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Act Today. Mail the coupon now for sample lesson and 64-page book. They're free to any fellow over 16 years old. They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my training in Radio and Television; show you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers **YOUR MAIL COUPON** in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—**NOW!**

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G-MEN

VOL. XVI, No. 1

JULY, 1939

Price 10c

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GOLDEN HARVEST

By C. K. M. SCANLON

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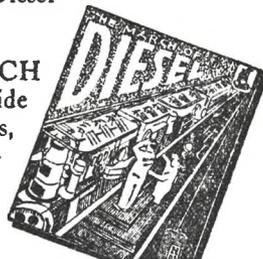
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City..... State.....

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FEDERAL FLASHES

THE Monument to Murder, in the shadow of the Trylon and Perisphere, was dedicated to death!

Next month's novel concerns thirteen rich men who banded together to erect the Monument to Murder, the grimmest exhibit to grace the World's Fair. Not over-elaborate or attractive in itself, the exhibit drew the crowds like a magnet. People from all over the country wanted to witness *The Murders of Yesterday Visit the World of Tomorrow!*

That was the lurid catchphrase, or slogan, used to publicize the attraction. For each of its thirteen oddly-assorted sponsors bore the surname of the victim of some famous and violent death in history. The "monument" contained just thirteen displays, of astonishing and gruesome realism, depicting various forms of death.

For Dead Men Only

Norman Hale, the Wall Street broker, for example, was the sponsor of a grim wax-works model at the Monument to Murder which showed the hanging of his namesake, the American patriot, Nathan Hale. The scene was grimly realistic. It showed Nathan Hale standing before a dangling noose, and you could almost hear him saying: "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

Another exhibit, arranged for by Mr. Vincent Lincoln, the insurance agent, depicted the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, his namesake. The exhibit recreated Ford's Theater, showed the bearded president and his party sitting in their box, pictured Booth's satanic figure slipping out from the curtains behind.

Still another exhibit, arranged for by Mr. Howard Custer, the millionaire, depicted the scalping of General Custer's young brother, Captain Tom Custer, at the hands of gloat-ing, victory-maddened Indians.

There were other macabre exhibits at the Monument to Murder. Scenes re-creating the burning of Jeanne D'Arc, the electrocution of Bruno Hauptmann, the stoning to death of St. Stephen, the suicide of Socrates, the killing of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings by an arrow through the eye. And there were others—thirteen in all.

Death the Sponsor

Then, suddenly, Death becomes the spon-

sor of the Monument to Murder! Howard Custer, the millionaire, is found scalped and dead—his life snuffed out like his namesake's. Soon another member of the "13" Club is found dead, an arrow through his eye—a replica of the effigy that owned his name. In whirlwind succession baffling murders follow one another with electrifying swiftness.

Norman Hale is afraid he will die by the noose. Sidney Hauptmann sees death ahead of him—by electrocution. Socrates shuns all liquids—they may be poisoned. Who is behind these ironic killings? Why?

The Riddle of the Century

The murders at the World's Fair become the riddle of the century. Only one man can solve it—Inspector Dan Fowler, of the F. B. I. Thrill follows thrill as the country's Number One manhunter sets out on a perilous path determined to smash the secret of the—MONUMENT TO MURDER.

Dan Fowler's startling answer to the most spectacular crimes of the decade will hit you with the impact of a .45 steel-jacketed bullet. You'll look forward to next month's thrilling complete book-length novel—MONUMENT TO MURDER, in which the Scourge of Crime makes the World of Tomorrow safe from a killer of today!

In addition to this great novel, there will be many other headlined stories and features in August G-MEN—including MR. WONG IN PUERTO RICO, a Chinese G-Man story by Lee Fredericks.

Join G-Men Club

If you who haven't yet joined—why not send in your application for membership in G-MEN CLUB now! There are no dues and no fees. All we ask is your promise to uphold the law and your interest in G-MEN Magazine. Fill out, sign, clip and mail in the coupon right away.

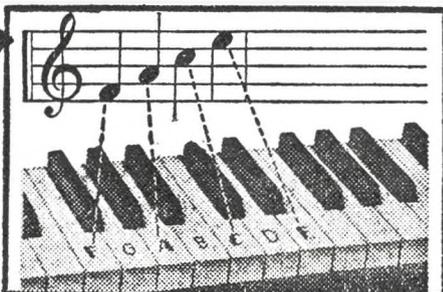
G-MEN CLUB symbolizes your respect for and co-operation with the law. Membership, however, is not to be construed as carrying with it any special privileges having to do with federal or local law-enforcement bodies.

Write us regularly. We welcome comments, suggestions, criticism. Here are some excerpts from just a few letters out of the hundreds recently received from readers:

"Each issue of your magazine that I have read was wonderful, with thrills and action. The BEWARE section is a great informer regarding the many rackets that are being operated for fraudulent and unlawful pur-

(Concluded on page 10)

You think you *can't* learn Music? *Just try this!* →



Easy as A-B-C

Look at the notes above—they are: F-A-C-E. Could anything be simpler to remember? You have already begun to learn to read music. And it's just as easy to play, for a remarkable invention, the "Note-Finder," tells you just where each note is located on the piano.

Look at Pictures and Play

Just imagine! Instead of spending tedious hours in study, instead of puzzling over obscure points, you look at clean-cut pictures that make every step as clear as day. Even children not yet in their teens soon learn to play by this fascinating print-and-picture method.

Which instrument do you want to play? Here's *Free Proof* you can learn quickly—at home

IF YOU have ever had any desire to play a musical instrument—if you have ever longed for the good times, the popularity and friendships that music makes possible, then here is amazing proof that you CAN learn to play—easily, quickly, in spare time at home. What's more, in just a short time from today, you can actually be PLAYING. Yes, playing the piano, the violin, or whichever instrument you please. Playing the latest popular songs, the old-time favorites, even classical music.

No Knowledge of Music Required

Forget all you have ever heard about music being hard to learn. Dismiss your fears of tedious study and practice. Never mind if you do not know a single note of music.

This modern way to learn music

will open your eyes! It's *easier* than you ever thought possible—and it's FUN. No old-fashioned drudgery, no tiresome drills and exercises. Instead, you start learning to play real tunes by note almost at once. You are thrilled to discover that you can actually create music! Soon you are experiencing the joys of musical self-expression. Soon you are winning popularity; you are being showered with compliments and applause.

Make Money, too!

Perhaps you have never thought of making money with music. But you may be pleasantly surprised to find how many opportunities it brings! Others have quickly started turning spare hours into cash and not a few have been launched on brilliant musical careers.

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See

WOODSTOCK
TYPEWRITERS

(Concluded from page 8)

poses. I think BEWARE should be a great help in the war on crime, if each, and every reader heeds the warnings that it gives.—Robert Pinson, Gray Court, S. C.”

“I have enjoyed G-MEN Magazine. It gives me great pleasure to tell you that you have the best magazine I ever read.—Saba Jamour, Jerusalem, Palestine.”

“I think G-MEN is a big value packed with knowledge. BEWARE shows how crooks work against the honest. I am a G-MEN booster.—C. W. Gleason, Oilton, Okla.”

“I'm very glad I have found such magazines as G-MEN and TEXAS RANGERS. I've never read better, more exciting or interesting magazines; both are okay. I'll say: If a better story could be printed, G-MEN would print it.—Tage Boesen, Copenhagen, Denmark.”

“Among my favorite features are CRIME BY POST and J. Edgar Hoover's addresses in recent issues of G-MEN. I also think that what this country needs is more real men like Dan Fowler.—Lewis A. Hufford, Kansas City, Kansas.”

“I am a constant reader of G-MEN and enjoy its thrilling stories. I'm a booster for your mag, too. I've had my friends start to read it and now they're fans. I hereby recommend G-MEN for the wonderful good it does for the younger generation by teaching that crime does not pay.—Ralph P. Baffaro, 9 West Oak Street, Lodi, Cal.”

Thanks to you all—and keep those swell letters rolling in. Write frankly—remember a knock is as welcome as a boost. And a postcard will do as well as a letter! See you next month.

—THE EDITOR.

G-MEN CLUB,

22 West 48th St.,
New York City.



I wish to join the G-MEN CLUB. I promise to uphold the laws of the Nation—to do all in my power to aid in their enforcement, and to back the efforts of Federal agents in their fight on crime.

Name

Address

City State

Age Sex Hobby

Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if membership card is desired.

TO OBTAIN THE G-MEN EMBLEM, our official insignia, enclose the name-strip G-MEN from the cover of this magazine, plus ten cents in stamps or coins.

NOTE: If you do not enclose the name-strip, send 15c, in stamps or coin. This nominal charge is made merely to cover our expense in mailing this valuable bronze badge.

7-39 If already a member, check here

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DON'T you wish you were like some of your friends who are forging ahead while you stay put? Like it or not, people size you up by what you earn. Is their sizing flattering to you? —Why not *plan* to get ahead, to make more money, to get a raise? If you don't know how, perhaps we can aid you as we have so many others. Chances are good that we can help you *boost yourself up* in ways you never thought of. —Thousands will gladly tell you how our planned training helped them—directed their work along *charted* paths to business success, bigger earnings, 10%, 20%, 50%, some even 100% and 200% greater income. . . . **At any rate**, let us send you the inspiring book "Ten Years' Promotion in One." It's **FREE!** It will surely help you *plan* your next raise whether you ask us to help you plan or not. Write us today for the book—the coupon is for your convenience.

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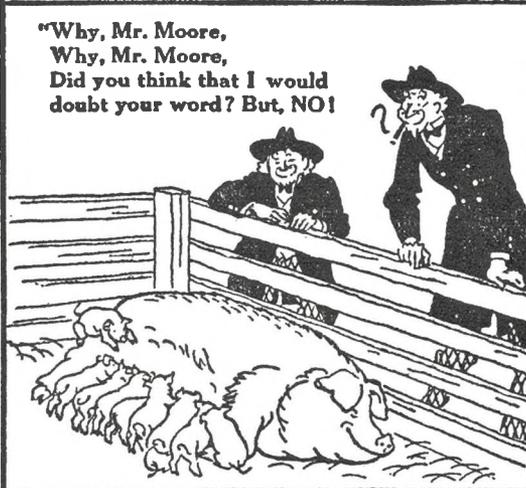
Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore agree on a truly great whiskey!



"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
M & M's a famous hit,
I do declare ...



"And I practice no deception
When I say that its reception
is a royal, rousing welcome
everywhere!"



"Why, Mr. Moore,
Why, Mr. Moore,
Did you think that I would
doubt your word? But, NO!



"It is slow-distilled, and therefore
It's the whiskey millions care for,
With its smooth and mellow flavor
...and its price so wondrous low!"

DO you like whiskey with that
good, old-fashioned flavor?
Then you will like Mattingly &
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You see, M & M is ALL whis-
key ... every drop slow-distilled.
More ... M & M is a blend of
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whiskey we think is best of all!

Ask for M & M, today ... at
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GOLDEN HARVEST



A strangled cry broke from the old man's throat (Chapter IV)

**F. B. I. Inspector Dan Fowler Takes a Trail of Blood and Bullets
When He Goes on the Manhunt to Check a Sinister
Crime Baron's Heinous Activities!**

By C. K. M. SCANLON

Author of "Murder in Alaska," "The Crimson Crusade," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death Thumbs a Ride

THE lurching mine truck, engine whining raucously in second gear, made its way down the ever dropping sinuous road that led into Bakerstown. The sun, red and dull, was sinking low in the west. Darkness

was settling fast and a thin mist was rising. It collected in small pools that grew ever larger and finally joined together to manufacture a dismal gray blanket that obliterated landmarks on the rugged terrain.

"Be glad when we get down into town," the driver said to the guards huddled together in the truck behind him. "It's a nice night for a murder."

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH G-MEN NOVEL

The Law Is Challenged by a Midas of

"Yeah," a man cradling a sawed-off shotgun in his arms grunted. "I never feel comfortable until I see this stuff safely unloaded, Shorty. About ninety thousand bucks in this box under our pants."

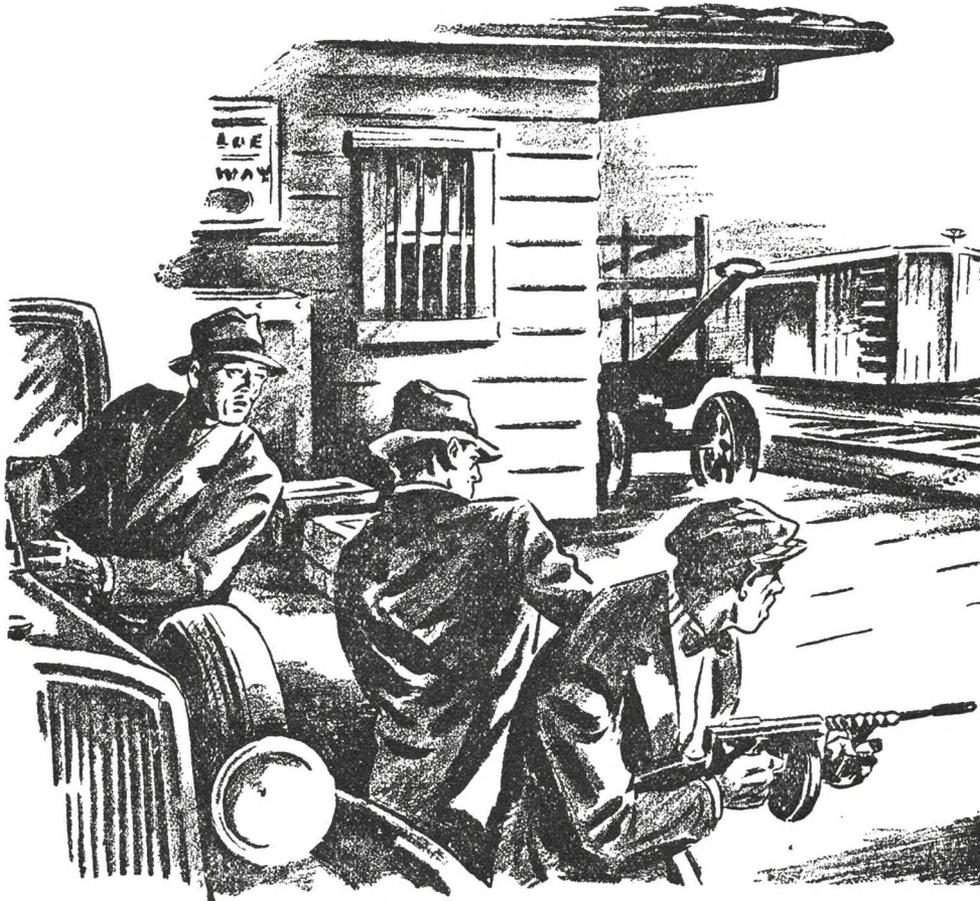
Another truck rider laughed.

"Gettin' nervous, huh, Mooney?"

The driver was off his seat, his short, thick-set body leaning far over the wheel. He drew a sleeve across his tortured eyes and cursed.

"A hell of a night to—what—the—"

As he spoke a ghostly figure leaped to the running board of the crawling truck and a wet hand reached inside.



You been cartin' this stuff around for ten years an' you ain't used to it yet. If anybody wants to lift this stuff, they better be strong guys. Two hundred and ten Troy pounds here."

Brakes squealed as the truck swung around a sharp bend in the road. A line of timber loomed up ahead and the swirling mists seemed thicker there.

It held a gun and the miner felt its cold muzzle smash heavily against the side of his head. Above the sound of screaming brakes, a hideous noise became manifest. It was a stuttering metallic roar that endured for nearly twenty breathless seconds. Machine-gun slugs bit through the wooden sides of the truck, ripped through the bodies

A Fabulous Yellow Hoard Is the Lure

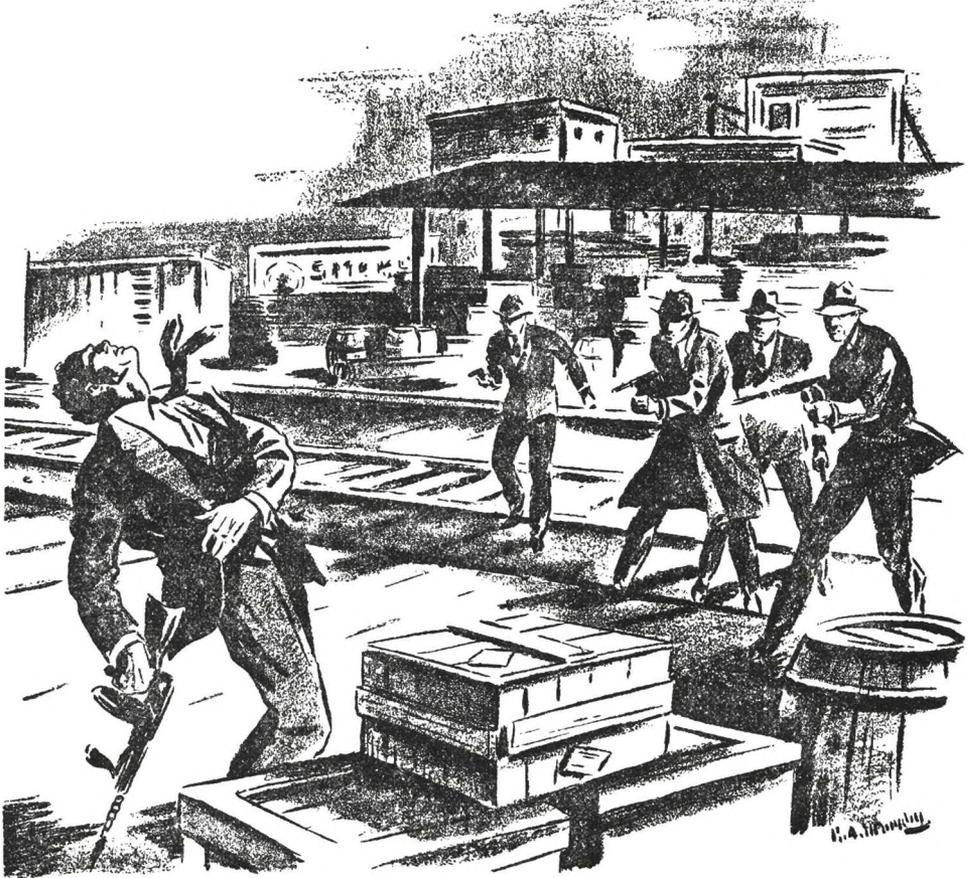
Murder Whose Touch Means Sudden Death!

of the guards and sent them sprawling to the floor, writhing and bleeding.

Voices boomed out then. The staccato voices of grim killers gripped with nerve-strumming tension.

"Make it fast, you buzzards! Get that gold out of the truck! Get it to the car!" the leader ordered.

to his hands and knees after terrible effort, looked toward the truck. He saw a man come into the road, saw him through a deepening red mist. His last dying thought was that he had never seen as big a human being before. Death took him then, flattened him in the wet weeds.



Burrage cursed in stark amazement hardly feeling the bullets that ripped through him (Chap. XVII)

It was no sixth sense that warned the driver of the truck that he was looking at the world for the last time when he tumbled off the machine. He tried desperately to break away in the fog, but bullets cut him down before he could reach the screen of pines. He got

The killers worked with calculated swift precision. Four men leaped into the truck and lifted the heavy wooden box that had been on its way to the express office in Bakerstown. Three others stood waiting outside, heavily armed. Then, from the darkness of the

That Leads Men to Commit Deeds of Terror!

woods, came the sudden kick-over of an engine.

"MASTER!" the apparent leader of the black crew flung out. "That box isn't nailed down! I gave this job just fifteen minutes. Take a minute over an' it'll cost you fifty dollars a man. Ha-a-h! That peeps you mugs up!" He stood there in the mists, this man, and the crown of his battered black hat seemed to brush the needles of a pine branch that swayed in the light wind nearly seven feet from the ground. A beam of light from the car crawling out of the woods struck momentarily against his face, bringing out in bold relief that part of it that was not masked. His eyes, showing a serpentine coldness in the apertures cut into the black cloth, were slightly aslant. His thin lips curled under a long, close-clipped black mustache. A great lock of black hair hung down over his brow and on one swart cheek was a large mole.

The gang chief's powerful chest rose and fell as he stood there and his breathing could be heard ten feet away from him. The eerie setting, the backdrop of misty sky, accentuated his bulk. One of his great hands that hung down on either side of him seemed closed about something as he took several steps forward toward the four men who were carrying the small wooden box.

Suddenly he stiffened, swung his head toward the yawning black maw of the truck. A spine-tingling laugh floated through the darkness there and then the voice of one of the dying guards said:

"Goin' out, you dirty rat. But I'm takin' you with—"

But before he could fire a burst from his gun, a strange sharp crack of sound broke the guard's threatening voice off short. The great hulk of a man laughed and walked away from the truck. Behind him lay the last of the truck's defenders—dead.

The movements of the gold-hijacking gang quickened as the leader's angry voice lashed them with bitter venom. The bars from the Midas mine were dumped into a big sedan. Men

followed swiftly, and the machine rolled through the swath of timber and headed toward Bakerstown. On the outskirts, it took a divergent road that angled toward the southwest. It left four men behind and they made their way to a squalid tavern near the railroad yards where they changed their clothes and arranged for an alibi in the event that a slip had been made.

In the back seat of the sedan carrying the gold bars, the leader of the raiders, face still masked, was addressing his men in a quiet, dangerous voice.

"I want to remind you birds that I do not overlook one little mistake," he said ominously. "You made one tonight, Corri. You did not make sure those guys were all dead and you have been warned before about that. It would have been nice to have left one of them behind that lived long enough to put the finger on us. Corri, you've got just one more chance."

"Yeah. I won't make no more slips, boss. I—"

Case-hardened men wisely refrained from studying that part of the big man's face that was visible. The lights in the dash were off, but intermittently the car passed lighted areas, and the killers made it a point to stare straight ahead. Once they had seen a man die for not doing that.

AN hour later, the masked man was alone in the car. He ordered the driver to stop the machine near a great outcropping rock that nearly canopied the rough road.

"Turn around and get that boiler in high," he directed when he got out.

"I'll be watching you for the next couple of minutes!"

"You know I don't never do nothin' but mind my own business, Chief," the henchman whined.

When the car was out of sight, the man with the slant eyes climbed up a rocky bank and became swallowed up in the dark wood. He walked through them, came to a small canyon where a saddled bronc was ground-hitched. He ripped the horse's moorings loose, climbed to the kak, then rode away toward the south. In a hideout in the

hills, he unsaddled the black, turned it loose in a makeshift corral, and disappeared through the doorway of a small shack.

* * * * *

TWO uniformed men came out of a lunchroom in the small town of Brookside. The uniform of one of them fit a little too loosely. A single light in front of the place that was patronized chiefly by truck drivers struck against their faces for a brief moment and betrayed the wariness in their eyes.

The initials printed on their visored caps were P. A. C. Co. Across the street an armored car was parked. On the side of it were the big red letters PUEBLO ARMORED CAR SERVICE.

Beyond the area of the single lamp-post, the street was in darkness. The two men paused, took a last quick look around.

"No coppers," one grinned. "What a snap this burg is, Chug. How does the suit fit?"

"Never mind the cracks. Let's pull outa here. There's a dead Greek back in that beanery—ya forget? I had to smash that driver pretty hard, the one with the ready fist. Maybe his skull's cracked. Here, gimme the key."

The armored car went out of Brookside and kept on going toward Salida. The car's crew had changed during the last half hour. In the morning, police would find a dead man in back of a lunch counter. They might not find the other two men who had been slugged and gagged and then locked in the back room closet for at least a day or two.

"Nice boiler for a raid on a bank," the driver grinned. "The Chief figures things to the last second, don't he, Chug?"

"Who do you suppose that baby is? He's no ordinary crook."

"You find out. I got a lot of years I want to use up. He pays plenty for what we do for him. You've been with this outfit nearly three months an' you're still nosey. It ain't healthy, mister."

IN the office of the Granada Mine in the foothills of the Saguaches, the superintendent tipped back his chair and looked at the clock. It was morning and the roar of the stamp mill echoed down from the long slope visible through the window and struck hard against the sides of the frame building. Just inside the door was an oblong box bearing heavily stenciled letters.

A mining engineer sat at a table in a corner, pouring over blueprints.

"That wagon ought to be here in about twenty minutes," the super drawled. "Willet, that's the only way to ship that stuff if you don't want it lifted. Direct. Rothwell asked for trouble when he conveyed that stuff to the station in a mine truck. Police haven't got anywhere—"

A man stuck his head in the door.

"Feller here sellin' a new kind of diamond drill. Want to see him?"

"Okay."

Five minutes after the salesman had been admitted, a tall lean-featured man walked in.

"Any luck, Marston?" the engineer said.

The compactly built man shook his head. "A neat job, that last one," he said. "We're fighting smart crooks, Willet."

SPECIAL AGENT MARSTON sat down, eyed the talkative salesman casually, then shook his head.

"There's one man I'd like to see on this job. Fowler. Inspector Fowler. This is getting too big for a guy who's only been with the Department for six months. I admit it—two hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold stolen since last April. There's one thing we've got to do. Catalog all workers in and around this gold mining section. Take their prints, their histories. I've been working on that. Men must be planted on the inside. That killing over at the Midas was too well worked out to be just—"

Time dragged. The salesman kept talking but at regularly spaced intervals he shot a glance at Marston of the F.B.I. The super seemed interested in the man's wares.

Ten o'clock. An armored car came in through the gate, rolled up to the super's office and stopped. Two men got out and strode into the office without preamble. The super got up, handed a sheet of paper to the man who said:

"G'mornin'. The stuff ready for us? That shipment to the Denver mint?"

The man hesitated, turned to his companion.

"You sign, Mac. I got trouble writin' without these two fingers on this—"

Bill Marston got to his feet, eyes clouding. His lips twisted with a thin grin.

"Watch it!" he yelled. "Those guys aren't—"

Hell moved into the mining company office. The salesman swung around, a gun in his fist. It was pointed at Marston and it spat fire. Incredulity spreading over his face, the G-man started falling forward.

"Get the stuff, you mugs!" the bogus salesman roared. "I'll cover these two here. Two bars in that box—you can lift it easy. Get in that boiler and get the guns going. All right, move backward, you two punks. In that wash-room. Faster, or I'll blast the both of ya!"

Men came running from the ore sheds. The uniformed men had the gold shipment into the armored car before the miners could get close. A machine-gun spat lead through a porthole in the truck, dropped two of them. A third member of the gold raiding gang backed out of the office, suddenly pivoted and legged it to the car. He climbed into the rear door, slammed the steel door behind him. Gears clashed. Guns kept blasting. A man's roaring voice called for the gate tender to bar the way.

"Shut that gate!" he cried out. "Get over there and—"

In the armored car, a gunner shifted his position, poked the business end of a machine-gun through the port that offered a clear view of the ground ahead of the hurtling car. Little tongues of flame shot out. Bullets streamed toward the gate, cut a man down there and the armored car shot out through the opening in the

high wire fence and roared out into open country.

Back in the office, Bill Marston tried to get to his feet. The super crashed his way out of the washroom and bent over the gray-faced G-man. Marston conjured up a ghastly rueful grin.

"I lose—" he whispered. "See that—Fowler gets these—these papers in this envelope—help him—maybe. Yeah—Fowler. He'll be here. He'll get these killers—tell him I tried—give him my—"

Bill Marston was dead. Ten miles from the Granada mine, the armored car was deserted. A fast car waiting there coughed up three men and they hurriedly removed the bullion. When police finally located the empty armored truck, they searched fruitlessly for leads.

CHAPTER II

The Living Dead



CONVICT NUMBER 56479 sat on his cot listening to the heavy breathing that filled the darkened cell blocks, an eerie cacophony of sound that had played on his nerves for almost thirty-five years. The grating night sounds of the city of

stone and steel. Canyon City. Where hate bred hate. Where men were caged up like animals, their ever increasing purpose to break out of the four-walled hell.

Nine o'clock! A searchlight beam swept over the grim prison. From a platform out in the big yard a guard's voice bawled loudly that all was well. Grim jest. The lonesome wail of a locomotive whistle swept in from the terrain stretching out from the city of the living dead and mocked the man who sat in the dark of his cramped cell.

