nice funerals at Pettricio's. Two of the stiffs didn't leave anything behind but families and best wishes. Clenegers buried them without no razz-ma-taw. But he didn't get Annel's body, and from our search and the reports made by the cruiser Annel didn't have

a dime, not even a pair of pants."

"Proving what?"

"Just this. Annel didn't leave any relatives. Pettricio, saying he was Annel's friend, said he didn't want him to be buried in no Potter's Field, that he would plant him nice. He claimed the body. Pettricio wouldn't do that for anybody. He's nuts over money. We know it, everybody in the district knows it. It don't add up. Nobody was Annel's friend, especially Pettricio."

Ruppert considered.

"Maybe you've hit on something. Isn't much to go on. But let's go pay our regrets to Annel and have a chat with Pettricio. Maybe he can tell us something about these other funerals where people ran but still got hit."

Wise was darting the coupé through the heavy traffic, weaving it agitatedly in short dashes with sudden stops, then spurting again. Even his driving was indicative of his temperament.

"When I went to eat this morning," Ruppert said, musingly, "I found a back door open. It was the Swede's. Somebody, a very strong guy, had gone back to Annel's room. It took a strong guy to open that door. Maybe a strong guy opened and closed it around dawn?"

"It was a strong guy who held Annel pressed against the bed so hard he couldn't even squirm," Wise said. "Some guy he wasn't afraid of, some guy he knew and trusted and—"

"And that lets out Pettricio," Ruppert pointed out. "He's just a small pop-eyed weasel with all his weight in his belly."

Wise's mustache drooped and the coupé stopped jitterbugging in excited dashes.

"Damn," Wise said, "you're right."

WISE still was silent and depressed when the pair entered the mortuary. Pettricio's office was deserted. In the chapel an ornate

casket, surrounded by flowers, was bleakly alone.

It contained the body of a giant of a man, small of head and mammoth of jaw, the wide shoulders bulging against the sides of the casket.

"For a guy nobody apparently cares about," Ruppert opined, "he's getting a nice casket and plenty of flowers. Mourners usually buy flowers . . . and this guy ain't got no mourners."

"Maybe he left dough for his own funeral. 'Lonesome guys often do.'"

"Dough," Ruppert said. "Dough. Let's look up Annel."

They found Annel's body in the back on the slab. The room reeked of formaldehyde.

The muscular attendant, in his undershirt, his front covered by a rubber apron, was using his thumbs on the corpse's protruding eyes. When the thumbs came away Annel's eyes bulged no longer. The eyelids were closed.

"Nice work," Ruppert said. "Whad-dya do with that thick, black tongue of his now?"

The attendant spun about.

"What do you men want? Nobody allowed back here."

Ruppert flashed his shield.

"Just looking," he said in his best official manner. "This was a murder case, you know." Wise was prowling about the room, disregarding the corpse. His eyes were avid.

"It's a murder case no more," the attendant said, "as far as I'm concerned. We got a release for this stiff and he's mine. You'll find the papers in the boss's office."

Ruppert turned on his heel and strode out into the chapel.

"Total release from the morgue, huh?" Wise queried the man.

"Total."

"When do you plant him?"

"I don't know. That's up to the boss. Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow. It don't matter. He has no relatives. I don't care. My job is to

make him look nice."

"Nice work if you can get it," Wise said. "What you dressing him in?"

The attendant jerked his thumb at the tied bundle of clothing still marked with the cardboard morgue number.

Ruppert lumbered into the room. His wide eyes were narrowed. He was taking quick puffs on a black cigar that he rolled back and forth across his mouth.

"How long has Pettricio been agent here for the Star Accident and Casualty Company?" he asked. Ruppert

"It's been good, pretty good!"

"I know it. Let's go, Wise. We got some checking to do."

"What shall I tell the boss?" the attendant called after them.

"Just say we were glad to find out he was an insurance agent."

THE pair sat at Headquarters, Ruppert at ease, Wise drumming his fingers nervously.

"Take it easy. He'll plant both the stiffs tonight, or I'm no detective," Ruppert predicted.

"Detective, hah!" Wise fumed. "Sit-

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carried two policies and a practicing license in his hand.

"Six or eight months—I don't know," the attendant said. "I got a policy. It's cheap and they give you a good funeral. Notice what the stiff in the chapel is getting, and him without no relatives to see to it that contracts are carried out. The boss knows his stuff."

"I guess so," Ruppert grudgingly admitted. "He sells 'em policies at a nice commission and cashes in a second time when he plants them. You can't beat a combination like that—as long as business remains good."

ting around on your chair doing nothing—"

The telephone rang.

Wise grabbed the receiver, then smashed it down on the cradle.

"Come on," he yelled at his mate. "Pettricio is planting them both, has just loaded both caskets into one hearse."

Ruppert moved with surprising speed.

"Drive it, Wise, drive it," he urged. "We gotta make the cemetery first. I want to see this."

Wise clamped his foot all the way down on the gas, the coupé going hell-

bent for destruction or a record.

The two open graves were side-by-side. A pair of grave-diggers stood atop the high mound of fresh earth, cigarettes dangling from their lips.

Ruppert flashed his shield. Wise talked. The diggers disappeared into the darkness, minus overalls and mud-died caps.

The hearse pulled up.

"Give a hand here," Pettricio yelled.

Decrepit hats pulled low, dressed in overalls, Ruppert and Wise approached. Pettricio was alone.

"We'll let 'em down by hand," he ordered. "No formalities. Pull out the boxes now. I got business to attend to tonight. The heavy casket goes in the right hole, the other in the left."

Ruppert and Wise struggled between tombstones with one casket and placed it near an open grave.

Pettricio held a flashlight on them and puffed furiously on a cigar. His derby was cocked over one eye.

The second casket was lighter in weight. It was placed near the second open grave.

"Drop 'em quick," Pettricio said. "Fill up the graves."

"Now, we can't do that, Mr. Pettricio," Ruppert said in a sad voice. "You know we gotta sign papers in the morning that we buried a body and not a lump of lead. We gotta take a quick look to make sure."

"What the hell," Pettricio said. Then, "Go ahead."

Wise already was prying at the lid of the lighter casket. When he pulled up the lid and Pettricio used his flash on the corpse, Ruppert said almost sorrowfully:

"Pettricio, you're under arrest!"

Ruppert shouldn't have taken a desperate and canny man for granted. Pettricio leaped over the casket. A split second later he spun about, a pistol in his hand that lanced flame.

Ruppert staggered back, clutching at his shoulder. Wise went forward

in a flat dive, hearing the hungry drone of bullets near his head. His shoulder crashed against Pettricio's legs, driving him prone. Wise's fist raised and descended twice, and Pettricio lay still. He was ready for the hot seat.

"GO over it again, boys," the inspector said next morning. "You tell it, Ruppert. It'll take Wise too long."

Ruppert, his arm and shoulder in a sling, smiled at Wise.

"Well, Wise found it out, I figured it out, and this Pettricio lug walked into it.

"Pettricio confessed that he had ordered this dumb Annel to knock off some of the policyholders who had contracted with him on signing of the policy to splurge on funerals. There's not much of an angle in that, even if he did collect twice through commission and funeral expenses.

"But Pettricio added another item, which this dumb Annel had stumbled upon and which he held over Pettricio's head to guarantee his own life. Pettricio would plant his victims, then dig 'em up again, making one hundred per cent on the deal, and then selling the bodies to some crazy doctor, Maurice, for experimental purposes. Dr. Maurice also is in the can.

"The guy who did the digging-up was this big guy in the other casket, a moron. When Annel cracked up that sedan he called Pettricio and told him what had happened. Pettricio couldn't take a chance on the squirt talking, so he and his gorilla broke in through the back door of the rooming house. While the gorilla held the numbskull, Pettricio strangled him with his own sock. Later, Pettricio bumped the gorilla to keep him from talking.

"This Pettricio was smart. To see how far he could trust this Annel on his first job, he had him bump a man who wasn't a policyholder. He thought

if anything went wrong, it couldn't be traced to him. Still another time this dumb Annel killed the wrong guy. These two didn't get real funerals, but at least Pettricio didn't dare do anything with their bodies."

"What was the evidence Annel held over Pettricio?" the inspector asked. "What you had against him amounted to no more than circumstantial evidence when you made the arrest."

"Annel's pants!"

"Pants!"

"Yes. Wise figured it out that the cluck was a real jailbird. Our records show it. Real jailbirds don't like to be shaken down completely for all their dough. Some like to bring marijuana inside with them, too. They have secret little pockets in which to carry things. Annel's was in the seam of his trousers' seat, near the top. He

had once threatened Pettricio that his pants could put Pettricio in the electric chair. So, after the kill, he copped the pants and tried to bury whatever secret they contained along with Annel. That was a mistake."

"It sure was," Wise said. "Annel didn't have no pants when found. But when we opened the casket he was wearing them.

"In the seam-pocket we found Annel's record of bump-offs and what he got paid for each—and by whom."

"Hmm," the inspector said, "one pair of britches turns out to be a book-keeper and an executioner. They were a wonderful pair of pants."

"But the seat," Wise said, glancing in his partner's direction, "was a little worn and thin, like maybe the guy liked sitting down and didn't believe working for a living was worthwhile."

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CHAPTER I

Tea for Two Shoplifters

I WAS whistling, but don't let that give you the wrong impression. Some of these little tea-kettles whistle just before they blow up. Trying to look like a customer who's just looking, thanks, I was walking through the mob that had invaded Washburn's main floor.

When Washburn's has a bargain day, the only way a man can stay alive in the store is to move along with the perfumed tide until he sees a counter. Then he has to grab the counter with

both hands, get his toes up close to it and hang on, letting the breakers of bargain-seeking females buffet him in some less vulnerable spots. This country has some good five-cent cigars. What it needs now are a few more women that are ladies.

The pull-for-the-island technique is all right when you're shopping in Washburn's on a bargain day, but it's no way to catch shoplifters. That's what I was supposed to be doing. Washburn's pays the detective firm of Simmon and Sharrod three grand per annum for protection, and I was it.

I am John Sharrod and nobody's stooge. Yet here I was, one end of a fifty-fifty partnership, filling in the job that we pay a female detective named Minnie twenty a week to do. Minnie had the flu. She had caught something at last, but I wasn't happy. Why should I fill Minnie's shoes when the other half of the firm, Jeff Simon, sat on the back of his neck in the office? His eyes would be closed and his lips and his nose making violent respiratory noises, which are parts of a process he calls thinking.

So I was whistling. Not anything in particular. Just venting my wrath in a not too offensive way. But I hoped it would also act as a fog-horn if I found myself between a comber of ladies and the forty-nine-cent-special counters.

Nothing breaks down a man's reserve like a department store. That's



John Sharrod



Everybody backed away and screamed and got in my way (Chap. III)
(In circle insert: Jeff Simmon)

how I feel, anyway. When I see a fellow-male in a crowd of women, I naturally gravitate toward him. Of course I couldn't gravitate today.

That center aisle was so packed, somebody could have stuck a knife into me and no one would have found it out until rigor mortis set in.

But I could sort of tack toward this fellow-man whose blond head loomed above the sea of hats. When I got over to the silverware counter, which you won't often find crowded with anything but wishers, I could stand still and try not to feel so all alone.

He was tall in spite of his stoop. His head gawked all the way forward on his scrawny neck. His yellow hair was parted in the middle and fell over his temples, so locks of it bracketed his furtive eyes. He looked a lot like somebody who had been called Sonny for thirty-odd years.

FOR a little while I watched him, thinking he was going to try dating the brunette back of the cosmetic counter where he stood. That was what I was going to try to do when the salesgirls passed me for a check-up at closing time. Sonny was so pitiful-looking, somehow, that I almost wished he'd beat my time with the brunette. He looked as though he badly needed a woman's loving touch.

But I don't think he saw the brunette, except as a kid who has smashed a window sees a cop. I watched the guy's hands and I watched the umbrella he was leaning up against the counter. Pretty soon I saw what I was expecting. He accidentally on purpose knocked something off the cosmetic counter with his elbow. At the same time his hands were busy examining a good-sized travel kit containing a lot of potential beauty for milady's face. I didn't see what he'd snatched, because it fell down inside his umbrella.

The brunette came up to Sonny. She was fixing her hair with deft fingers, which was unnecessary. Her hair was perfection. Her eyes weren't on Sonny, but were sort of straying in my direction, I hoped. She asked Sonny if she could help him, but Sonny had helped himself. He muttered something and turned away.

I was holding his only lane of rapid

escape, so I nabbed him by the elbow as he sailed by. Catching Sonny was less sport than netting a one-winged butterfly. He turned the color of a peeled onion and blinked with those weak eyes of his. He tried to jerk away from my nipping fingers. He demanded quietly to be released. Then he threatened timidly and finally prayed fervently.

I reached down inside his umbrella. What he had picked up was a special ninety-eight-cent vanity case with the embossed initial "Z" on it.

I put the compact into my pocket. He sure was a whipped-looking hound, in spite of good clothes that hadn't made a man out of him. I had about decided to let him go, seeing as he hadn't taken much. Then I remembered that Washburn's had been losing quite a bit lately, and that Simmon and Sharrod had to eat. Especially Sharrod. So I clamped tight to his arm and steered him along the back of the store toward the special elevator for employees only.

"Wh-what are you going to do with me?" he bleated.

"Sonny," I told him, "we've got to see Mr. Washburn. You shouldn't be so ashamed to buy your girl a compact that you have to steal one."

We were just passing the drinking fountain when I said that. There was a girl sitting at the fountain. She turned her head too quickly, and the water splashed over the sweetest cheek I'd seen in a long time. It was a velvety, dusky-golden cheek, with only enough rouge so when it paled you knew it. And she paled now.

She came toward me, sort of taking my breath away, hoping she'd talk to me. She was wearing a hat and an expensive-looking gray-green suit. The hat would have looked like an old bird's nest with somebody else's face under it. She had wavy brown hair that I could see in spite of the green-dotted veil that was a part of the hat. She had greenish-blue eyes that

looked as though some one had just hurt her feelings.

That was about all I could take in just then. I remember hoping she was the kind who would slap my face if I tried to strike up an acquaintance with her. It would have needed slapping, if I'd got fresh with a girl like that.

She put a gloved hand on the arm that welded Sonny and me together.