The man was not as old as he appeared to be. A narrow band of light shone through the cell wicket and revealed a cadaverous face as of a man

who had lived many years beyond the proverbial three score and ten. His hair was snowy white. Few men in Canyon City remembered the Burt Spangler who had been brought through the gates to serve a life sentence, a tall, wiry young outlaw whose legs were slightly bowed from years in the saddle. Even the most hardened of the guards at the prison had felt something twist inside of them when they had heard the great prison gates bang shut behind the man who had spent the greatest part of his twenty years with the sky for a roof.

Their sympathy was short-lived when the recollection of what he had done swept back upon them. A United States marshal and three deputies had gone down before the flaming guns of this man and his outlaw gang. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold coin had been taken from a Wells Fargo express box, a train dynamited, six of its crew slaughtered.

Burt Spangler's eyes, as they peered into the faint shard of light penetrating the wicket, looked a little dead. Not so dead as they had seemed during the years that had gone. Life was returning to them again. Freedom lay ahead. Number 56479 opened his thin lips and let a silent laugh breathe out from between them. He was to become Burt Spangler again, freed after thirty-five years, and he was sure he knew the reason for the state's leniency.

His brain had not cracked during those long terrible years. The Government wanted the gold that belonged to it, a Government that had undergone radical changes during the past six years. He had read the censored papers in the prison library. Burt Spangler had a purpose in keeping abreast of the times.

That gold, hidden out in the hills, through the stabilizing of the currency by the Administration in Washington, was worth approximately forty percent more than a quarter of a million dollars if a man could get it reduced to scrap. Bullion was now worth thirty-five dollars an ounce.

Fifty-five years old, Burt Spangler had given the law thirty-five years of his life and they were going to pay



Dan Fowler

him more than a quarter of a million for those lonely years. No one could possibly know what those first five years in Canyon City had meant to him, to a man who had lived in the saddle virtually from infancy.

MADNESS had threatened him, had nearly broken him. State and prison officials had hammered verbal bait at him relentlessly until he was near collapse.

They had taunted him with the vision of freedom, had reminded him of the sweet scent of the pines that decked the rugged western slopes. Everything had been tried on Burt Spangler during those first five years in the effort to loosen his lips with regard to the hiding place of a quarter of a million dollars in gold. But the ex-outlaw trusted no man within the law.

The years had passed, each day becoming more purposeless than the one that went before. Thirty more years of torment passed before Burt Spangler was told that his sentence was to be commuted. Convict Number 56479, the most famous inmate of the western prisons, had laughed inwardly though remaining outwardly impass-

sive when the warden gave him the news.

"You figure I'll head right for that dough, huh?" he had thought. "You'll have a dozen lawmen on my tail. Well, you're right, Warden! Thirty-five years in this rotten place have earned that dough. And I'll get it in spite of your dirty bloodhounds!"

But Spangler had kept his lips locked tight, his face expressionless. He had returned to his cell with a wild surge of feeling straining against his stony reserve. He had had years enough in which to plan for the removal of that great cache of gold. Thirty-five years gave a man ample time to seek a confidant in whom he could place his trust.

Burt Spangler had the name of a man in the world outside. The underworld. Spangler had learned a lot about modern badmen and their methods during the past twenty years. The six-gun was now outmoded, he knew. Men rode in high-powered cars instead of on horseback. The law did not call a top badman an outlaw anymore. He was a public enemy.

Yes, the name of a man was stamped indelibly on Spangler's brain. A fellow convict had assured Spangler that an old pal of his, Al Hugo, was the man he must contact.

Hugo, slick organizer, had been too smart for the cops and was sitting on top of the outside world. Hugo could organize. He had brains, had to have brains to have got where he was without even once appearing in a lineup.

Convict Number 56479 lay down on his cot and slept. His mind drifted back over the years. In the phantom world of his dreams, Burt Spangler was far from Canyon City.

He stood in the dark shadows of a line of timber with six other men. He was young again and the wind drifting down from the high peaks carried the tang of pine into his nostrils. From out of the darkness behind him came the faint rattle of bit chains, the restless stamping of steel-shod hoofs. Burt Spangler drew a black kerchief up over the lower part of his face when he heard the distant mournful wail of a train whistle.

HE turned to the men with him, said in a hurried, crisp voice:

"Yuh all know what's to be done when the iron horse stops at that water tank. The express car'll be right over that culvert filled with the dynamite. It'll rip the car wide open when I press down on the plunger of this spark box. Ben, you an' Shorty drop the hombres that pile off that engine. Four of us gets the gold out an' packs it away. Pancho, yuh come down fast with them pack hosses. Two hundred and fifty thousan', yuh buckos! Keep that in mind when the blow-off comes!"

Burt Spangler's lips were pressed tight against the sodden end of a cold quiry. He was poised there on the balls of his feet, listening to the sounds that stirred in the darkness far up the tapering twin lines of steel. For three days he and his riders had been covertly piling dynamite in the culvert, had even been burying it in the banks. It was in a cowtown saloon that a railroad despatcher had let the news of the gold shipment slip out. Thereafter Burt Spangler had laid his plans.

The iron horse, its Cyclopean eye cutting a path through the darkness, roared around a bend, slowed down and crept along the rails to the water tank. Gradually the big locomotive lost momentum and came to a stop. The fireman swung out of the cab, climbed to the tender to reach for the great spout that jutted out from the tank.

Then it happened, a dull blast of sound that seemed to shake the rugged peaks that looked down upon the watering place. Steel rails snapped loose from their moorings and twisted away from the wheels of the careening express car. The big wooden coach pitched down an embankment and crashed heavily against a boulder. The cab crew leaped to the ground and died before they could comprehend the disaster that had met them.

Bullets from Spangler's riflemen smashed derailed coach windows. Passengers screamed and fought madly to get below window level. Down the hillside stretching away from the timber came Spangler and his men. Two

stopped suddenly, rifles held in readiness. Spangler and three others looted the express car, shot down two half-stunned guards, and hauled out the Wells Fargo box. Once it had been forced, the outlaws formed a line up the hillside and tossed the bags of coin along from one to another in the manner of a bucket brigade fighting a fire.

They worked with swift precision until the pack horses were loaded down, then hurried to the spot where they had left their broncs. Twenty minutes after the train had been dynamited Spangler and his men were on their way to the badlands, driving their mounts relentlessly. They were at the place where they had planned to hide their loot by the time the news of the robbery finally reached the nearest town.

Having hidden the gold in a natural cave deep in the hills, Spangler and his men rode to a hideout not far from Leadville and turned their broncs loose in a brush corral. The outlaw named Shorty caved in when the gang got inside the sprawling wooden shack. He had lost a lot of blood. It was still dripping from a wound in his leg and spattered the board floor as he fell. With a curse Spangler drew a gun and shot the injured outlaw as he would have destroyed a horse that had broken its leg.

"CAIN'T take no chances," Spangler said defensively as hard eyes turned questioningly toward him. "He cain't move for a coupla days an' I'm takin' no chances of anybody findin' him laid up here. We're movin' out in the mornin'."

The single shot fired by Spangler, however, proved to be his undoing. A posse, riding by within a hundred yards of the hideout, heard the gun blast and moved in. They dismounted, approached the shack in a semi-circle. A lookout spotted them, tore into the cabin and banged the door shut behind him.

"The lawmen — they've got us trapped, Burt! They—"

The outlaws fought until their gun belts were empty, fought until only one man was left alive in the cabin.

That man was Burt Spangler, and he was propped up against a table with a bullet in his side when the place was charged. One of his clammy hands was trying to lift a Colt to business level and a sheriff's deputy wanted to kill him. Another lawman reminded the deputy that they had a quarter of a million in gold to recover for the mint in Denver, so Spangler was allowed to live.

Convict Number 56479 awoke in Canyon City with the voice of that deputy ringing in his ears.

"Yeah, we'll let 'im live. When he's been rottin' in a penitentiary for a couple uh years, he'll spill where he hid that loot."

Burt Spangler sent long fingers running through his shock of white hair. The reliving in sleep of that train robbery had put a hard eager burning light in his eyes. The gold was still where he could lay hands upon it after thirty-five years. He had beaten them all. Prison had not chastened Burt Spangler. It had only increased his hatred for the law and he was going to take up where he had left off those long years ago. He had everything figured out, just as he had had that robbery figured out back in the dim past. He—

A guard yelled at him. The light had flashed on in his cell. Spangler threw a coarse prison blanket aside and swung his feet to the stone floor. He drew on his baggy prison clothes in haste, splashed water on his face from a basin in the corner.

Cell doors were unlocked and Spangler stepped out onto a balcony, descended two flights of steel steps and shuffled into line. Lines. Always it had been lines. Guards kicking prisoners into them. Whistles that did things to a man's nerves. Burt Spangler went through it all mechanically just as he had done thousands of times before. He filed into mess, ate silently, filed out again and into the machine shop where he was soon at work. The man at his side yelled at him, the noise of the machines drowning the voice so far as a guard was concerned.

"Go out in a coupla days, huh, ol' timer? Don't fergit all I been tellin'

ya. Times have changed. But Al Hugo—”

“Yeah. I’ll see him. I’ll have a cut for you when yuh get out for steerin’ me right. Them detectives ain’t any smarter than sheriffs was. Trail me to the stuff, will they? Burt Spangler’s been thinkin’ right along with ’em—ahead of ’em. It’s the only reason they’re lettin’ me out, the rats! Got tired waitin’ for me tuh croak. Just as if I’d tell ’em even then.”

“Let Hugo do the job, Spangler. You keep low because ya’ll be spotted from the second ya git outa here. A quarter of a million—it still sounds screwy to me. How d’ya know they never found it anyways?”

“I know. Do yuh think they wouldn’t’ve told me? They’d like a laugh, them dirty lawmen!”

“Douse it! The screw is headin’ this way.”

JUST a week later Burt Spangler stood before the warden’s desk. He was garbed in a cheap suit that had been made in a prison shop and he had a ten-dollar bill in his pocket. There were three newspaper reporters with the warden, for Spangler was great copy. Anything he would say on his release would be on the front pages of all the big papers. But Spangler did not say anything. Not even after the warden’s lengthy lecture.

“Listen, Spangler, you’ve served thirty-five years. You are walking out of here a free man who has paid his debt to the state. I am advising you to reveal the hiding place of that gold you took from a Government express box years ago. You are an old man now, Spangler. You’ll be helpless in a world that you do not know if you try to beat the law again. You’ll be caught and sent back here for the rest of your natural life.” He paused. “Well, Spangler?”

“I ain’t got a thing to say,” Burt Spangler spoke quietly. “Id like to go. I’ll be thinkin’ of yuh, Warden.”

Reporters watched the freed man follow a guard out into the corridor and one said: “There’s somethin’ in that guy’s mind. If you ask me he figures he’s worked out that dough

here. You wouldn’t think to look at him now that he used to be a western badman.”

“Maybe he won’t go near that dough. He’d maybe let it stay where it is and die in poverty rather than take a chance on handing it back to Uncle Sam.”

The warden ground a half-burnt cigar into an ashtray and glared at the scribes.

“Clear out!” he barked at them. “You’ve got all the story you’ll ever get if I know that old devil. He isn’t human. You couldn’t ever change his black heart. But if he makes a try at moving that dough—well, we’ll be ready for him!”

Spangler went out through the gateway with a thin smile playing on his lined face. When the gates locked behind him he stood still, alone in the sunshine, his nostrils distended as he breathed in the sweet air of the outside world. Then he started walking with that shuffling gait that was never to leave him.

Momentary panic at encountering the modern world swirled around him as he made his way toward the railroad station. Everything was strange to him. There were no horses anywhere. Prisoners had told him about that—he had read about it in the prison library—but he had not been able to visualize a purely mechanical world. He kept on walking as if in a daze.

CHAPTER III

Inspector Dan Fowler



N the great stone building on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C., the Director of the F.B.I. sat at his desk, eyes fixed on the phone he had just dropped to its cradle. Gravity was rife in his eyes and the muscles stretched

over his strong jaws were bulging. He banged the flat of his hands down on the edge of his desk, shoved his

chair back. He picked up the phone again, spoke crisply into the transmitter:

"Get me Inspector Fowler!"

Twenty minutes later, a rather grim-featured, broad-shouldered man walked into the presence of the Director, his eyes harboring an anticipatory light. Those eyes, pleasant to look at when undisturbed, could become as hard as chilled steel on occasion. Dan Fowler wore a sack suit that screened the powerful compact frame beneath it. There was the suggestion of un-



Mr. Six

bounded energy in his every movement and the Director looked at him with ill-concealed admiration. Fowler's wide mouth formed a pleasant smile as he nodded, waited for his chief to speak.

"Hello, Inspector," the Director said a little wearily. "You remember Marston? Blond fellow, from the office of the D.A. in New York? Went out to Colorado to investigate—"

"I do," Dan said. "Any word from him?"

"Yes. Indirectly. He was killed this morning. The Granada mine was raided by that bunch of gold thieves. About sixty thousand dollars' worth of gold stolen. Marston spotted a couple of crooks driving an armored

car. They didn't give him much of a chance." The Director got up and went to the window, looked out over the seething capitol for several moments, then walked back toward his desk.

"We're up against an organized gang, Fowler," the Director began. "Something bigger than we've imagined. The miners are demanding that we take action, concerted action. The authorities out there are at their wits' end. Four mines have been victimized in seven months. Close to four hundred thousand dollars' worth of bullion stolen, seven law officers killed. Marston makes eight, Dan."

"I would say that it was the Government's business," Dan Fowler said, his eyes losing their calmness. "Gold is a mighty important factor in this country today. The Gold Clause Act calls for the registration of every ounce of the metal. Hijacking gold shipments, raiding mines, high grading—they're all Federal crimes. Murder of Federal officers—"

The Director picked up a magazine, stabbed a page with his finger.

"They never learn, those crooks! That article there deals with the efficiency of the F.B.I. In four years, it tells the public, we have sent over fifteen thousand criminals to the Federal penitentiaries. Out of every hundred cases, we have taken into court, we've secured ninety-six convictions. Yet, they go on, those rats, thinking that they are the ones we won't catch. Out West, there is a devilish shrewd mind working against the law. He has an organized crew of clever crooks and he no doubt boasts of political connections. No ordinary crook, Dan! He could never have reaped such a harvest of blood and gold without leaving his trademark unless he was diabolically clever. He's your job, Inspector. Go out and get him!"

"I'll leave in an hour," Dan Fowler clipped. "I wonder if I can have Larry Kendal assigned to this case. And I believe that this is an opportunity to try out the efficiency of that new armored car, and its portable laboratory, Chief."

"You have complete charge of this

case, Dan," the Director said. "Your judgment, as long as I've known you, has never failed to produce results. Those crooks have to have a hiding place for that gold until they can dispose of it. They have to have a place to melt it down. For all bullion, before it leaves a legitimate mine, must be earmarked for proof of its source. Possibly that stolen bullion has found its way to the mint through regular channels, through lawful procedure, yet it is stolen metal. Some of it, no doubt, is being hoarded and that, in itself, is a Federal offense, Inspector!"

Fowler nodded briefly.

"When gold has to be melted, you have to have the necessary equipment. It cannot be done in a small space. An expert has to do it. It has to be moulded into bars of a shape that is comparatively standard. Find that place and—"

The Director smiled, held out his hand.

"Good luck, Dan Fowler. I know that if we have one man in this Department that can smash those crooks out there, it's you, Dan. You have little to work on. Whatever Marston had unearthed out there the last few weeks was inside his head. It—it's no use to us now."

Dan, the grim light of battle in his eyes, went out of the Director's office and put in a call for Larry Kendal, who was out in the laboratory working with the technicians.

"Drop everything, feller," Dan told him. "We're on our way. We're driving that moving fortress west, so hop over here, Larry. There are a lot of things we've got to check on before we leave. Okay."

Dan and Larry checked the equipment in the F.B.I. super-car, found it complete. The body of the car was constructed of heavy steel plates and the glass in the windshield and windows were obviously bullet-proof. The radiator was armored and the tires impervious to punctures. In the motor arsenal there were portholes for machine-gun or rifle fire and a compartment for ammunition. It was equipped with a two-way radio and an emergency laboratory that was to be tested for efficiency for the first time.

"Nice little job to park anywhere," Larry Kendal said. "What will it do, Dan?"

"It has a special engine and special gearing, Larry. We can hit it up to one hundred and ten if we have to. Sweet, huh? Well, we've got just ten more minutes. Something tells me we're up against one of the toughest assignments we've ever tackled, feller. We're starting in from scratch—"

"That's news," Larry quipped. "Were we ever on a job where the crooks left their calling cards?" He smiled wryly. "I've heard that place out there was getting wilder by the minute, wondered how long it would be before they gave it to you to clean up. They say they pay bounty on G-men out there."

LARRY'S forced levity brought a grim answer from Dan.

"Yeah. One was never heard from again. A U. S. marshal out of Denver was found floating in a river. Then Marston— We'll be in the public eye the minute we hit the goldfields."

"They won't stop us from getting there, Dan," Larry said, eyeing the super F.B.I. car.

Fifteen minutes later, the crowds on the streets of the Capitol stared curiously at the D.J. car as it rolled westward. Beyond the congested area Dan opened it up and the needle of the speedometer hit seventy. For five hours he sat behind the wheel and then he turned it over to Larry Kendal.

"We drive all night," the ace agent said. "We can't afford to hold over. We ought to be getting breakfast in St. Joe or around there somewhere.

Dan Fowler's guess was a good one. At dawn, the D.J. wheeled fortress crabbed toward a curb in the western metropolis and the F.B.I. men got out and stretched their limbs. They crossed the street to a restaurant and sat down to a heavy breakfast. Halfway through the meal, a newsboy came in hawking his wares. Dan bought a paper, spread it out on the table.

"Take a look, Larry," he said, and pointed to the headline:

**SPANGLER RELEASED—RE-
FUSES TO REVEAL
GOLD CACHE.**

"Sometimes," Larry said, "I think that's a cock and bull story, Dan. Like something out of a book—"

"It's real enough," Dan said. "The stuff was stolen, Larry. It was never found. Spangler will have a mighty hard job getting any of it. They'll have men on his trail as long as he walks free. The Government would like to recover that gold. Melted down, it would increase forty percent in value. Well, Spangler isn't our problem. Chances are, that stuff will stay where it is for a good many more years. Spangler is old. His wits will be dulled."

"But if he got help somewhere—"

Dan nodded.

"I doubt if Spangler would want to cut in anybody after paying with thirty-five years of his life. Come on, gulp that coffee down, Larry. We're starting to roll again in just two minutes."

CHAPTER IV

Hugo Meets His Man



NOT aware that the F.B.I. had unleashed its best mantracker and able assistant and had sent them racing westward, the leader of the gold-fields criminal organization held court in an isolated crumbling stucco abode in the hills. An old

prospector, having struck it rich, had found a crowded city not to his liking and had gone back to the solitude he had always known. A little unbalanced, he had sought to build himself a castle miles from civilization.

Having nearly completed the low sprawling house, it had occurred to him that the riches he had amassed by long years of terrible effort had brought him nothing but trouble and worry. A wandering geologist had stumbled upon the place, had found the old man dead upon the floor with a rusty pistol near his cold fingers. The passing years had woven a grim legend

anent the shattered gold grubber's dream. They had choked the place with spiny shrubs and avidly creeping vines until it was hidden from the prying eyes of men who chanced to pass that way.

And while Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal toiled the D.J. super machine over night-shrouded highways far to the east, many miles away, a light gleamed in a window of the old dwelling.

Four men were sitting in a low ceilinged room that was illuminated by an old-fashioned oil lamp. They were an ill-assorted quartet grouped around the rotting rustic table. It was the hard glacial light in their eyes that had made them birds of a feather. The face of one stood out in sharp contrast to those of the other three whose skin had been tanned by the blazing sun, had been toughened by life in the open.

This man's countenance was pallid, mute evidence that his life had been largely a sedentary one. His nose was large and a trifle hooked and he talked with a curl to his lips. His name was Al Hugo and he was a big man in his own element, a dangerous and clever one.

"All right, Six," Hugo said. "That's a screwy name—but here I am."

The big hulk of a man across the table sat back in his chair and smiled almost imperceptibly.

"What's in a name, Hugo?" he asked silkily. "Six is a lucky number. Talk, Hugo! If I'm not mistaken, *you* have the proposition." He bit his large teeth down on a thin cigar and his slant eyes watched Hugo without seeming to watch him. Contempt was hidden by the half lowered lids visible through the black mask.

"Spangler," Hugo bit out. "He's my proposition. He'll be heading for Chicago on a bus just after dusk tomorrow. Coming to see me to spill something that Uncle Sam would give his right eye to know. But he'll be trailed as long as he lives. Six, I need help. This is a strange set-up for me. I figured it out this way. I've got to get Spangler out from under the eyes of the bulls and there's only one sure way of doing it. Get him before he

gets out of this country. You have a man working for you, Six. He used to work for me. I contacted him and he arranged this meeting. I'm putting my cards on the table. Hugo never crossed a pal."

SIX smiled, his gold tooth gleaming in the lurid light.

"That is most commendable, Hugo. You want my help in getting Spangler. I know this country, Hugo, that it? A lot different from working on city streets, isn't it? I have the organization to move that gold cache once it is located, yes? Not an easy task, moving a quarter of a million in coin! Even for my organization. Hugo, I've talked this out with the smart ones I hire. We want fifty percent. Take it or leave it."

Al Hugo drew cigarette smoke into his lungs, exhaled it slowly. A brief angry light shone in his eyes but was immediately dispelled. The men with Six had reminded him on his way in that once he had met the brains behind the gold-looting gang, he had better come to terms.

"You're in a spot, Hugo," they had told him. "Once you do business with Six, you'll find out."

"I've got to take it, Six," Al Hugo said resignedly. He spread his palms in a gesture of defeat. He took a map from his pocket, a map that had been marked with pencil. "That's the bus route. Spangler's doin' everythin' I told him to do in that last letter I got to him. He's takin' a bus out at six o'clock. There's the stops it makes. Right here is a crossroads lunchroom and fillin' station. I've cased it, Six. It's the place to take Spangler. The bus gets there every night at eleven. The town is a mile from that stopover, and before the bulls could—"

Six studied the map, traced his finger across it. Hugo saw that he wore thin, black kid gloves.

"We take him off there," Mr. Six said. "We'll need only four men." He turned to the two men who had brought Hugo to the bleak retreat. "Mertz, you get the black car at five o'clock. You'll pick up Corri, Drucker and Red Stone and come out to Horgan's roadhouse on the Salida road.

Hugo and me, we'll be waiting there. If Spangler isn't on that bus, Hugo, you'll pay for the time we've wasted. Or else."

Al Hugo took a stiff drink out of a bottle that was thrust toward him. The fiery stuff made him feel better. The place had been giving him the creeps. The night sounds coming in through the window had rubbed against his nerves.

The hard men there were different from the rats he handled. They were like men he had read about. Men who rode horses and handled Colts. Throwbacks from the days of Billy the Kid and Jesse James. Al Hugo felt small in that dank desolate place.

"The boys will take you back to the dude ranch," Six said. "They'll have to put the blindfold on you, Hugo. You don't mind? After all, Hugo, we've only just met. You might decide to go it alone and then—well, you might get a notion to show some smart boys the way here. Be seeing you, Hugo."

"Yeah." Hugo got up, reached for the bottle and downed a stiff draught. For the first time in his life, Al Hugo did not feel sure of himself. Six's personality was breaking his own down. The thought maddened Hugo and he weighed the crime czar's own words in his mind, had half an idea to carry them out. But his fear had its way with him and he drove the wild whisperings out of his head.

Six waited until Hugo had gone beyond the carrying of his voice. Then he turned to his henchmen.

"All right, you guys," he snapped. "Start moving. I go my own way." He got to his feet and his shock of black hair nearly brushed the ceiling. In the scant light from the smoky, guttering lamp, he was an awesome figure to those two men whose very souls were in the clutch of those great long thin hands wearing black leather gloves.

From whence he came, they did not know. The devil had a retreat of his own somewhere, they knew that. It was death for the man who stumbled upon it. Death that the giant could mete out by simply stretching out what appeared to be an empty hand.

BURT SPANGLER lay back against the leather cushions of a bus rumbling through the night. He looked like a very tired old man hunched up the way he was. The world he had been shut away from so long had bewildered him from the moment he had stepped out through the prison gates. People looked strange. Their clothes were strange.

The thought that he was on his own frightened him. For thirty-five years, his life had been regulated by men with brass buttons. He felt suddenly helpless, was seized with a desire to yell for the bus driver to turn the big machine around and take him back there to the world he knew. He fought the impulse off, lay back in his seat and closed his eyes. He was a fool! He had nearly blown his top. There was a fortune waiting for him, money enough to keep him in luxury for the rest of his life. Once he contacted Al Hugo—

The tire slap, the acrid tang of burning oil seeping into his nostrils, lulled him to sleep for a while. Spangler woke with a start when the bus stopped and he looked out through the dusty window into a neon sign's bloody glare. The bus driver announced a fifteen-minute stop and swung the heavy door open. Burt Spangler and three other passengers remained in their seats.

Five minutes passed before a black sedan rolled off the macadam and slid past the row of gas pumps to come to a stop between the door of the cross-roads oasis and the big cross-country bus. Inside the bus a man assigned to track Spangler straightened. He reached for his gun as the machine disgorged five men. Two of them covered the door of the restaurant and the others drove toward the bus.

Burt Spangler's tracker crumpled when a bullet spat through the window. A woman screamed hysterically when the three masked men got aboard. One lifted Burt Spangler out of his seat as if he had been a rag doll.

"Beat it, old-timer. It's you we've come for. Drag him out of here, Chug!"

A burst of gun fire came from outside. Glass splintered. Arc lights were



Stacey Blane

shot out and the big parking space was plunged into semi-darkness. Two men half-pushed, half-dragged Spangler down the aisle and then pushed him off the bus. The woman passenger, sanity split to shreds for the moment, clawed at the masked men. A hand reached out, caught at the black satin of her dress, and the woman tried to sink her teeth in the hold-up man's wrist. A fist hit her on the side of the head and she went down moaning.

"Come on! We've got to get outa here!" a kidnaper roared.

Spangler was flung into the black car. A bullet came out of the restaurant window, spanged off the hood of the big machine. A chopper answered the shot with a burst of fire that riddled the big glass windows, sent glass flying all over the parking area. The gunner turned and ran, was jerked into the sedan as it picked up speed. In another sixty seconds it was roaring away in high.

THREE miles down the road, it stopped. A blue sedan waited there and Spangler was dragged out of the black machine and thrown into it. A voice ripped out: "Ditch that job, Corri. Burn it up!" A car door slammed and engines raced.

An hour later, Burt Spangler sat between Six and Al Hugo in that blue sedan that was parked in a woods lane off the main highway. The ex-convict's bony hands shook. The fright that had come into his rheumy eyes back there at the roadhouse still had its grip on him.

"Get him talking, Hugo," Six said coldly. "I never waste a bit of time. I want the dope before we leave here."

"Spangler, I'm Al Hugo. They had a bull trailing you and we had to get you off his hands. Here's the kite you got out of stir and sent to me. Take a look!"

The old outlaw's breathing soughed eerily through the stillness. He looked at Hugo's proof and nodded.

"Yeah. Just gimmie a second, Hugo. Been a long time since I saw rough stuff. Hell, in my time, it wa'n't like that — back — there. Fast cars — machine-guns—"

"I said I didn't waste time, Hugo!" Six bit out. "Get it out of him or pull his arm off."

Spangler's thin face got deathly pale.

"I-I'll tell you. I couldn't get it alone, Hugo. An old tunnel in the hills near Leadville. Marked by two crooked little pines — no, not now. They will be big — old now — like me. You couldn't find it alone — have to show ya. Guess it don't matter who helps me get it — long as I beat the law ag'in, huh?" Spangler laughed and some of old recklessness showed in his avid eyes.

"Start this boiler," Six barked at the driver. "Head toward Leadville!"