"Please," she murmured. She shook her head queerly and swallowed. Then she transferred her shopping bag to the other hand and struggled to get her purse open. "I'll pay for anything he has taken," she said. "I don't—I wish— Oh, please don't arrest him!"

I LET go of Sonny because I remembered that my hat was on. I smiled and forgot that Sharrod had to eat.

"That's perfectly all right, miss," I said. "If you say so, we'll just forget the whole thing."

Then something happened that reminded me I was sour on the world. As she was shaking loose a bill from a roll she had in her purse, the handle of her shopping bag broke. The bag tumbled down and you would have thought she was taking Santa Claus' job. Everything fell out of that bag. Something like a sample kit for a mail order company spread out on the floor at my feet. There was everything from silver spoons to phonograph records, all unwrapped. A lot of the stuff had Washburn's well known price tags on them.

She knelt swiftly to pick the stuff up. I got down to help her, keeping an eye on Sonny all the time. He was staring at the stuff as though he was loco.

"Why, that's mine!" Sonny said. "Quick, hide them!"

"Yeah," I said, "that's what we're doing!"

I was mad because I'd nearly been taken in by this doll. When the phonograph record wouldn't go into the

top of the shopping bag, I snapped it in the middle and put it in on the instalment plan. Then I took the girl by one hand and Sonny by the other. There was quite a crowd of titterers and whisperers around by this time.

The girl was still white-faced as I steered the team into the elevator. She began biting her beautiful lips. I asked her why she didn't say something, and she bit them harder. I marched them both out of the elevator and into Washburn's office. Harry Washburn was phoning. Instinctively he smiled at the girl, then saw me and started to frown.

"Simmon and Sharrod service for you, Mr. Washburn," I said. "Here is a pair of shoplifters that have been going through this store like a vacuum cleaner."

"Shoplifters?" Mr. Washburn put down the telephone. I could see he was mildly horrified. "Mr. Sharrod, please go back to your duties. Please depart, Mr. Sharrod." Then he got up and put a gentle white hand on my shoulder. "I can explain a little later why you must not arrest this couple."

A cream-puff could have knocked me down, so it was no wonder Mr. Washburn got me out of the office so easily. After his door closed, I spent some time looking at its impressive panel and wondering what kept that guy's ears apart.

I went down to the main floor, trying to figure out was life worth the struggle, especially in Washburn's on bargain day. Then I began wondering why Washburn paid us three grand a year. Just so he could invite shoplifters to tea?

Then I saw the girl in gray-green going out the front door. She had a limp shopping bag in one hand and was holding Sonny's arm with the other. She saw me and her face got cold with hatred. The veil on her hat might have been singed by the glare in her eyes. She clicked out the door, across the sidewalk and to the curb.

Sonny helped her into a little coupé, then got behind the wheel.

A taxi came along about the time the coupé was in the middle of the block. Running out in the street, I hailed it and got in. I told the driver to keep his eye on the coupé and follow it at a distance. But it wasn't any good. Nothing came of it except that I found out a little more about this team of shoplifters and came pretty close to losing the contract with Washburn's.

Sonny and the girl went into a nice-looking apartment house on Meridian and Sixteenth. That was where I discovered that her name was Donna Zehring and that Sonny played a hot piano down in the *Chez Paris*.

CHAPTER II

Death of a Doll



BAFFLED and sore, I taxied downtown again to Ohio Street, where Simmon and Sharrod's office is. To make sure she won't keep Simmon's mind off his work, we have a fifty-year-old office girl. I told her good morning not unpleasantly and went into Simmon's office.

He was lying on the roll-backed couch he has in there, cutting pictures of movie stars out of a magazine. He jumped when I jerked open the door, sliced right through Lombard's wrist. I jerked the scissors out of his hand.

"That's mayhem," I stated. "If anybody feels like that, I do. What's the matter with old man Washburn anyway?"

Jeff Simmon is a small, dark-complexioned individual, with less hair on his head than in the little awning over his mouth. Some people think he's handsome. I know his character bet-

ter than they do.

"From what I gathered over the phone a moment ago, he was suffering from cerebral hemorrhage," Simmon replied, sitting up. "He wants to know what the hell he's paying us for. Somebody lifted about fifty bucks in merchandise during the last half-hour. Where in hell were you?"

I groaned. I told him about nabbing Sonny, and his lady friend having a whole bagful of loot that would have totaled more than fifty dollars. Then I explained how Washburn let them go.

"Let's see that vanity case," Simmon said.

I remembered I had forgotten to turn it in to the brunette at the cosmetic counter. So I took the case out and handed it to him. It was a chrome-and-green enameled thing, about the size of a dollar watch. It had an oxidized, raised letter "Z" in the center of it. He opened the catch. There was a cake of compressed face powder inside, embossed with the trade mark of the company that made it in New York and Paris. On the other side was a small cake of rouge. Simmon kept turning the compact over and over in those supple fingers of his. Finally he asked, because his brain wasn't as supple as his fingers:

"What's the 'Z' for?"

"Initial, sap. That's Washburn's special ninety-eight-cent initialed vanity. The girl's name was Zehring and I suppose the guy's is, too."

"Yeah," Simmon said lazily. "For propriety's sake. But if he lifted it off the counter, I still don't see the reason for the 'Z.' Got any vanities down at Washburn's with the letter 'X' on them?"

Simmon handed the compact back to me and I began to see what he was driving at. I once had a girl whose last name was Quincy. When I picked out a nice initialed cigarette case for her once, I was told that the manufacturers never made them with "Qs"

on them. "Q," "X" and "Z" aren't called for often enough to make it profitable for manufacturers to turn out articles with those initials.

"Maybe times have changed since then," I said.

I started to close the vanity when the rouge compartment sprang open. Inside was a little compartment you wouldn't think was there at all. Against the metal bottom of this hidden section was a lot of whitish rings, as though it had been filled with aspirin tablets. I pointed them out to Simmon.

"Let's see," he said, and took a close look at the case. "Yump. That's for aspirin. But by the looks of those powdery circles, I'd say that the tablets were bigger than the usual five-grain variety."

"That isn't it so much as what the hell has any one been using the case for at all?" I complained. "It was new, yet somebody must have been carrying aspirin in it."

"Maybe somebody exchanged it for something else after a few days," he suggested. "Women do that. Then maybe the Zehring girl left it there on the counter and Sonny picked it up for her."

"But that wasn't any reason for Sonny to smuggle the compact to his gal in an umbrella," I argued.

I ran my finger around the compartment where the aspirin tablets had been and stuck my finger in my mouth.

Simmon watched me with flattering interest.

"What's it taste like?" he asked.

I swallowed wryly. "Quinine. Phooey, is that bitter!"

"Wouldn't you be surprised if they found you dead within the next forty-eight hours," Simmon said with a politely sympathetic grin. "It could be strychnine, you know."

I shrugged and tried to grin back. I couldn't, though. He had made me pretty unhappy.

JEFF SIMMON had some nasty hunches. The nastiest ones usually came true. That's one reason why I was jumpy all afternoon at Washburn's. Another reason was that I and a lot of other people had been on my feet too much. But mostly it was that the bitter quinine taste had stuck on my tongue until I began to think it wasn't quinine at all.

At closing time, I was in the alley entrance, waiting for the clerks to check out as they went by me. It's a bit of precaution the management takes to discourage temptation. Considering the pay they give the girls who clerk in that store, it's a good idea.

But they were late closing that night because of the sale. The cold concrete was beginning to feel like a permanent part of my feet. Some colored boys were dodging in and out between the trucks, kicking a tin can. The trucks were mostly up at the big loading doors and that cut off most of the light from the mouth of the alley. Chill, damp air kept the smoky sky down on earth. The light over the door where I was standing looked like a big, yellow puff ball and gave just about as much illumination.

A small truck drove up to the door I was guarding, and a grizzled old man got down. He was wearing one of Washburn's service uniforms. Those discarded moth-pastures are like something the Salvation Army Band has been glad to throw away. He had the ragged butt of a cigar nipped between his jaws and the downward hook of his nose reminded me of a parrot's beak.

I had seen this man at opening time that morning. He was just one of a dozen of his kind who wrestled stock and hustled empty packing cases and junk from the store. I had heard somebody call him "Smacky" that morning, but I don't suppose that was really his name. He nodded at me. The light seemed to catch on his sharp

eyes and cling there even after he had stepped into the darker part of the doorway.

He came out a little later with a big crate loaded with empty cartons. I didn't see how a dried-up prune like him could ever hoist the box onto his truck, but he managed without a single grunt.

Some of the salesgirls started coming out then, and Smacky and his boxes were in the way.

"You got about all of that stuff?" I asked him.

He nodded cheerfully. "One more trip and I'm through. Don't see why them stock boys pile things in front of this door. What if there was a fire or something?"

He went back in. Pretty soon I heard something like stage thunder behind me. I turned around. There was a big bundle of torn wrapping paper coming out of the entry, with the curled-up toes of Smacky's shoes shuffling beneath. I got out of the way to let him pass. When I did, the wind I had been blocking caught hold of the paper and gave it another rip. I got a glimpse of something that looked like the neck and shoulders of a nude body!

I JUMPED at Smacky and tore aside the paper. He looked at me puzzledly, and I began to feel like a fool. It only goes to show how jumpy Jeff Simmon's hunches can make me feel. Inside the paper was a window dummy who had been quite a doll in her day. But now her head was bashed in and a piece of her skull was dangling from the glued end of the hair on her scalp. The face was pretty badly scarred up, too. Smacky, with a gentleman's respect for feminine modesty, had covered the dummy's nudity with a paper.

"This was Grace," he explained sadly. "Many's the time she stood up in the sixth window, modeling a thirty-dollar dress. Why, she sort

of grew up with Washburn's. The other day somebody dropped her on her head. I think maybe she can be mended, but you know how styles change. What they think is a good dummy these days is something with a head shaped like an egg, yarn eyelashes, and gilt-painted hair waved like the fur of a cast-iron dog."

With Smacky as her only mourner, Grace was interred in the heap of junk in the truck.

Then Smacky drove down to the service entrance for some more packing cases.

The girls started coming out in a pretty steady stream, so I had to stand at the door. If any of them had made purchases in the store that day—and most of them had—I had to okay the sales check and take a look at the little identification card each of them had. That's how I met the brunette I'd seen back of the cosmetic counter. Her name was Hester Sour.

It didn't fit, but that was her name anyway.

"Hester," I said, by way of leading into the question of dinner for two, "I'm the new store detective—"

"I know," she cut in. "I could tell by the size of your shoes."

She walked out into the alley, leaving her words to freeze the air. I watched her to the corner, where she hooked on the arm of what you'd have instinctively christened Butch. He had a bashed-in face that did its best to surround a flat nose which looked as though it had got that way from stopping too many knuckles. Hester looked pretty tiny with this Butch hovering over her. She must have said something about me.

He looked back and chewed something that was probably me in his animal imagination.

It was thirty minutes later when I got off duty at the back door. Then I went inside and hurried to the first store phone I came to. I wanted to talk to Washburn about the team of

shoplifters, Sonny and Donna Zehring.

I wasn't at all clear on how they got on the immune list and what their racket was. I took down the phone receiver and immediately I knew that something was haywire on the switchboard. Somebody was talking, and I was in the middle of something I'd have liked to heard from the first.

"He got hold of one of the empties, so he won't really have nothing," a husky male voice was saying. "But I still don't like it much. The place is lousy with dicks."

"If that one comes snooping around here again tomorrow," another higher-pitched voice said, "we let him have it through the belly."

THEN there was a noise like someone grinding peanut-brittle and the line went dead. Afterward I found out that was what it was—peanut-brittle. The girl at the P.B.X. switchboard is a fiend for it.

I tried Washburn's office, but the boss had left. I didn't leave. Even though I checked the whole store, I couldn't get anywhere, nor could the peanut-brittle fiend at the switchboard help much. Lines got twisted. I knew about that. But everything else was twisted. There was something plenty phony about Washburn's, and I thought Sonny and Donna Zehring were mixed up in it some way.

But there was also something so damned inevitable about it. Why did it have to happen to me? Here Jeff Simmon had got a nasty hunch about me courting rigor mortis, and then those gabbing phone lines had practically guaranteed that I was going out fast.

An unlovely picture began knocking about in my brain. I saw the inside of the morgue, a sheet covering a slab, my cold toes sticking out from under the sheet.

CHAPTER III

Lead for Lunch



NOBODY has ever accused me of being generous. Also, I like to live. So it must have been my interest in Donna Zehring that prompted me to refuse Jeff Simmon when he said he'd stand in for me at Washburn's the next day.

I packed a .25 caliber automatic with a big magazine because I sometimes need a lot of shots before I get results. And I didn't notice the jam in Washburn's as I had yesterday. I wasn't so much interested in what happened to my feet as what was going to happen to the rest of me.

Along about half-past ten, when the bargain hunters were in full cry, I caught sight of Sonny. He looked a lot skinnier and more washed-out than ever. Seeping through the crowd, he was giving a poor imitation of nonchalance while working his way toward the jewelry couter. I moved right along in his direction, hoping those furtive blue eyes of his wouldn't look my way.

He was looking so hard for me that I guess he didn't see me. I was within a few feet of him, and all I could hear was the noise of the shoppers, which was plenty. I put out my hand to get a grip on his shoulder when he folded up like a road map.

Everybody around him backed away and screamed and got in my way. But I'm big enough to be good on the shove. I went through the line of panicky shoppers to reach Sonny.

"The poor man's fainted!" gasped one woman.

"It's a fit!" cried another.

"Blood!" screamed a third.

The muscles of Sonny's legs were

working spasmodically. He was lying on his face with his head screwed around. I could see that his eyes were closed. There was a small hole in the back of his gray topcoat, and it was rimmed with a ragged line of blood.

I roared at the shoppers to get back and flashed my badge to drive the idea home. Then I stooped over the man. His breath was coming in short hacks and there was a bubbly sound in his throat. He tried once to get to his feet. He couldn't push himself an inch off the floor. He opened his eyes and looked at me, though I don't think he could see much.

"Sis—" he said, and went limp.

I'd seen men die before, but not just like that. It sort of stuck in my throat. I guess I wasn't thinking as I should have been, for it was some few seconds before I noticed that black, rustly cloth was brushing my cheek. I looked around and followed it up to a face.