GOLD. Dusty rotting canvas sacks of it piled into a cave at the end of a small tunnel that miners had once dug and abandoned when gold traces had proved to be pyrite. A tunnel closed to the eyes of man for thirty-five years by a pile of brush and boulders. In that cave, three men gazed avariciously at the treasure trove. Their feet stood in muck caused by the seep of water into the subterranean place from a bubbling spring.

Burt Spangler babbled like an idiot as he dug his skinny hands into a sack of gold coins. His mind's eye saw men

riding again. Riding away from the wreck of a U. P. train. The leader was young, dark eyes filled with dancing devil-lights as he drove his mount into the teeth of the wind. Young Burt Spangler!

Al Hugo was speechless. Six sat on his haunches, his slant eyes fixed on that pile of precious coin. Greed was in those eyes—and murder. They were all a little mad for a while, those three.

Spangler spoke first.

"There ya are! I was crazy, huh? Two hun'ed and fifty thou—"

"Wrong," Six said, his voice banging hollow echoes against the sides of the cave. "Four hundred an' some odd thousand, Spangler. Melted down for bullion. Sold to Uncle Sam—the old boy's own dough. Funny, ain't it? We move it slow, Hugo—take our time. The stuff's heavy."

"What's his cut, Six?" Hugo said to the masked giant.

"This," Six ground out, and his short laugh was a diabolical thing. His powerful gloved hands reached toward Spangler. The long fingers wound around the ex-convict's scrawny neck as the old man knelt over his gold. They exerted terrific pressure, brought a muffled strangled cry from the old outlaw's throat. Three minutes later, Burt Spangler lay on the ground, his glassy bulging eyes fixed on the gold he had given up the best part of his life to keep.

Hugo, backed against the wall of the cave, stared at Six with horror draining expression out of his eyes.

"Ya ought not to've d-done that, Six!"

The crime leader laughed sneeringly.

"They make tough guys soft in Chi, don't they, Hugo? Listen, mister, this old bird was half cracked. We let him run loose and he'd spill everything sooner or later. He's hot, isn't he? He's a marked man. And so will we be if they ever find him now. Kidnaping, Hugo. They snuff you out for that or give you life. Federal offense—"

"Yeah, that's right," Hugo said. "He was such a poor ol' devil. I— I— what'll we do with him?"

"Prop him up there against the

wall," Six said stonily. "He'll watch the stuff for us until we come after it, until I figure a way to move the coin. I've got the place to melt it, Hugo. Seems like I'm doin' most of the work. Fifty percent isn't enough. I'm taking sixty. Your end, now that Spangler is dead, will be bigger anyway. Any complaint, Hugo?"

The Chicago underworld king shook his head. He would have agreed to any terms at the moment just as long as he could get away from there. He followed Six down at the foot of the precipitous slope to the place where they had left the blue sedan.

"YOU do better work in Chi?" Six said to Hugo as they got into the machine. "Bulls will be looking for a black car. We're ridin' a blue one. Let 'em try to spot us!"

"Yeah," Hugo said. He did not see the face of the driver in the reflecting mirror. His eyes were getting a silent message from Six.

"You want to go back to the dude range, Hugo," Six said, then gave the driver directions. Hugo nodded, felt a crawling along his spine. A sort of panic seized him as the singing sensation in his nerves became stronger. He saw Spangler's dead face and the terrifying thought came to him that Six really did not need Al Hugo anymore.

The Chicago badman would have given every ill-gotten dollar back in the Windy City to have been anywhere else for the moment. Al Hugo knew he would never get back alive. Desperation sent his fingers straying toward the gun that hung in a shoulder holster. He tried to keep his voice calm.

"Have a smoke, Six?" he said evenly.

Then Hugo had an ugly automatic in his hand and it was leveled at Six. Hugo's laugh, his words, were shaky.

"I'm wise, Six. You're figurin' on bumpin' me. Well, I'm beatin' you to it—"

Six's eyes widened.

"Don't be a sap, Hugo. That gold has made you screwy. What gives you the idea that I—" His right hand came up slowly, innocently, stopped an

inch from Hugo's head. It seemed to Hugo to be a spasmodic gesture of defense. The hand turned a little and then a sharp cracking sound vied with the drone of the swiftly moving blue sedan. Powder smoke curled toward the car top. Al Hugo sat rigid in his seat, a blue hole between his eyes. A little trickle of blood came out of it. Hugo's automatic dropped from nerveless fingers.

"Stop the car, Mitch," Six said hollowly. "Climb out of there and pull this stiff out. Then turn around and drive like mad toward Leadville.

The ugly-faced driver dragged Hugo out and threw him in a ditch. He got back into the car, drove forward fifty yards before he found a side road where he could turn around. Backing up hurriedly, he nearly ripped off a fender when he hit an old fence post.

"You losin' your nerve too?" Six snarled. "Leave me stranded out here an' only one of us walks away! Step on it!" He threw an empty cartridge shell into the road, reached in his pocket and drew out a small leather pouch. "Keep your eyes straight ahead, punk!" he hissed, "or you won't be seeing me!"

CHAPTER V

F.B.I. Means Fight



BAKERSTOWN lay cramped between two mountains, a gold town that had been built on a reef of precious ore-laden quartz. Its shaft houses, stamp mill and ore sheds clung to the slopes of the twin mountains and the town itself

sprawled away from them at either end in the shape of a huge hourglass. From a blatant shack and log camp it had grown until it rated a city charter. It was the site of the rich Midas mine.

An aura of uncertainty hung over Bakerstown when the big D. J. supercar came to a stop in front of police headquarters. Curious townspeople edged toward it, mumbled their as-

tonishment. Dan went into the dirty yellow brick building housing the law and asked for Chief Michael Regan.

Regan came out of his office, eyed Fowler and Kendal quizzically. He was a small chunky man with a rather flat face and his eyes never seemed fully opened. Dan introduced himself, then said:

"We want to look at that mine truck, Regan. The bodies in the morgue."

Regan smiled. He noted the signs of weariness around Fowler's grim mouth, the lack of fatigue in the man-hunter's cold eyes.

"So the F.B.I. has finally realized that we're really up against a bad situation here, Fowler," he said somewhat sourly.

"We came here to enjoy the scenery, Regan," Larry countered, and Dan nudged him.

"Made any arrests?" Fowler asked.

Regan screwed up his face.

"There's an alarm out for the man that killed Marston down at the Granada mine. The super there gave a good description of him. He wore glasses, had a mustache. No doubt, both were false. Arrests? I've made a dozen in three months. Crooked shyster lawyers got them out of my hands with bail bonds. The witnesses were beaten up, Fowler. Politicians whispering in the right ears. Big ears, Inspector. We risk our skins to enforce the law here but certain men apparently do not want it enforced."

"That way, is it?" Dan said, jaw muscles bulging. "We've been up against this kind of a set-up before, Larry."

Regan went on.

"The men from the Pueblo armored car outfit could not identify their assailants. Both were masked. The owner of the restaurant at Brookside, of course, was dead when they found him. If you want to see the bodies we've—"

Dan and Larry, a few minutes later, examined the bodies of the crew of the hijacked mine truck. Two of them drew scant attention. It was the corpse of the shortest of the three that brought a surprised exclamation from Dan's throat. He pointed to a wound that seemed to have been made by an

object no thicker than a spike.

"Went in the flesh here at his side," the G-man said. "Came out the other way. Not a mortal wound. Too clean a job for a stab wound, Larry."

Kendal shook his head. He was puzzled. Dan turned to Regan.

"I want to look at that truck these poor devils were riding," he said.

Regan took the F.B.I. men down to the police garage. The truck had been taken there after local authorities had checked up on it at the scene of the holdup. Dan examined the holes in the sides of the truck made by machine-gun bullets. Then he crawled into the conveyor and studied the floor. Dried blood fouled it and flies buzzed there.

DAN took a knife from his pocket, told Kendal to hold the flashlight beam on a certain spot on the truck boards. He dug something out of the wood, held it up in front of his eyes. It was a bullet, but one such as he had never seen before. It was hardly thicker than a small spike and was approximately an inch and half long.

Regan and his men crowded in close when Dan and Larry jumped down from the mine truck. Dan held the strange missile in the hollow of his hand.

"It is a bullet, all right, but I've never seen anything like it before," he commented. He stood there, his hard face staring into space for several seconds. Dan Fowler was mentally painting a picture. "Judging from the number of bullet holes in this man," he finally said, "it wasn't necessary for him to be punctured with this thing. How was this man lying when you found him, Regan?"

The chief thought for a moment.

"Right in the back of the truck. His head and shoulders were dropped over the edge."

Dan nodded.

"Probably he was badly hit. He must have crawled out and tried to get a shot at somebody before he passed out. Maybe he had the drop on somebody—or thought he had. Some rat shot him with this thing, had little time to aim, Larry. It was the other bullets that finished this miner

here. The shock of this queer bullet was enough to knock out what little life he had left in him. It's only a guess, Larry, but here is evidence that a man around this section of the country carries a weapon that serves him in a tight spot. Otherwise there would be little use of his carrying anything but the orthodox pistol or automatic."

Regan interrupted.

"Couple of months ago we found a man killed out on the Tourmalin," he said hoarsely. "He had a wound in his chest like that one there. We put it down as a stab wound."

Dan agreed with Regan that such a wound could be erroneously diagnosed even by the best medical examiner.

"If this bullet, on examination in the laboratory, has been fired from a gun of which there is a record," he said, "we'll identify it by the Atlas of Arms compiled by Metzger, Dr. Heess and Haslacher. The book contains photographs of more than a hundred different small arms and their mechanism. Every efficient police department in the large cities of this country has such a manual. Do you happen to—"

Regan nodded.

"We boast of having a very efficient law-enforcing body here, Inspector. If our efforts are stymied by forces beyond our control, it is no fault of ours. We have the manual, Fowler."

After careful study of the strange missile in the police lab at Bakers-town, Dan and Larry checked with the Atlas; but no classification of such a bullet could be found.

"It's barely possible," Dan said, "that the firearm could have been hand-made. Yet the bullet it fired seems to be a carefully fashioned instrument of death. We'll get it off to Washington and let the experts work on it there."

The F.B.I. men went up the mountain road to the scene of the hijacking. They noticed, ruefully, that a pelting rain had obliterated whatever evidence might have been left in the way of tire marks or footprints.

DAN grinned icily at Larry as they rode back down into Bakers-town in a police car.



Fowler fired at the huge figure (Chap. X)

"Starting from scratch wasn't the half of it, feller," he said. But there was not the slightest trace of discouragement in his voice. Rather it contained a challenging timbre that defied the goldfield hijackers and killers to cope with the keen brains of the Department of Justice. Lack of leads, Larry Kendal knew, had never bothered Dan. The crooks were bound to make a slip. They always had. Lawless men work under terrific pressure. They have to plan perfectly, and human ingenuity, particularly when it is confined to crooked channels, can never be perfect.

An hour before midnight, the D. J. armored car was in the town of Masonville, site of the Granada mine. Dan looked sadly at the body of Bill Marston, late of the F.B.I. The terribly bleak expression that came to his steel-gray eyes boded ill for the young G-man's murderers.

The police chief produced the bullet that had been the cause of death and Fowler examined it cursorily. He knew it would be of little use to anyone unless the gun from which it was fired could be found. A tall thin man came in then and the chief introduced him to Dan Fowler. It was Willet, super of the Granada mine.

"Glad to know you, Fowler. I have some stuff here for you. Marston told me to turn it over to you." Willet handed Dan a long manila envelope that betrayed signs of much handling. The Federal ace took papers out of it, scanned them hurriedly for the moment.

When Willet had left, Dan swung triumphantly to Larry.

"This is Marston's groundwork—preliminary canvassing of prominent citizens of Bakerstown and vicinity. A list of men he tentatively put down as being possible suspects. These reports will save us a lot of time—"

Larry nodded, pressed his lips tight together when he saw the gory stains on the former F.B.I. man's records. The telephone rang and the chief picked it up, barked into the transmitter a little irritably. His temper suddenly cooled and Dan and Larry saw an expression of stark incredulity sweep over his face.

"What? What?" he was yelling. "Over at—" He swore softly, banged the instrument back into place. "A gang of crooks shot up the bus stop over at LaRue. Ninety miles from here. Took Spangler off it—kidnaped the ex-convict that—"

Dan's teeth clicked sharply.

"Spangler!" he said to Larry. "That's the old outlaw—Come on, feller. This might be the break! We'll be there in a little better than an hour."

The supercar burned up the roads again with Larry Kendal behind the wheel. "Spangler was hot," Dan Fowler bit out as the speedometer needle climbed. "He's as good as a quarter of a million in gold right now with that secret inside his head. This is kidnaping, Larry. Once we get one of those rats, it will take more than local pull to get him out. I'll gamble everything I own that the bullion raiders have planned this little job. They knew the bus Spangler was going to take out of this neck of the woods. They tagged every stop the bus made on a route map. Larry, we'll catch up with those birds before long—"

A CURIOUS crowd was at the bus stop when the powerful D. J. car moved in, its heavy tires biting into the blue stone of the parking area. Three police cars were grouped together near the gas pumps. Private cars belonging to the morbid residents of the surrounding country clogged either side of the highway.

Cops were striving futilely to get them taken out of there. The bullet-scarred cross-country bus had not been moved. Passengers, fright still stamped on the faces of most of them, milled about uncertainly. One or two were demanding transportation out of LaRue.

A cop, after a quick glance at the big armored car, walked toward the two grim-faced men who had stepped out of it. Dan quickly identified himself and the cop grinned drily.

"We need G-men out here, Inspector. So far we've found nothing of value that will tip us off to the crooks that pulled this job. We questioned most of the passengers, but they all

tell a different story. Most of them were scared so stiff they—”

Dan climbed inside the bus and took a look around. When he came out, he asked the cop if any passengers had been hurt.

“Only one. A crazy dame tried to battle it out with a crook and she got treated a little rough. She was a swell looking dame wearing nice clothes. They took her up to the hospital at LaRue for treatment for shock. I guess she went haywire from fright, Inspector. The sedan was a big black one carrying Wyoming license plates. Fakes—”

The police from Colton arrived. They photographed the holdup area, looked for prints. Dan and Larry went into the lunchroom, looked the place over. On the floor there was a dead man, a tablecloth drawn over him.

“Neat and fast job,” Dan said. “Planned to a dime. Tire marks don’t show in blue stone. But that woman, Larry—. She was the only passenger that came in contact with those killers. If—”

Larry Kendal knew that Dan was getting a hunch. A real Fowler hunch. The Director in Washington had another name for them. Clever deductions born of straight thinking. Larry followed Dan to the D. J. car and climbed into the driver’s seat. “We’re going to visit the hospital,” Dan said.

TEN minutes later, the two Federal men walked into LaRue’s little hospital. They went up to the room where the girl victim of the bandits lay. They paused in the doorway. A man, obviously a local detective, sat beside the bed trying to get the patient to talk. Dan saw the face that looked whiter than the cloth of the casing against which it was pressed. A halo of rumped hair wreathed it.

“You must leave her alone,” a nurse said. “She’s in no condition to talk. Please go away—”

Dan and Larry waited until the angry plainclothes man walked out of the room. Dan led the way into the room and the efficient looking nurse barred their way.

“**W**ERE from the Department of Justice, Miss. I’m Inspector Daniel Fowler. We do not intend to disturb your patient. However, I would like to see the dress she wore, please.”

“That’s a strange request, Inspector.”

“I have made stranger ones, nurse.” He smiled warmly.

The nurse swung the door of a closet open, reached toward a black dress that was draped over a hanger.

“One moment, nurse,” Dan said swiftly. “Be sure you touch only the under side of the cloth with your fingers. Larry, we’re in luck. It’s satin. If the crook who grabbed her did not wear gloves, he’ll have left latent prints.” To the nurse he said: “How long will the patient be held here?”

“Two or three days at least, Inspector. Her nerves—”

“Fine. The dress shall be returned tomorrow. Larry, that police laboratory in Bakerstown seemed to be an efficient plant. Let’s get started. Something tells me that tomorrow is going to be a big day.”

CHAPTER VI

A Call to Arms



THERE was a fleshpot at Bakerstown called Carradine’s. Seldom closed, the sound of its revelry reached far beyond its ornate entrance. It was a part of Metropolitan night life transferred to the goldfields of Colorado. Transients

from far-flung big cities found Carradine’s crystal bar, his big-time orchestra and floor show, a cure for nostalgia.

Bakerstown’s elite considered it the place to go, the place in which to be seen. If a customer had the where-withal and the inclination, he could command anything at Carradine’s. The second floor was taboo for some. There, richly furnished, was a gambling layout that would delight the

jaded eyes of the most exacting Cosmopolite. Carradine's prices were prohibitive as far as the common herd of the city were concerned. Moreover, the patronage of the rank and file was discouraged by the broad-shouldered scarred-face sentinel in tuxedo who stood just inside the door.

The question, "Ya got a reservation?" never varied. People of Bakerstown could only guess what went on behind the scenes in Carradine's.

It was a night when the fleshpot was seething. The bar was crowded and not a gap showed at the tables. A blond girl, clad in a scanty costume, weaved a sinuous path through the place and conjured up a blues tune from an accordion.

While raucous laughter greeted the torch song, a man got up from a table in a far corner. He followed a waiter to a back room, picked up a phone there. He said: "Yes, who is it?" When the answering voice strummed over the wires, the man's face lost its mask of irritability.

"I have little time to talk," the voice at the other end droned. "I thought a little bit of information might interest you. The G-men have come into this town and they mean business. No doubt you've seen their battleship on wheels, Gregg. The man that brought it here is Fowler! Fowler! He has smashed some big smart boys, has either put them behind bars or under the dirt.

"Don't underestimate this man, Gregg. He's smart as the devil and twice as tough. There'll be a meeting in Bakerstown tomorrow. I got the tipoff from Marston. Rothwell will be there. The mayor and Chief Regan. Strawn and Blane—"

"I've seen Fowler, Six," Gregg broke in. "The man with him is no pushover either. We've got to move a little faster. If there are any loose ends, we've got to pick them up."

"You handle them," Six said. "We can't quit yet. We've got too much at stake. Nearly a million bucks. No man on earth, not even Fowler, is going to take that kind of money away from me. Get busy and keep an eye on Fowler. Watch every move he makes. Put three men on him."

"Very well. But there isn't a slip anywhere. That G-man hasn't got a thing to start on, Six. We—" A click came from the other end of the wire. Gregg hung up, took a deep breath and left the little office.

FIVE men sat in the office of Frank Rothwell, president of the Midas mine. Rothwell was a tall beefy man with a broad leathery face that bore tiny white scars, the souvenirs of less affluent days. He was the proverbial self-made man to the casual observer. He had come up from the lowest depths of a mine to become president of the famous Midas holdings.

Near Rothwell, a thin little man fidgeted in his chair. He was Silas Strawn, banker, one of the directors of the Midas. His bony hands never seemed to stop moving. They fumbled impatiently with his rich silk tie, pawed at his bald head. Strawn's angular face kept twitching.

"Well, where is this Federal officer? Where is he?" he blurted out. "My time is money, Rothwell. He's pretty presumptuous if he—"

A man across the table banged the dottle of a pipe into an ash-tray and cleared his throat. He appeared to be the calmest man in the room. He was Stacey Blane, a compelling figure of a man bearing all the earmarks of a cattleman rather than a man interested in civic affairs. His rather long rugged face was handsome and bronzed and his dark eyes, about which there were lines indicating that they were accustomed to focus on long distances, showed an alertness that comes from a life in the open.

Stacey Blane's long-fingered powerful hands and lithe dynamic frame had earned for him a long string of prizes in rodeo competition throughout the west. He owned the dude ranch comprising nearly five hundred acres twenty miles southeast of Bakerstown.

"Fowler, I understand, is an unusual man," he said. "They say he generally has his way. After all, gentlemen, he represents the Federal Bureau of Investigation. If we want to clean up this country, we need his help."

Chief Regan nodded emphatically, glanced sourly at the mayor of Bakerstown with whom he had had many clashes. The Honorable Martin Lamphier glared at the chief, seemed to read his thoughts.

"I agree," he snapped. "Perhaps Dan Fowler can show Regan something about efficiency in the running of this so-called police department. If he does nothing else that is constructive—"

Chief Regan got out of his chair, his face livid.

"Perhaps Fowler will ferret out the crooked office holders at the city hall, Lamphier. The crime fixers, the shyster lawyers and bail bond—"

"I'll break you for that, Regan!" he thundered. "I'll have you before the city council. You heard those slanderous charges, Rothwell. You, Blane—"

Stacey Blane broke in.

"We're getting excited, gentlemen," he said gently. "Our nerves are a little frazzled. Your Honor, please—"

The mayor fought for control, sat down. A strained silence gripped the office. Eyes watched the clock. . . .

Dan Fowler and Kendal were detained at the police laboratory. A dactylographical experiment had monopolized their interests there. The fingerprint expert had stretched the sleeves of the satin gown on frames, had sprinkled the sleek material with calcium sulfid powder. He tapped the frames to remove excess powder and he pointed to the developed prints with a satisfied smile.

"Prints right enough, Inspector. I'll have them photographed and enlarged, then compare them with records we have on file here."

"Fine," Dan said. "We'll spread them from coast to coast. I'll be at the Midas mine for the next hour or two."

A man came into the laboratory, asked for Fowler. He introduced himself as Worthing, special agent in charge of the Denver field office.

"Glad to see you," Dan greeted him. He smiled and introduced Larry. "We think we've got plenty to start on here. Prints found on a woman's dress. Say—" Dan took the strange bullet dug out of the mine truck. "I want

this sent to Washington, Worthing. The experts there have to work on it. There's no record of any kind of gun that fired it in the Arms Atlas here. Get a man aboard a plane, Worthing."

"I'll start back right away, Inspector," the agent said warmly. "When you need help, I'll have the right men for you. I've been in touch with the Director. I don't mind saying that they've sent the only man out here that can clean the rats out of this part of the country, Fowler."

"Thanks. I hope you're right, Worthing. Larry, look at the clock. We're ten minutes late already for that meeting. Grab your coat and let's get going."

On the way to the Midas mine, Dan Fowler's grim mouth twisted with an enigmatic smile. Larry Kendal knew that Dan had an ace up his sleeve, was going to play it.

"I'm going to use some bait, Larry," the ace agent said after a while. "So far we've got a bullet and a set of fingerprints. The super at the Granada said that the man that killed Bill Marston had glasses and wore a mustache. We want to find that man, dead or alive. Larry, I'm sure that in a few days, he'll turn up—dead. We've got to get a look at any man who dies violently in this town or any place near it!"

"I don't get you, Dan."

"You will before long, feller."

THE five men in the office of the Midas mine straightened in their chairs when Dan Fowler walked in. The dynamic personality of the ace of the F.B.I., his cold searching glance, wiped anger off the faces of the group, commanded their respect however reluctant they were to grant it.

"Sorry to be late, gentlemen," Dan said. "This is my assistant, Larry Kendal. Had important work to finish up." He nodded pleasantly to Regan, and the police chief introduced him to the four he did not know.

Rothwell's eyes brightened. He was proud of his ability to judge men. He saw in Fowler a dangerous man for anyone who was on the wrong side of

the law. There was bulldog tenacity in the manhunter's grim face. One increasing purpose shone in those grim gray eyes, the determination to smash anything that dared flaunt the laws of the land.

Stacey Blane, used to associating with the strongest type of men, eyed Dan Fowler closely as the Inspector dropped into a chair. Up to that point, his own presence had dominated that group of Bakerstown officials. He felt then that a stronger will than his own had walked into that room.

"Gentlemen," Dan Fowler began, "I'll get to the point. I called this meeting for the purpose of forming a united front against the criminals that are making this part of the state a disgrace to a civilized nation. It has come to my attention that local and state authorities are powerless to check this gang of thieves and killers. I will not go into detail. The Department of Justice has moved in here, gentlemen. With your cooperation, we'll go far to drag every last rat to justice and put him behind bars or in a gas chamber. I have been given full authority to act here and I'm backed by the full force of the F.B.I."

Silas Strawn sniffed audibly.

"Pretty speech, Inspector. Of course we'll cooperate. Let's be brief. I have important business of my own."

"I will be brief then," Dan Fowler said icily. "Thus far, the law enforcement bodies out here have been unable to get a single conviction despite the fact that wholesale murder and robbery has been prevalent for months. Rothwell, your mine has lost nearly two hundred thousand dollars worth of bullion. Your men have been shot down like rabbits and yet you can sit by calmly and—"

"I resent that inference, Fowler!" Rothwell blazed, jumping to his feet. "Federal Inspector or not, you can't get away with that sort of—"

"I'd be a little more careful if I were you, Fowler," Stacey Blane said quietly. "I've known Frank Rothwell for years. His character, his reputation are unimpeachable."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rothwell," Fowler said graciously. "I really did not

mean it that way." He paused and Larry Kendal sensed that he had realized the desired effects of his words. He knew that Dan had checked the reaction of his words on the faces of those other four men grouped around the table.

"A FEW hours ago," Dan said, "I saw the results of a bus holdup. A man was taken off that bus. Kidnaping is a Federal offense. The crooked leaders of this crime ring have added another Federal charge to a dozen others that hang over their heads. In a few hours I'll make an arrest, possibly before that. I will have the murderer of a Federal officer locked up. The man that killed Marston at the Granada mine! I have positive identification of the man, his whereabouts!"

No one in the room was more surprised by this statement than Larry Kendal. He fought for control as the effect of Dan's words struck against the group like a blast of air from a dynamite explosion. Rothwell's cigar slipped from his fingers and Blane's fingers snapped the pencil it was holding into two pieces. The mayor of Bakerstown sucked in his breath and held it. Strawn and Regan sat stiffly, waiting for Fowler to go on.

It was Blane who broke the silence.

"If that's true, Inspector, you've certainly worked fast. Let's hope you have. It's time we took action out here. If you need help, I've got a lot of good men at my ranch—"

"Thanks," Fowler said, and a thin cold finger traced along his spine when Rothwell ventured to ask the name of the suspect. The G-man smiled wanly. "For obvious reasons, Rothwell, I'm not at liberty to divulge the name. From the report left to me by Marston, the Federal operative, explaining Bakerstown's political setup, I sense that Chief Regan's job has been a ticklish one. A man cannot successfully run a police department when his hands are tied by crooked political red tape. Let me warn you that there might be certain respected citizens of this community tied in with this bunch of gold thieves and murderers! I'm not making any di-



The "salesman" swung 'round and his gun spat fire (Chap. I)

rect insinuations. Rather I'm giving you a word of warning!"

Stacey Blane laughed shortly.

"Perhaps before we leave, Inspector, you will want our fingerprints."

Strawn laughed sneeringly.

"I assure you that mine are not on record, Fowler."

Frank Rothwell got up from his chair.

"There are times, Inspector," Rothwell said, "when insufficient evidence allows a law-breaker to go free. It is not the fault of the legal machinery here in Bakerstown. Clever lawyers can sway stupid juries. If it's assurance of full cooperation from the leaders of this community and its police department you want, Fowler, you shall have it. I'm certain that every man in this room will stand back of you. We are cognizant of the fact that interference with Federal agents is a crime in itself and we have no desire to taste life behind bars."

Rothwell's veiled sarcasm brought slow smiles to the faces of his associates. The tension lifted.

"I thank you for your trouble," Dan Fowler said. "Getting you all together here has saved me the trouble of talking with you individually. I need the support of the men who control this municipality, needless to say. Good day, gentlemen."

DAN and Larry looked at the long gray limousine that was drawn up near their own powerful armored car. The initials on the door read S. T. B. A man wearing a wide-brimmed Stetson hat leaned against it. He nodded, hooked a thumb toward the Federal experimental motorcar.

"That's a sweet looking job."

"It'll do," Larry grinned. Walking away with Dan, he said in a low voice, "They make 'em big out here. Blane and Rothwell. Say, what was the idea, Dan? When did you tag Marston's killer?"

"Strategy, Larry," Fowler said. "We'll wait and see if it works." On the way down the winding road that streaked into Bakerstown, Dan scanned Marston's notes, read pertinent facts to Kendal.