A little old woman, padded out in a black dress and cloak, stood there. Her right hand hugged a pocketbook tight against her side. Her left hand suddenly rested on my shoulder. She had the brightest eyes I had ever seen, peering down at me from the shadow of a wide-brimmed hat. There was something familiar about her face, though I couldn't think where I'd seen it before. Her withered lips moved and she began piping:

"Look! Look!"

I got up fast. The little old woman pointed with her left hand at a man who was backing swiftly through the crowd, his black eyes on the spot where Sonny had fallen. He had deep-set eyes, like a skull, a slot of a mouth and blue, sunken cheeks. When he saw the old lady pointing at him, he turned and started to run.

I PULLED my gun. The sight of it threw the shoppers into a panic. That was just about all I had hoped

for, because I wouldn't have tried to shoot in that jam. When the mob opened up before my gun, I had a clear way to the killer. I cut off a lot of the distance between us and felt sure I was going to tag him. But he hurdled a counter, got into another aisle and was gaining in the race to the door.

Just as the guy came alongside the cosmetic counter, Hester Sour picked up a big electric perfume vaporizer and heaved it at him. She missed his head, but the wire attached to the vaporizer tripped him up. I gained ten feet before the guy was up and moving again.

It looked as though the finish would be the two of us tangling with the revolving door. But I decided to put everything I had into a flying tackle. I just managed to get his right ankle in my hand.

Going so fast, he came down hard, though I hadn't exactly made a three-point landing myself. But he had plenty of kick in his legs, as his heel proved to my jaw. I wasn't all winded, though. There was a quick scramble in which a floorwalker somehow got mixed up. But I got close enough to the guy's head to caress his temple with the barrel of my rod.

Then it was just a matter of handcuffing him to a steam pipe and sending the floorwalker for the cops.

I searched the guy. His tough look hadn't lied. He was heeled with a long-barreled, mean-looking gun and there were a couple of loose diamond rings in his pocket. The first thing that flashed into my mind was a professional jealousy motive between this lug and Sonny, for they both seemed to have sticky fingers. But I was my usual hundred per cent wrong.

Whatever the motive, it looked like a clean job to me. I had the corpus delicti, the murderer and his weapon. Also I had an eye-witness in the little old lady in black—I thought. But when I got back where Sonny was

sprawled, she just wasn't around.

Hagstrom, the police detective, took over where I had left off. I found out that the man I had captured was Pete Jennings, with a record for theft as long as your arm. But he would admit nothing, not even his own name. He actually said he'd never seen the gun before.

"These rings now," said Hagstrom to this Pete Jennings. "Two of them and both with Washburn's tags on them. What do you think that makes you?"

Jennings shrugged. "A bigamist if I married both girls."

This Jennings was a wise guy, but I knew when they got him down to Headquarters he'd soften up a bit.

"What gets me," I complained to Hagstrom as the ambulance doors closed over Sonny's limp body, "is what Jennings did with the silencer and why."

"Ditched it and didn't have a chance to ditch the gun, I suppose," Hagstrom said. "You sure he used a silencer?"

I was as sure as my name was John Sharrod. Furthermore, I had a crazy feeling that the reason we hadn't found the silencer was that silencers are a lot harder to get than guns.

Then Hagstrom wanted to know more about Sonny. I told him that Washburn could probably give him some information on the deceased, so we went up to Washburn's office.

HARRY WASHBURN paced heavily up and down his office floor after we had told him what had happened. Then he plopped into a chair, took out a cigar and moistened the end of it. When Hagstrom mentioned something about this murder hurting Washburn's business, the boss flared up.

"You think that's what's worrying me?" he demanded. "You don't know Harry Washburn. I'm thinking of Donna Zehring, the murdered

man's sister. Sweetest girl who ever breathed, square as a die and good stuff clear through. I used to know their folks. Paul—that's the man you just took away in the ambulance—was a musical genius. He and his sister were devoted to each other. Paul was a good boy and I'd like to see anybody who said he wasn't. He was just unfortunate, that's all."

Washburn lighted the cigar he had been licking and shoved the humidifier across the desk to Hagstrom and me.

"That doesn't tell me why I caught the Zehring pair shoplifting the other day," I reminded him.

Washburn nodded. "I should have told you, but Donna was too sensitive about it. Her brother was a genius, as I said. He was also a kleptomaniac. It was Donna's greatest fear that he would be caught and sent to prison, so she kept on the lookout all the time. Whatever Paul swiped, she would hunt up and return to the various merchants in town. Paul never got anything that was of much value. Everything he got from my store, Donna returned almost immediately."

I began to feel mighty small and mean. I began to understand how I must have made Donna Zehring feel when I had nabbed her brother and her before all these giggling women. Then I began to wonder how I could square things with her. Maybe the account would have looked square to some guys, since I had nailed her brother's murderer, but I was looking at it from her side of the fence. I knew darned well my grass wouldn't look at all green to her.

Washburn's paid me for protection, and Paul Zehring had been shot in Washburn's, right under my nose. So I didn't think I could blame her if she didn't fall down and kiss the ground I walked on.

What Washburn couldn't understand was why anybody had shot Paul Zehring. Hagstrom said he'd soon find out the motive, because he'd go

to the night club where the corpse used to play.

"The devil's own playground," Hagstrom said sadly, "these night clubs. Ought to clean them all out. No good. Find me a night club, and I'll show you a breeding ground for trouble."

I wasn't of the same opinion. The next day, when Minnie got out of her flu bed, I sent her out to snoop on a divorce case we were handling. I stuck to Washburn's to clear myself.

JEFF SIMMON was tilted way back in his chair in the office, having a hunch. The hunch was that I had bagged a fall-guy when I had caught Pete Jennings by the hoof.

"In a way," I admitted, "maybe I did. I was down to see Hagstrom last night and they had pumped Jennings dry. Jennings was head man in a ring of shoplifters that has been doing all right by itself."

"Shoplifting's pretty picayune stuff for a murder mix-up, isn't it?" Jeff asked.

"Yeah," I agreed. "And another thing. They haven't found Jennings's fingerprints on the gun that bumped Paul Zehring."

Eyes closed, Jeff Simmon nodded as though it were an old story to him.

I looked at my watch. It was nearly nine o'clock and Washburn's opened at nine-thirty. I had something up my sleeve besides my arm, and I wanted to get going.

"Yes, sir," Jeff yawned. "There's something bigger than shoplifting in all this. Is Hagstrom working on a love triangle or something equally absurd in conjunction with the Zehring murder?"

I told him I didn't know what Hagstrom was working on and didn't care. I was thinking so hard about Donna Zehring that when she walked into the office two minutes later, I thought I was having a swell dream.

Here it was just the day after her brother's funeral and Donna was

dressed as chic as Paris, and she was smiling. But I got a good look at her, saw the tired lines around her eyes and that her smile wasn't a particularly happy one. When I found my tongue, I said, "Miss Zehring!" dumbly.

"How did you know my name?" she asked sweetly as she seated herself in the chair I offered.

"Elementary, my dear Miss Zehring," Simmon sherlocked, covering the girl with an appreciative eye. "He followed you in a taxi and asked the janitor of your apartment. What can I do for you?"

Donna Zehring was uncertain whom to address. She took a long breath and talked to the carpet.

"I've come for a job. I want to be a detective in Washburn's."

Jeff Simmon grinned. "We'd be delighted to have you in our company—"

"No," I interrupted. "We wouldn't."

CHAPTER IV

Green Grows the Graft



GOT in between Donna and Simmon, leaned against the desk and met the girl's surprised, hostile eyes.

"You don't understand, Mr. Sharrod," she said, her voice fluttering a little.

"I've got to have the job. Oh, I don't mean for money. I must to find out who killed my brother. It wasn't this Pete Jennings. I know it wasn't. I talked with Pete Jennings last night in his cell. He was pitiful, in a way. Says he never saw my brother."

"Sorry," I said, "but you don't understand. Neither Jeff nor I think Pete killed your brother, but there's a good reason why we can't let you in on the investigation. There's a silencer missing."

Her brow furrowed. "A what?"

"A silencer," Jeff explained coming around the desk so he could look at Donna Zehring. I couldn't blame him for that. "You see, no one could have fired that gun without arousing attention unless it had a silencer on it. The gun was found on Jennings, but not the silencer."

"And that," I added, "means only one thing—the killer wasn't through with the silencer. They're rather difficult tools to buy."

Donna raised her lovely head defiantly.

"I'm not afraid," she stated.

"You don't get it yet," I said. "The killer isn't after you, but he might be if you showed up as a detective. There's something going on in Washburn's store that won't bear a close examination."

"What is it?" she asked. "Do you know who killed my brother?"

"No," I replied. "But I've got an idea why he was killed. Did you ever see this?"

I brought out the vanity case Paul Zehring had snatched from the cosmetic counter. Donna examined it carefully.

"I've seen compacts like it at Washburn's."

"But never with a 'Z' on them," I said pointedly.

"Probably not. What does that have to do with my brother's death?"

"He took it from the cosmetic counter."

Donna stood up with a single lithe motion.

"I will be in Washburn's by the time the store opens," she said coldly.

She turned and left the office.

"Keep her out if you can," Jeff Simon challenged.

I didn't keep her out because I didn't try. Instead, before I went over to Washburn's, I put on a bullet-proof vest. It was the missing silencer that had me worried.

Donna was on Washburn's main

floor nearly all day. Shopping a lot and buying a little, she was keeping those lovely eyes of hers open. She spent nearly an hour at the cosmetic counter. Hester Sour finally sold her a bottle of perfume, but that didn't get rid of her. There was something in the way Hester's dark eyes watched Donna that gave me the same sensation I get when a barber tests the edge of his razor on his thumb.

Finally I pulled the ace out of my sleeve. It was like taking a nap on a railroad track, but I thought it would take Hester's attention from Donna. Besides, I was ready for anything. That was why I had put on the heavy underwear before leaving the office.

I approached the cosmetic counter and walked to the tray of initialed compacts. I brought my hand out of my pocket, the "Z" vanity case palmed. Then I looked over all the cases in the tray and fingered them. They all had those little compartments for aspirin in back of the rouge compartment, but none had the initials "Z," "Q" or "X".

HESTER floated down to where I was standing, tucking in her black hair with deft fingers.

"You want something?" she asked, her dark eyes meeting mine squarely. "Something besides a date?"

I pretended to pick up the "Z" vanity from the tray and held it toward her with the initial side down.

"Yeah," I said. "My nose gets shiny, don't it?"

"Just like a badge," she said.

I forked out a bill and at the same time flipped the vanity case over so the "Z" showed.

Hester's olive skin grew several shades paler. Nervously her fingers fluttered up toward her hair.

"That isn't your initial," she said as she took my money.

"No," I answered. "I want it for a girl friend."

"Cheap, aren't you?" she said, making change. "What's her name?"

"Zircon."

Hester laughed uneasily. "Zircon Sharrod. It'll sound nice after the marriage. Want me to wrap it up?"

"No, thanks."

I put it in my pocket. I felt that if I handed the compact over to Hester, I'd never see it again. Then I turned and walked away, feeling that two dark, beautiful, mighty hate-filled eyes were drilling my backbone right through my heavy underwear.

In the book alcove, I glimpsed Donna Zehring. She saw me and beckoned with her eyes. Then she picked up a book from the counter and started to leaf through it. I was wrong when I thought she wouldn't make a detective. She never took her eyes off the book even when I was standing right beside her. I picked up another book and started to browse through it.

"It'll look better if you hold that right-side up," she said, referring to the book in my hands.

"Well?" I mumbled.

"The brunette behind the cosmetic counter has a nice green lump at the top of her stocking."

"She probably goes out with tough mugs," I said, thinking of the guy who looked as though his name was Butch.

"Don't be funny," Donna breathed. "It's money. While I was buying some perfume, a young girl came up to the counter. She was nervous. She had a vanity case she wanted to exchange, she said. She handed the package and the sales slip to the brunette, who turned her back to the counter and did something with the package. Then she put a compact back in the tray. The nervous girl fingered among all the vanity cases in the tray. She picked up what I would have sworn was the same one the brunette had just put back. It had a 'Z' on it."

"Yeah," I muttered. "Go on."

"Then the nervous girl handed the brunette a bill, but it was actually two

bills stuck together. I had maneuvered down the counter a little so I could watch the brunette when she turned around. She put the top bill—a one—into the cash register. The one underneath was a hundred-dollar bill, and that went to join the wad in her stocking. Then she wrapped up the 'Z' vanity and handed it back to the girl."

I DROPPED the book and grabbed Donna by the arm.

"Listen," I whispered between clenched teeth, "did the brunette see you watching her? Did she?"

Donna cleared her throat as she looked up at me and smiled.

"Have you read 'An American Doctor's Odyssey'?"

I stared over Donna's head. On the other side of the book counter, a couple of squinting, piggish eyes glared into mine. I met the eyes of the guy I had christened Butch.

Butch moved away. In his eyes had been that I-like-you-better-dead look. I stared around at the hurrying shoppers, chattering about prices and qualities. I wondered what they would have thought if I had stopped some of them and explained what was going on around them. What would they think the sort of plot that was being carried out and the murder plan that was being hatched? I'd have enjoyed the situation a lot more if Donna hadn't been involved in it.

"Listen, kid," I whispered to her. "You get out of here and get out fast."

I couldn't even be sure that was good advice, because I didn't know where she could go so these people couldn't reach her. They had killed silently in a mob of potential witnesses and got away with it. I couldn't think of a place Donna could go and really be safe.

"Haven't you got somebody you can trust?" I urged desperately.

She shook her head. "No one. I'm all alone now."

"No," I said, squeezing her arm gently.

Her eyes were bright with unshed tears, but a smile was softening her beautiful lips.

"Are you going to call the police?" she asked.

That brought me down to earth and back to murder.

"You don't know this protection racket. Catch the crooks, sure—but don't do anything that might injure the reputation of the merchant. We can't pinch Hester yet, but we can use a little finesse. I'll get the wad of dough off her tonight when she checks out. That'll mean questioning her about it and trying to lead up to your brother's death.

"I'm pretty sure I know why he was killed, and I have a good idea what the Z compacts are for. But Hester isn't the power behind the business. Somebody else connected with the store is in it. And then there's Butch, the muscle-man who was just giving you and me the undertaker glance."

"Where do I come in?" Donna insisted.

"You don't," I said. "You go out. You're not wearing heavy underwear like mine. You're going up to Washburn's office."

And then I changed my mind fast. How did I know Washburn wasn't in on this racket? It was such a swell idea, Washburn could have used it to clear off the debt he'd put himself in by remodeling his store. "No, honey. You're sticking right with me."

Taking her to a chair in what they call the book-nook, I sat her down and kept my eyes on her for the rest of the day. Imagine getting paid for that! Yeah, but thinking of guns poking around corners and over counters took most of the pleasure out of it, though it left plenty. Donna certainly was a gorgeous female. I was falling hard.

CHAPTER V

Somebody with Three Hands

T closing time, Donna was with me when the girls checked out. I didn't pay much attention to them. I was too nervous, waiting for Hester to show up with her load of trouble.

The brunette came out at last, dressed to kill and hardly looking as if she'd been on her feet all day. She had on so much make-up, I was certain she was covering more than a pretty nice skin. One of Washburn's green packages was under her arm. She showed me the ticket that said she had bought six compacts with an employee's discount.

"What's the idea of all the compacts?" I asked.

"Prizes for a bridge party," she said haughtily.

My hands wouldn't stop quivering when I opened the package. Inside were six of the ninety-eight-cent vanity cases, none of them bearing the initial "Z." So I snapped open one of them. There was nothing phony about it. All that time, Hester kept tapping her toe and looking hard at Donna.

"That the girl friend?" Hester asked. She was nervous and had to talk, or give a good imitation of palsy. "P-r-e-t-t-y, isn't she?"

"S-m-a-r-t, too," I said. "Just step into the room over there, Hester. We ought to have a talk, you and me."

Donna followed us into the stock room. When the door closed, Hester put her hands on her lithe hips and smiled defiantly at me.

"I'm in a hurry," she said. "But I want to know why you're so unpleasantly interested in me. I've tried to be on the level with you. I'm telling

you because you're so dumb, somebody has to. You don't know what gratitude is. When your big feet got in your way the other day, who tossed the perfume vaporizer that caught your murderer for you?"

"You did," I admitted. "You knew beforehand that Jennings wasn't the murderer."

Hester jerked a glance at Donna.

"He's sure crazy about you. Something made him like that, anyway. Do you understand him?"

"Hester," I said, "you're packing a roll in the top of your stocking. I want that right now."

"You what?" she blurted, recoiling.

"That roll in the top of your stocking," I repeated. "Inexperienced as I am in playing valet to a lady, I'll have to get it from you if you don't beat me to it."

"You would?" she yelled. Then she ripped open her coat, flung it down on the floor and gave it a kick. "Okay, you can search me!"

She stood there trembling with fury, eyes blazing. I picked up her coat.

"This first, since you were so anxious to get it out of the picture. Donna, take her behind that packing case and don't leave a hem unturned. If you find anything suspicious, I want to look at it."

Hester laughed scornfully. "Wise guy, aren't you? Do you know what you'd resemble if I told the boy friend you had been pawing me?"

But she hip-twisted behind the packing case. Donna evidently did a thorough job, for it took her long enough. But she didn't have any better luck with the rest of Hester's garments than I had with the coat. Hester came out from behind the case, fixing her hair. It needed fixing this time, because Donna had heard about girls hiding things in their hair.

"KAY," I snapped at Hester. "So you passed the roll to your boy friend. He's mixed up in

this. Probably bumped Paul Zehring."

"He never bumped anybody," Hester sneered. "But if I were you, I wouldn't console myself with the idea that he never will. See you in the morgue, John Sharrod."

She tucked the package of compacts under her arm and walked to the door.

"Wait," I ordered. "Before you really pull anything else, I want you to know I don't swallow that gag about those compacts being bridge prizes. About the first thing you'll do with them is pry off their initials and put the letter 'Z' in their place."

Hester laughed. "Because you are is no sign I'm screwy. You couldn't sell vanities initialed with the letter 'Z.' I never saw one. We never carry 'em."

"You can sell them for plenty when 'Z' stands for 'M.'"

"Hüh?" She stared dumbly, but I could see I was on the right track.

I jerked my head toward the door.

"You and Butch figure it out. It's a cryptogram. So long, Hester."

"Good-by!"

As she switched out the door, I turned to Donna. She looked a little disappointed, I thought.

"Next move, tail Hester," I said. "Let's go. My car's out back."

We ran through the alley. While Donna watched Hester walking toward the end of the alley, I got to my car and hopped in. I stepped on the starter and nothing happened. The ammeter didn't even jiggle. I jumped out and raised the hood and saw why, without a second glance. The ignition wiring had been ripped, cut, slashed and hacked.

"Hurry!" Donna called softly from the alley.

I hurried out to meet her on foot.

"You could work a jig-saw puzzle while I'm fixing that buggy," I told her. "Let's sprint for it."

I grabbed her hand and we started running down the alley to where Hester had turned the corner. Donna

shot a backward glance and squeezed my hand hard.

"Somebody is following," she gasped.

I looked back and saw a silhouette of what looked like Butch. The guy was late. He had figured on my messing around longer with the maimed car. It's a cinch to knock a guy off while he's bending over the motor of a car.

We got on South Meridian, and there was Hester clipping along toward Monument Place. Quite a crowd was on the street at this time in the evening. People were hurrying home or to restaurants. Hester came to an abrupt stop, turned, but didn't seem to pay any attention to Donna and me. She saw somebody back of us and called:

"Hello, Harold!"

So Harold was his name, but he was still Butch to me. He came up fast as though to join Hester. What he did, though was drop a ham of a hand on my shoulder and spin me around—and I'm not easy spinning.

"What's the idea of annoying my girl?" Butch yelled, loud enough to get plenty of attention.

When he tried to shake me, I let him have a surprise poke in the middle. Butch grinned, and why not? That was what he wanted. It brought a crowd around us quicker than a barker and a grass skirt can do it at a sideshow.

BUTCH backed a little and up came fists like a pair of stone-cutter's mauls. But between Butch and me stepped a little old lady, the same who had pointed out Pete Jennings to me the day Paul Zehring was murdered. She had her purse gripped up against her body with her right hand. She shook her left forefinger in gentle admonition under my nose.

"I am ashamed of you boys," she said in a kindly, cracked old voice.

Then she turned a little toward

Butch, but he had faded into the background of curious onlookers. Suddenly I found out who had murdered Paul Zehring and how it was done. Not that it was to my credit, because I found out the worst way possible. I just happened to glance down.

Between the folds of the little old lady's cloak, I saw the blue glint of a silenced pistol and the trigger-finger of a *third* hand. All this I gandered in one-tenth of a second. The other nine-tenths I spent thinking about my own middle as that silenced gun went *huh*.

The slug chunked into my bullet-proof vest. If that had been all the damage, I might have finished things up right then. But when the slug struck that heavy underwear at such close range, the impact had the kick of a mule.

I went down, and it looked like an out for a second. It was the thought that the old lady's third arm would turn on Donna that dragged me to my feet again. I stood weaving around in the crowd of bewildered onlookers, sort of caved-in with pain but still able to navigate. Over the heads of some people, I saw the little old lady mincing off down the street. And then I saw Butch and he saw me.

Butch yelled something at someone who afterward turned out to be Hester. While I was pushing through the crowd to get to him, I saw Hester and Butch grab Donna between them and force her along the sidewalk toward the monument. I whipped my gun out, but the chances of using it were slim. I didn't care if I shot at Butch and got Hester. But I was scared I'd shoot at Butch and get Donna, who was right between them.

So I yelled and tried to run, waving my gun around as a threat. A car shot off the Circle and braked. The back door flew open. The little old lady jumped in with surprising speed and Donna was shoved in after

her. Hester got in back and Butch piled in front. The car shot forward. This, I was sure, was the time I couldn't have whistled a taxi if I'd had a fog-horn for a larynx.

SO I stood at the curb and made a wild leap as the car flashed by. I must have had my eyes closed. I didn't know the car had a trunk rack on the back until I found myself crouching on it. A whole lot of my future depended on the strength of my fingernails.

The car swung into the alley back of Washburn's. Any other way, it would have had to argue with a traffic cop. I was too busy hanging on to notice where we went after that. All I could gather from the landmarks shooting past was that we were heading northwest, probably toward the wide-open spaces.

I was stretched on the trunk rack, my head sticking over the left side of the car when we went under the last street light on Belleview. The surprise nearly sent me flying off my little perch. As the light from that lamp hit the rear vision mirror on the door of the car, I got a glimpse of the reflected profile of the driver.

I couldn't see much but the end of his nose and his mouth, because his ears were about all that kept the chauffeur's cap from sliding over his shoulders. But the mouth would have been enough. I haven't stared at that little hairy awning for five years of my life for nothing.

The guy whose head wouldn't fill the chauffeur's cap was Jeff Simmon!

I wanted to hug him. He certainly had more brass than a pair of andirons, sitting up there right alongside Butch, taking orders, and driving that car full of hoods. I got to chuckling so much, I was afraid I'd shake the trunk rack off. Here was just a sample of Simmon and Sharrod service that would shoot our stock sky-high and put us in good with the bluecoats for

once in our lives. When Jeff Simmon crashed the car in front of the police barracks or some place equally handy for an arrest, the finish would be just too swell for anything.

But just as Jeff, probably acting on Butch's orders, swung the car off the highway to the covered-bridge road, something went haywire. Somebody must have got a squint at Jeff's face.

Next thing I knew, Jeff's arm went limp and dropped over the window sill. The car swerved, rocked, and careened with a loud squeal of tires toward the bank of the road. I thought I had wings. The next thing I knew, I didn't know anything.

I SHOULD have come to with my head in Donna's lap and her hand caressing my brow, with Hester and her pals surrounded by U. S. Marines. Anybody else in the same pickle would have got that kind of break. But the truth is that I found myself heaped on a slivery pine floor in a farmhouse. Hester and her pals were surrounded by nothing but four flimsy walls and some anxiety. Jeff Simmon, his manly beauty unspoiled by the accident, was tied in a chair.

Hester had a couple of red scratches on her face, caused by the broken glass. Donna was standing near a rickety table, her wrists ridged and purpled by tight cords.

There were a couple of oil lamps in the room. Butch was taking the chimney off one. As he bent over the yellow light, I could get a good look at that thing he used for a face. Butch was a cross between a bulldog and an ape, but the idea lurking among his sparsely scattered brain cells was a product of man's civilization. He was going after Jeff Simmon's bare feet with the flame.

Across the room, sitting on an empty box near the door, was the dear little old lady, smoking a cigar, the gray wig pushed back from her fore-

head. She was a curious compound of Smacky, Washburn's truck-driver, and Grace, formerly a dummy in Washburn's sixth window. The portion of the old lady that Grace had contributed, from her plaster anatomy, was the extra arm.

CHAPTER VI

The Real Dope



SMACKY had removed the right arm from the cast-off dummy, strapped it on his right shoulder, and pulled the sleeve of his female garment over the arm. It's an old shoplifter's gag—

that extra arm.

You see, the artificial right arm which goes through the sleeve is used to clasp a purse that's stuck to it some way. The real right arm stays inside the coat, coming out now and then to snatch something off the counter while the left arm and artificial right arm are in full view. I don't know how long I'd known about that gag without ever thinking it could be used in a murder.

As for me, I already said I was heaped on the floor. I was feeling like a half-filled sack of potatoes—limp yet covered with lumps.

"What we've got to find out," said Smacky, dropping the falsetto of the old lady, "is how much you dicks have told about what you know of our business. You're going to talk fast and plenty, Mr. Simmon. I know you birds are just private dicks, but the other guy was a Fed, wasn't he?"

Jeff shrugged as well as he could, considering the amount of rope around him.

"If you mean Paul Zehring, he wasn't anything but a piano-player and a kleptomaniac."

"Come on!" growled Butch, teasing Jeff's toes with the lamp flame. "None of them jaw-breakers. Who was this Zehring guy working for?"

The sweat stood out on Jeff's forehead. He turned so white, his black mustache looked as though it had been painted on his skin.

"Cut it out," he gasped. "I'm talking, ain't I? Paul Zehring just copped that 'Z' compact because he couldn't help it. A kleptomaniac is a guy who collects things that don't belong to him simply for the sport or something. If you hadn't bumped him, maybe you wouldn't have to worry now."

Butch started to roast Jeff's feet again, but Donna sprang forward.

"That's true!" she cried. "Paul Zehring was my brother. He had no connection with the police."

Hester grabbed Donna by the arms and shoved her back against the table. The table joggled. One of those six compacts that Hester had got in the store fell down and hit me on the chest. I didn't move. It was safer to play dead.

"Speak when you're spoken to, kid," Hester warned Donna. "We aren't playing for match-covers."

Jeff tried desperately to kick the lamp out of Butch's hands. He succeeded only in getting himself burned.

"It don't stand to reason," Smacky said. "Why should private dicks in the store-protection racket be investigating a dope deal?"

"It doesn't," Jeff agreed. "Possibly it's because John Sharrod and I used to be Boy Scouts. Hereafter the Feds can chase their own dope. I didn't want to get mixed up in it, anyway. It was Sharrod who got us involved, and I always back up anything my partner says, see? So I was outside Washburn's tonight and happened to overhear Aladdin here—" meaning Butch—"talking to your chauffeur about getting the car ready for a get-away. All I did was sap your

chauffeur, put on his clothes and regret it.

"Why don't you talk to my partner? He's the guy who took the 'Z' compact from the klep—from Paul Zehring. He brought it to the office and examined it. He said the powdery stuff in the aspirin compartment tasted like quinine. Nothing tastes so much like quinine sulphate as morphine sulphate. Why don't you address your questions to him, only omit the lamp ceremony because you might make him mad."

I KEPT my eyes closed and tried to look like a corpse, hoping I was as white as I felt. I can't say I thought Jeff Simmon was being as heroic as he might have been.

"We'll get to him when he comes to," said Smacky, relieving me for a second. He added, in a manner that brought my blood pressure up again: "If we got the time to let him come to."

"What do you intend to do with us?" argued Donna. "Keep us here all night?"