"Get this, Larry. Lamphier's campaign was financed by Carradine, owner of the night spot here. It's Generally known that Carradine's has the most ornate gambling place west of the Mississippi. His clientele is the pick of Bakerstown's social and political leaders. Carradine's place has been the scene of two shootings. One arrest—no convictions. Mayor Lamphier filed petition of bankruptcy three years ago. He's now reputed to be one of city's wealthiest men."

"Must be a profitable job," Larry said wryly.

"Carradine seems to be the hub of the wheel here, Larry," Dan went on. "We've got to get acquainted with Carradine. And here's something about Blane. Owner of Bar V ranch. Rodeo performer. Powerful political influence in county. Strawn, banker, director in Midas mine. Implicated in Western Utility swindle, nineteen-thirty. Cleared. Rothwell—president of Midas mine. The big wig of Bakerstown, its leading citizen. . . ."

"That information Marston collected will save us a lot of time," Larry Kendal said. "By the way, I wonder if there's any word on those satin prints."

CHAPTER VII

Devil Tracks



FOWLER and Kendal went down to Headquarters, found that Regan's men were still checking up in the rogue's gallery. Dan picked up the enlarged prints that had been developed on the satin dress and he pointed to a little thin white line cutting through whorls of the prints.

"Looks like he got a nasty cut sometime or another," Fowler said. "These prints ought to be easy to spot if that crook had a record."

"One thing we've got here," Regan said, "is as fine a picture gallery as you'll see anywhere."

Fowler lit a cigarette.

"I'm going to take a walk, Regan," he said shortly. "I'll be back in an hour."

A few minutes later, Fowler and Kendal walked into Carradine's. Larry whistled softly when he stepped across its exotic portals. A big flat-nosed man crowded them close.

"What you want?" he growled.

Dan flashed his badge of authority.

"I thought news got around faster than this," he said. "We'd like to see the boss."

"Oh, Federal dicks," the heavy-set guardian said. "The boss ain't here."

Dan and Larry strolled to the bar, ordered beer. The F. B. I. ace let his sharp cold eyes wander. They held for several seconds on the face of a man sitting at a table with a flashy looking brunette. Then they wandered again. Dan Fowler, once he had studied the face of a crook, remembered it forever. When he turned away from the bar, there was a tightness about his wide mouth. Out in the street, he turned to Larry.

"I recognized a couple of those faces, Larry. Seen them before." He paused, let his mind race back over bloody man trails. "Volner!" he suddenly cried out. "Pinky Volner! I thought I'd seen those funny eyes of his before. Used to be trigger man for Ace Clinton. Went over to Hugo's—Al Hugo's gang. Now what would Pinky be doing out here unless—"

A car came down the street, its siren screaming. Its brakes began to shriek crazily and it crabbed toward the curb. Fowler saw Chief Regan getting ready to push the door open.

"Hop in, Fowler," the official called out. "There's a dead man out in a ditch near Blion. Kids found it—"

"We'll come out there in the D. J. car, Regan," Dan answered. "Let's hop to it fast, Larry. Maybe the fish have bitten on that bait already."

The powerful Government machine overhauled the Bakerstown Homicide Squad three miles out of the mining city. Larry throttled down, took the squad car's dust.

Three natives of the region and a pair of frightened kids were peering at the corpse in the ditch when the lawmen piled out of the machines.

Fowler reached the dead man first, dropped to his knees in the soft loam. He lifted widening eyes to Kendal.

"Speak of the devil and—Larry, this is Al Hugo! Scar from left temple down to the lobe of the ear. The big shot must have come out here on business—"

Larry swore softly.

"Not Marston's—"

Dan shook his head, got up. "No. Hugo would be too big to play that end in a job! Look at that hole between his eyes. Looks as if a spike had been driven into his skull. It's the same kind of a wound we examined on a dead man in Bakerstown."

REGAN'S men worked swiftly. The medical examiner said that the man had been dead for almost thirty-six hours. A rifling of the dead underworld leader's clothes brought forth evidence of identity that was beyond question. Fowler found something in Hugo's clothes that rocked everyone there back on their heels. A gold piece. A twenty-dollar gold piece.

"The picture is pretty plain now," Fowler clipped, and he was building it with his alert mind's eye. "Those rats got Spangler's secret out of him. Hugo, in some way, was contacted by the ex-convict before he left prison. Ten to one Spangler's as dead as Hugo right now. Take a look at that map there. The bus route. Pencil ring around the town of LaRue."

Regan looked bewildered. Larry Kendal pointed to Hugo's shoes.

"Hugo wasn't walking around here," he said to Dan. "He was thrown out of a car. You can see tracks here where it swerved off the road a little. But look at that red clay on his feet."

Dan looked, and his gray eyes took on a grim triumphant consistency that Kendal knew well. The F.B.I. ace swept the immediate vicinity with those grim eyes and then got down low to study prints in the dirt near the road's edge.

"The car was traveling that way," Dan said, pointing down the road. "Little heaps of dirt thrown on either side of these tracks point the way the machine was traveling. Wheels travel

in the direction in which the soil is lifted. If it kept on going, that murder machine, it would go into the hills over there. I've got an idea it turned around and went the other way."

Chief Regan shook his head as Dan walked down the road to an opening in the rotting board fence.

"That's where it turned around, Larry," Dan said. "Prints of all four tires are in that soft mud. Take a close look. Two of them, the front tires had Fiskyear treads—new tires. That one there is different—so is the other. Crooks generally want good shoes when they go out on a job. They can't gamble on skids and blowouts."

Larry nodded. He knew as well as his superior that large municipal forces and especially state police always keep up to date with tire classifications. He knew that there were but one hundred different tire patterns in the motoring field.

Dan Fowler pointed.

"Larry, that tire mark there is mighty close to that old post. About one inch away. Obviously the fender had to hit it—the driver of that car was in one big hurry." He examined the post minutely and a tracing finger came in contact with the head of the old rusty nail. Larry watched him scrape rust off the nail and let the particles drop into a small envelope he had taken from his pocket. Chief Regan came up, queried with narrowing eyes:

"Find anything, Inspector?"

"Not sure," Dan hedged. "Well, I guess that's about all we can do here."

"Yeah. We'll take the stiff to the morgue. We know he was Hugo."

"When you get him into Bakerstown, get that little bullet out of his skull, Regan," Dan said. "It'll match one that's on its way to Washington. I'll have a look at it later."

REGAN hesitated, seemed to have a question on his lips. He turned and walked to the Bakerstown police car. A dead wagon came up and the body of Al Hugo was lifted into it. When Regan's rolling stock moved out of the place, Dan Fowler strode toward the big D.J. armored car.

"Here's where we test the efficiency

of this boiler, Larry. Get the plaster of Paris. There's water there in a big bottle. We want moulages of those prints. If a heavy storm should come up, they would be wiped out."

The plaster of Paris mixed, Larry sprayed the tire marks with shellac. The shellac dried quickly and over this Dan sprinkled talcum powder. Then the plaster of Paris was poured over it. Dan walked back to the car and turned on a light. He set up a folding bench and set a microscope on it. He was examining the particles scraped off the head of the nail when Larry joined him.

"When you scrape a fender against anything, some of the paint must come off," Dan grinned. "This microscopic diagnosis shows that this stuff is dark blue in spots. So there you have a blue car. If this was black paint, we'd be up against it because you know that some cars have black fenders and others colored bodies. But they don't paint fenders blue unless the body of the car is painted the same color. This paint looks pretty fresh, Larry."

"That's smart work, Dan," Larry said.

"I wouldn't say that. Science, Larry! Get that blue car and we'll go a step upward when we get this sample to Bakerstown for a microchemical analysis. Today you can definitely analyze even the smallest quantity of paint and trace it to its source. I would say that this car used on this job was freshly sprayed. There's no telling how many times its coat was altered. Crooks keep changing the identity of hot cars.

"So here we have a blue sedan. Criminals seldom have use for smaller models. A sedan with brand new Fisk-year tires on the front. A Dunlap on the right rear and a Fireling Type K on the left rear. Once we spot it, we can't miss it. I doubt if the crooks will bother to spray that fender mark. It will do them no good if they do, Larry."

Larry grinned, admiration for his superior written all over his lean face.

"It licks me, Dan, why those crooks keep trying to lick science—and your brains! I'll get those moulages aboard, Dan. This portable lab sure saves work. And it gives us privacy."

"That's the idea. When you're not even sure of your police—"

"I've got a sample of that clay from Hugo's boots," Larry said. "The big shot brought it from the place where he picked up that gold coin, I guess. It's the funniest looking mud I ever saw!"

Dan nodded, still thinking.

"Looks like some dirt I once saw near a mineral spring. A geologist would know if this stuff is unusual around here or not. If we have to, we'll send it to Denver. We've started, Larry. The crooks are getting careless, working too fast. And we'll get those murderous gold pirates soon, smash their crime ring!"

FIRES of indignation blazed in Larry's eyes as he carefully placed the moulages on a big folded blanket, covered them with the corners of the heavy material.

Dan Fowler touched a match to a cigarette, sucked sweet smoke into his lungs.

"Hugo, then, was Spangler's contact man," he observed. "He probably came out here and looked the ground over, figured the job was too big for him. Besides, he could not risk muscling in on the activities of this gang of gold thieves out here. Let's suppose he asked the big shot crook to go in on the job with him. It's more than plausible. There are big open spaces out here—Hugo didn't know this kind of the world. He knew the bus Spangler was to take to Chicago. He helped snatch him. Apparently Hugo and the leader of this bunch of killers could not agree on the split. There was trouble. You've seen Hugo. He got the short end both ways."

"Sounds logical, Dan. Hugo could not melt down a quarter of a million in gold without the necessary equipment, much less move the stuff with his Chicago gang."

"Hugo was shot by that devilish weapon we haven't classified yet," Fowler continued. "It has to be a small arm. Hugo, I'm sure, was shot up close, but that bullet did not begin to come out through the back of his skull. It's an ace-in-the-hole instrument—a weapon a man cannot see.

We'll spot it yet, feller. Find the place where these hellions are remelting gold bars and you'll find the same place where Spangler's gold will be put into bullion and sold to Uncle Sam for four hundred thousand."

"For a minute, when we saw Hugo's carcass," Larry said, "I thought your ruse had borne fruit, Dan."

"I'm sure it will yet," Dan said. "We're through here, Larry. Let 'er roll."

CHAPTER VIII

The Big Fish Bite



DUSK settled over Bakerstown. Evening newshawkers blared out an extra. "Chica-a-go Gang Le-e-e-eader fo-o-ound sla-a-ain! Ux-x-x-xtra-a-a-a! Hugo's body fo-o-ound!" their shrill voices declared.

In a small room of a second-rate hotel on Bakerstown's west end, a tall, cadaverous-faced man paced the floor. Beads of sweat glistened on his face. An ash-tray near the phone was heaped with cigar butts. His unnaturally-bright harassed eyes kept straying to that phone. When it finally rang, he fairly leaped toward it.

"Yes, yes—hello!" he began.

Into the receiver pressed hard against the ear of the man in the dingy hotel room, came a fast burst of words.

"You can see a sign from your window there," the voice said. "A neon sign. And you know the name that's flashing through those tubes. Well, if we are not careful, it won't be there long. This man Fowler is a dangerous person to us. I've studied him closely and nothing in the world can buy him off. You don't buy G-men off. He knows about Sarnow, and if you haven't—"

"He's taken care of, Six," the occupant of the hotel room said hoarsely. "He'll never see a jail. But look here. You're crossing me. I've heard about Hugo, the coin found in his pocket. I

was not let in on that job. You've located Spangler's—"

"Shut up! I'm the boss and don't forget it. You'll get your share in due time, like everyone else. You sound as if you had lost your nerve. I have little use for men without nerves. Remember that. Remember that you're up against the toughest Federal crime-smasher that lives. We've got to work with even more finesse. Watch Fowler's every move. Sarnow—of course you've arranged his 'suicide'?"

"I carried out your orders, Six. They'll never prove anything else. Say, your voice sounds—"

A breathless silence followed. Then— "There will be a meeting tomorrow night. You are aware of the time and place. You'd better be there to insure against my crossing you!" The words coming through space were charged with venom, a grim warning.

"Forget it, Six. I can't afford to take the chance. I'll be of more use to you here."

A silky laugh came over the wires.

"I am sure you will. Good night," the mysterious Six said ominously.

The man hung up the phone in the hotel room, took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his steaming face. He left the hotel ten minutes later, walked northward on Bakerstown's main street. A sign up ahead mocked him. It said CARRADINE'S.

IN his palatial home a mile from Bakerstown, Frank Rothwell sat talking with Stacey Blane. The president of the Midas mine seemed to have aged ten years in the past twenty-four hours. The dude rancher watched him narrowly.

"What's troubling you, Frank?" he said softly.

Rothwell got up, slammed a newspaper to the floor.

"It's this whole nasty mess, Stace. Sooner or later it will blow wide open. That man Fowler is the kind that never lets go once he gets a hold on something. Names of people you and I know will be dragged in the mud. People we put in high offices. The finger of suspicion will point at me. At you, Stace! I can't afford to—"

"You're worrying over nothing,"

Blane said, taking a drink of whiskey out of the glass at his elbow. "You're prominent politically, yes. The citizens of this city certainly can't expect you to sit at an office holder's elbow every minute of the day to see if he is performing his duties according to the law books. Sit down, man, and have a drink."

"Sure, Stace. It's these killings, these gold robberies that have me unnerved. We can't afford this drain on our company. The stockholders—well, you know how the word is spreading. Read the papers. Bakerstown, a cesspool of crime. You heard Fowler at that meeting. He suspects us all, Blane! The Department of Justice is a ruthless—"

"Law officers," the rancher smiled, studying the glass he held up before him, "are mechanical men in a sense. Their psychology is understandable. Everyone is a potential criminal in their minds when they start out to break a case."

Rothwell took a deep breath and sat down.

"Maybe you're right, Stace. How about staying on for awhile tonight? Get up a game of bridge. My wife—Jack—we'll make a foursome—"

"Shouldn't, Frank," Blane argued. "But if it'll help you lose your jitters, I'll stay for three or four hours!"

THERE was a big parking space in back of Carradine's establishment. It was dimly lighted. Dan Fowler had noticed it earlier in the day, knew that it could hold a hundred cars. He had kept it in mind. The F. B. I. ace called Washington in Regan's office. The Director informed Dan that firearm experts were puzzled over the missile he had sent them.

"They agree that it was fired from a very small short-barreled pistol, Dan," the chief of the Federal bureau said. "But there is no record of such a gun as far as they can see. Looks as if we will have to check with Forrester in London. He's the world's foremost authority on firearms past and present. I have a trans-Atlantic call going through, Dan."

"I picked another one of these

queer bullets out of Al Hugo," Dan said. "Whoever handles such a weapon is a treacherous snake. This case is big, but we're making progress, Larry and I. There is no doubt but what these crooks have located Spangler's gold cache. I'm certain it was the same gang behind these other outrages. Gold is heavy stuff and can't be moved like feathers, Chief. The man directing these jobs has a powerful organization. But we've been up against crime trusts before, and we've smashed them. They're beginning to slip in spots—"

"You'll get them, Fowler," the Director said. "You've got a smarter organization backing you up. It's never been licked yet. Good luck, Inspector, and keep driving!"

Dan and Larry walked out of Regan's office just in time to hear the desk sergeant call out: "What's that? Suicide at Rockmount and School Street? I'll send men right over there. Don't touch a thing, ma'am."

Dan jerked at Larry's sleeve.

"Go over there with Regan's men. We can't overlook a bet. Sometimes suicides prove to be murders. I've set a trap and anything dead in this town might have sprung it! I'm taking a look around Carradine's. I want to watch the cars there, Larry. Meet you here in a couple of hours."

"Right, Dan. Keep your eyes peeled. I don't like the feel of this burg tonight."

From an areaway, two men watched Inspector Dan Fowler leave the Bakerstown police station. They slipped out of the shadows and walked along in his wake. They stopped in the lee of a darkened shoemaker's shop when Dan angled across the street and approached Carradine's seething pleasure palace.

The F. B. I. man saw a long, sleek limousine slide through the gate of the parking area. Dan's grim face twisted a little.

"Big shot, whoever he is," he muttered, and walked past the place. He did not stop until he was three blocks away. In the light of a street lamp he looked at his watch. Nine o'clock. The parking space should be well filled in another fifteen minutes. So far the signs showed that Carradine

was going to have a big night. Over in a small poolroom, two men sat near the window, their hard eyes keeping watch on Fowler.

"Wonder what is on that G-man's mind?" a spotter bit out.

"Casing that hot spot. Must be lookin' for somebody." He laughed jerkily. "If it's Joe Sarnow—"

"Would that be a laugh!"

TIME dragged. Dan retraced his steps and turned in through the gate of the parking lot. Music was boiling out of Carradine's. The clatter of kitchen-ware broke and ran through the sounds of revelry as Dan made his way through the narrow lanes between rows of parked cars.

The attendant loomed up in front of him, a bulky man wearing a uniform and a visored cap.

"Lookin' for somethin', Mister? Your car? What was it—"

Dan Fowler held his badge of authority close to the questioner's eyes. This changed his tune.

"You stick close to me," Dan said icily. "Walk just a little ahead."

"Yeah—but there's cars comin' in, copper. I got a job—"

"The place is filled. You know that. No more cars could get in here. Let's go."

The F. B. I. sleuth flashed the beam of a light on a row of cars. He was not aware of the pair of eyes that were pressed against the window on the second floor of the building housing Carradine's club. They fell away from it when Dan spotted a blue sedan and held the light on it. The word was passed along through Carradine's place.

Men got up from a table and left. Out of the poolroom across the street came Carradine's shadow men. They stopped, spoke hastily to a thin man who had hurried out of the night club. The white-shirted man stepped back to the sidewalk, addressed two others waiting there.

"Come on, we'll take him. He's trying to find a car there. If it's the one I think it is, that copper won't see the sunrise. How the devil did he get wise?"

"Shut up. Let's get started," the other said nervously.

FOWLER pointed to the vehicle. "Who owns this car?" he asked the attendant.

A swift inventory of it had proved beyond question that it had been the one from which Hugo had been thrown. The face of the uniformed man wore a startled look. The man's porcine eyes looked beyond Fowler and the G-man read a sinister warning in their depths. He whirled to see vague shadowy forms closing in on him. The attendant yelled, "Look out," and his heavy body crashed into the F. B. I. ace. Fowler crashed against the side of the blue sedan. A terrific blow caught him on the side of the head. Voices ripped through his waning consciousness, drifted into oblivion with him.

"All right. Get him in that car near the gate. You, Corri, you get rid of that sedan. This is where Fowler gets off. Hurry it up, his pal is not far away!"

When Dan regained his senses, he was lying on the floor of a car. The roar of a laboring engine, blended with the buzzing inside his head, aggravated the dull ache that seemed to have body inside his skull. The jolting car kept shifting his cramped body like a bag of grain and Dan knew he was being hauled over a rough road. Something pressed cruelly against his cheek and he slowly moved his hand toward the hard object. A rough voice froze his inching fingers.

"The G-rat's stirrin'."

"Yeah. But he's still out plenty. I put plenty behind that black jack. He won't remember his name for a while yet. Tough guy, is he? The great Inspector Fowler. They can all be stiffened."

Dan's brain was as clear as a bell. His recuperative powers had always been a source of wonder to his associates. His fingers moved again. Somebody in the car struck a match and the dark interior was suffused with light for several seconds. Dan lifted his head a trifle and he saw that his face had been pressed against a metal die. The raised letters spelled C-A-M— The light went out and Dan's fingers closed over the die.

The car's engine was thrown into second. Dan knew the road was going ever upward. He kept working the die farther under his body. When the car finally stopped, he had it in his pocket. A bleak smile bisected his face when rough hands yanked him off the floor. Dan wondered if this was to be the finale of his hectic career. He had thought that same thing many times before. There always had been a way out. But there was a law of averages. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Murder Signs



BACK in Bakerstown, Larry Kendal stood in a furnished room and looked at the body dangling from the end of a rope. Regan's men, policemen of the old school, immediately diagnosed the tragedy as suicide.

"There's the chair he kicked over," one pointed out. "He threw the rope over that steam pipe that runs along the ceiling and then tied it to the radiator. Neat job!" The coroner was inclined to agree.

"Don't cut him down," Larry said. "I'm not convinced. Name was York, was it? Ray York. Foreman at the Midas mine. He's F. B. I. business, gentlemen."

The medical examiner sniffed.

"Let him have his way," he said. "After all, we must cooperate with Uncle Sam."

Larry grinned coldly, got up on a table and reached up to the steam pipe. He examined the rope fibers and his lean jaws became set. The strands were pulled upward. If York had kicked the chair over, his body would have been pulled downward and the rope fibers would have been pulled in the same direction.

Larry knew that the body had been pulled up. He jumped down from the table, eyed the men that stood there with a trace of disdain in his usually mild eyes.

"York was murdered," he announced grimly. He ignored the resultant verbal skepticisms, yanked the chair from where it had fallen on the floor, studied the wooden seat, then took hold of a slowly swinging boot.

"York was never standing on that chair," Larry pointed out. "There are heavy nails in his shoes. There are no marks of them on the wood of the chair seat. A man about to die, if he stood on the chair with a rope around his neck, would be standing tense. Those shoe nails of his would have bitten deep. York did not kill himself."

A plainclothes man looked at the chair, then at Kendal.

"Say, you've got somethin' there!"

"More than you think," Larry mumbled cryptically. "Once we get this body down to the morgue, I'm going to make a little experiment." He could see Dan Fowler back there at the meeting in the mine office when the ace of Federal men had thrown a bombshell.

An hour later, York's corpse lay on a slab in the Bakerstown morgue. Larry called Willet, the super of the Granada mine at Elion, and asked the man to come to police headquarters as soon as he could get away. Larry went out to the D. J. car and opened a small metal box. He took a pair of spectacles and a false mustache out of the make-up kit.

When Willet of the Granada arrived, Larry took him to the morgue and pointed to the body of York. The face of the dead man was still terribly discolored. But Larry had prepared for that. He had removed white light bulbs in the bleak room and had replaced them with blue ones.

The super looked at the dead face wearing the glasses and the false mustache.

"Yeah. I've seen that face before, Kendal. In my office. Talked with that man for fifteen minutes. I remember that long nose and those glasses—that's the crooked salesman that come in that day—that's him!"

LARRY KENDAL'S lips curled. "Daniel Fowler will be interested," he said to no one in particular.

"The rats that strung York up should have taken that two hundred dollars from his pocket. But they had to work fast. Where would a mine foreman get that kind of dough? Regan, I'm going out to look for Fowler. I know he'd like to look at the killer of Bill Marston, G-man. Now I know why he sent me out to look at a suicide!"

Kendal lost Dan's trail at Carradine's. He went inside the place, was allowed to pass through the roaring night spot. He saw no sign of his superior. Over at a table close to the circular dance floor he saw two familiar



faces. Rothwell and Stacey Blane. Blane's glance clashed with his momentarily and the rancher nodded jerkily, resumed his conversation with a beautifully clad woman.

Larry threaded his way through the maze of tables, came to an exit screened by heavy rich portières. A man in evening clothes barred his way. Larry gave the attendant a quick glance at his badge, kept on going. On the other side of the hangings loomed a flight of heavily carpeted stairs. A man came down then. He was tall and loosely built, clad in full dress.

"This is a Federal man, boss," a voice behind Larry purred.

Larry Kendal knew that he was looking at Carradine. The man's eyes were small and sunken inside his long equine head. Larry thought they were made of the same glass stuff that goes into the eyes of toy animals. Carradine smiled warily. "And what brings you here—er—"

"Special Agent Kendal. Inspector Fowler came over here some time ago. Have you seen him?"

Carradine shook his head. Larry tried to read the thoughts behind the

CHAPTER X

Village of Ghosts

bony pale face, but Carradine's eyes were as expressionless as the studs on his shirt front. A sinister quality seemed to charge the unhealthy atmosphere of the place and strike against Kendal's sensibilities. At that moment, he would have bet his life that Carradine was lying. The tension in that little anteroom was not a natural thing.

"If you do not mind," Larry said, "I'll keep looking around."

"This is an exclusive establishment, Kendal," Carradine said. "I have very prominent people here who do not wish to be disturbed. I am not used to having police here—"

"No doubt," Kendal said, sarcastically. "There is an exit to the parking lot in the back here, I believe?"

Carradine gestured with a long pasty hand.

"Keep on going straight ahead, Kendal. You cannot miss it."

LARRY walked out of Carradine's, found himself in a great yard choked with cars. Two men were busily shifting several of them around. The special agent walked over to a big black sedan that was slowly being backed into a cramped space. Larry got on the running board, spoke to the driver.

"Somebody left early, huh?"

The face under the visored cap assumed a vague expression of wariness.

"Yeah, mister. People sometimes go home. Who are you?"

"F.B.I."

"Oh. Lookin' for somebody?"

"Yeah. Inspector Fowler. He was here awhile ago."

"Funny, I didn't see anybody."

Larry Kendal dropped off the running board lest he get the skin scraped off his back. Sober reflection was cooling his blood, sending little prickly sensations along his scalp. He walked away from there, circled the block several times. There was no sign of Dan. He hovered near the gate of the parking lot for another half hour. Once he stooped down and picked up a cigarette butt. The brand Dan smoked. Larry, his eyes hard, went back to where the big super car was parked in the police garage.



NIGHT spread its sable blanket over the goldfields, over the rough country stretching out for miles and miles in four directions. The shadows crawled into a ghost town thirty miles westward where a cluster of decaying frame

dwellings, fouled with dust and crumbling with the rot of time, huddled at the end of an unbeaten road in the foothills between the Rockies and the Sangre de Christo range.

Doors swinging on rusty hinges made spine-chilling eerie sounds when gusts of wind stirred them. Broken windows looked like the half-closed eyes of giant monsters where the remaining glass stood out against the darkness behind uncovered openings. That which once had been a busy little street was overgrown with foxtail, galatea grass and weeds. Now nothing but rats darted in and about the place.

Plaintive whispers as of stalking specters rose up each time the wind passed through the deserted town. It was a creepy place where a man could most certainly hide away from the world for an indefinite period of time, where he could be hidden for months on end or in which he could be quietly removed from the realm of the living if an enemy so decreed.

Within the four weathered and warped walls of a deserted shack there was a dim light. Its feeble rays did not penetrate the slatted blinds that had been drawn to and carefully slanted downward.

On the second floor of that isolated and deserted house Dan Fowler, Inspector of the F. B. I., glared at his captors. Dried blood had matted his rumpled hair and his face was streaked with dirt. His clothes were rumpled and soiled, his shoes scuffed and dusty. The knuckles of one of his bound hands were raw as the result of a blow that he had managed to crash into the

face of the gangly, ratty-eyed man who lolled back in a chair near a rusty old iron safe.

The place, Dan knew, had once been an office. An old desk, much scratched, stood in one corner of the room. Yellowed papers littered the grimy floor. An old-fashioned paper press stood on top of an outmoded filing cabinet and on a rickety shelf attached to the wall stood a dusty demijohn.

"It won't hurt none, copper," one of his captors said with a crooked grin. "They'll never pick up enough of ya to piece together. You been lookin' for gold, Fowler? Ha, we got some here. You can do a lotta things with that stuff besides buyin' whiskey an' glad rags for dames. The boss figured this out. He knows as much an' maybe more than you dirty lawmen, Fowler."

"You won't get away with it," the F. B. I. man bit out tensely. He was watching with feverish eyes the preparations the loose-lipped, bow-legged man and two others of his captors were making to send him into eternity. "There'll be a dozen more agents of the Federal Bureau here in no time. They'll hunt you rats down into your holes until there won't be one of you left to nibble at their rat poison!"

"CAN the chatter, Fowler. You're gonna join the ghosts that haunt this place. Only once in awhile people come here—not often. No, Fowler, this ain't the boss' real hide-out. He wouldn't want to mess it up with your carcass, would he? This is just one of the spots he has filed away inside his head where he can get rid of a guy he don't like. Sometimes nobody comes here for months. An' if anybody should happen to hear this place blow up, huh! Somebody's always blowing up somethin' in this gold country."

"I still say you scum won't get away with it!" Fowler said, his spine crawling.

"That's what you think! See this stuff, Fowler? It's fulminating gold—auric oxide, the boss said. Ya treat it with strong ammonia to make a black powder, an' when it's dry it can

be set off by heatin' it to a hundred an' forty-five degrees Fahrenheit. This nice little brazier of coal is gettin' hot, Mister G-man. We put the little keg of powder right here near the desk where ya can't reach it.

"This piece of galvanized iron holds the powder right over the brazier an' that's goin' to get plenty hot, too. Before all that coal burns up it's goin' to get hot enough to blow ya to hell, Fowler! You can't move an inch because that swivel chair you're tied in is nailed to the floor. The boss don't take no chances. That's why we got this thermometer hitched onto that brazier. When it climbs to a hundred, we get out. It's ninety now, copper. Interestin', ain't it?" He laughed with sadistic mirth.

"Come on, Mitch," one of the murderous crew barked suddenly. "Let's start now. I ain't takin' no chance that—"

"Okay, the brazier is red hot. Inspector Fowler went to the ghost town and poked around and got blown up! The killer orated the F. B. I. man's scheduled death notice, his loose lips drawn up at one corner in fiendish enjoyment of his job.

Dan Fowler had been close to death many times during his turbulent career as a manhunter for Uncle Sam. Always his shrewd brain had succeeded in conjuring up a loophole through which he had managed to slip. His remarkably observant mental faculties already had begun to absorb every detail of the place. Well aware that the abandoned office was the place intended for his removal, he overlooked not the slightest item worth noticing.

And even as the intended killers had been rigging up their devilish contraption, the G-man had grasped at a possible reprieve from swift and violent death. The obvious nervousness of the men in the place was a vital factor in his favor. He was certain that they would be afraid to wait until the little red line in the thermometer should hit a hundred. He figured that the heat in the brazier would reach the height of its fury then but that the little line would climb slower.

"Bye 'bye, Fowler," the tall man

with the split gory lip sneered. "Have a nice trip."

THE four men hurried out of the place then, slamming the door behind them. A few moments later the G-man heard the engine of a car turn over. He heard gears mesh and the roar of a motor competing with ribald laughter. Yellow rats! Their cowardice was giving Dan Fowler a slim chance—slim, but a chance, nevertheless.

The G-man squirmed in the swivel chair and the back of it struck against the wall. The whole place seemed to quake with the impact, so flimsy was it after years of neglect. Dan saw the water in the big demijohn splash up against the heavy glass. Bound as he was, his efforts were painful and slow. Squirming and jerking at his bonds, he kept his feverish eyes on the thermometer that kept climbing, climbing, nearing one hundred degrees!

Sweat trickled down his face and it seemed as though his lungs were filled with infinitesimal needles that tortured him with every breath. Suddenly he heard a snap and his bound frame went over backward. He struck hard against the wooden boards of the floor and the whole tacky house trembled violently.

The demijohn on the shelf over the desk teetered then righted itself. Still helpless, bound to the broken swivel chair, Dan Fowler shifted his body with a tremendous effort and then fell heavily against the wall again. This time the demijohn toppled from the shelf and went crashing down to break up against the corner of the desk. Water splashed over glowing coals and steam hissed and curled toward the cobwebby ceiling.

Dan Fowler laughed a little insanely. There had not been enough water completely to douse the fire in the brazier, but he knew that the heat beneath the powder had been checked to such an extent as to give him precious extra moments of life. The back of the old chair was steadily giving way under his painful contortions and twistings. A wooden arm came out of its socket and his bonds loosened.

With the torturing knowledge that his would-be executioners might be hovering not far from the ghost town in wait for the expected explosion, Dan fought with every shred of power he could muster from his weary body to get freed of the ropes that bound him. Teeth gritted, and getting leverage by bracing his feet against the wall, he slowly pulled his arms free.

Dan's wrists were raw and bleeding and he had drawn blood from his lips with the pressure of his strong teeth, but he was free. Wild exultation warmed him, sent hot blood through his cramped muscles. He leaned against the shabby old desk and panted from his exertions. Then he gathered himself together, lunged forward and kicked at the legs of the brazier. The powder keg toppled to the floor and rolled into a corner.

Dan stumbled across the room, leaned heavily against an old battered desk. He stayed there until the blood ran warm once more through his seemingly tireless frame. His eyes were fixed on the rotting dusty floor and the sickly light from a sputtering saucer of tallow played on some of the old papers that had been scattered there.

EVERY sense alert for signs of life out there in the eerie town, Dan stooped and picked up one of those gaudily engraved papers. They were stock certificates, each representing ten shares in the Utopian Mining Company. There was a man's signature on the one he held. The writing had faded but was still entirely legible. It was strange handwriting and it was that fact that prompted Dan to pick several others up and cram them in his pockets.

Dan Fowler knew that the past reaches out sometimes to point a long accusing finger at a man who lives in the present with a conscience that refuses to rest. Mining men generally remain mining men. There would be old settlers in Bakerstown who could tell about the Utopian Mining Company. There was a possibility that they would remember the man that had put his name to those certificates.

Dan remembered something then.

A steel die that hung heavily in the inside pocket of his coat. He brought it to light, examined it hurriedly, for he knew he had to get out of there. There would be killers out there in the dark, waiting—waiting for the sound of an explosion. The raised letters on the die were CAMEO MINE TINMAN COL.

Dan pocketed the die and moved out of the place that had nearly sealed his doom. His wide mouth was warped with an icy smile and there was grim reprisal in his wide-set gray eyes. The hot gold gang had struck, had won a point. Dan knew that the blue sedan would be a heap of black and twisted steel by morning.

But had they won?

Inspector Dan Fowler had seen the faces of two of those men that had brought him out of Bakerstown before. Kel Burrage, fugitive from justice. Wanted in connection with jewel smuggling in New York. And Mitch Younger. At large from San Quentin after cutting a thirty-year stretch short by murdering a guard. Dan had given no indication that he had recognized those men, knowing that if he had, his death would have been more surely insured. Big underworld names in their own right, men such as Hugo, Burrage and Younger had been taking orders from someone else.

That man had to be a powerful brainy individual, Dan realized. He went out into the ghost town, walking slowly, eyes shifting from side to side. The shadows seemed to crawl. He swung around the corner of an old shed where the weeds and grass were slimy with dew.

Dan stiffened. A man loomed up in front of him so close he could see the startled expression in a pair of beady evil eyes. The G-man recovered swiftly from shock, drove a hard fist flush against the prowler's jaw. A gun dropped in the weeds and the F. B. I. ace snatched it up, fell sideward. A shot blasted the silence to shreds and Dan felt the windrip of it against his face.

Splinters flew from the side of the shack and he felt one bite deep into his cheek. He saw the masked man who

had fired that shot even as he went to his knees. Standing fifty yards away, his mammoth figure was silhouetted against the moonlight.

Dan fired, and then the world broke up all around him.

THE masked man on the knoll cursed, turned and reeled down the slope that led to the woods that formed a half moon around the forgotten gold town. The man Dan had struck got up near the shed, took one look at the prostrate G-man and ran raggedly across the clearing.

His bared white teeth were bloody and he spat out:

"Should of plugged him in the first place. Dirty copper!"

Reaching the car, the man Dan had slugged ripped out, "We better make sure, boss. He takes a lot of killin'—"

Six's face—the part that showed behind the mask he wore—was gray. Rage burned in his slant eyes.

"Get in, you fool. You bungled one job tonight. Too bad that G-man didn't break your neck. We're getting away from this place. They won't find him—not enough of him to worry about. The buzzards will get him."

The masked man felt of his leg, sat back against the leather of the car seat. He gritted his teeth spoke confidently to himself: "I never missed a man at that distance."

Dan sat up, felt tenderly of his head. He wondered how much a man's skull could stand before it stopped working for keeps.

Blood fouled his fingers and he traced a bullet burn along the side of his head with a forefinger.

"A little closer and it would have cracked this head of mine," he grimaced, rising unsteadily to his feet. He headed out of the ghost town. "Wonder if that was the big shot. No pop-gun he had—a real he-man's gun." Dan kept his thinking inside his head as he kept groping his way downhill, his gun held ready, pausing sporadically to listen to night sounds. It was a wild place. But a car had brought him in there. There had to be a road. He walked in a wide circle before he found it and staggered along its rutted bed.

CHAPTER XI

Grim Enigma

LARRY KENDAL drove into Bakers-town three hours after midnight. His young, lean face was grave. Fatigue was not all that took a lot of brightness out of his eyes. He and Dan had been through a lot of danger together. They

were closer than most brothers. Larry got out of the D.J. car, walked to the hotel where he and Dan made their headquarters. He had combed the country within a radius of eighty miles but it seemed as if Dan Fowler had been swallowed up by the bleak rugged terrain. Larry wondered if he had not been.

The thought drove through his heart like a cold blade and he vowed that he would tear Bakerstown to bits if Dan Fowler had gone the way of a dozen other lawmen that had tried to drag the goldfield gang out of their holes. Larry tried to sleep but he tossed fitfully in his bed. At dawn he was up, put on his clothes hurriedly and went to police headquarters. He wandered around the place until nine o'clock, impatient.

One of Regan's men called to him from the door leading to the rogue's gallery. The man handed Larry a cook's pedigree. "Been working on these things since seven this morning, Kendal. Take a look at the guy you thought was Ray York. His name's Sarnow. We've checked on his prints. And that is not all—the prints on the card you got off that satin dress. Chug Tremper belongs to them, but we've known the guy around this town for six years as Tom Lacey. He drives Strawn's car. The banker—"

Larry, despite the concern that was hollowing him out inside, grabbed the records from the Bertillon expert's shaking fingers. Larry Kendal was first of all a Federal man. Sentiment was the one thing that was of little use

to the F. B. I. Men of Kendal's calling walked hand in hand with death every day. There was a long list of names back in Washington. Names of men like Dan Fowler. . . .

"You sure of that?" Larry said. "Regan know—"

"Not yet—"

"Keep it under your hat until I've got this Lacey where I want him for kidnaping. Chug Tremper, once a member of Frazetti gang. Convictions—two. State prison, Ohio—two years. Five years in Joliet. Released four years ago. And Sarnow—wanted back in Massachusetts for the murder of a customs officer. Fowler's work, all of it. Somebody walked into a nice little trap—"

"He sure did, Larry!"

Kendal spun around. Dan's voice was sweet against his ears. Larry ran toward him, caught him by the arm. Dan's clothes were torn and muddy and dried blood was smeared over his face. The ace of the F. B. I. was smiling with his lips but his eyes were as cold as two chips of steel.

"They nearly got me too, feller. Pull that chair up for me. I've had a rough night."

"You haven't been to no taffy pull," Larry admitted, a glad singing in his heart. "You need a doctor and some sleep. You're going to take both or I'll take a crack at you myself."

DAN slept in the hotel until three that afternoon. He got up, felt of the bandage on his head and yelled for Larry. He put a call through for police headquarters. The desk sergeant told him that Kendal was over at the Leadville Federal Building, told him that the special agent had made an arrest, that the whole town was boiling. Dan banged the phone down, hurried into his clothes.

In Leadville, Larry had Lacey arraigned before the United States Commissioner. Lacey stood before the stern silvery-haired man a trifle bewildered. Larry read from a paper of particulars and when he was finished, the commissioner asked Tom Lacey alias Chug Tremper if he had anything to say.

"Not until I see a lawyer."

The commissioner smiled very drily.

"Mr. Kendal, you'll have this prisoner arraigned before me—er—say day after tomorrow. I will not be able to manage a formal hearing until then." He turned toward a sheriff, said: "Lock him up. Put bail at fifty thousand!"

A steel door clanged behind Tom Lacey a few moments later. Dan Fowler walked into the little cell block and flashed a wide cold grin at Larry.

"Have a look, Dan," the special agent said: "There's the hot shot who left his marks on a girl's arm. Chug Tremper himself!"

Dan Fowler peered in at the prisoner. Lacey's bravado had fallen away from him. He sat loosely on a small bunk, his head dropped in his hands. The ace of the F. B. I. waved Larry out of the cell room. Outside he said: "He'll start talking after he has a chance to think things over. Good work, Larry. He worked with quite a bunch of rats. I've had a look at Mitch Younger and Kel Burrage. There'll be an alarm sent out for those two guys right away. Yes, Larry, we're fighting a bunch of crooks that have had plenty of experience."

"Sarnow was the name of the suicide I helped cut down last night, Dan," Larry said. "He was murdered. Went under the name of Ray York and he has a record. Willet of the Granada identified him as Marston's killer. What does that tell you?"

Fowler's eyes flickered with a sudden cold light.

"It tells me plenty, Larry. They fell for that ruse of mine. Five men were at that meeting in Rothwell's office when I made the statement that I had Marston's murderer dead to rights. I've been waiting for this. One of those men sitting in on that meeting is either the brains of this rotten racket out here or he knows the man who is.

"And consider these facts. Strawn's chauffeur is an ex-convict. Sarnow or York was foreman at Rothwell's mine. I tagged that blue sedan with the nail rip along its left rear fender and then the lights went out. Somebody watched every move I made last night. Somebody in Carradine's was tipped off that I was in that parking lot.

Well, I found more than the sedan last night, Larry."

"There was a lot of excitement in Bakerstown when I took Lacey out of his rooming house," Larry commented. "I'll bet that phones are still buzzing. Strawn threatened to fight me tooth and nail. But when I showed him Lacey's prints, his mug on the rogue's gallery file, he folded like a pricked balloon. He—"

A DEPUTY called to the G-men. "Come in here quick. Lacey wants to talk. He's scared out of his shirt!"

Dan and Larry went back into the cell room. Lacey alias Tremper was gripping the bars of the cell door as if he sought to pull them loose from their moorings. His face was white and beaded with sweat.

"Listen, Inspector! You got to give me a break. I was goin' straight—yeah. Until that rat Corri spotted me in Strawn's car. Then I had to go in with—"

"Corri?" Fowler fairly yelled. "Then he's in this too! Big Jim Corri. Go on, Lacey—"

"Listen—you got to keep me here. If they bail me out, I'll be filled full of lead. I demand protection. I'm a witness. They can raise fifty g-grand in fifty seconds. I got a chance to beat a death rap if I get into court, Fowler. It's murder if you turn me over to—"

"Sure," Dan said. "I'll talk to the commissioner, Chug. You want to stay in jail. We'll arrange for that." An exultant grin on his face, the Inspector hurried out of the cell room.

An hour later, Dan Fowler was back in Bakerstown and he and Larry worked swiftly. Rothwell and Blane and Silas Strawn came into police headquarters and sought out the man that was slowly but surely driving toward the core of crime gripping the gold-fields. Dan swung around in his chair when the three entered the room. His eyes studied their nervousness for a moment before he spoke.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Dan said a little coldly. "What can I do for you?"

"There must be a mistake, Inspector," Strawn said irritably. "Lacey

was the best chauffeur I ever had. Honest and dependable. For the last four years—"

"A man's fingerprints never change, Strawn. So there can be no mistake. Sit down, gentlemen."

A pause fraught with terrific tension followed Fowler's words. Stacey Blane jerked a long brown cigar from the breast pocket of his rich tweed coat, shoved it into his mouth. He saw that the wrapper had been torn and he threw it into a basket near Fowler's desk.

"It's unbelievable, Inspector," Rothwell muttered.

"A lot of things around this city are."

Dan countered. "Sarnow was a foreman at your mine. Sarnow killed a Federal agent, Marston. The rats who rubbed Sarnow out tried to make it look like suicide. Science proved otherwise, Rothwell. If I am not mistaken, there were only five men who knew that I had the goods on Marston's killer. Or thought I had. That was a bluff, gentlemen. I had no idea who killed him!"

Stacey Blane, after the shot had struck home, got half out of his chair. "Look here, Inspector! You are suggesting that one of the five that sat in on that meeting the other day is a dangerous criminal? That Rothwell here—Strawn—Lamphier or myself had Sarnow—"

"I HAVE made no accusation. But it is a strange coincidence that Marston's murderer was destroyed a few hours later," Dan ground out. He watched the faces of the three men covertly, studied their subtle actions. He went on. "Last night, an attempt was made on my life when I spotted a certain blue sedan that was parked behind Carradine's. It was the sedan I had traced by gleaning certain evidence at the scene of the killing of Al Hugo. The cold-blooded devil that has robbed mines of thousands of dollars worth of bullion is around here, and I'm going to get him, gentlemen, if I have to raze this municipality, tear it out by the roots!"

"We're behind you, Fowler!" Frank Rothwell's hearty voice boomed out. Silas Strawn's hands shook as he

pushed back his chair.

"Walls have ears, Fowler," Blane said. "Someone outside Frank Rothwell's office might have been tipped off. It places us in a very embarrassing position, to say the least."

"If you would remain here a few moments, Rothwell," Fowler said, "I would like to talk to you alone."

The president of the Midas mine stared into space.

"Very well, Inspector," he said impassively.

"I'll wait outside in the car, Frank," Blane said.

Dan Fowler's nerves strummed a little when Strawn and Blane left the room. When they had been gone more than a minute, Dan took a long envelope from his pocket, drew out of it the time-worn certificates he had found in the ghost town. He shoved one toward Frank Rothwell.

"You've been in this mining game for many years, Mr. Rothwell," Dan said. "What can you tell me about the Utopian Mine?"

Kendal thought that the massive hulk of the man across the table twitched slightly. Rothwell's mouth tightened as if he strove to mask emotions that had been suddenly stirred.

"Utopian— Yes, I recall, Inspector. A swindle. Two men convicted under the Blue Sky Law. The mine was salted. A man—Richard Duane, was convicted, sent to Leavenworth for several years. His partner—I do not recall his name, Fowler. He got away." Rothwell thought for several seconds, dug the tips of his fingers into the furrows of his forehead. "Yes, there was a strange angle to the case—it happened over twenty years ago—the details are hazy in my mind. Those people, victims of the swindle, received sums of money in the mails. After Duane had completed his term."

"Strange," Fowler said. "Apparently a man's conscience proved hard to live with. This man Duane—his writing is unusual, Rothwell."

The president of the Midas admitted that it was. He waited for further questions, his face oozing perspiration despite the cool breeze that came in through the open window. But Inspector Fowler cut him short.

"That's all, Mr. Rothwell—and thank you."

When Rothwell had taken his leave, Dan eyed Larry with a vague light of triumph in his wide-set eyes.

"THEY'RE getting worried, now, Larry. We've got Tremper. Every law officer from here to the Pacific, from coast to coast, is on the watch for Burrage and Younger. The big shot has lost some big henchmen and he's going to make a move before long that will trip him up. We've got a lot of work to do. This hundred dollar bill that came out of Sarnow's pocket had a piece of paper pasted across it where it was torn. There's a print on that paper, barely visible. It could be Sarnow's. Then again, it could belong to the man who paid Sarnow off."

"We know that Bakerstown holds a man, perhaps several men who are connected with the crime ring. I'm sending to Leavenworth for the record of this man Duane. A newspaper file will tell us who the other man was. They may not be connected in any way with this case but the chances are that they might be.

"It is possible that Rothwell could be robbing his own mine. He could collect insurance on those stolen shipments and still be in possession of the bullion. It would be a profitable business. Strawn himself, a director in the Midas mine, could be put down as a possible suspect. Lamphier became rich in office. A man known to be bankrupt when—"

Larry Kendal saw Dan's eyes drop a little, followed the course of his superior's eyes. Dan appeared interested in the papers that had been thrown in the waste basket.

"Our deductions could be all wrong," Dan continued. "Kel Burrage is no small man. He could have been the guy that nearly blew my brains out last night. Burrage has a reputation of being an organizer, a mighty thorough devil that seldom leaves a trademark. Yet he did not make sure of me. The man was about Rothwell's build, dressed in clothes that would certainly be out of place in Carradine's. Black, wide-brimmed hat. Pants rolled up

over his boots. Reminded me of a heavy in a horse opera—"

"Rothwell's no parlor pet," Kendal grimly quipped. "He has skin on his face as tough as the leather in his shoes. You've seen those little white scars—"

Dan nodded.

"It doesn't seem to me that the big shot would risk being in that ghost town last night. It doesn't make sense. A man who could draw and shoot like that bird doesn't need a toy gun that shoots those slugs we dug out of Hugo and the mine truck guard. Westerners, some of them, can still handle a Colt!"

Daniel Fowler called the Denver field office of the F. B. I. He asked that a man be sent to Leavenworth at once to secure the prints of one Richard Duane. That much off his mind, he put a call through to Washington. The Director had received no word regarding the strange death-dealing missile that Dan and Larry had discussed a few minutes before.

"IT can wait," Fowler said. "We're uncovering some wolves wearing sheepskins out here. Hugo, Younger, Tremper, Sarnow and Kel Burrage. Tremper is in a Federal jail and I'm sure he will want to spill a lot when he's been cooling off there for another few hours. I'm betting that when we grab the king snake, the population of this whole county will need a pulmotor. When I get a man's record from Leavenworth, this case might be nearly broken!"

"I have had reason to believe," the Director said, and Fowler thought a chuckle punctuated his words, "that you have been getting places, Inspector. I have had complaints regarding your high-handed methods there, your insolvent disregard of high officials. You've been stepping on sensitive toes, Fowler." The chuckle that followed this time could not be mistaken. "Keep stamping on them, Dan. When a half a million dollars in gold is involved, I'm sure the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury will overlook those complaints. That's all the reprimand I have for you Inspector. Let them

have it!"

Dan Fowler indulged in a slow smile when he hung up the receiver.

"Green light ahead, Larry. All green lights."

CHAPTER XII

Six Strikes



HE windows of a big mine shed near the town of Tinman were dark. Moon shards driving through the dirty glass, brought little flashes of light from the metal parts of the stamp mill that stood in the center of the place. The

machine crushed the ore into pulp and this came out through screens in one side of the mortar. It flowed over sloping electro-silvered plates or tables the surfaces of which had been amalgamated by rubbing with quicksilver. It was the ancient pestle and mortar idea developed into an efficient modern machine. The stamp mill was not working. The shed was deserted.

A hundred yards away a watchman sat, drawing in on a blackened pipe. He seemed unaware of the shadowy figures that moved in the darkness behind the stamp mill shed. They seemed to become swallowed up there. In reality they were. Ten men went down through a glory hole near the shed and made their way to a great subterranean chamber near the big adit in which gold ore was dug.

A single light burned in the eerie place. From one corner of it came the roar of a smithy. Bellows whipped the fire to a white fury and molten gold bubbled in a fire-clay retort placed above it. On a heavy bench built against a shored wall, iron moulds were waiting for that bubbling liquid.

Six, a grim, masked figure, counted the men who came into the underground chamber. His avid eyes shone through the slits in the black cloth covering the upper part of his face. Little sweat globules were raised

on his bared swart features. He called off names as men took their places on a rough wooden bench. Burrage, Corri, Younger, Slyker. Six others had answered his summons. Then he watched the gold melting operations, gave instructions to the three men toiling near the smith. He ripped a piece of burlap off a pile of bars on the floor. The bars were shaped like long, thin loaves of bread.

Six, satisfied with developments, turned to his men, studied their faces closely. His eyes strayed to the hawk features of Burrage. Beside Burrage, Mitch Younger sat tense, his eyes dangerous. Six saw on all those faces a growing fear and he spat into the cold dirt at his feet.

"Your stomachs are curling up," he sneered. "That G-man has got you all licked! Take a look at that stuff in that retort. The bars on the floor. Are you going to let Inspector Fowler take it? Your share, you white-livered skunks? Not mine. I'll be spending some of that dough while Fowler rots in a grave. Yeah, Burrage. I always heard you were a hard guy. A cop killer! You sit there with the guts running out of you. The alarm is out for you and Younger! After the payoff tonight, you'll start running like a pair of whipped—"

Mitch Younger got off the bench.

"Wait a minute. Who do you think you are, Six! You bungled things last night. We had Fowler—"

A powerful fist crashed into Younger's face, sent him flying. He went over the bench, crashed against the wall.

"I bungled—" Six bit those words back. Rage bulged his slant eyes. He laughed madly. "Get up, Burrage, tough guy! Now the Gs won't recognize your face with half the teeth in it knocked out. Try and run, you and Younger, and I'll have men cut you down before you get a mile. I've got men that know these hills!"

"But Lacey, boss. If he talks—"

SIX swung his deadly glance toward the speaker.

"Lacey won't. He's half dead with fear now. I had a guy visit him. I told that guy to tell Chug that noth-

ing but an army tank could keep him away from lead if he opened his trap. They have to move him out of there, sooner or later. Fowler is clever, infernally clever, but he hasn't cracked the surface of this business yet. He's got names. He's got a couple of funny looking bullets—" Six laughed without moving his lips.

"The stuff in that retort there was taken from the Granada mine. I'm paying you off for that job tonight. Five hundred to each of you."

Greedy fingers reached for the money Six doled out. When the pay-off was over, Six addressed them again.

"Now listen to me," he said. "Fowler thinks we're playing our cards close to our chest. We hit that Ophir shipment two nights from now. Monday. It will be at the express office in Elion at nine o'clock. Train doesn't pull in there until ten. Seven men handle that job. Corri, you see that it goes smooth. And don't forget my orders. Shoot until you drop if a slip is made. Don't forget, I can turn you over to the authorities, any time. Most of you have got blood on your hands, and they have a gas chamber in this state. I saw a guy die in it once. He strangles to death. Don't let them kid you about that."

"It's dangerous, Six," Corri said. "Fowler never stops thinking. He smells a crook like a—"

"You heard me, Corri! You take Younger and Burrage. Pick the others yourself. Monday night. There's a hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of bullion waiting for us. Now start moving out of here."

Soon the underground smithy was deserted by all save Six. He stood there staring into the mouth of the tunnel through which his men had crawled. One hundred and fifty thousand. Six was thinking to himself and his thoughts were even more hellish than the white heat that struck against the bottom of the fire-clay retort.

He had a good decoy to lure G-men away from a quarter of a million now. A way to cut down his payroll, rid himself of men who were getting too hot.

Five miles away, in the old haunted stucco ruins, Six met a dozen men. They were of a different stamp than those he had talked to back in the mine. Their faces bore the tan of burning suns. They were outdoor men, wind-whipped and hardened to leathery toughness.

In one respect they were like those other men. Their eyes held a greediness, were clouded with that tense, wary expression one sees in the eyes of a hunted animal. Like a wolf pack, they were held together by a common bond. Unity was their strength. Take their leader away from them and they would become a lot of mad beasts that would tear each other to shreds. Scum of the badmen of the Rockies. Throwbacks from a day long past.

"IT is arranged for Monday night," Six said. "You all know your orders. Those big vans arrive in Bakerstown from Cheyenne. They are going to the Bar V ranch. Blane intends to ship some prize steers, a couple of wild broncs, in those vans. They're for the rodeo at Cheyenne on Friday. The G-men will get a tip-off on that Ophir raid. Fowler and that smart guy with him will gang that place with all the lawmen they can get together.

"You know that this is our last big job. We work it right and we'll be sitting pretty for a long time. We'll be shipping bullion to the mint for the next three years and it will be stamped proper and there will be no questions asked. I've planned this ahead. Nothing can stop me. I've seen the right people and it has cost me a lot of my bankroll."

"I get it," a tall, gangly man grinned, baring yellowed teeth. "Six, you're the smartest hombre in this man's country. Fowler—bah! He hasn't any more idea where that stuff is hid than—"

Six laughed demoniacally.

"If he looked for twenty years, he wouldn't find that coin," he said confidently. "Wonder if the guard sitting beside it is lonesome. All right, there's nothing more to say. You know what you have to do. Every last man of you. Well, what are you waiting for?"

HOURS later, the citizens of Bakerstown forgot the F. B. I. investigation for the moment.

Screaming headlines drew their interest. They had to do with gold and the precious metal, in one way or another, had affected their daily lives ever since Bakerstown had reached its present importance.

RICH VEIN DISCOVERED IN CAMEO HOLDINGS

State and Local Mining Authorities Confirm Findings of Superintendent Shawtell

Engineers Optimistic as to Potential Yield

Dan Fowler let his coffee get cold as he scanned the small type under the sub-head.