Butch laughed nastily. "Yeah. As far as I can see, with only you three saps in the know, our business isn't what you'd call shot. We're making ourselves a hundred grand every six months in this game, but we don't any of us feel like retiring. Do we, Smacky?"

Smacky grunted. Then I heard a distinct metallic click that was familiar to me. I sneaked a look. The click was Smacky sliding over the safety-catch on my own .25 caliber automatic.

"If you've got anything more to say, maybe you'd better say it," Smacky said to Jeff.

Jeff had quite a bit to say. While he was talking, I was trying to be a genius. I had in my possession one ninety-eight-cent vanity case. I've read of people making escapes at the critical moment with less than that if

they used their brains. Heroes always think best in critical moments, yet here was just such a moment and no burst of brilliance in my head.

I had heard of guys sawing their way out of trouble with a watch spring, but what I had was a vanity case. Maybe I could get out the cake of compressed powder and call Smacky a nasty name by writing on the wall. I might have broken the mirror in the case and set myself free with the glass. But the mirror was made of metal and I was tied only with the bonds of fatigue, which were beginning to wear off.

With my automatic in his right hand, Smacky was facing Jeff. Between Smacky and the door, also facing Jeff, was Butch. The two girls were facing Jeff and he was trying to talk us all out of the jam.

"You'd be crazy to bump us off," he was saying hurriedly. "It doesn't take any genius to figure this out. Your trick of passing out dope to the fiends over a department-store counter is bound to show up pretty soon. You mark the compacts containing dope with the letter 'Z' which you stick on after prying the regular initial off. Why, I began to smell a rat the first time I saw one of those compacts with a 'Z' on it. Then you pull the colossal blunder of bumping an innocent guy like Paul Zehring.

"You think he's a Federal when he lifts one of the 'Z' compacts some dope has brought back for a refill. Why, last time I talked with Hagstrom, he was hunting for a motive for the Paul Zehring murder. He won't find any. When he doesn't find any, he's going to check up on what Paul Zehring was doing just before he died. He'll check with Washburn and find out Zehring swiped that vanity case in his shoplifting. Then what have you got—cops on your trail right away?"

"That'll take a little time," replied Smacky, though he was plainly worried.

"Yeah?" said Hester. "I think the dick's right. It didn't take Sharrod long to follow us out here, did it?"

"It sure didn't," Jeff straw-clutched. "And you don't think my pal Sharrod would have come out here without leaving word with his pal Hagstrom where he was going, do you? I've seen Sharrod in action before. Whenever he thinks he's going on what might be a one-way trip, he calls up Hagstrom. He says to follow him with an ambulance and a squad car if he's not back inside of a certain time."

THAT was a lie, but I wasn't in any position to contradict anyone just then. Smacky got tired of Jeff's lecture. He took a step toward Jeff and raised the automatic.

"Why, how do you know but what right now the police aren't on the point of breaking in that door?" Jeff yelled.

Just then I gave up trying to think of something right to do with the vanity case that had fallen from the table. I sat up quickly and pegged the thing at the glass pane in the door.

Jeff saying what he did about the police breaking in, coupled with the sudden crash of glass, could have brought just one result. All eyes jerked toward the door, among them the black eye of the rod in Smacky's hand.

That was my chance. I jumped up at Smacky from behind, my right hand closing over the fist that held the rod. I had a lot more in my grip than Smacky had, and Butch was right in line with the gun. Hester yelled and Butch swung around, yanking out his gat. I gave Smacky's trigger-finger a couple of quick jerks.

Even John Sharrod couldn't miss at that close range. Butch hit the floor like a side of beef while I wrestled with Smacky.

I don't want to dwell on the scrap with Smacky. If I had mopped up the floor with Butch, that would have been something. But I was twenty years younger than Smacky and I wasn't encumbered with women's garments. And I didn't have a dummy's arm strapped to my right shoulder. That was the way in which he was handicapped.

All the credit for the finish goes to Donna, who kicked the shins out from under Hester. The brunette had thought of draping an oil lamp around my head. So it was not surprising that it ended with our roping Smacky and Hester alive, driving them back to the police and taking Butch to the hospital to have my slugs removed.

Jeff told the bluecoats he had a hunch, from the directions Smacky had given him when he was playing chauffeur, where they could find the hideout of the gang. That would be where they kept the dope they were peddling over Washburn's cosmetic counter in the "Z" compacts. It was a good hunch. I remember reading how the police took in fifty-grand-worth of morphine compressed into eight-grain tablets.

What we had against Smacky for the close-up shooting of Paul Zehring limited Pete Jennings' engagement in the penitentiary to five years.

Later, Harry Washburn got generous and raised his annual anté to the firm of Simmon and Sharrod another grand. That was a good thing because Simmon had to eat. The Sharrods also had to eat—both John and Donna.

TRAITOR TRAIL

By

OWEN FOX JEROME

*Author of "An Old Spanish Custom,"
"All at Sea," etc.*

**A Fifth Column Spy Discovers
That You Can't Destroy the
Pillars of Justice!**

ONE big thing wrong with this country is that the Government is too easy on criminals and traitors and spies after they catch them. Take the Joe Delaney case, for instance.

It's a funny thing about these Fifth Column guys; they show up in the most unexpected places. Rather, they don't show up—and folks get excited and go witch-hunting all over the place and grab the wrong birds or maybe the little fish. And usually, the big weasel they're really after is the mild-appearing little waiter who serves your ham and eggs at the lunch counter or the affable guy who rides ~~home~~ ~~shoulder~~ ~~to~~ ~~shoulder~~ with you in the subway or on the trolley.

Things get so mixed up sometimes that it makes a fellow feel this screwy world is all upside down and that justice is an obsolete word in the dictionary.

That must have been how Clara Delaney felt when her big brother Joe took the rap in that navy-yard affair in Philadelphia. Things just seemed to fold up on her like the Murphy bed did one night in her two-by-four apartment over in Steelburg. That was after the noise about the Delaney



The spy's slugs had nailed him in shoulder and side

case died down and Clara had finally managed to get a stenographical job in the office of the Joplin Metal Works clear across on the western border of the state.

It was tough as hell on the kid, seeing that Joe was her only living relative and that she was in a sort of swanky girls' college at the time. But Clara was a game little sport. She could take it on the chin.

She never would admit, even to herself, that her brother Joe could be guilty. And after the dust sort of settled, she went back to the old home town and kept trying until she got a job. She refused to admit that the whispers and snubs and sidelong glances which greeted her were a form of the well known and hysterical sport of witch-hunting.

Joe was serving his second hitch in the U. S. Navy when the bubble burst about his ears, terminating in his taking the rap. You see, he was nearly fifteen years older than Clara, and he was sending home most of his pay in order to put the kid through college. More than he could possibly afford. Of course, Clara quit school when the storm broke and rushed to be at Joe's side.

But she couldn't help him any. She only succeeded in bringing herself into the public eye. Joe turned her down. He ordered her to scram, to get as far away from him as she could in order to keep the mess from soiling her skirts. And from then on, Joe would have nothing to do with or say to his sister. In fact, he wouldn't talk to anyone. He just lapsed into a sullen silence.

For Joe knew how the mess he was in, with its inevitable stigma, would brand the innocent as well as the guilty. If he didn't know it to begin with, he had plenty of time in the clink to brood over the fact.

Plenty of time? You said it! Proved guilty of treason, Joe got ten years. Good behavior would shorten it. Swell consolation.

But Clara was loyal and staunch. She stayed right in Philadelphia and camped on the very steps of the Federal Building while Joe's case was being considered. She made good copy for the sob columns of the papers for a while, what with the country's general excitement over spies at the time. And then, after Joe's conviction and sentence to a Federal pen, she went, dry-eyed and tight-lipped, back to

Steelburg to work in the Joplin plant. There was a hurt around her heart and a tight feeling back of her eyeballs and in her throat that wouldn't let her cry.

For hadn't they sent Joe, dear old generous and tender Joe, to prison for being implicated in a spy and sabotage ring against his native land? There wasn't any justice for people trapped by circumstances as Joe had been. Clara wasn't blaming the Federal government or the court-martial board, but she was bitter because the really guilty people such as Fritz Colter and John Brandon were never brought to book, and the mysterious man in the green velour hat was never even found. Their names were just mentioned innumerable times in the proceedings, but nothing ever came of it. And Joe didn't help matters any.

DAY after day he sat at the trial, arms folded and lips locked tight. The circumstantial evidence introduced against him was damning. . . . Where were you getting that extra hundred dollars per month? Isn't it true that you met the known propagandist, John Brandon, in the Sailors' Harbor twice a month for the six months preceding Lieutenant Wayne's shooting? Can you deny that you attended two secret meetings of the Nazi agitator, Fritz Colter? Did you or did you not turn over the blueprints of the new revolving turret to the mysterious man in the green velour hat the night Lieutenant Wayne was shot? . . .

And through it all Joe Delaney sat numb, white-faced. Stunned and tongue-tied, said the defense. Dazed, said the papers. Confounded and terrified by remorse, said the prosecution.

Whatever it was, Joe didn't talk. Not even when they presented questionable evidence that he had sold out his country for the paltry sum of one hundred dollars per month in order to send his kid sister through an

unnecessary college. That was one thing they couldn't definitely prove. For Joe had been sending money home out of his pay long before the Philadelphia navy-yard scandal.

But what difference did that make, the prosecution had argued angrily, when he started sending all his pay home for college expenses and began living on the monthly one hundred dollars he collected from the man in the green velour hat? It was as broad as it was long, no matter how the figures were juggled.

And, in the end, it hadn't made any difference. Joe Delaney got ten years for delivering a set of plans to one Mr. X, unapprehended foreign agent, just before Lieutenant Wayne walked in on the set-up in time to take alarm and exchange shots with the master spy.

They had the testimony of the lieutenant on this, and it was quite graphic. He had heard voices in the furnace room where there should have been no voices at that hour of night. Recognizing Machinist Mate Delaney's voice, he had entered in time to see Delaney passing a folded blueprint, or something like a blueprint, to a man in civilian garb and wearing a green velour hat.

"Delaney!" the lieutenant had cried. "Halt! What does this mean? Who is this man? What—stop, or I'll fire!"

For at the lieutenant's first cry Delaney had started violently and made one dive to crouch behind a length of boiler piping beside the furnace. The spy in the green velour hat had turned to run into the blackness of the far shadows, but at Wayne's words he swiveled and exposed a Luger automatic in his right hand. He had blasted a couple of shots at the naval lieutenant before the latter had time to raise his own gun.

The lieutenant being informally clad in whites and sweat shirt, his figure had gleamed like a perfect target in the dim lighting of the single overhead bulb. The spy's slugs had nailed

him in shoulder and side. He let out a single groan of agony as he staggered back, triggering his gun wildly before he fell to the concrete floor, unconscious. Green Hat had then fled like a wraith. What Delaney did—or thought—had made no difference.

The uproar had brought guards tardily to the spot. But the civilian got away unscathed. What difference did it make that Joe Delaney was found with tears in his eyes, holding the lieutenant against his chest as he sought to staunch the flow of blood? The court-martial board found Joe Delaney guilty of complicity in treason and let him off with ten years in a Federal prison to think over his heinous offense. If Lieutenant Wayne had died, Joe would likely have got the death penalty—maybe. Fritz Colter, alien agitator, and John Brandon, newspaper propagandist, were not even arrested. Nothing could be proved against them, so they were simply questioned and released—after which they disappeared.

CLARA was still thinking about certain phases of this business tonight as she tossed her hat and bag onto the bed and moved wearily about to prepare her frugal supper. She got the bowl of stewed prunes out of the icebox, and then experimentally tasted the cream while she waited for the coffee water to boil. For Clara was saving every cent possible of her slender salary in order to help Joe. If she couldn't get him out, at least, she would have some money saved for him to use in making a fresh start somewhere, somehow.

That was the reason she wouldn't marry either Jack Breen or Danny O'Leary. Joe came first. She had made that plain to all three of them. Of course, she had to tell Joe all about it by letter. He had forbade her ever coming to Atlanta to see him. In fact, there hadn't been much pleasure in that last good-bye. Come to think about it, she and Joe hadn't had time

for a private heart-to-heart talk since that day the bombshell of treason had exploded.

Jack Breen was a plainclothes sergeant on the Steelburg police force. He was a newcomer, but he was already cited twice for bravery and each time he had been promoted. He had the knack of handling the foreign laboring element that thronged this steel town. Big, ruddy-faced, square-jawed, breezy without being obnoxious, Breen had the inside track in the race for Clara's heart.

Danny O'Leary realized this in silence. He wouldn't say anything—and he couldn't have said much. For Danny was just a cop—a harness bull where Breen was a couple of cuts above him in social standing. But Danny had known Clara Delaney for a great many years. He had carried her books to school and sat in the seat behind her and dipped her tawny braids in his inkwell while her big brother Joe was a puddler in the steel mill before he went off and joined the navy. Danny had been Clara's childhood sweetheart, and he hadn't got over it.

With Clara—well, it was hard to tell. A woman's heart can't be read like a comic strip in the daily paper. Joe Delaney had figured the answer might be Danny O'Leary, if Clara didn't outgrow the young Irishman by going to college, and Joe had been satisfied. The first warning that things maybe were going to be different was when Clara sent him the snapshot of Jack Breen and herself and hinted that Breen wanted to marry her.

The coffee water began bubbling, and Clara measured coffee carefully into her little two-cup aluminum drip-olator. Danny would stop by as usual for a cup and a few minutes' chat. With a faint smile, Clara began slicing bread for toast, debating whether or not she wanted to go to the effort of fixing ham and scrambled eggs. She didn't know how she would have dragged from one dull gray day to an-

other if it weren't for the little brotherly visits of Danny O'Leary.

Promptly at six o'clock Danny rapped at the door, and Clara admitted him. Instantly, by his manner, she could tell that something unusual had happened. He glanced swiftly around the room, furtively, and then took both of her hands in his own big Irish mitts.

"Are you—alone, Clara?" he asked in his gentle voice. "No company?"

"Of course not, Danny," the girl replied. "What a question! You're the only company I ever have at this hour. Sit down. The coffee is ready. Will you have a piece of toast and some strawberry jam?"

"Just coffee, thanks. You—you ain't expecting—company? Are you?"