"Interesting, Larry," he said to the special agent sitting across the table. "The Cameo mine. There was a die in that sedan that gave Hugo his last ride. They use those things to stamp gold bars with. For identification. A crook having one in his possession—"

Kendal grimaced.

"Things are starting to add up."

Dan crumpled the paper up, left it on the table.

"That report from Leavenworth ought to be in my hands this afternoon, Larry. I'm banking on that thing. We'll take a look at Chug Tremper, see if he wants to talk. He's had time to think about the spot he's in. He might give us a line on the big boy."

Outside the hotel a big gray car drew up. Stacey Blane got out of it, glanced toward the Federal men. The chauffeur got out of his seat stiffly. Blane grinned, shoved him back.

"The next time you want to ride a bronc, Mercer," he said, "pick out one you're sure of." He nodded to Fowler. "Mercer here is a top rider. But I've got a horse out there nobody's broken yet. I'm going to Cheyenne. You ought to knock off for a day and get a look at that Sky-High stampede. All work and no play—"

"Maybe I will," Dan grinned, and walked toward the super car.

On the way to Leadville, Dan checked up on the alibis of the various suspects.

"Blane and Rothwell were in Bakerstown the night I got the ride," he told Larry. "I've made sure of that. Strawn couldn't fit into the clothes of that big gunman who nearly stopped me. Lamphier was at Carradine's from nine to two. If one of those men is the leader of this gang, he's directing operations from a swivel chair. Burrage might be our man. His size—" The ace of the F. B. I. lapsed into silence and Larry knew that Dan's brain was assembling scattered thoughts, was going back over the trail checking up on details that might have seemed mere trifles to anyone else. Weighing old thoughts with new ones, weeding them out.

Chug Tremper's eyes were tortured when they peered through Federal bars at Dan and Larry. Dan shot questions at him and the prisoner turned away and paced his cell. He came back again, gripped the bars with shaking fingers.

"I don't know the big shot, Fowler! Nobody knows who he really is. I ain't lyin'. What would it get me? Look at the spot I'm in? Wait—I only know one thing. They call him Six. That's all—"

"Six?" Dan Fowler rolled the strange title over and over on his tongue. "It's a strange name, Larry. Come on, Tremper, you know more than you're telling us!"

The prisoner's eyes flashed.

"Yeah? I ain't sayin' another word. That guy knows everything. He can be in a dozen places at once, that devil! He'd get me even if I was in a steel van. You couldn't stop him. Nuts to you G-boys. I'm takin' my chances on getting a life term. It's better than croaking, Fowler. You can talk until you're hoarse. I'm keeping still!"

"Somebody has been to see him," Dan said. "They've scared the life out of him. We're wasting our time. But we've got one thing. A name—Six."

"And what do we do with it?" Larry said perplexedly.

CHAPTER XIII

Sentinels of Death

It was a hot day. In the little cubbyhole atop an eighty-foot tower perched on a rocky ledge in the Saguaches, a forest ranger scanned the timber stretched out for miles on every side. He squinted through powerful field glasses and his

attention was drawn to a spot off to the northeast.

"There's something dead down there," he mumbled. "Buzzards circling." But only signs of smoke and fire were his business. He yawned, sat down at a small table and picked up a magazine.

Another man watched the buzzards. A placer miner, one of that small army of gold seekers that still remain in the west. He watched those grim scavengers swoop down out of the haze. One drifted down over his head so close he could hear the rustle of its wings. Raucous cries ran through the stillness. The birds kept going down to one spot on the lonely land, a spot hidden by a great upthrust of rock, only to soar upward again and fly about in a wide circle.

"I'm gettin' out of here," the placer miner said and gathered up what stuff he had brought into the little canyon. No sooner had he spoken when a rifle's sharp crack came from somewhere on the higher crags. A bullet sang too close, ripped along the man's shoulder, then flattened against a rock not twenty yards from where the man stood. "Yeah, I'm gettin' out quick. No gold signs here anyways." He hurried out of the canyon, eyed those buzzards as he went, his fingers digging into the bullet burn in his shoulder.

Hideous cries carried a thwarted timbre as if something was holding the scavengers back from a feast they knew to be there. The gold grubber saw three of them perched on a high rock near a great gnarled tree. They

seemed to be watching, waiting. The man kept hurrying across the rocky terrain. One well placed bullet was hint enough to him that he was not wanted in that area.

INSPECTOR DANIEL FOWLER walked into the office of the managing editor of the Bakerstown *Sentinel*. The newspaper man needed no flash of the visitor's credentials. Fowler, during his short, hectic sojourn in the mining town, had become front-page news. Reporters had been trying to keep in step with him. Half-tones of his strong grim features, Jacksonian nose and square chin, his wide-set eyes, had been peering out at the readers of the *Sentinel* since he and Larry had rolled into the city of lawlessness.

Mygatt, the managing editor, could understand why crooks quailed at the mention of Fowler's name. He felt a little uncomfortable himself, hard-boiled newspaperman though he was, when those gray eyes searched his face. Fowler's head still carried a bandage. Mygatt knew that there would be other healed scars marking the F. B. I. ace's powerful frame. Mygatt felt a tremor go through him as he pictured the face of this man behind a blazing gun. He smiled.

"Hello, Inspector," he said warmly. "What can I do for you?"

Mygatt wondered if Dan Fowler was going to attack the policy of the *Sentinel*. He could tell the G-man that his hands were tied, that he was not the publisher. If the editorial page had failed to demand more concerted action regarding crime in the area, Fowler could be referred to Lamphier, owner of the *Sentinel*.

"I would like to look over the files," Dan said. "I refer to a mining swindle of about twenty years ago. The *Sentinel* has been published that many years?"

Mygatt breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thirty years, Inspector. I'll take you to those files."

Typemill clatter was stretched a little thin when the G-man followed Mygatt through the seething city room. A blond sob sister leaned toward a hard-bitten police reporter.

"That's my kind of man," she grinned.

"Don't let him see you, sister. You're public nuisance number one."

Dan had a thick file of back-numbers on a table ten minutes later. They had come off a rack labeled July-Aug., 1917. He flipped the brittle old pages, finally came to an issue bearing big black headlines.

DUANE CONVICTED IN UTOPIAN SWINDLE

GETS TEN YEARS

ARNOLDI STILL AT LARGE

Dan devoured the print, then fixed his eyes on the pictures of both men. There was something about Richard Duane's face that was vaguely familiar. Somewhere he had seen that face. A face could change in twenty-two years, and no one was more aware of that fact than a lawman. The *Sentinel* Fowler had read that very morning had carried follow-up news anent a man, an ex-convict, Coster, who had engineered one of the greatest drug swindles in the annals of crime. A man whose integrity had been unquestioned by his associates, whose outward appearance, without the help of a surgeon's knife, had undergone a metamorphosis that was unbelievable.

DAN kept studying that face before him and slowly the light of understanding swept over his keen probing mind. He wished he could have been wrong in his analysis of that half-tone, but years of observing the physiognomic peculiarities of men had given him a photographic brain. Pigeon-holed inside Dan Fowler's head were myriad faces, and a dozen others had been added to his mental file since he had arrived in Bakerstown. One of them—

The F. B. I. ace turned his attention to Arnoldi's features. They were adorned with a mustache and goatee. A face that could easily be changed. Yet a man's eyes never can be altered. Arnoldi's were deep-set, glaring. The little white spots in the two dark shadows, Dan sensed, had been 'put there

by a retoucher's brush.

Dan left the *Sentinel* building fifteen minutes later. Back in the city room, a man got up from a desk, went to a phone booth and dialed a number. Getting his party, he talked swiftly.

"Fowler just came here," he began. "He's poking through back numbers of the *Sentinel*. Issues of July and August, Nineteen Seventeen."

Carradine, the man on the other end of the wire, cursed softly. Before he broke the connection he bit out: "Good work, Kelsey." He slumped forward in his leather chair, fingers gripping the edge of a rich mahogany desk.

"Fowler! Again he crosses my path," the man whispered to himself. "He digs deep. If he suspects—" He lunged for the phone again, called impatiently for a number.

Carradine's equine features betrayed the fear going through him. Cigar smoke swirled around him, hung in lacy tendrils close to the ceiling. His smooth black hair was disheveled and his white collar was snapped open. The phone jangled, jarred his frayed nerves. He snatched it up, recognized a voice.

"Get over here right away," Carradine said hoarsely. "Things are going out from under us. Fowler has been looking through the files at the *Sentinel*. July and August, nineteen seventeen.

"That mean anything to you?"

A sharp click came from the other end of the wire. Carradine walked to the window, looked out.

"If Six knows—" he mumbled suddenly, terror leaping into his deep sunken eyes, "we—"

Dan headed for police headquarters. He found Larry in the laboratory looking at enlarged prints. Larry's face betrayed triumph. "Three prints on that paper reinforcing that hundred dollar bill, Dan. Two were Sarnow's. The other wasn't. Find anything over at the *Sentinel*?"

"Plenty, feller." Dan looked at the clock. "Worthing's man ought to be here soon," he continued. "I'm going to have company for Tremper before dark, or I miss my guess. Come on into the office, Larry."

Dan told Larry of his findings at the *Sentinel* office. He mentioned a name and Larry's eyes bulged.

"Once a crook, always a crook," Kendal said cynically.

FOWLER shook his head. "I have more faith in my fellowmen than that, Larry. Even after all I've seen in this crime-busting business. If what I think is true, we're going at this man carefully. I'm going to give him every chance in the world. But there's another man I don't believe should get a break if I get enough on him. Larry, that guy is Carradine. He's too big a man in this town for his size. He is in a position to get plenty on the officials of this community. Professional gamblers have ways to put the hooks into persons that hold high places. Carradine, I'll bet my hat, can tell us where we can find Six."

A man put his head in through the door.

"Call for you, Inspector. I'll connect you with that phone."

Dan nodded, picked the instrument off its cradle. The Director's voice straightened him in his chair.

"Hello, Inspector," the Director said crisply. "We've got the dope on that bullet. That English ballistics expert has one in his collection. It was shot out of a single fire pistol they call 'The Murder Maid'. Only a few manufactured. A Polish product called a Skomak. Government there put a ban on it. It kills at very close quarters—a devilish weapon that can be hidden from view if held in a pocket handkerchief. It was designed no doubt to get a man out of a tight corner. Watch out, Fowler, when you frisk—"

"Just about the way I figured it, Chief," Dan said with a quick intake of breath. "I hope to put a key man in this rotten mess behind bars tonight. It might be the breaking point. Well—"

"Wait, Dan," the Director said. "A friend of yours is standing right here. She wants to say 'hello'."

A sweet voice came over the wire, caressed Dan's right ear. It compensated for all the gruelling hours

he had spent in the goldfields.

"It's not very private here, Dan, but you know what I'd like to say," Sally Vane said with a merry laugh. "Good luck—and please take care of yourself, Dan."

"You bet I well, Sally," Dan said, his gray-blue eyes showing a softness that no crook had ever glimpsed. "We'll be lunching in the Olmstead Grill in less than a week. Wrap yourself in cellophane 'til then, honey, and we'll step out with a bang."

"I'll be on tiptoe, Dan. Good-bye for now."

When the Inspector hung up, it was as though Sally's voice had given him a new lease on life. Some day the blond girl, who herself was an invaluable operative in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was going to be Mrs. Daniel Fowler. She had promised him that.

CHAPTER XIV

Antidote for G-man Poison



THE man sitting across the desk from Carradine seemed to shrink in his well-tailored clothes. His eyes were haunted by abject fear. Carradine's words kept feeding that fear. Desperate words that came off shaking lips.

"That's the way those Federals work, mister! If you've got a hand in this nasty business, you'd better pack up and get a long way from here. Fowler has those old certificates of ours in his possession. A name is signed to them. Your picture is in those old newspapers—and mine. There's a record of you at Leavenworth. If Fowler gets those in his hands—"

"Look here, George. I've suspected for a long time that you were mixed up in this bloody business out here. These killings—"

"Yes? You've got a record. You're in the same town with me. You think Fowler would believe that your hands are lily white? Fat chance! You're

tarred with the same brush—"

"I paid for my crime," the well-dressed man went on. "Paid double, Carradine! With four years of my life and money. I squared accounts. I'm asking you to keep me out of this mess if— I've got a family, position here. I fought tooth and nail when I left that prison, got where I am by— look here, you still owe the Government a few years—"

"Drop that kind of talk—Duane!" Carradine's white face twisted into a mocking smile. "Don't like that name, do you? I called you here to think up a way to get us out of this corner. You've got powerful friends. You could get away with anything. Fowler has to be bumped!"

"No—none of that! You're out of your mind—"

"Fowler must die," Carradine repeated. "You get us out of this—it's your last chance."

The big man mopped his face with a handkerchief that was already sodden. "I'll think of something—Carradine. I—"

"Do it quickly because we haven't much time. They have planes flying around today. A man can get to a place and back again in a hurry. It's up to you. Get Fowler off my neck or—"

The big man walked out. Just outside the door, he paused and his hand slipped into the pocket of his coat. His fingers came in contact with an automatic. He pivoted, was about to turn the knob of the door. Fear spun him around, sent him stumbling down thick-carpeted stairs.

He drove to his home, sat there drinking for the next three hours. One ray of hope cut through the cloud of fear that engulfed him. He picked up the telephone.

Dusk crept through Bakerstown's streets. A car bearing a D. J. brass plate pulled up in front of the police station. A tall lean F. B. I. man got out of it, hurried up the steps of the yellow brick building. He spoke to the man at the desk and the sergeant pointed to a door. The Federal Agent walked into Regan's office, spotted Dan Fowler and tossed him an envelope.

"Little late," he said. "My plane had engine trouble. There's your dope."

"THANKS." Dan Fowler grinned as he opened up the envelope. He studied the record of Richard Duane, spoke aloud to Larry.

"Six feet, one and three quarter inches in height. Sandy hair. Light complexion. Brown eyes. V scar over left eye. Upper helix of ears with right angle in front. . . ."

Dan clamped his lips for a moment, shot Larry a significant glance. He studied another paper. The description of George Arnoldi. It was a vague one. Arnoldi had had a brief criminal record prior to the Utopia swindle. One year in House of Correction, Oklahoma—juvenile delinquency. Dan studied the prints that had been forwarded to him.

"We go night-clubbing tonight, Larry," he announced thoughtfully.

THE great sprawling ranchhouse of the Bar-V spread was a perfect setting for a Hollywood dude western. Its red tile roof, contrasting sharply with the green backdrop of lodge pines, could be seen for miles. A touch of old Spain in the lee of the Rockies. Water gurgled musically in a fountain set in the center of the roughly pebbled patio.

Balconied windows looked out over the center court that was flanked on every side by Moorish archways. Not far from the main house there was a long line of sheds and behind these was Stacey Blane's big corral. Riders clumped about the place, clad in the picturesque costumes of other days. The owner of the Bar-V knew the value of atmosphere and he spared no expense to spread it.

Blane sat in a big chair in the privacy of his upstairs retreat, looking over papers spread out on his desk. From outside came the soft strumming of a guitar, the musical laughter of women. On Blane's desk was lithographed ballyhoo sent out by the promoters of the famous Cheyenne Stampede.

The phone at Blane's elbow rang sharply. He snatched it up eagerly. "Yes? Oh, hello Frank—up to my

neck in work. Got things to clear up before I leave for the rodeo—what?"

Blane did not speak for nearly two minutes.

"All right. If you want to see me, I'll be there in about an hour. It better be important, Frank." Blane laughed, dropped the instrument. He yanked a cord near his chair.

A tall thin servant wearing loose-fitting Mexican trousers, answered the summons.

"Ruiz," Blane said, "I'll be leaving for Bakerstown at seven. Make the necessary arrangements."

"Si, Senor."

A quarter of a mile from the ranch-house, on the edge of a low hanging butte, a big man lay sprawled out, chin resting on his hands, elbows on the ground. He pushed a big lop of black hair from his slant eyes and stared down at the light beams of a big car roaring over the road that led toward Bakerstown. He laughed, jumped to his feet.

"So there goes Blane," he whispered, his white teeth gleaming in the dark. "That's fine. I'll be on my way." He tossed away a cigar stub, pushed through a clump of red fir and came out onto a path that sloped down to a small canyon. There he got into a car, kicked it to life. . . .

Carradine's place, ablaze with red and white light, quaked with the hideous riot of noise that was as usual pouring from it into the night. Fowler and Kendal made their way to the center of confusion, were crossing the street when two big moving vans rumbled up. One slowed down, came to a stop. The driver called out to Dan: "How do you get to the Bar-V?"

"I wouldn't know," Dan said. "Sorry."

The vans rumbled on. On the sides of them were great black letters. BROWN BROS. HORSE TRANSPORTATION. CHEYENNE.

THREE men stood on the sidewalk talking when Dan and Larry reached Carradine's. The voice of one of the men who was clad in rough clothes carried above the sounds that were boiling out of the Bakerstown hot spot.

"G-men, huh?" The voice was a little sour. "Yeah? Maybe if we had a hundred more out here a guy could walk around looking for pay dirt without getting shot at!"

Dan stopped, crabbed toward the man, and his eyes hardened a trifle. He saw the spokesman's fingers dig into his shoulder.

"Maybe you're right, mister," Dan said. "Then we could be in a hundred places at once. Somebody winged you, you said?"

"Yeah, and not with a slingshot. A man's got a right to placer mine around here, ain't he? Or don't we have no more rights? Listen, I was out by Ludd's Creek mindin' my own business when somebody ups and tags me with a bullet. A little closer and the buzzards would have had me, G-man! Lot of 'em around there waitin' just as if they knew I was almost ready for pluckin'!"

Fowler laughed tightly.

"Maybe you were pokin' around someone else's favorite spot, brother. I hear they don't waste much time with highgraders!" He walked on, Larry at his side. The man called after them. "Highgrader, am I? You lawmen think everybody's a crook. Well, I'm an honest man an' I know my rights. I'll—"

Dan laughed. The brief outburst of mirth went back into his throat just as he and Larry were about to walk into Carradine's. The Inspector turned and watched the prospector move into the shadows beyond a street lamp. Dan's eyes slowly narrowed. "Okay, let's go in!" he said to Larry, his voice grim.

The Federal men were passed through by the narrow-eyed sentinel at the door of Carradine's. They walked through the roaring pleasure palace, went upstairs and walked into Carradine's ornate office. The gambler was in full dress. His eyes were expressionless when he turned them toward the door.

Apparently he had been tipped off to the visit. His fingers betrayed the turmoil behind his stony front. They gripped the edges of the desk in front of him with such tenacity that his knuckles seemed ready to burst

bonily and completely through the skin.

"What can I do for you?" he said silkily.

"Answer some questions," Dan said. "They tell me you know all the answers in this town. Ever hear of a man named Richard Duane? One who used to call himself George Arnoldi? I have records of both men. Pictures and identifications that are interesting, Carradine. Arnoldi owes the Government about ten years of his life. The print we found on the paper reinforcing a hundred dollar bill that was taken from Sarnow's pocket is Arnoldi's. I want you to accompany me to headquarters—er—Carradine. The police think you might help them clear up a few things."

CARRADINE'S pasty face assumed a sudden sickly pallor.

"I refuse to be questioned by the police or anyone else, Fowler!" he ground out. "I have my rights and I know a little about law! Your high-handed methods are going to cost you that pretty little badge you wear if you don't watch out!"

"Carradine, I have a warrant for your—"

CHAPTER XV

Out of the Past



A QUEER sound made the G-man swing around in time to see a portion of the wall shake. Carradine pivoted, died almost instantly as a blast of gunfire came from that wall. Dan crashed shot after shot in the direction from which the

death-dealing missile had come, then leaped forward.

Carradine's falling body fell against Dan, and the F. B. I. ace sprawled over him. It was Larry Kendal who hurled every ounce of his weight against a paneled section of the wall. It gave way with a rending, splintering crash and the special agent was catapulted into a dark narrow hallway where he

caromed off a solid wall of plaster.

Larry regained his balance, ran down a narrow warren. He came to a sharp turn at the end. Too late he saw the big form loom up in front of him. Something hard crashed down on his head and he went down with guns roaring in his ears again.

Dan, gun smoking, hopped Larry's prone figure. He came to a dead end, whirled and stepped fast down another dark hallway. A door slammed and a bar fell into place.

Dan Fowler at length found that door after groping around but it resisted his onslaught. He turned and went back to where Larry was struggling to his feet.

"Beat us again, Larry," Dan said. "Hurt much?"

"I-I'm okay, Dan. You get the guy that bumped Carradine?"

Fowler grunted, raced back into Carradine's office. Footsteps pounded up the stairs leading from below.

"A nice little rathole, this second floor," he said softly. "Full of rabbit lanes."

He kneeled down beside Carradine. "He's dead as a mackerel, Larry. I think I know who got him. A certain man had a reason. Too bad—"

Regan and his homicide squad arrived five minutes later.

"I want this body taken to the morgue after the coroner gets through with it," Fowler said tersely. "Have this place photographed thoroughly, Regan. I think we've caught up with George Arnoldi, fugitive from justice!"

"Arn—"

Larry Kendal wiped some blood from his scalp.

"Yeah. He's on the floor there," he offered.

Footsteps sounded, it seemed, all over Carradine's place. White faces appeared in the splintered aperture in the false wall. The white V's of shirt-fronts stood out against the darkness of the warren. A big man came through the opening. Mayor Lamphier biting down hard on a cold cigar.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

"His customers," Dan said, pointing to the corpse on the floor, "seem well acquainted with this upper floor."

LAMPHIER showed his anger at the implication.

"The gamb—er, game room, Inspector, is not far from this office. Naturally we heard the disturbance. We were having a game of bridge—" Lamphier seemed to lose his breath then. His hair was disheveled and the front of his stiff shirt was smudged with cigar ash.

For several minutes, Regan's men ransacked the place. Then Frank Rothwell came up the stairway, pushed his way to where Regan was directing a police photographer.

"Who killed him?" Rothwell asked, bewilderment evident in his eyes. Dan Fowler drew the man's glance and the Federal Inspector smiled significantly, icily.

"I think we're through here, Larry," Fowler said. "Mr. Rothwell, you knew Carradine quite well, didn't you? Politically, you had a lot in common with the man. I'd like to talk to you alone."

Rothwell nodded.

"My car is outside, Inspector. We'll go to my home."

Rothwell's butler admitted the master of the house and the two tight-lipped manhunters accompanying him. The little old man bowed humbly to the president of the Midas mine.

"Mr. Blane has been calling you for the last half hour, sir," he said meekly. "He is very sorry, but he had motor trouble. He's up at Gannen's filling station at Colton. You wish to call him there?"

"Very well, Parslow. Get him for me."

"Beg your pardon, sir?"

"I said, 'Yes, get him!'" Rothwell's voice bellowed. "Hard of hearing," he said to Fowler as they walked into a big living room. The G-men waited until the call was put through. Parslow came in. He said:

"Mr. Blane just left, sir," he said. "He should be here soon."

"Carradine was shot and killed awhile ago," Fowler said tonelessly to Rothwell, watching his face carefully.

"I know. I know. Another killing. When will they end, Fowler?" Rothwell turned his eyes away, sucked in his breath.

"Perhaps you can tell us that, Duane!"

Rothwell's powerful frame stiffened, turned slowly. The shot had struck home.

"Let's not go into detail, Inspector." Rothwell said. "Please lower your voice. My wife— You've caught up with me. But before God, Inspector, my hands are clean. Ever since the day I walked out of prison, I've led an honorable life. It's been hell, though, Fowler. Since Carradine—Arnoldi came across me again. He knew he could ask anything of me in payment for silence. Political help—anything. I suspected that he knew plenty about these crimes. But I had to hide my suspicions, Inspector. I've paid my debt to the country. I made good every dollar!"

"You had the motive to kill him," Dan said. "Did you?"

"No! I should have though—long ago!" The torture he had lived through burned in his eyes then. Rothwell turned them toward Fowler and they took on a desperate pleading expression. "If a man pays the way I have—hasn't he the right to—"

DAN FOWLER prided himself on knowing men.

"I believe you, Mr. Rothwell," he said. "I'm going to do all I can to help you. Does anyone else know about this?"

"I don't know. Perhaps one." Fear was rampant in Rothwell's eyes. "They call him Six. If Carradine worked with that man—he knows. If I've helped crooked politicians into offices in this city, Inspector, it was no fault of mine. What are you going to do, Fowler? I really do not care for myself. A man's past will catch up with him sooner or later."

"I'm going to wait awhile," Dan said. "I'm going to give you a chance, Rothwell. Naturally, if you'd killed Carradine, you'd have arranged an alibi. You're a very intelligent man, sir. But if you are holding anything back—if you're mixed up in this bloody business, I'll smash you to bits with the rest of that bunch of thieving devils. I can always put my finger on you, Rothwell!"

"Yes. I know that, Inspector."

"You sent for Stacey Blane. Why?"

"I wanted to tell him what I've told you, Fowler. He's been my friend for years."

"Let sleeping dogs lie," Dan warned him. "Understand?"

"Very well, Inspector."

Leaving Rothwell's house, Dan swung toward Larry.

"I think Rothwell was giving it to me straight," he said. "That man might have slipped once, but he'll never do it again. Six got Carradine. He was a regular patron of that place. He knew the layout of the place perfectly. Six is working fast now, Larry. Too fast. He'll trip. I think he'll try to clean up unfinished business and then pull out for good. The next few days are going to be loaded with dynamite."

"There's a car coming up the drive, Dan," Larry broke in. "Looks like that big gray one."

Dan waited near the D.J. car. Blane's limousine rolled up and stopped. The rancher got out, loosened a big muffler that he had wound around his neck. The sky was overcast and there was a chill in the night air. Blane wore a great polo coat and ten gallon hat. His boots were highly polished, gleamed in the light shining from over the front door of the big mansion.

"Hello, Fowler," he said. "I heard about the killing on my way through. It's getting worse and worse, this mess!"

Dan shook his head.

"It was well planned, Blane. Looks like the fine hand of Six!"

DRIVING into Bakerstown, Larry said: "One thing I'm sure of. The killer had no white shirt front. It would have shown up in the dark of that hall."

Fowler said nothing. Larry knew that his superior's mind was backtracking, reviewing the events of the last few hectic days, adding up various factors.

Arriving shortly at police headquarters, Dan went into the morgue where Regan's men were checking up on the remains of Arnoldi. He

watched for several minutes, left.

Later, he and Kendal sat in the lobby of the Bakerstown Hotel taking a breather. After they had been there about a half hour, a sedan drove up in front. Beads of rain on the dull black finish of the car, sent off little shards of light.

"Funny," Dan said. "It hasn't rained here, Larry." He got up when the driver of the car entered the hotel. "Say, Mister," Dan grinned amiably, "you must have been driving under a waterfall somewhere. There's been no rain around here."

"No? Say, it rained plenty southwest of here. Came down in buckets. I was in Colton when it started around eight-thirty—"

Dan Fowler nodded slowly, his eyes troubled. He looked at his watch for the tenth time that evening.

"Larry, Blane's car was at Colton," he said pointedly. "There was no sign of rain on it."

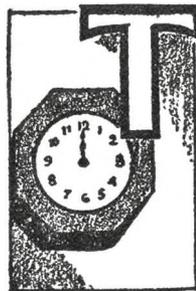
Larry thought a moment.

"It was in a garage there, wasn't it? Getting fixed."

"That's right. The tires, I remember now, were a little muddy. Seems like we're pounding our heads against a stone wall, Larry." Dan sat down, picked up a newspaper. His eyes were fixed on the type but he did not read. An elusive thought tormented him.

CHAPTER XVI

Hell Brewing



THE day following Carradine's death was another hot and sultry one. A man rode through the foothills of the Saguaches, came to a little gorge. He rode into the slash in the rocky chaos, came out into a small bowl-like clearing. There

was a brush corral there holding three broncs. The tall, beefy rider dismounted, turned his own mount loose into the corral, and then strode to the almost hidden lean-to in one corner of the clearing.

When he came out he picked out a black horse, piled leather on its back, bridled it. Then he mounted and rode away, driving upward over a rough trail.

Six was abroad. His slant eyes beneath the lop of hair hanging down under the brim of his black, battered hat danced with a wicked gleam and a grin curled his hard mouth. He had planned his master stroke, a move that would checkmate Inspector Dan Fowler and put him six feet under ground.

Six dropped down into the little valley an hour later where the ruins of the old stucco house squatted deep in undergrowth. A dozen men were waiting for him. Six wasted little time.

"It's all planned to the last detail, you men. You take over the van at the place I have mentioned. There must be no slip-ups or you will all find yourselves looking for owlhoots before dawn. Those of you that are not filled with lead. I have taken Fowler's so-called brilliance into consideration. There is but one road leading into that part of the hills where the gold is hidden over which that Federal car can travel. If by any chance, the G-men should think in step with me, I shall be waiting for them. If Fowler, by any chance, figures that the Elion job is only a decoy, well—"

A little pock-faced man laughed.

"We've got that old car gassed up, Six. We'll look out for our end. So Burrage and the other big shots are going to walk in and get blasted, huh?"

"Remember," Six said, flashing a wicked grin in reply. "There's five thousand dollars for each of you when this job, this last big job is completed. A much larger share than you expected, isn't it? But with certain high-priced operatives cut off my payroll, I can afford to be generous. You have any questions?"

There was no answer.

"Then be waiting for orders at eight o'clock tonight. Here."

DDAN FOWLER sat in an office at Bakerstown's police headquarters. Both Dan and Larry Kendal were aware of the hum of excitement that

was current in the city of Mammon. There was a dread expectancy in the sultry atmosphere as if worried brains were sending out telepathic waves. Carradine's death and exposure had rocked the city to its very foundation. Dan sat toying with a steel die. But he was talking of buzzards.

"Larry, I'm going to follow a hunch. Buzzards. Buzzards have a nose for a corpse. I'm thinking about that prospector who got tagged with a bullet. Maybe I misjudged him—the fellow might have been on the level. I've been asking myself why the buzzards ever since I talked to him. Could those birds out there have been trying to get at a corpse that was hidden just beyond their reach? A wild stab, feller, but sometimes we've got to play the wild ones. Like a poker player gambling on drawing to fill a straight with two cards. If Six had a man out there—"

"Nice figuring, Dan," complimented Larry. "There's something in what you say. Nobody would shoot a harmless guy like that gold grubber for a few grains of gold. You think then that—"

"I'm going to chance it. I'm going to bring some more special agents in on this job. This little stamper here might have been used on gold bars that had to be melted over again. It was in the hands of killers, Larry. Mines have a limited output of the metal. Experts know that. It would seem strange if a certain mine should ship more gold to the mint than it can honestly produce. So they would have to strike a new vein—"

"Experts and mining engineers, officials can be bought. We're in an unhealthy rotten mess here. I'm going to work along those lines. Along another, too. People think that lawmen are born without brains. Crooks are positive of that fact, and that's where they make mistakes. We're getting men in law-enforcement now with better education, better training than ever before. The crooks have not taken that into consideration. That—and science. Laboratories, such as the one we have here, are making lawlessness a pretty unhealthy career,

a short-lived one. An organization such as this goldfield gang leader must have, needs to think of every angle—such as that one they've no doubt overlooked. Dead meat draw buzzards.

"I've been thinking of a new slant to this case, Larry. Six might know that Rothwell is Duane, Arnoldi's old partner in that mine swindle. Six's contact with Carradine is broken. He'll need a high official in this town to do the fixing for him. No doubt he'll put the hooks into Rothwell, the man who was forced to hand out favors to Carradine. We'll keep a close watch on Rothwell. There's a chance he might be up to his neck in blood. That's one reason I left him free, Larry. To draw rats to him."

"Looks like you're piling up things, Dan. To slam at them all at once."

"That's right. Now here's another point of attack—"

THE phone on Fowler's desk rang. He picked it up.

A hurried husky voice rolled along the wires.

"Fowler? Listen, Inspector, I gotta talk fast. I heard two of Burrage's gang talkin' in a tavern here. They're goin' to knock off that gold shipment at Elion. They—"

Fowler clamped a hand over the mouthpiece.

"Larry, get into the next office. I'll hold him on. Something about this sounds promising."

"Wait," Dan said to the man on the other end. "You want Fowler. I'll get him for you."

"Make it fast. I don't want my brains blown out!"

Dan stalled. Then he said: "Hello. Yes, this is Fowler. Who is this?"

"Never mind." The man repeated his message, augmented it with, "This is a straight tip. I heard the name Burrage mentioned. Read in the papers that he was wanted by the G-men. So I—"

"Yes?" Dan prompted, but a significant click came from the other end. Dan hung up, went into the adjoining office.

"I'm getting it, Dan," Larry said. "In a second." He spoke into the

mouthpiece. "Yes? Drugstore in the west end? Hogan's? Thanks, sister."

"This tip could be on the level," Dan said as he and Kendal hurried out. "Crooks fall out. Then again, there may be something fishy about it. Good thing you could trace the call."

The drugstore in question was a small one. A young clerk held forth there and the Inspector watched his face closely as he gave him a look at his badge. Fowler garnered but a brief expression of awe, then snapped questions.

"A dull time of the day, now, isn't it? Not many people come around. You'd remember those who came in here the last fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, sir. An old woman. A kid after a coke. And a short, thin man; he phoned somebody while I filled a prescription for him."

Dan grinned, asked for the nature of the prescription.

"It was something for mercury poisonin'," the clerk said. "Sometimes these ore grinders get it who don't use the cyanide process grindin' ore. When they work around amalgam a lot—"

"Thanks, son," Dan said. He gestured toward Larry, hurried out. "The tip," Dan said on the way back cross town, "is plenty hot, all right. Somebody connected with crooked ore grinding or smelting is not satisfied with his cut, perhaps. One thing we're sure of Larry, is this. There is going to be a try made for the Ophir shipment."

"If it's only a decoy raid, we've got to be ready to shoot a one-two punch. A decoy raid to draw the law enforcement officers to Elion can mean but one thing to me. There's a bigger job that Six wants to cover. We do not have to guess about that big job. If he is going to try and remove that coin out—"

Larry Kendal throttled the supercar down, a slow grin sweeping over his face.

"You sure have got a lot of stuff stored away in that head of yours, Dan. You don't miss a trick."

FOWLER made a clucking sound with his tongue.

"A man's bound to miss a few. Grand slam hands are scarce, feller. Tonight we can't miss a trick. We can't afford to overlook that call that came in. Larry, I'm turning that job at Elion over to you. You take two cars. Hem that express office in and let those crooks get at the shipment. Warn the guards.

"I'm taking this armored car tonight and I'm going to head for the Saguaches. I'm going to hunt up that prospector. If this gold raid proves to be a decoy job, I want to be ready for those hellions. Six has to move that stolen coin. It will be a tough job even if it is in hundred dollar pieces."

"It looks as if you were keeping in step with that big shot, Dan. Six figures you'll have most of the lawmen centered at Elion. But if that tip off was on the level—"

"We've got to look at it both ways. First thing I do now," Dan said, when he got out of the armored job, "is find that gold grubber. He'll know how to get to that place in the hills."

TIME dragged. Department of Justice special agents gathered at Bakerstown police headquarters. Regan picked seven of his best men, turned them over to Larry Kendal. The populace of the mining center sensed that something big was going to break. They gathered on street corners, talked in lowered voices. A ripple of suppressed excitement drifted through the city. Men in high places waited for the lid to blow off.

In a deserted house six miles from Elion, Kel Burrage sat in a chair tilted back against the wall. Younger and Corri idly played at rummy, but their crooked minds were not on the game. Two other case-hardened men were stretched out on the floor. Burrage kept tinkering with a machine-gun that was held in his lap. The remains of a simple meal were strewn on a dirty oil-clothed table. Waiting was playing havoc with their nerves.

"They've got two guards sitting on that stuff," Burrage grinned. "One got paid off by Six the other night. This is going to be a pipe. We grab the stuff, get our dough, and get out of this country. The Feds are comin'

too close. I'd be gettin' out now if I had the dough I need. Pay attention, you mugs! There isn't one of us that will beat a chair or a rope, or any other kind of quick snuff out if we ever get caught. We can't miss tonight."

"He's telling us," Corri sneered. "Burrage, they call you the toughest guy in the country. Watch me tonight and learn how to wipe out cops if they get in my way. Before I moved in here, I was sure you was this guy, Six. Kel. Looks like I was wrong, don't it?"

Younger laughed without moving a muscle on his evil face.

"We got to figure on the time. Nine-fifty we walk into that express office. We pick up our sixth man there. Four of us handles those bars. The other two covers us."

"I've learned it by heart, big shot," Corri snapped. "Shut up!"

CHAPTER XVII

The Lid Blows Off



GATHERING rain clouds partially obscured a gibbous moon that threw an eerie light over the town of Elion. A mine truck drove away from the express office there, left a wooden box and two men to guard it. One of

them lolled against the door jamb, a crooked smile on his high, cheek-boned face.

"The place looks dead tonight," he said, eyeing the little whiskered station agent who strolled toward him.

"Does, don't it?" the station agent said mockingly. "Don't be fooled, neither one of ye. There's a lot of G-men not far from here. They got tipped off the gold was going to be lifted tonight. They come, here's what ye do. Let 'em get in here. Drop to the floor, see?"

"What? What did you say, ya old— G-men? Then somebody —" The crooked gold guard's face turned a

sickly white. He whirled and went into the semi-darkness of the express office. "I'm goin' to get a smoke, Bill. I won't be gone long," he said.

"You stay here, you fool," his companion told him. "You're scared stiff, you yellow-bellied skunk! With all those G-men out there, you—say, something's rotten here! Slavin, you're a crook!" He leaped forward when the crooked guard tried to get out of the room. His fist crashed into the man's face, felled him. "Make a move and I'll fill you full of lead!" he roared. "Get out of here, pop," he warned the little station agent.

Behind a tacky building not fifty yards away, a police car was hidden. Across the tracks near the only exit out of Elion, Larry Kendal knelt near another black machine. Three special agents were grouped near him, guns held ready. Larry looked at his watch and the luminous dial told him that it was nine forty-five.

"If they're coming," he ground out, "it won't be long now."

In the express office, a man tried to get to his feet. A terrific boot thrust sent him sprawling again. He lay there, groaning.

One of Regan's men whispered hoarsely.

"Look over there. A car is coming. No lights. I guess Fowler had the right dope. Where is Fowler?"

Larry watched the black car go by not twenty feet from where bushes screened the special agent and his men. When it rolled over the crossing, he gave the high sign.

"Let's go!" he said crisply.

The black car drove up to the express office platform. Men piled out. Kel Burrage led the way, machine-gun in his hands. Out from the shadows of the tacky freight shed came four of Regan's men. A riot gun started yammering, tearing the tortured silence to bits. Burrage cursed with stark amazement, hardly feeling those bullets that ripped through him. He turned around, startled. "It's a trap, men," he yelled hoarsely. "Six crossed us—" Suddenly a sawed-off shotgun blazed in front of his dimming eyes and heavy shot blew the rest of his life out.

MITCH YOUNGER, dragging a smashed leg as if it were a heavy chunk of wood tied to him, clawed for the steering wheel of the car. One of his own men, crazed, sent him sprawling, got in the seat himself and got the raiding car moving. Regan's men poured lead into it, as it slued around and shot for the railroad crossing.

Kendal and his men met the gold pirates' car there and machine-guns riddled the windshield, killed the driver. The car ran wild, left the road and slammed against a string of freight cars on a siding. Two men crawled out of it. One, desperate, threw a shot at Kendal. Answering fire cut him down and he fell forward on his face. ♦

Big Jim Corri, hurling oaths at the cordon of lawmen, stood behind an express truck and fought it out. Mitch Younger was on his knees, fighting for strength enough to lift the ugly snout of his machine-gun.

"Take it, ya dirty coppers!" Corri screeched as he pumped an automatic pistol. A man near Larry choked blood and went to his knees. Bullets splintered the truck, drove through Corri, and he started to crumple. The gun dropped from fingers gone lifeless.

Younger cursed the lawmen when they yelled for him to give in. He hitched his pain-wracked powerful body around, got the machine-gun muzzle on a line with the men who closed in.

"All right," Larry Kendal bit out, a little sick from the bloody shambles, "you asked for it!"

Mitch Younger's body shook violently as heavy bullets speared through it. Kendal turned away, waved the lawmen in. "Looks like that tip was a hot one," he said. "Looks like Dan is figuring right about—"

The mine truck guard came out of the express office, his face gray in the dim light.

"There's a rat inside there, G-man. When he found out we'd set a trap, he went nuts."

Kendal and his men looked over the gun harvest. The special agent could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Some haul tonight, Sarge. Kel Burrage and Corri. Younger. Three of the toughest crooks this country ever knew. Worth plenty to Uncle Sam, their pelts. Three of them—right here in a bunch."

"Larry Kendal's shrewd brain harbored a grim suspicion. Never before in the annals of crime had three such men been found banded together. The possibility that their deaths had been arranged was glaringly apparent to Dan Fowler's understudy.

"Dan wasn't far from wrong," Larry told himself when police cars drove in, sirens screaming. "He seldom is. This isn't the only hot spot in the gold fields tonight."

Regan came up, his eyes shocked by the sight that struck hard against them.

"Lord, Kendal!" was all he could say for several minutes. The chief's men dragged a crooked mine worker out of the express shed, hurled him toward the G-men. The man's angular face was bruised and bloody. His torn mouth babbled words.

"We were crossed! How—how did the Feds know—"

KENDAL lifted the man to his feet, then flattened him against the side of the express office. "Spill it, you rat! What do you know? Talk or we'll beat your brains out!"

"I don't know nothin'," the man whimpered. "Six sent me here is all I know. I've never seen him. I—I was here to help grab that gold. All I know—"

"Take him away," Kendal said. He turned his eyes westward.

"Six might be in a corner right now," Larry said. "There's a smarter head than his working tonight. Regan, this man they call Six—he arranged this raid, then tipped the law off. He wanted them killed. He knew that Burrage and Corri and Younger would stand up and pump guns until there was no more life left in them. He had no use for them anymore. They were hot, after Dan Fowler tagged their ugly mugs that night."

"I've got to take my hat off to you Feds," Regan said. "This man Fowler in particular. Yeah—"

Larry smiled grimly, then gritted his teeth. He swayed a little and dug fingers into his side.

"That slug came a little too close for comfort," he forced out. "Feels like it chipped a rib."

Dead bodies clogged the little morgue in Elion. Larry Kendal went to a hospital and had his wound dressed. The doctor told him it was but a flesh wound, that he would be all right. But he would have to remain quiet until morning.

"Just my luck," the special agent said. "What a break! Dan—"

BUT in the Saguaches, the grim drama of the murky night went on. The powerful D. J. car hummed over a graveled road. Fowler gripped the wheel. Special Agent Joe Tanner from Denver sat beside him and in the back was another F. B. I. man-hunter. Sitting beside the agent was the gold grubber that had talked of buzzards. His face showed his nervousness. His gangly frame kept shifting on the seat.

"What's up, Inspector?" he suddenly asked, his voice wavering. "If any shooting starts, I don't want to be here."

"You're safe," Dan said. "Bullets can't get through this machine. Long as you stay inside of it, you've got nothing to worry about. Take it easy, mister. You're working for Uncle Sam."

"I had a brother worked for him once. He's under the ground in France!"

Sober faces broke into brief grins. "We ought to be near that spot soon," the prospector said. "It's about two more miles."

Two men, perched on a high place a half mile ahead of the D. J. car, cursed softly as they spotted the two shards of light.

"Six was right," one said. "That dirty Fed figured every angle. Well, we know how to stop him. Let's get to the car. It's coming upgrade, that armored heap. It isn't hitting more than twenty right now."

"Smart guy, Fowler. But he's dealing with a smarter one. He'll wish he'd never thought this one up!"

Twenty more minutes. The road kept rising. The topography wreathed in tendrils of mist became more desolate. The nervous gold grubber peered out through the bulletproof window.

"That tall spire of rock off to the right. About two miles from here—that's about the place—"

Dan braked the super car. His bronzed hands gripped the wheel tightly and his eyes bored through the murk ahead.

"Up ahead there, Joe. You see a light? I thought—"

An ominous sound cut in on the car's steady droning. A tiny spider web design appeared on the windshield in front of Fowler's keen probing eyes. He ducked involuntarily.

"It's a car," he said grimly. "They're plugging away. Let 'em have a taste of it, Joe!"

The special agent pumped lead at the car up ahead. A signpost flashed past—Ludd's Creek. The powerful fortress on wheels kept gaining.

"My hunch was right," Dan said tightly. He laughed when the black blob ahead swerved crazily, almost went into the ditch.

Joe Tanner flattened his nose against the windshield, shouted a warning.

"That bridge ahead. Look at that railing shake—the thing won't hold us, Fowler. This car weighs—"

The D. J. car was leaping toward the bridge.

"Can't stop in time now, Joe," Fowler said. "We're going too fast—we'd crash. I've got to depend on our momentum to make it. Hold your breath, Tanner!"

The heavy machine roared out onto the rickety wooden bridge. Supports that had been nearly sawed through, gave way. The G-men felt the old structure shudder under them and Joe Tanner cursed with hardly any sound. A nerve-shattering splintering noise broke the stillness and Tanner turned a little white as he climbed over the back of the seat.

"GOOD luck, Joe," Fowler yelled, as he ducked from behind the wheel. The drop was sickening—twenty feet down into the slug-

gish waters of a creek. Dan Fowler knew that Six had won another trick before the super-car splatted into mud and slimy water.

The senses were knocked out of the F.B.I. ace when his head struck the dash. He was hurled back into the rear seat on top of the terrified gold-seeker and one of the agents from the Denver field office. Muddy water seeped in, trickled over his white face.

A mile beyond the creek laughter rolled out of the lurching canvas-topped car.

"There goes the battle-wagon Slick. And the dirty G-men with it. Nice piece of work. If they ain't all dead, Dinky Lawson will make sure back there. Well, we're through for the night. This ought to rate us a couple of extra C notes."

Fowler opened his eyes. Even that much effort thickened the dull ache in his head. Memory came to him. He moved his body, looked down into the bloody face of the prospector. He felt a stirring under him and a man groaned. It was Special Agent Mike Rourke.

Dan Fowler crawled to the rear door, forced it open, dropped into water up to his waist. He came back in, got his flashlight and let the beam sweep the interior of the wrecked car. Joe Tanner hung over the front seat. Fowler knew he was dead.

"They'll pay for this, Joe," he forced from his tight lips. He swallowed a lump, and shook his head sadly.

Then he turned to the other occupants saw that they were beginning to show signs of life. Both were badly hurt. Fowler rummaged through the wrecked Government machine, resurrected the car's first-aid kit. He examined the gold grubber first, and patched up a big cut on the man's head. Mike Rourke was hurt much worse. One of his legs was broken and a little trickle of blood came out of his mouth.

"Take awhile to get you out of here, Mike," he said.

"Okay, Dan. I can hold out. Go get 'em. Smash the rotten murderers!"

"Yeah?"

Fowler's spine crawled. He had not heard the approach of the man whose voice came from the rear door that was swinging open slowly. He turned his head, looked into a pair of mercilessly hard pink-rimmed eyes. His flash lighted up the man's anguler evil face.

"I got to make sure, Fowler. Takes a lot to kill you, don't it? Say a prayer, mister! First you, then these mugs!"

Dan Fowler desperately looked for a way out. Talk, he knew, might prolong his life, the lives of the others in the wrecked car for precious seconds.

"I've seen you before," he said evenly, eyes roving swiftly.

"No kiddin'. I do work for the mayor, Fowler, when I ain't workin' at this sideline. Get set—"

Fowler's eyes widened. On a blanket that had been thrown over the back of the front seat was a lot of white powder, part of the contents of jars in the portable lab that had been smashed when the car had hit. Fowler uttered a silent prayer—he couldn't be sure what it was; he had to gamble on it.

"Just let me have a smoke," he said quickly. "One little drag at a cigarette." Desperately he feigned a frightened, pleading voice.

"Just one drag. Give the other guys a pull. It'll take about ten seconds." The pink-eyed man began to count. The lust to kill fogged his brain a little. He was going to snuff out the great Fowler!

Dan put a cigarette between his lips. He struck a match but its flame never reached the tip of the little white cylinder.

It hit the little mound of white powder and the resultant blinding flash lighted up the inside of the car. The crook with the automatic screamed crazily and brought his hands up to tear away the burning pain in his eyes. Fowler had immediately clamped his own hands over his face the moment he had tossed the match and had fallen over backward. It was lycopodium powder, as he had hoped! He set himself, lunged at the burned hood and drove both fists against his seared face. The man toppled, went out into the waters of the creek.

"Smart, Inspector," Rourke forced out. "That flashlight powder saved us. Okay—I can hang on now—"

Fowler fashioned splints out of a wooden box he had emptied of gas bombs. He applied them to Rourke's leg. A crude job, but one that might save him from gangrene. He found a hypo and gave Rourke a shot of morphine. Mike grinned: "Thank, Dan." "I'll get along now."

"I'm still coming at you, Six!" Fowler ground out and crawled out of the wreck. He stumbled over the man he had outwitted. The killer's senses had left him and his head was under water. Fowler left him that way. Climbing up the creek bank, he heard sounds coming out of the night. They carry far in the hills. He saw a great spirelike rocky formation poking its head up into the mists and he walked in that direction.

Fowler forgot his own hurts. Not far away, according to the prospector's reckoning, there would be buzzard meat. The night sounds became even more distinct as the F. B. I. ace kept driving forward.

CHAPTER XVIII

King Scavenger



ON a high eminence overlooking the little town of Bald Ridge, the lights of which gleamed in the dark five miles away, a man sat in the weird shadow cast by a great up-thrusted rock. From that vantage point, he watched operations

down there in the little basin. A rifle lay across his knees, a dead frayed cigar was between his great teeth. His red-rimmed eyes and restless hands gave away the turmoil that boiled inside his massive figure. A hanging lop of this black hair was soaking wet.

He kept stabbing his eyes at his watch. Time was everything. They had been working for over an hour down in that basin. The vans were in the shadows of the great pines walling

in two sides of the clearing.

Horsemen had followed the same procedure ever since Six had issued his orders. Their every move was systematic. Riders came out of a blind canyon at spaced intervals, single horsemen who made a wide circuit of the basin. The riders made their way to the vans, unloaded heavy saddle rolls. Then they swung out again, rode back the way they had come. From somewhere near, cattle bawled restlessly.

"Three-fourths," Six ground out. "Three-fourths loaded. And not a lawman in sight. Hah! Tomorrow I'll be in the clear, Fowler or no Fowler. If he fell for that bridge trap—"

A man staggered past Six, hurled a blanket roll down a steep slope.

"Faster!" Six yelled. "In an hour, the sun will be showing. We want to be on our way."

The king of the gold pirates seemed a little insane. The possession of a quarter of a million in gold was having its way with his crooked brain.

"Did Spangler put up any kick? What did he say when you lifted that stuff out from under his eyes, huh?"

"I'll be glad when it's over, Six," the man said. "That stiff sittin' in there. His eyes open—"

"Yeah. As wide open as Inspector Fowler's," Six laughed crazily. "Fifteen more minutes, you buckos. I want it all out of there!"

His face streaming sweat, scratched by spiky dry branches and bush barbs, Dan Fowler came from around a great boulder. Voices were close now, husky voices that banged weird echoes from crag to crag. Above those echoes, an authoritative voice boomed out:

"Start rolling. We're finished here!"

Lungs dry and filled with tiny puncturing needles, the G-man staggered forward, a gun taken off Rourke's pain-lashed body gripped in his fingers. He saw a shadow loom up ahead, heard the jangling of steel against rock. Horses whickered and sent up a drumming sound.

"Coming at you," Fowler blurted out and fired.

He knew he had missed. His footing went out from under him and he nearly slid down a thirty-foot ledge. He got up, stumbled forward. A shrill whistle made his eardrums vibrate. Down in the canyon, a man was throwing himself on a horse that was going across the rocky floor on a dead run.

FOWLER, as he threw another chance shot, marveled at the feat. The man had snatched at the saddle horn with one hand and he vaulted into the saddle like a winged Mercury. Breathless, Dan leaned against a lodgepole pine. He heard the sounds of horses running through the foggy night. They were everywhere, it seemed.

He was out of his element there, he thought rebelliously.

"I'd give ten years of my life," he muttered, "if I had a fast horse and the ability to ride it like that devil."

He grinned then with his wide mouth. The rest of his rugged features might just as well have been made out of rock, so expressionless were they.

"A big bunch of them. They moved that gold," he mused bitterly as he moved slowly across the rocky ground. "I must have been in that wreck an hour." He looked down at a little light that flickered far below, between the Saguaches and the town of Bald Ridge. That was the place he had to reach. The cold grin was firmly set on his hard mouth. The fight, he promised Six, was not over.

Dan Fowler had been mistaken about one thing. His second snap shot had not missed its mark. The big rider's massive body was rolling drunkenly in the saddle as his horse galloped through the hills. Blood trickled out of a hole in the rider's back and he cursed deliriously as, with muddled senses, he fought to keep his tight grip on the pommel. The horse under him seemed to be going in dizzy circles. Every time he raised his head, the darkness in front of his glazing eyes became a reddish mist. Sweat oozed out of his gray face.

The bronc, having its head, took a trail it knew well. It led to the Bar-

V. The corral there, the feed, were far more to the black's liking than what was offered by a brush corral out in the hills. The great ranch-house was wrapped in early morning quiet when the rider tumbled out of the saddle near the corral fence. The horse shied at the thing that hit the ground, whickered shrilly. The blast of sound roused Blane's stablemen.

The big hulk moved a little. Through cold lips, he gasped:

"Six, ya've met a smarter man—"
Then he lay still.

A half-clad little chore boy reached the prone figure first. He looked at the widening pool of blood in the dewy grass, then ran across the yard shouting. Lights appeared in the windows of the ranchhouse. Guests peered out, called to each other.

Stacey Blane got out of his bed, cursed the disturbance outside. He went to the window, looked out over the yard. He saw the saddled horse milling uncertainly about, saw men running, heard them shouting to each other.

Blane was suitably dressed and striding across the yard to the corral five minutes later. Several of the guests, curiosity driving them, followed at his heels. A woman saw the big blotch on the ground, screamed hysterically.

"That bronc, boss," a stable man said. "It's got a Bar-V brand."

Blane knelt down beside the dead man, rolled him over. A patch came loose from the sweaty clammy face. A curse rolled off Blane's lips. He got up.

"Leave things as they are," he warned. "The police will want to handle this business. That man there—he was riding Buck Mercer's black horse. He could be Buck—!"

"What was that, Mr. Blane?" a man said under his breath. "You don't mean—?"

"Look in Mercer's room. See if he's there!"

WITH faint streaks of pink slicing across the eastern rim of the world, Dan Fowler stumbled into the yard of a little set of buildings built in the shelter of an overhanging

butte. He pounded on the door of the weathered shack until a sleepy-eyed gaunt old man answered his summons. A lantern was thrust close to Dan's weary battered face.

"Who be ya? What ya mean bustin' in here for?"

"Listen, mister. Take a look at this badge. I'm Fowler of the Department of Justice. I've got to get to a phone, man!"

"Hell's bells. Gov'ment officer! I—ain't got no phone."

Dan groaned a little.

"Where is the nearest one?"

"Bald Ridge, mister. Reckon I could get ya there in half an hour soon as I crank up old Betsy. Ya look done up. Got some hard cider in here. Come in an' wait until I git my pants on."

Dan thought the old flivver would never make it. The old wreck seemed to crawl. Shadows were shortening when the asthmatic machine rattled into the town of Bald Ridge.

"The drug store, Inspector," the old settler said. "Hi Stone lives upstairs. We'll rout him out!"

The desk sergeant at Bakerstown police headquarters yawned. He looked at the clock on the wall.

"Two more hours and I can hit the hay. Gettin' too old for this night shift. Five more years an'—"

The phone rang, startled him out of his musings.