Clara looked up from her coffee pouring with a swift frown. "What do you mean, Danny? You mean Jack?"

For a minute the young policeman didn't answer, his fine blue eyes frankly searching her piquant face. Then he soberly shook his head.

"No, Clara," he said gravely. "Not Jack. Joe."

The girl uttered a little cry. She paled, and her hands flew to her throat. "Not Joe!" she whispered. "You don't mean—why, Joe—couldn't!"

O'LEARY was reaching for his cup of steaming coffee. He changed his mind and placed his hand once more over her slim fingers and pulled them down.

"I see you haven't heard, babe," he said, calling her by the name Joe had long ago given her. "Listen, honey, I don't know whether this is good news or bad. But they were taking Joe from Atlanta to Leavenworth—just one of those crazy shifting of prisoners, I guess—and Joe escaped from the train—five miles south of here. He dived headlong from the platform of the car as the train was crossing that trestle over the Allegheny River."

"Oh, Danny!" The girl began to tremble. "Maybe Joe was—was killed."

"Not Joe," said O'Leary. "They stopped the train and combed both banks of the stream for miles. Joe got away clean. The report's just out here in town now. Steelburg is thought to be his destination—because of you, Clara. We've been instructed to keep a sharp watch for Joe. They—they think he'll make for here to see you. Clara, I don't want to be the man to put the finger on your brother. I couldn't do it! I remember when he used to buy an apple and—and—"

"Break it in half to give me one piece and you one," Clara finished for him. "Yes, I know."

Danny O'Leary stood up and took the girl by both shoulders.

"Clara, is there any reason for Joe coming here?" he demanded. "Did you write him you wanted to see him? Did he write anything from prison that might have given you a hint?"

"No, Danny. I swear it. I never hear from Joe. He never writes me, although I write him once a month."

With this confession, the girl broke down and sobbed in her hands. Gently, even as his eyes grew round with astonishment at this revelation, he patted her shaking shoulder.

"Don't, Clara," he murmured gently. "Don't cry. I know that Joe loves you with all his heart. He—it's just that—well, if he does show up here tonight, don't let him stay. Tell him to keep going as fast as he can. They'll maybe kill him if they find him here. You know how everything's stirred up over Fifth Columns and sabotage—and that explosion at the powder mill over on the south side last week. That's all. I've got to be going. And I haven't been here and I haven't told you a damned thing. Understand?"

He grabbed his cap up and fairly ran from the house. As the front door slammed behind him, Clara Delaney raised her face and stared dumbly after him. Then, suddenly galvanized into trembling action, she sprang up and began drawing the shades of all the windows.

Joe was out there somewhere in the night. A fugitive, he was being hunted down like a mad dog. Suppose he was trying to make it to Steelburg? Suppose he did try to communicate with her? With Federal men and the local police and the witch-hunting rabble from the steel mills—why, Joe was in deadly danger! Why on earth had he dared such a crazy thing?

She locked and bolted the front door, placed her back against it, and leaned there for a minute before going to see about the door at the rear. All thought of supper was forgotten. She couldn't eat anything now, couldn't even drink her coffee.

There was a creaking sound from the direction of the kitchen. Slowly the kitchen door swung open as she stood there and stared, her heart in her aching, straining eyes. The tall and bulky figure of a man in a slouch hat and tight-fitting topcoat entered the room and stared at her across the intervening space. A forty-five automatic was gripped in one brawny fist. It was Joe!

"Joe!" she cried out. Then she remembered secrecy, and her hands flew to her mouth. "Joe!" This time the sound was more of an aching whisper. Almost blindly she groped her way from the hall back into the combination living- and dining-room. "Oh, Joe, you poor, poor dear."

"Hello, babe," said Joe huskily, his grim face breaking into the first semblance of a smile it had known for many months.

THEY met in the center of the room, and the man had to sweep her up in his arms to keep her from crumpling to the threadbare rug. The girl began to cry hysterically against his chest.

"Here, here, this ain't gonna do," he said tenderly. "Snap out of it, kid. I got things to do before I let them take me back. I'm starving, babe. How about a bite to eat?"

She was instantly ready to be placed

on her feet, drawing strength from some inner source the existence of which she had never suspected.

"Of course," she said, smiling through her tears. She began fluttering about the room, hastily putting things out on the table. "The coffee is still warm. Everything else cold, but you can eat it. If we only had time, I'd fix you a hot supper—but you can't wait, Joe. You shouldn't be lingering here a single minute. Oh, why did you even come here? Danny says they are combing the whole countryside and town for you."

"So that was Danny, eh?" said Joe with a faint, hard chuckle. "Don't get panicky, kid. I'll explain everything to your satisfaction after I eat something."

He jerked the ugly hat from his head and then slid and tugged his way out of the tight topcoat. He made a number of clicking sounds as he moved—and then he stood before her in prison garb, one loop of a pair of handcuffs about his right wrist, the other loop dangling emptily. His gun had disappeared into the breast of his striped jumper.

"Oh, Joe!" Clara moaned at sight of his close-cropped poll and the grim expression which rode his face like a mask of iron. "You poor boy. Why—why didn't you write to me? What—"

"I told you last year in Philadelphia to stay away from me, babe," he answered as he sat down at the table. "No matter how things came out, I knew I was no good for you any longer. That's why I didn't write. But I couldn't keep still and take my medicine any longer after your last letter. I found out they were transferring me to Leavenworth, and when I learned we would pass within five miles of Steelburg—well, I just had to make a break for it. I slugged my guard when I got him in the washroom. I didn't have a chance to take off the cuffs. He'd played smart and left the key with his buddy.

"But he had a little hand, and I got

the cuff off him without taking more than a yard of skin. I took his gun and made it out to the platform just in time to dive into the Allegheny. I know that river like a book. I stole this coat and hat after dark from a filling station out on the highway. I didn't dare try to hitch-hike. But lemme finish these prunes. They don't serve cream on 'em in stir."

"But, Joe, they'll be after you. What made you break away? It'll only make it tougher on you. You know I believe you are innocent. I told you and I wrote you that I would wait and work for you. Ten years isn't forever. And maybe I could have your case reopened, and—"

"It is reopened," Joe said harshly. "And you did reopen it. I told you I had things to do before I go back to prison. I ain't trying to run away, babe. I just knew I had things to do that couldn't wait until I got out. So I took it on the lam. I've got plenty to tell you. And when I finish my job here in Steelburg maybe I won't even get to Leavenworth. It's like this, kid. You gotta stick to Danny O'Leary because—"

A tremendous thundering at the front door interrupted his speech. Clara jumped as though she had been stabbed and gave vent to a little scream. Joe wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and leaped to his feet. He motioned to the door. As the girl started toward it in fascinated horror, her brother drew his gun and followed softly after her.

THE hammering continued. "Open up!" came the shout. "Open this door in the name of the law! Clara? Are you there? This is Jack."

"Go away!" cried the frantic girl. "What do you want?"

"Joe Delaney!" answered the voice of the plainclothes sergeant of detectives. "We saw him enter the back way. The house is surrounded, Delaney. You haven't a chance."

"Clara!" came the distressed voice

of Danny O'Leary. "I'm sorry, Clara, but I can't help it. Better let us in."

The girl turned anguished eyes on her brother. A queer and terrible light had come into Joe Delaney's own eyes. He jerked his head toward the lock as he took his position behind the portal.

"Let 'em in, kid," he ordered in a terse whisper.

She clung to him frantically. "No, no, Joe—they'll kill you if you are armed. Not Jack and Danny, but the others. Give me that gun first."

"No," he almost snarled. "Let 'em in!"

Moaning helplessly, the girl unbarred the door. Instantly the barrier was thrust back so quickly that it almost crashed into her face. Barging in, two hundred pounds of beef of him, gun in his fist, lips set in a grim line that exposed his teeth, Detective Jack Breen entered the hallway. At his back, crowded out of the play by the broad-shouldered plainclothesman, was the anxious Danny.

Across the shoulder of the girl Breen saw the stripe-clad figure of the fugitive, and a terrible light came into his glittering eyes. With one swift motion, reckless of the safety of the girl, he raised his gun.

"I was expecting you—*Breen!*" snarled Delaney.

With a movement more rapid and ruthless than the detective's, Joe Delaney hurled his sister aside. The girl fell across the low table in the hallway, and for a brief instant Delaney and Breen stood face to face. Too late the plainclothesman saw that his prey was armed. His fiendish grin of triumph turned into a leer of fright as both guns began to roar.

At such pointblank range the results were disastrous. Breen grunted horribly and went down with a whole clip of .45 slugs in his belly. Joe Delaney, partially protected by the door, had a seam of bullet holes stitched down across his right side from the neck to the seventh rib before Breen's hand

stopped squeezing the trigger. It made a mess of his shoulder, a bloody ruin which would leave him stiff and lame to the end of his days.

But Jack Breen was finished, and that was all that mattered. Then, and then only, did Joe Delaney drop his gun. He surged forward from the wall where Breen's slugs had riven him, swayed, and tipped gently over onto his face across the body of the man he had mortally wounded.

It was later, while the police surgeon was finishing the job of patching him up, and Danny O'Leary comforted Clara, and the phone was ringing and reporters were crowding in, and a couple of Federal men were taking charge of things, that Joe Delaney made his amazing statement.

"Listen to me now while that guy who calls himself Breen is still alive to corroborate what I say," said Delaney. "His name isn't Breen. It's Brandon. He's John Brandon, the alien propagandist. He's more than that. He's behind all this sabotage going on here in Steelburg, and he knows I know it, even if I haven't had time to prove it. Why? Because he's the mystery man who wore the green velour hat!"

THERE was a murmur of astonishment, and the listeners fell quickly silent. Only the hoarse breathing of the accused man was audible from his cot alongside that of Delaney.

"I kept still in Philadelphia and took that treason rap by myself, because I didn't have enough evidence to nail Brandon down. Lieutenant Wayne sorta messed things up when he stumbled in on us. When I learned through my sister that Brandon was here, handling sabotage and playing up to her to learn if I was keeping quiet, I knew the time for a showdown had come. I knew Brandon would try to kill me to shut my mouth forever against him, but I had to take the chance.

"So my transfer to Leavenworth,

and my escape from the train was arranged. I'm talking now so the record'll be straight if—if I don't pull out of this. And I want a confession outa Brandon before he dies."

"Joe!" exclaimed Danny O'Leary in amazement. "You mean you ain't guilty of treason? You mean that you been doing counterspy work?"

"Sure, I'm guilty," grunted Delaney. "I took his money, didn't I? Of course, the War Department supplied me with the blueprints I turned over to him. But I had to go to the pen to keep staying under cover. Clara—Babe—forgive me, kid, but I couldn't tell even you. I was trying to tell you all I dared tonight—before the fireworks started. I knew you would take a hell of a lot when the witch-hunting began, but I couldn't even spare you that. My job was to get John Brandon, and I had to keep going until I

got him. Now you Feds better get this snake's statement before he reports to hell for duty. I'm ready for the wagon, Doc."

He wasn't quite ready—not until Clara had a chance to kiss him and sob against his cheek that she and Danny would be haunting the hospital and the penitentiary and the courts until he was well and free and reinstated as a petty officer in the Navy.

Sure, John Brandon lived long enough to admit his Fifth Column work, and then died peacefully in bed. Fritz Colter was implicated in his statement, but Fritz hasn't even been stopped from talking, much less deported as yet.

Yeah, one big thing wrong with this country is that the Government is too easy on criminals and traitors and spies after they catch them. Huh? I ought to know. I'm Joe Delaney.



MAKE MINE MURDER, a Baffling Mystery Novel by EDWARD RONNS, Featured in the March issue of Our Companion Magazine
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MARKED FOR SUDDEN DEATH

By
**PAUL
SELONKE**

*Author of "Justice by
Sacrifice," "Loot of the
Damned," etc.*



Joe let me have a vicious swipe across the skull

Jack Lawson Keeps Trying to Buy a Belt—and Finds Himself Strapped by the Town's Most Vicious Criminals!

BUNNY DAVIS, the little girl who runs my office for me, warned me what was waiting in the next room. But I didn't expect to run into a frill like this blonde. She had a figure that should have been insured, a lovely face that was white and emotionless as a plaster cast. Dressed in black, she had the sleek look of one

of those mystery women we used to see in those old spy movies. And when she lifted her lashes, I stared into eyes that reminded me of a pair of flashing blue diamonds.

Nobody would expect anyone like her to show nervousness. But the way her gloved hands fingered her big black purse told me she was.

"Are you Jack Lawson, the detective?" she asked huskily.

I nodded.

"I'm Gloria Allen, the niece of John Hackett, our ex-governor," she went on. "I want you to protect my uncle from being—murdered."

My jaw must have tumbled down then. It wasn't the shock of learning that Hackett was in physical danger. It wasn't even the fact that he would be the last guy in the world to pick me as his bodyguard. Rather, it was that the stuffy ex-governor could have a relative who radiated glamor like this Judy did. And it added another item to my afternoon of queer discoveries.

Right after lunch I started out to buy myself a new belt. The one I was wearing, according to Bunny, was getting to the unsightly stage. The route to my favorite toggery passed by the office building where the Robinson Construction Company occupied the entire third floor. It made me remember all the protection racket trouble Old Man Robinson was having. The inspiration came to me that maybe, in spite of our low regard for each other, he could use a good private detective.

Robinson was a stoop-shouldered six-footer, with a hawk-face as hard to read as a slide rule. I slushed through the inch-deep rug of his paneled office and came to a halt in front of his desk. He stared at me suspiciously. He was tense, almost as though he half expected me to shove a rod under his nose.

"This is indeed a surprise, Lawson," he bleated. "After what you said about Hackett and me. . . ."

He was referring, of course, to the misfortune of three months ago, just a little while before Hackett was defeated for reelection. Robinson was Hackett's campaign manager. In a play to get votes, they started a drive to clean up the vegetable price-fixing racket. I don't know where they got it, but they uncovered evidence that I was up to my neck in that racket.

And I had a dirty time proving they were wrong.

"You can't blame me for the things I said," I replied. "But bygones are bygones. What I want now is work."

I told him then how their accusation had lost me clients, and right now I didn't know where my next office rent was coming from. I showed him just how I could be valuable to him in his protection racket difficulties.

HIS suspicion seemed to mount. He began talking through his nose, like all those snooty boys do.

"You've got a reputation of being a hard-hitting private detective, Lawson. I really would like to help you. But that racket has all been cleared up. I'm very sorry. I can only suggest you try me at some future time." He shrugged his stoop-shoulders and gave me the old bye-bye sign by burying his sacred physiognomy in the papers on his desk.

I wasn't fooled. So help me, he looked like a fellow swamped with grief, the affliction growing the more he thought of it. But what I couldn't figure out was why a cluck in his position should have the jitters.

You can't bull-doze a client into hiring you, so I returned to the street. I paused in front of the building to fill my pipe. I figured that our little past set-to was what caused me to be steered away from what looked like a nice juicy job. And as I stood there, I suddenly saw Robinson charge out of the building. He sprang into a cab and rode away.

My first impulse was to tail him. Then I decided, to blaze with him. If he didn't want help, I wasn't going to stick my nose in. And thus ended mystery number one.

I was so sour over the unpleasant interview, I forgot about the new belt I had set out to buy. Instead I went into the nearest tavern. Detective Jim Blaine was in the smoky joint, hunching over a beer. Jim and I had worked side by side when I was on the Force.

Only he had had the good sense to stick to the official side of the law. I plopped in the chair by his table and grinned at him.

"How's hunting, Jim?" I asked.

He gave me a sullen look and took a pull from his stein.

"What in hell?" I asked him. "Who's been stamping on your corns this time? The commissioner?"

He licked the fringe of foam from his upper lip.

"A stiff. The boys found him behind a row of garbage cans in an alley near Eleventh Avenue. He was killed on the spot. Whoever blasted him used a silenced gun, because the people in the apartment houses didn't hear a thing."

"Good old mob stuff," I commented.

"I wish it was," he growled. "It wouldn't matter so much then. But, Jack, why the devil would anybody want to blast Tony Pearson down?"

"Say, you don't mean Tony Pearson! Not the Pearson who was a sort of trouble-shooter for Hackett in the State House, do you?"

Jim nodded dourly. "It's more than an innocent bystander getting his. Pearson had a gun on him. He also carried various instruments that unmistakably look like heist tools. It don't make sense."

"Did you go over and see if the ex-governor knew anything about it?"

"Sure I went to him. That's the rub. And I'll eat my hat if Pearson wasn't still working for Hackett."

I asked him why he thought that. He told me that Hackett got all worked up over the killing. The ex-governor wanted to know pretty badly whether anything but the gun and the burglar tools had been found on the corpse. Jim said Hackett had looked nervous over the business, but clammed up to any kind of questioning.

So there was my afternoon's mystery number two. I kept thinking about the way Robinson was as badly scared as Hackett. I didn't mention it

to Jim, but tried to figure the tie-up while I helped him down a couple more beers.

I still failed to recall what I had gone out to buy. So I left Jim Blaine and headed back to my office. Mystery number three was sitting next to my desk in my private office.

NOW she crossed her knees in a rather careless way.

"You know about the investigations Mr. Hackett started in the latter part of his term," she said. "He smashed the spiritualist racket. He smashed the policy games, and the vegetable price-fixing business—"

"He didn't smash that," I butted in. "It was my business he wrecked. But first you should explain why you think he might be murdered."

She stared at me as if she thought I already knew and was egging her on.

"After he retired from office," she explained, "he begged the present governor to follow up what he had done in this price-fixing."

"Don't kid me," I said. "That was only a gag to get votes—at my expense."

Again she jolted me with that stare. "The new governor politely refused. He said that his office was going to concentrate on state affairs, not police business."

"Must have made your uncle sore," I said, to keep her talking.

"No, Mr. Lawson. Just determined. He vowed to devote his time now to continuing this work. He got private detectives and some men he had had in his office to work with him. He's been getting somewhere, because whoever's behind this price-fixing has been phoning and writing threats. Tonight is the deadline. If he doesn't call off his men, he's to be murdered. They're going to kill him as if he were a gangster."

Maybe she didn't know it, but she was explaining to me just why Tony Pearson departed this life. And it was rather unpleasant to learn what hap-

pens to snoopy individuals who make our price-fixers cross.

"Mr. Hackett plans to ignore the warnings, Mr. Lawson. But I'll pay anything—"

She reached inside her left glove and brought out four C-bills, which she handed over. I stared at them. Something inside me whispered that this woman wasn't the type who would worry about her uncle's well being. She certainly wouldn't grieve over a guy who could leave a sweet will like Hackett's.

"You're living at the Hackett house?" I asked her.

She didn't nod, nor shake her head. Her blue-diamond eyes stared dispassionately into my face.

"You can find me at Three-thirty-three Plymouth Avenue," she said.

"Okay," I nodded. "And you can depend on me."

She cruised out of my office then. When she passed the desk in the reception room, she gave Bunny that defiant, disparaging stare that classy dames reserve for each other.

Bunny's high heels clicked angrily into my office. Her curving red lips were compressed, her hazel eyes flashing.

"Look, sucker," she snapped at me. "I was a newspaper woman before I was sap enough to become your secretary. It—"

I grinned. "I know that whole routine, honey. You're going to tell me I'm weak when it comes to blond hussies like her. Only this time she happens to be a yaller-haired angel. She doesn't toss straws to drowning men. She throws four hundred life-savers!"

She snatched the bills out of my fingers, glaring.

"That goes into the bank, not into some bartender's sock. That isn't what I've been trying to tell you. As a reporter, I covered Hackett's family a lot. Human interest stuff, you know, when he first got into office. I know his family down to the last bewhiskered ancestor."

"It'd help, Bunny, if I knew what you're driving at."

"We're probably going to be married sometime, you lug. I don't want to be marrying a corpse."

I laughed and pulled her close to me.

"Take it easy. I've protected people from mobsters before and never got a scratch."

"Maybe that's so," she retorted. "But I happen to know that our ex-governor has neither nieces nor nephews of any description!"

"You—what?"

THE light of understanding swept over me. I hurried into the reception room, where the windows looked down on the street. My new client, I imagined, must have reached the street by this time, and I was right. I saw her cruise out of the building entrance and begin looking around.

A yellow convertible coupé with the top down came sliding up to the curb. The blonde got in. There was a handsome, greasy looking hood at the wheel. He shot the car away as fast as if a bus-load of cops were after him.

I stared, because I happened to know him pretty intimately. Once he put four slugs into me because I showed too much interest in his personal affairs. His name was Joe Colosso. He owned the Dreamland night spot, which was nothing more than a smoothly run clip joint.

But what was his connection with the blonde? Was he the guy who sent her to see me? And why in the name of reason did she pull her fancy act up in my office?

I turned away from the window, looked into my office and saw what Bunny was up to. The gleam of female curiosity was in her eyes. She was just starting to open the big black purse the blond moll had left behind.

I let out a war-whoop that would have done justice to an Apache, lunged into my office. My right hand wrenched the purse away, and I

shoved Bunny with my left. She sat down on the floor in a manner which offended more than her dignity.

"You big, clumsy ape!" she hurled at me. "You—you—"

"Shut up, Bunny. I think I've got things figured out."

"That's what I get for hooking up with a maniac," she snapped, picking herself up.

"A brilliant detective," I corrected. "You see, Miss Snoopy, there is but one way to open a purse like this."

It was a cloth purse, and I cut open the bottom, holding it wide so Bunny could see what was inside. She gaped at a springlike attachment fastened to the catch, a little battery with wires leading to a narrow, powder-filled glass tube.

"She left her purse purposely," I explained. "She thought the first thing a snoopy cop will do is peek inside. Which would have been a bad thing for us. This here glass tube contains enough boom-boom to pick up our office and blow it out of the window."

Bunny's red mouth slipped open in a startled oval. Her face began to get green around the edges. She grabbed me and hung on.

"Jack," she moaned. "Oh, Jackie, if—if I had opened that purse—"

"But you didn't do it," I replied. "It's funny, too, the way the inspiration came to me. I saw the blond gunning out of the neighborhood as fast as she could. Then I saw you with the purse. It reminded me of how she had had the dough in her glove instead of the purse."

"Must have been my guardian angel whispering to you," Bunny said fervently. "But why should the hussy want to blast us to Kingdom Come?"

"That's what I intend to find out," I snapped. Her hazel eyes got a queer flicker in them, a flicker I had seen before, and I said: "No dice for you, spitfire. You'd cramp my style, tagging at my heels."

"And leave you to the mercy of that woman?" she retorted. "All she'd have

to do is turn on the heat. You'd be a sucker for any one of her pitches."

"I didn't bite on that pitch," I said, indicating the purse. "Or maybe you don't think there really is a firecracker inside."

SHE stared at the purse in horror. That was the moment I waited for. I legged it out of the office, did a dash down the hall to the elevator. A down car was loading up there, so I beat Bunny out of the building by a mile.

I hadn't let on to Bunny, but the bomb-in-the-purse episode had handed me the stomach flutters. Joe Colosso was aiming to wipe me out. That meant he imagined I was prodding him, which I wasn't. But ever since I almost tripped him in his private little numbers game—which tripping he avoided by loading down my torso with lead pellets—he had got a real batty idea. He thought I was a super-brain in the Sherlock Holmes class! It started a lot of people grinning, the way catching sight of me always gave Joe the jitters. I used to grin about it, too. But now—

Seeing I wasn't prodding into any of Joe's works, all I could find for his attentiveness was one motive. This obsession he had over my cleverness must have been keeping him awake at night. So he had probably decided to polish me off to bring back the rose to his cheeks.

There was one way to find out. I flagged a cab and told the driver to head for Joe's domicile. Before we had rolled more than a block, I remembered the address his blond judy had given me. Something occurred to me. Maybe, before seeing Joe, I ought to take a look there and find out if there was anything in it.

No. 333 Plymouth Avenue turned out to be one of a block of dirty, old brownstone houses. Some had "Furnished Rooms" signs in their windows, but this one didn't. It looked every

(Continued on page 104)

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(Continued from page 102)

inch a vacant. Yet as I stood on the sidewalk, wondering how that fitted in, I felt as if somebody was watching me. There was a chance that those eyes could be from inside No. 333. Therefore, to do a thorough job, I went up to the door and hammered on it.

Nobody answered, of course. I cupped my hands on the dirty window next to the door and looked in. Filth and emptiness were all I saw. But it had the atmosphere of a place where crime might be spawning. So I brought out my pick-lock and went inside.

The house smelled like the wrong wing of the city dump. Gun in hand, I examined it from cellar to garret, but I found no signs of evil affairs. That part satisfied me. I had been sure that blondie had this address ready in case the explosion fizzled and I started snooping.

Walking down the block to find myself a cab at the next intersection, I didn't like the way my thoughts kept jumping around. One minute I was deciding this was a "general principles" murder plot of a jittery hoodlum. The next minute I thought I was crazy. My common sense, of which Bunny tells me I have little, kept hinting that there was something much bigger behind all this.

All at once that yellow convertible coupé batted out of an alley ahead of me. It swept down in my direction. That blond tiger was behind the wheel now. Joe Colosso sat next to her, his beady eyes on me. And he had a big automatic in his grab.

There was only one thing to do. I did it. I dived behind one of the thick trees that line the parkway. Offering up lightning-fast prayers to the gods, I struggled to clear my own gun out of its holster.

Joe's automatic started blazing, biting holes in the tree and in the ground around me. I rolled to keep that tree between the coupé and myself. It pre-

vented me from tossing back slugs, though. And by the time I could safely gain my feet again, the convertible had disappeared down the avenue.

Excited citizenry came running toward the spot, yelling and looking around. But before they caught on that I had been the target, I took a fast walk into the alley the coupé had chased out of. Three blocks later, when I eased into a tavern, a prowler car burned by with its siren wide open.

THIS was getting so unfunny that it took three shots of Scotch to ease down my stomach flutters. I kept thinking about an old underworld proverb. If a killer misses you twice, watch out. He won't miss the third time. Joe's belligerence didn't seem to fit in a "general principles" murder any longer. To make sure there was no third time, I knew there was only one way I could avoid it. I had to find out the real reason for his sudden thirst for blood.

Scanning my recent past, the thought of ex-governor Hackett bobbed up again. The only real fact I had was that he and Robinson were still plugging at their investigation of the vegetable price-fixing racket. Or were they? The only information on that had come from the blond smoothie who carried blasting powder in her purse.

But what if it happened to be the truth? Joe Colosso dabbled in a lot of things. Couldn't he be inside that price-fixing racket? Yet how would I figure in then?

Suddenly something snapped inside my thick skull. It sent me into the tavern phone booth to dial the ex-governor. A servant answered first. When I hesitatingly gave him my name, he almost bowled me over by saying that Hackett was waiting for my call.

"Glad to hear from you, Lawson," Hackett's baritone said a few seconds later. "Your secretary is here and—" "Bunny Davis?" I bleated.

(Continued on page 106)

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(Continued from page 105)

"Exactly," Hackett went on. "She told me about that affair in your office, and I believe her."

"What?"

"I've been wanting to get in touch with you—er—for some time. Over that unwarranted accusation, you understand. And I have an idea why an attempt was made on your life. One of our suspects in this price-fixing, I hear, has a high respect for your ability. I believe he thinks I hired you. He means to keep you from working on the job, just as he is trying to stop me with threats of death."

That fitted with what I had figured out. I asked him if he knew who was behind the racket, seeing that they had brought their guns into the open.

"Not for sure," he said. "But I believe it's a connection between a certain questionable night-club man and a produce company. I sent Pearson on a dangerous mission..." He paused. "Better come over here, Lawson. We can talk and plan better here."

"Okay," I told him. "But I just got an idea while you were talking. It might take a little while for me to get there."

I got the idea in operation by putting a call to Jim Blaine at Headquarters.

"Look, Jim," I said. "How about meeting me in that alley where Pearson's body was found? I think I can tip you off to the why and wherefore."

I knew something like that would bring him at a gallop. So I strutted out of the tavern, feeling that Joe Colosso had not overestimated me so far as my ability was concerned. And I was chuckling over how lucky I was to have a secretary like Bunny. That lovable little female could argue a blind man out of his pennies. She had gone over and put the screws on the ex-governor. No wonder the poor guy had said what he said.

"I've been wanting to get in touch with you for some time. Over that unwarranted accusation."

She would have scratched his eyes out if he hadn't.

IT was six-thirty when I walked into that alley. Jim was waiting there, impatient as sin. So I gave him the dope on the ex-governor.

"Why don't he swing us cops in if he has inside leads on that price-fixing?" he growled. "We ain't been getting nowhere."

"He thinks you guys are being greased," I explained. "Remember, he said as much when he first began investigating."

"And Pearson really was working for him?"

"Yeah. He hinted that he had sent him on a dangerous mission. I wouldn't be surprised if Pearson got what he was sent for. You remember you told me Hackett asked about it."

"You think Pearson was being chased into this alley and that he stashed the stuff here somewhere?"

"That's the ticket. Let's begin by dumping out these garbage cans before it gets too dark."

"But his killer must have combed these cans," Jim protested.

"We'll see," I said.

So we grabbed one of the cans, lifting it with the intention of decorating the alley.

"Easy!" I burst out, excited. "See what I see?"

"The luck of the ignorant," he chuckled.

We were staring at a pair of ledger books. They lay half-buried in the circle where the can had been standing. After we set the can down, Jim picked up the books and whistled.

"These are the books of the Central Produce Company. Hell, Jack, if this is evidence against that racket—"

"Don't lose sleep over it," I butted in. "Just take the volumes to Headquarters and tuck them in the vault. Meanwhile, I'll go out and garner some more *objets d'art*."

"What about the ex-governor?" Jim

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

said suspiciously. "He ought to do some explaining, don't you think?"

I grinned. "Leave him to Bunny. She's over at his house, and there's no telling what she's already talked him into."

I felt a little stuck on myself as I hurried to see Hackett. A little talk with him, and I felt sure we'd be giving the cops enough dope to crack the price-fixing racket. And with the publicity the Lawson-Bunny Davis combine would get, maybe business would start looking up again.

Hackett's place was a big, old-fashioned hulk set deep in wooded grounds. I barged up the walk, climbed the porch and punched the bell. Waiting for the door to open, I teetered contentedly on my heels in the manner of all self-satisfied mugs.

It was dark outside now and the front hall wasn't so well lighted. The door swung open. I saw what I thought was the servant who had answered my phone call. But this guy wore a cap and was handsome and greasy looking. He had a gat in his fist, and went by the name of Joe Colosso.

I saw my damn-fool mistake, ducked to get at my gun. But he was too fast for me. Joe let me have a vicious swipe across the skull, giving me a private fireworks display inside my brain. I felt as though I had been dumped into a bin of grain. The grain went a mile over my head. . . .

LONG before my other faculties began functioning, some inner voice kept telling me that the price-fixing boys had suddenly moved into the Hackett house. But all I worried about was Bunny. I was trying to decide what I should do to anybody who so much as laid a finger on her. And all at once I discovered that I could move my arms and legs again.

A lighted room reeled in front of me. After a couple of head shakes, I began realizing that I was in the attic.

I didn't get much chance to see much else. Joe Colosso jerked me up with my back against a wooden pillar. He yanked my belt out of my pants, slipped it around my middle. He trussed me so tight against the narrow post, I could hardly breathe.

"What are you trying to do?" I griped. "Squeeze my tongue out?"

Joe leered, apparently enjoying my disconcerting predicament. He stepped back then, giving me a view of the situation I had been sap enough to walk into.

Not far from me, ex-Governor Hackett graced another of those wooden pillars that held up the roof. He was trussed by a belt the same way I was. His square, aristocratic face was bleak as he stared helplessly at me.

Joe's emotionless blond was lounging in a chair, as if this were the wing of some cocktail bar. But she was toying with a gat three times her size. And she kept the cannon in the general direction of Bunny, who sat wordless and staring on an old army cot.

It wasn't until then that I saw old man Robinson himself. He was standing on the other side of the cot. And he held a revolver in his hand!

That he was in charge of these festivities sort of knocked the wind out of me. Of course I should have guessed, now that I considered everything. But you ordinarily don't suspect a guy who's on a half-dozen boards of directors, and who heads one of the biggest charities, of being in the rackets. It just goes to show how greedy some people are.

"What in hell, Hackett?" I said to the bound ex-governor. "Didn't you have your investigators here so nothing like this could happen? Or are they down in the basement, tied up with the rest of your servants?"

"Take it easy, sap," Bunny snapped grimly from the cot. "It's your own fool fault. I imagined you were up to no good and talked Mr. Hackett into sending his men out to find you."

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

Hackett licked his lips and wouldn't look at me. There isn't a man alive who cares to admit a sharp-tongued female has made a boob out of him.

But he wasn't the only boob. If I hadn't gone to stewing in my ego, I'd have realized the real danger that confronted us. And now Bunny, in her quaint way, had tossed us an anvil.

To keep from saying nasty things to her, I turned my attention to our hawk-faced host. He seemed to be regarding me as the guest of honor. He spoke in his best board-meeting voice.

"You are going to be the fall-guy a second time, Lawson. This time the frame will stick. It will be quite shocking for the rest of us to read the papers tomorrow. The well-known underworld detective was actually the head of the price-fixing syndicate. He had a battle to death with our late governor."

"As pretty as that, eh?" I smirked, struggling to control my stomach flutters. "Just remember that the cops aren't dumb. Bunny always tells me I have a childish brain. But even with my limited mentality—"

"You've figured me out, Lawson?" Robinson grinned.

"SURE," I said. "You weren't active in this recent private investigation of Hackett's. You didn't know until afterward that he had a clue that a local produce company was mixed in this. When you did learn that, you had Joe, your right-hand man, watch the Central Produce offices in case Hackett should try a snoop. Pearson, however, was too smart for Joe. He got hold of the books.

"Joe shagged him, lost him. He caught up with Pearson again in that alley. Then came the big scare, because the books were missing. You guessed that Pearson stashed the books somewhere along the route. And if Hackett got them, he would have definite proof of what you really are."

"I told you the monkey was smart,"

Joe Colosso said nervously. "Shut up, Joe," Robinson growled. But he kept staring at me. "You threatened Hackett," I continued. "You actually meant to bump him if you didn't get those books. And when I came into your office, you thought he already suspected you and had sent me there to get the goods on you. You went racing out to tell Joe about it. Joe is scared of me. He lost his head and started after me in earnest, laying a double trap. The one in my office and the one at that Plymouth Avenue—"

"Enough," Robinson grated. "I've purposely let you talk. You've as much as told me that you know where those books are."

"Sure, I know," I grinned. "Pearson shoved them beneath one of those garbage cans. I found them and sent them to Police Headquarters."

"You're lying, Lawson! You're not the sort to play ball with the police."
(Continued on page 112)

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(Continued from page 111)

"I can't do any more than tell you the truth," I said.

"You like your secretary a lot, don't you?" he asked ominously.

Icy snakes joined my stomach flutters.

"You've got to believe me—I tell you they're at Headquarters," I cried desperately. "Call up Jim Blaine. He took them over."

Joe Colosso butted in with a nasty laugh.

"I told you that's the only way this monkey'll talk. The frill's the apple of his eye."

They turned away from me then and walked over to Bunny. Bunny looked cold as ice, but I could see she was scared witless.

"Robinson!" Hackett cried. "Have you lost your reason?"

Robinson grabbed Bunny's wrists, pushed them flat down on the cot so she couldn't move her hands. He looked up at me.

"This is your last chance, Lawson. Are you going to talk?"

"Tell him, Lawson," Hackett begged. "For God's sake, don't let him torture that helpless girl!"

When I kept silent, Robinson nodded to Joe. The hood snapped open a wide-bladed knife. I knew what he was going to do. He was planning to slip a blade underneath her fingernails!

The blond, gun in lap, was watching the proceedings with a little smile on her lips. Hackett, on the other hand, was sweating as though it was his own daughter who was going to get the works. Maybe I was stubborn, not lying to save Bunny. The fact was that I didn't think Robinson would go through with it. I couldn't believe he was that rotten.

Suddenly Bunny screamed out in agonizing pain.

It was as though that knife had cut into my heart. Instinct sent me plunging forward. The minute I moved, I expected the belt to stop me. Old and

frayed from usage, it snapped like a rotten rope.

I was plunging straight at the cot!

I LANDED smack on top of the men. They sprawled. Joe tried to get me with his knife, but I put him to sleep with a smash to the jaw. The blond was screaming now, throwing wild slugs that almost parted my hair. But I had dived on top of Robinson. He was on his knees, his gun sweeping up.

He shrieked in pain when my heels smashed down on his kneecaps. That gave me possession of his gun. Whirling to face the blond, I saw her struggling in the furious grasp of my little Amazon.

Robinson tried to grab back his revolver. So I kicked him in the shins, let him have a snap-swing with the gun to his head. And that was that.

Turning again, I grinned. Bunny was sitting on top of the blond, waving that cannon under the dame's nose.

"The books!" Hackett yelled in excitement. "Where are the books?"

"Where I said they were, and where we're heading now," I snapped. I unfastened him and handed over the gun. "Take charge here, Boss. I've got some personal business to take care of."

Yet when I jerked her off the blond, Bunny turned on me. Fury glared from her hazel eyes.

"You stubborn ape!" she stormed. "If I hadn't screamed ahead of time, you'd have let them carve my fingers to bits. And a lot you'd have cared!"

"That's the thanks I get," I grinned. "If I'd bought that new belt you tried to make me get, we'd only be newspaper copy tomorrow. I couldn't have snapped the new one."

"Oh, Jackie!"

She melted, wrapping her arms around my neck. But when I didn't reciprocate, the stormy look came back.

"What's the matter?" she pouted.

"Nuts," I growled. "I've got to hold my pants up, don't I?"

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20x4.40-21	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.40-21	2.25	1.00	100
20x4.50-20	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.50-20	2.25	1.00	100
20x4.60-21	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.60-21	2.25	1.00	100
20x4.75-19	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.75-19	2.25	1.00	100
20x4.75-20	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.75-20	2.25	1.00	100
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20x4.80-28	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.80-28	2.25	1.00	100
20x4.80-29	2.25	1.00	100	20x4.80-29	2.25	1.00	100
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If you suffer from rheumatic or neuritis pain, try this simple inexpensive home recipe. Get a package of Ru-Ex Compound, a two week's supply, mix it with a quart of water, add the juice of 4 lemons. Often within 48 hours — sometimes overnight — splendid results are obtained. If the pains do not quickly leave you, return the empty package and Ru-Ex will cost you nothing to try. It is sold under an absolute money-back guarantee. Ru-Ex Compound is for sale by drug stores everywhere.

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- | | | | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Mfg. of Pulp and Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signaling | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Light | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Homes | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation | <input type="checkbox"/> House Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work | | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coping and Building | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing | | |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman | | |

BUSINESS COURSES

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | | | <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Station Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carting | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management |

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing | |

Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....

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A MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY SAVES UP TO 30% ON GASOLINE! OR COSTS NOTHING TO TRY



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TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
START TO START

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State Street
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Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor for control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3-1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

Yours very truly,
Bob McKenzie

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

Fits All Cars

Easy To Install

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

The Vacu-matic Co. Wauwatosa, Wis.

Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills—gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power—greater speed—quicker pickup—faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is entirely different! It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required to save dollars on gas costs.

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are but a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.



Edward J. Clary
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Please send full particulars about VACU-MATIC, also how I may obtain one for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

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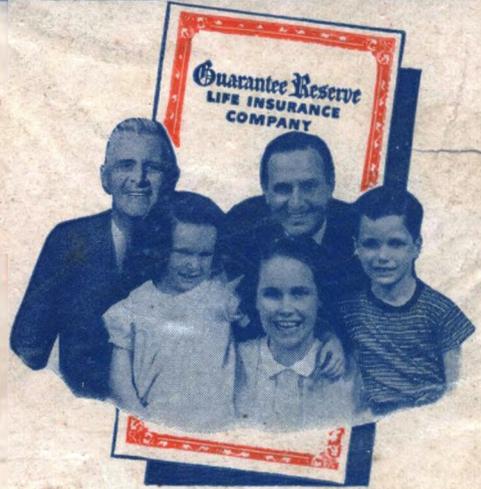
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Only \$**1** A MONTH

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THIS **Guarantee Reserve** POLICY INSURES FROM TWO TO SIX MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY . . . FOR AS MUCH AS . . .

\$1,422⁰⁰

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(The above figures represent the amount of insurance provided by the policy on a typical average family of five persons)

\$2,844⁰⁰

For Auto Accidental Death

\$4,266⁰⁰

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Insures Men, Women, Children—Ages 1-75

If aching hearts and unbearable grief were all that accompanied death . . . the burden would still be great. But added to that grief and despair are the huge expenses that always follow the footsteps of tragedy. You'll need ready cash to see you through, and unless you carry insurance on each member of your family, some time you're going to have to face these financial burdens.

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The **Guarantee Reserve** Policy is brand new . . . it is actuarially sound . . . figured out by leading insurance experts without using the many misleading or confusing "trick clauses" and "hidden phrases" that are contained in so many low cost policies. Seeing is believing . . . that's why we want you to see the policy before you decide to keep it. We want to prove that this is the Policy you should have for your family's protection.

Parents, Children (Married or Unmarried), Brothers, Sisters, Grandparents, In-Laws, Included
NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Selling by mail saves agents' commissions, branch offices, expenses, collection expenses . . . that's why from 2 to 6 members of your family, including relatives, may be included in your **Guarantee Reserve Family Policy** for a total cost of only \$1.00 a month. You be the judge . . . decide for yourself without agents to

high pressure you . . . without embarrassment or obligation.

Send the coupon below for details of this sound insurance offer made by the reliable **Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company**. Don't delay . . . do it now, while you and your family are in good health.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL WANT ANSWERED!

1. Q. Does the death of one or more members of the insured family cancel the Policy?
A. No. The policy remains in effect, insuring the balance of the insured family, as long as the premium are paid.
2. Q. How are premiums paid?
A. Pay your \$1.00 a month in advance. You will receive a receipt and premium notice with each month. NO collectors will be sent for either you.
3. Q. In what States are policies issued by **Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company**?
A. **Guarantee Reserve Life Insurance Company** is legally entitled to do business by mail in every State in the Union. It is incorporated under Indiana insurance laws.
4. Q. Is a Medical Examination required?
A. No. But any members of your family who are not in good health cannot be insured.

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