"Hello—hello—"

"This is Inspector Fowler," said the voice at the other end. "At Bald Ridge. Send an ambulance right away. Have it pick me up here. Two men suffering out here in the hills—hurry. Give me news on that Elion job. Was it—"

"I'll say the tip was hot. The morgue in that town is full. Younger, Burrage, Corri. Three others shot to pieces. They got a couple of Regan's men. They—"

"Kendal. How is he?"

Dan's heart skipped a couple of beats.

"Scratched a little. Laid up in Elion, Inspector. Cars have been searching all over for you. What happened to you?"

"Plenty. Tell you later. Get that ambulance started out here. Send a

squad car."

No sooner had Dan hung up, when Blane's call drew the desk man back to the phone.

"Get the police out to my ranch, Sergeant. Right away. A dead man here. If Fowler is there, tell him this looks like his business. Man is wearing a disguise. Get Regan here—wake him up!"

The harassed sergeant whistled thinly through pursed lips.

"What a night. Dynamite's exploded!"

FIVE o'clock. Rain began to beat down on the town of Bald Ridge. With it came a police ambulance, a squad car with four men aboard. Dan Fowler, clothes torn, face covered with dirt and dried blood, came out of the constable's office, jumped to the running board of the smaller machine. He issued orders in a voice that belied his weariness.

"Ludd's Creek," he cried to the ambulance driver. "Government armored car wrecked there. Get those men out! Open this bus up to the limit!"

"Inspector, you look as if you've been in something," a policeman said. "Regan and several of the boys have gone to Blane's ranch. There's a dead man there. Rode in on a horse early this morning."

Dan Fowler swung around to face the man.

"On a horse, you said? How far is that place of Blane's?"

All of Dan Fowler's amazing durability seemed to spring to life in his jaded frame. His hard eyes gleamed as he gripped the man by the sleeve.

"Fifteen miles. No more."

"Let's get going, men. Maybe I didn't miss."

DAWN. And a chilling, slanting rain. The Bakerstown police car drove into the Bar-V yard, skidded to a stop. Dan got out and walked toward the tight group standing near the corral fence. Blane stepped forward, heavy slicker draped over his bulky figure.

"Looks like you've had a tough night, Dan," he greeted. "Take a look at this man. We've kept him covered

against the rain."

"Good work."

Dan stooped down, yanked the covering of the corpse away. He fingered the lop of heavy black hair on the dead man's forehead, ripped the artificial mole from his cheek. His forefinger felt gingerly of the skin drawn up on the outer edges of the grisly object's eyes, then kneaded the flesh with a wet finger. A thin piece of something broke loose and the eye lost its slant. Fowler searched the pockets of the dead man, looked a little puzzled.

"Looks like your foreman was a crook, Blane," Dan said. "That man is Buck Mercer! He wears two coats. That makes his chest as big as a barrel!"

"I was pretty sure of it when I got a close look at him, Fowler. Hell! You don't know what to expect in this bloody country."

Dan Fowler examined the black battered hat that lay beside the body. Thoughts milled in his brain and began knitting together. Old thoughts clashing with new and weaving a pattern, a picture that shortened Fowler's breath for a moment. He straightened, said to Chief Regan:

"I want the body handled carefully when you have it moved. I kind of imagine we have a man named Six to take to the morgue in Bakerstown. Yes, that's where I want it. That hellion has been Federal business ever since I took prints off a satin dress!"

The F.B.I. ace's teeth chattered. Rain beat down on his wrinkled torn clothes. He turned to Blane.

"Say, if you own an old coat, I'd like to borrow it for awhile. No raincoat, but something warmer. And a stiff drink of something hot will do me good."

Stacey Blane led Dan to the ranchhouse. The G-man was sure that the dead man was well covered before he left the spot. He asked Regan to be especially careful regarding the black hat.

Blane gave Dan a tweed topcoat, and instructed his servant to brew a hot whiskey and lemonade for the F.B.I. man.

"Looks like you've got this gang

cleaned up tonight," Blane said. "Burrage, Corri and the others at Elion. Now this guy Mercer. I can't believe it, Fowler. Buck was well paid. He had a future—"

"Crime draws some people. I don't understand it," Fowler said as he sipped the hot drink. It stimulated his battered muscles, soothed his nerves.

"It'll be a punk show I'll put up at Cheyenne tomorrow morning," Blane said sourly. "No rest tonight. This rotten business. Mercer and I—"

"Yeah. It's tough to find out you're wrong about a man," Dan said. "I wish you luck, Mr. Blane. Now I'm going to Bakerstown and sleep until noon. Then—well, I might have some cleaning up to do. Too bad he didn't live long enough to—" Dan shrugged, wrapped the heavy tweed coat around his drenched body.

"Before I go," Dan said, "I'd like to use the phone. I want to find out about Rourke and another man. Got to get the salvaging of that Government car under way. Takes a lot to crack one of those jobs up, Blane. Need it again sometime, we will."

"There's a phone over there on the table, Inspector."

Dan reached for the instrument, called the operator.

CHAPTER XIX

F.B.I. Magic



MOOTHLY, the police car rolled away from the Bar V ranch.

"Stop at Elion. I want to see Kendal," Fowler said as the car sped along. Three miles away from the ranch-house, he took off the tweed coat,

wrapped it carefully and placed it between his knees. Regan wondered at the action.

"I thought you were cold?" he said, puzzled.

"That drink's got me on fire." Dan masked a smile.

Special Agent Larry Kendal could hardly believe that it was Dan Fowler who walked into his hospital room—not until he got a look at his eyes, heard his voice.

"Looks as if you had it figured close, Dan."

"Yes. Mercer rode into Blane's place with a bullet through him, Larry. He wore a disguise. He could be Six. Everything points to it. All but one thing. Where is that little gun? That little 'Murder Maid'? It wasn't on him. Mercer had one of his men tip us off on that gold-snatching job last night. It was a swell way to get rid of some men who were getting too hot to handle, a way to screen a bigger job out in the hills. Yeah, I got there a little late. Six kept in step with me. That car went through a bridge."

"The gold was taken?"

Dan nodded.

"But I've got an idea where it is." He sighed. "I'm going to get some sleep now. Up in a few hours. Laboratory work to do. I . . ."

Dan yawned, swayed. Kendal reached out and shook him.

"You peel off your clothes right now and get those cuts washed. That bump on your head is the color of an egg-plant!"

Kendal yelled for a nurse.

"You can do your sleeping here. We both get out of here at noon. Fine thing, keeping me here with just a burn along the side."

Dan grinned, yawned prodigiously. "Right, feller. Sleep here just as well as—get me—"

"Fix this guy up and put him to bed," Kendal said to the tall stern-faced nurse who rushed in. "He's made of iron, but fix his scratches so he won't rust! And I'm getting out of here in just six hours!"

Six hours later, Dan, refreshed by sleep, his wounds cared for, got out of a car in front of police headquarters in Bakerstown. Larry, walking a little stiffly, followed at his heels. Newspaper men ganged them.

"Was Mercer the head of that criminal ring, Fowler?"

"Give us the inside on that trap you set last night?"

"Listen, Inspector—"

"Later, boys, later," the F.B.I. ace said shortly. "I'm not sure of everything myself at the moment."

Inside the dingy brick building, Regan met the Federals. Dan asked Regan if he had carried out his instructions.

"I have, Fowler. Mercer is on a slab in the morgue. His clothes are in the laboratory waiting for you. So is that coat you borrowed from Blane. The hat is in my office, wrapped up in newspaper."

"Good. We won't want to be disturbed, Regan. Larry and myself have plenty of work ahead of us. Everything set?"

"The technician and the chemist have been expecting you for an hour."

"Come on, Larry. Here's where you'll pick up some stuff you forgot since those lecture courses in Washington."

THE lab experts, Forshay and Collings, had little to do for the first twenty minutes after the G-men entered the long narrow room. Dan unwrapped the clothes that Mercer had worn, picked up a wrinkled black coat and sniffed at the lining of the breast pocket. He handed it to Larry.

"Take a whiff and tell me what you think."

Larry bent his head, smelled of the inner lining of the pocket. He looked at Dan.

"Oil" he said. "Machine oil."

"Yeah? Gun oil, feller. That little gun was carried in that pocket. But where is it now?"

"You're thinking way ahead of me, Dan. But why the tweed coat there?"

"That comes next," Dan said, and he unfolded the borrowed coat carefully. He laid it on a table, picked at the cloth with his fingers. After awhile he held four hairs about two inches long in his hand. He put them in an envelope, then asked Larry to hand him a package that had been placed on a stool.

"That," Dan grinned as the lab experts hovered close, "is what is called the *piece de resistance* — the hat off Mercer's head. I want every loose hair inside of it removed and examined under the microscope."

He nodded to Forshay. "That's where you come in."

Several hairs were removed from the inside of the hat. Forshay examined them first with the naked eye.

"Looks like there are two kinds of hair here," he said to Dan.

Forshay then mounted the hairs in a diluted solution of glycerin, put them on a glass slide. He examined them through a microscope with an eyepiece micrometer, spoke as he worked.

"We can easily check on hair, Fowler. All types are different, generally speaking. There are but two real types, however. They can be divided in but two categories. That without medulla and that with medulla. Hair is made up of three parts, medulla, cortex and cuticle. The medulla is important. The actual diameter of it is not. But the relation between the diameter of the medulla and the diameter of the whole hair is of great importance."

"Greek to me," Larry said.

Forshay studied the hair found on the tweed coat then. It matched with one of the samples taken out of the hat.

"It naturally appears black to the naked eye, but there is a distinct reddish tinge to it when you look at it through the microscope," Forshay pointed out. "Same curly texture. The other hair samples are jet black, are very straight."

Larry looked at Dan Fowler when the F.B.I. ace banged a fist into the palm of his hand.

"I thought so! Larry, to quote an old one—one's Six and the other's half a dozen! Chug Tremper got me thinking it was that way. He said the devil seemed to be in a dozen places at once. I followed that line of reasoning."

KENDAL'S eyes bugged out. "You mean, Dan—you mean Six could be two men!"

"Precisely. They both used that disguise. They were of the same build. One could be seen at a time when a certain outrage was committed by the other, and no one would suspect him. It was a clever alibi system. Buck Mercer was the one I nicked the night

I nearly hopped off the narrow edge out in a ghost town. Thrown off a bronc, he told Blane the day after. One thing we've got to find. That Skomak pistol. It will clinch the case against Mercer."

"He had a stooge then, Dan?"

Dan nodded, put a call through to Frank Rothwell. He said to the president of the Midas mine:

"If you see Mr. Blane today, tell him to drop in here at Headquarters."

"Blane left for Cheyenne an hour ago, Inspector. I talked with him a few moments. He's going to that rodeo. Congratulations, Inspector, on that job last night. I guess you've—"

The F.B.I. Inspector's eyes lost none of their cold light.

"Thanks, Rothwell," he clipped.

Dan's fingers toyed with a steel die as he stared across the desk at Kendal.

"We'll get a search warrant from the United States Commissioner in Leadville tonight. In the morning we'll go through the Cameo mine."

Regan came in, a satisfied grin on his face.

"Those other instructions, Inspector. I've carried them out. We checked on that road through Tinman. Owner of an all-night lunch place saw those vans go by his place about four thirty."

"That's about all I want to know," Dan said.

When the chief walked out, Larry put pertinent facts to his friend.

"If another man is at large, Dan, he'll be tipped off the moment we walk into that Cameo mine."

"You forget, Larry. Remember Lacey—those others? I don't believe they knew who Six was. Mercer alone knew. Possibly Carradine did, but he is dead. Six found out who Carradine was, knew he had his connection in Bakerstown. When this thing breaks, there will be a nasty job for the D. A. to clean up. The big shots behind the Cameo did not know who the mastermind of crime was, I'm positive. This—" and Dan banged the steel die down on the desk—"is what I'm banking on."

in front of him when Inspector Dan Fowler, Kendal and four other special agents of the F.B.I. walked into his office.

The man's face was stony as he reached for the Federal search warrant. He gazed at it steadily, lifted his eyes to meet Dan Fowler's direct scrutiny.

"This is unusual, Inspector. I don't see why such a procedure is necessary. But that paper certainly supersedes what little authority I have here. I'll show you around."

"Thank you," Dan said, "Let's get it over with."

The super led the G-men into the adit, a horizontal opening that led to the Cameo pay streak. The Cameo, the man pointed out, was a drift mine. Post and headboards supported the roof, and small cars were used to transport the gravel that was removed in a system of regular cuts and sluices in the pay streak. A small outfit. There was little in the adit to interest Dan. He asked to see the stamp mill and the ore sheds. He wanted access to the stamp mill files.

"Certainly." The super's voice seemed to get a lift to it.

"Wait," Dan said, and leaned against the timber shoring. "Another opening here? I thought I heard voices."

The G-man sniffed at the air, glanced toward Kendal.

The super was tapping his pipe against the wooden supports. It was a measured tapping.

Dan listened again, but no sounds came from the other side of the wall.

"Come on, Larry," Dan barked suddenly. "Three of you stay here and keep the super company. I want to look around outside."

"Fowler, what do you mean?" the super protested. "Do you insinuate that I'm hiding something? This is an outrage—"

Dan and Larry Kendal hurried out of the adit. Out in the open air, Dan said:

"Watch near the sheds. Somebody got the signal to lay off underground. Part of that mine has been walled in. There's an entrance or exit—"

"Look—over there, Dan! Coming out from that brush heap near that

THE superintendent of the Cameo mine swung his feet off the desk

big shed!"

Dan saw the head and shoulders of a man. He ducked out of sight.

"Come on!" he whispered, and started running.

Dan got to the clump of undergrowth, spotted a great wooden cover similar to those that are laid over a cistern. He yanked it loose, dropped down into a small glory-hole, flattened himself against the wall. A gun made a booming sound in the tunnel, its echoes running back and forth through the subterranean passage. A bullet chipped the wall near Dan. Somebody yelled hollowly:

"Lay off that shooting. There's no way out. They'll get us sooner or later!"

"The rotten coppers!"

"You men in there!" Dan roared. "Come on out or we'll load this tunnel with enough tear gas to blind you for life!"

Four men filed past Dan.

"How the devil did you get wise?" one ripped out.

"Hold them here, Larry," Dan said. "I'm going to take a look at the end of this tunnel."

A FEW moments later, the F.B.I. ace stared at the underground smithy, dragged gunny sacks off a small row of gold bars. In one corner of the place, a stack of burlap bags drew his attention. Dirt had been piled up against them until they were barely visible.

Dan, lips twisted with a triumphant grin, ripped one of the sacks open with a jackknife blade. Gold coins glittered in the dim light. Dan took a look at the golden brew bubbling in the fire-clay retort, then retraced his steps.

Six men were locked up in the Bakerstown jail an hour later and held incommunicado. Dan instructed Regan:

"Don't let a man come near these birds. The charges are larceny of Government Gold Shipments, accessories before the fact for a dozen murders, including those of Federal officers. Conspiracy to defraud, Federal Kidnaping Act. A dozen other crimes. I've got special agents covering the only phones over at that mine. As for

the newspaper men—you know nothing, Regan!

"In three hours I'll let the works blow wide open. Then we can issue warrants for the arrest of all the men behind the Cameo. We'll let the teletypes click all over the country, let the Federal law machine grind. You'll see grist the like of which you never saw before, Regan."

"That was a smooth job out there at the mine," Larry Kendal said. "No word'll get out of there from anyone of importance with Worthing's men in charge. I could see that those other workmen were all at sea when we took those crooks out."

"Come on, Larry. We're starting right away."

CHAPTER XX

Showdown



A CONFUSED roar of sound gripped the lobby of the Stenton in Cheyenne. The rodeo crowd predominated. Tall wiry men, faces burned to a rich bronze under their ten-gallon hats, stood out in sharp contrast to the run-of-the-mill patronage. Cowgirls clicked the high heels of their riding boots against the parquet floor, commanding the attention of the majority of the crowd. Rodeo fever gripped Cheyenne. The day of days had arrived and all other business in the city had been neglected.

Into this center of buzzing activity strode Inspector Daniel Fowler and his chief assistant, Larry Kendal, less than an hour of fast driving behind them. Their eyes roved as they wormed their way through the milling crowd. Conversation was muddled but scraps of it broke clear and hit hard against Dan's ears. Buck Mercer's name was on the lips of many. The F.B.I. ace went to the desk, asked the clerk a stock question and at the same time gave him a glimpse of his badge of authority.

"Don't bother announcing us," Dan said.

The door of a small suite was swinging open and voices boiled out of the place when the G-men walked down the carpeted hall of the Stenton's twenty-eighth floor. Stacey Blane was holding court for the scribes in his rooms. When Fowler stepped over the sill, Blane's stentorous voice broke off short. The rancher came forward.

"Well, hello there, Fowler. So you did decide to get a look at the broncbusters!"

"I want this place cleared, Blane," the Inspector said. "There are questions I must ask you regarding Mercer—and Rothwell! The answers are not for the newspapers—yet!"

"You heard the Inspector, boys!" Blane said. "I must ask you to leave!"

The representatives of the press withdrew reluctantly. Dan followed them out into the hall, made sure they kept on going to the elevators. He went into Blane's suite and shut the door behind him. Blane stood not far from a window, hands plunged deep into the pockets of a belted brown sport coat.

"I'm taking you back to Bakers-town, Blane," Dan snapped. "Six—I've caught up with you at last!"

The massive figures stiffened a little. The rugged face never moved a muscle. Dan marveled at the killer's control.

"Yes, it's all over, Six! We broke the Cameo mine wide open this morning. We found hairs off that coat I borrowed from you out at the Bar-V. We checked them in a laboratory with some hairs we found in the black hat that came off Buck Mercer. Two kinds of hairs in that hat, Blane. Yours and Mercer's. You knew I had Carradine dead to rights, so you killed him. It was Mercer wearing your big polo coat and ten-gallon hat who sat out there at Gannen's gas station establishing an alibi for you. You were in Bakerstown, Blane! When your foreman dropped off that horse at the ranch yesterday morning, you saw a way out, didn't you?"

"INSPECTOR," Blane bit out, "you're crazy!" He moved from

where he stood, stopped when Dan made a significant gesture.

"Yes? I've got Spangler's gold, Blane. And bars of gold that were remelted and stamped with a steel die I found on the floor of that car that gave Hugo his last ride! That was a job you should have handled, Blane. Mercer slipped up. I began to suspect you the day you pulled a cigar from your pocket. It got torn on something sharp—that Skomak!"

"When Chug Tremper mentioned that name of yours, things started to pile up. You and Mercer saw a way to become millionaires and you no doubt planned these killings and robberies far ahead. You found out about Carradine—and Frank Rothwell and you built the rottenest political machine this side of the Mississippi. Carradine brought in men like Younger and Corri and Burrage, and those rats in turn sent for men they had once ruled. You, yourself, rounded up the scum of the cattle regions—"

Blane brought a hand up slowly when Dan, for the merest fraction of an instant, swung his gaze away from him. His features twisting into a malevolent evil mask, he pivoted sharply. Larry Kendal's bullet caught him before the instrument of death he held in his big hand could shoot its venom. A little hole in the cloth of Kendal's coat trailed smoke.

"Pretty shooting, Larry," Dan's voice boomed as he watched Blane stumble toward the wall, his face blanched, his lower jaw hanging ludicrously. "That's his confession. Blane, you should have given that little popgun to Mercer when it was the foreman's turn to wear those old clothes. We smelled gun oil in the pocket of that old coat, the breast pocket. Put the cuffs on him, Larry!"

Guns held ready, the G-men approached Stacey Blane. Blane dragged his bleeding body up to its full height and with terrible effort, hurled himself toward the open window.

"Larry, grab him!" Dan roared.

Too late. Six's heavy frame went over the sill. Dan and Larry stared at each other for a breathless second. Above the roar of traffic that poured in through the window, came the sound

of Blane's big body smashing against the pavement far below. A woman screamed hysterically.

"That about closes this case," Dan said. "The best way for it to end. Rothwell is safe now."

Larry nodded.

"Right, Dan. You had everything figured."

"THAT, sir," Dan Fowler said a half-hour later into the telephone, "is just about the whole story. Blane got too big. If he had been content to confine his criminal activities to bullion and had let Hugo handle the Spangler treasure, he might have made this case harder for us to crack. One thing he forgot and all others like him have made the same mistake. Science, sir. When we got those prints off a woman's satin dress and those fender scrapings off an old nail head on a fence post, we weren't in the dark anymore.

"After setting a trap that bore fruit in the form of a supposed suicide—the man that shot Bill Marston—I knew that one of Bakerstown's biggest political moguls was up to his head in this rotten business. He gave me a ride, sir, right into the past of a man who was a fugitive from justice—George Arnoldi. Under the name of Carradine, he pulled the strings hitched to Bakerstown's political puppets and naturally the marionette master was Stacey Blane. He built up his own political machine, put a scoundrel in as mayor of the city.

"Blane, knowing that he had to dispose of that stolen bullion, arranged for a new vein of ore to be discovered in the Cameo mine, the place where stolen gold was melted over again. Realizing that the mine's yield of metal was limited, Blane had to take one fact into consideration. If the Cameo shipped more bars to the mint than its average output warranted, then he would have been on a spot. Blane did not know I carried that steel die with me, the one I found in a killer's car. The biggest criminal brain cannot know everything, remember everything, Chief. Blane forgot that buzzards make it a business to locate dead things. They located Spangler's

corpse for the G-men!"

"No one man can get all the breaks, can be acquainted with all the tricks, Fowler," the Director chuckled. "The modern criminal thinks he is a million times more efficient than old-time crooks, but if they only knew it, they haven't half the chance of beating the law that the old crooks had. Modern scientific methods have these crooks backed off the map. They may get just so far. Then—say, it looks as if you played one of those so-called hunches, Inspector. After all, Blane had his tracks covered pretty well until—"

"No guesswork, sir," Dan laughed. "It was Blane's alibi that licked him. It was too perfect. I mean the one he established on the night of Carradine's murder. Well, on the night when Kendal smashed that Ophir raid, I dropped in at Colton on the way to the Saguache mountains and questioned that filling station man, Gannen. He told me Blane was there that night and that it rained plenty. Blane got out of the car and had to cross an open space to get to a phone, he said.

"WELL, when Blane arrived in Bakerstown, his boots looked as though they had been just handed to him by a bootblack. You could have seen your face in them if you'd knelt down a little. Blane forgot to figure on the weather. Sometimes it rains here in one spot and leaves another place as dry as a bone.

"I knew then that Blane had never been in that car. It was Mercer, wearing a duplicate outfit such as a big polo coat and a ten-gallon hat. When Blane drove away after the killing, he met Mercer and changed places with him. The act had to be worked in a hurry and it looks as if Mercer forgot to tell Blane he had been out in the rain."

"You see, sir, I suspected then, that Blane and Mercer had more than one sartorial trick up their sleeves. A remarkable thing, Chief. You cover the lower part of their faces here in the morgue and they look exactly alike. The same noses and the same colored eyes. No wonder that garage man tagged Mercer as Blane when Mercer had a muffler drawn up over the lower

part of his face.”

“You certainly smashed them, Inspector. Hurry back here—”

“I’ll say. There’ll be a score of crooked officials with indictments plastered on them within forty-eight hours. The D. A. here is on the run, Chief. Lamphier committed suicide just twenty minutes ago. The Federal courts are going to have a busy year ahead of them, getting all these crooks measured for prison suits.”

“My congratulations, Dan,” the Director said warmly, gratefully. “For the job you’ve just finished. That goes for Larry Kendal too. I guess the department won’t mind the bill for fixing up that armored job in exchange for over a half-million in gold bullion, Inspector!”

Inspector Dan Fowler grinned as he replied:

“Thanks, Chief. As far as we’re concerned, we’ve just got through another routine job.”

The Director laughed briefly, hung up.

Dan cradled the receiver, grinned ruefully across the desk at Larry Kendal.

“That’s that, feller. We’re through here. But somewhere in this land of ours, right now, there are crooks scheming more hell. But every year we make crime tougher, less profitable, more risky. There’ll come a day, I hope—”

Dan Fowler shrugged. He wondered if he would ever live to see that day.



IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

MONUMENT TO MURDER

A Complete Book-Length Novel Featuring

Dan Fowler, the Scourge of Crime

By C. K. M. SCANLON

THIS 20 FREE SHAVE OFFER WINS EVEN WISE GUYS



Lambert Pharmacal Co., Dept. 23, St. Louis, Mo. Please send me free and postpaid your large sample tube of Listerine Shaving Cream; Listerine Brushless Cream. (Check whichever is desired.)



Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____

Public Enemies

By Clayton Marwell

EARL YOUNG

A Regular G-Men Feature

EARL YOUNG, KILLER, WAS A DEPRAVED YOUTH OF LEBANON, PA. AT AN EARLY AGE HE BECAME INVOLVED IN CRIMES AND SPENT A GREAT DEAL OF HIS TIME BEHIND THE BARS OF PRISONS.

HE SERVED TERMS FOR AUTO-STEALING, ASSAULT WITH INTENT TO KILL, BURGLARY AND VIOLATION OF THE STATE FIREARMS ACT. SERVING A SENTENCE FOR ASSAULT, HE ESCAPED FROM PRISON ON MAY 18, 1938, AND HEADED WEST IN A STOLEN CAR.

VAIN AND EGOTISTICAL, BOTH HIS ARMS WERE GAUDY WITH TATTOOS, AND IT WAS THIS CLUE OF IDENTITY THAT BROUGHT HIM TO HIS END, AS THE G-MEN, AFTER A NATION-WIDE SEARCH, TRACKED HIM DOWN.

IN KENTUCKY AND IN KANSAS, ON HIS TRAVELS BETWEEN HOLD-UPS, YOUNG KIDNAPED YOUNG GIRLS AND FORCED THEM TO ACCOMPANY HIM. TWO OF HIS VICTIMS WERE FOUND TIED TO TREES, BRUISED AND BEATEN. THEY COULD IDENTIFY THEIR KIDNAPER ONLY BY HIS ARMS, WHICH BORE CONSPICUOUS TATTOOS.

MAYBE SOMEONE WILL FIND YOU -- MAYBE NOT! PLEASE!



ON THE NIGHT OF JULY 28, 1938, IN SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA, YOUNG SEIZED SEVENTEEN-YEAR OLD BETTY SCHNAIDT, ALONE IN THE HOUSE.

DON'T SQUAWK, OR I'LL KNOCK YOU OVER THE HEAD!



ON AUGUST 1, THE BODY OF BETTY SCHNAIDT WAS FOUND 150 MILES AWAY. SHE HAD BEEN TIED UP AND STRANGLER. POLICE ALSO FOUND A CAR IN A NEARBY TOWN WHICH HAD BEEN TOWED IN AND NEVER CALLED FOR. IN THE CAR WAS FOUND ROPE OF THE SAME KIND THE BODY WAS TRUSSER WITH.

THIS IS THE MURDERER'S CAR. WE'RE GOING TO NEED SOME HELP. THIS CAR HAS WISCONSIN PLATE S. I'VE CHECKED IT. IT WAS STOLEN IN OMAHA. THAT LET'S THE F. B. I. INTO THE CASE -- I'M CALLING THEM!



IN A FEW HOURS G-MEN WERE AT THE SCENE EXAMINING THE CAR.

SURE, THE ROPE IS A CLUE, BUT IT WILL BE HARD TO TRACE. HERE'S A SHIRT I FOUND IN THE CAR WITH THE LAUNDRY MARK, A. G.

I FORGOT TO TELL YOU BEFORE. WHEN THE FELLOW GOT OUT OF THE CAR AND SAID HE'D RETURN FOR IT, HE DROPPED A ROAD MAP. I SAW IT -- IT WAS A MAP OF MINNEAPOLIS -- AND HIS WRIST WAS TATTOOED!



G-MEN IN OMAHA AND MINNEAPOLIS WENT TO WORK ON THE LAUNDRY MARK. THE OMAHA SEARCH WAS FRUITLESS, BUT IN MINNEAPOLIS THEY STRUCK PAY DIRT.

YES -- THAT'S THE TYPE OF LAUNDRY MARK I USE. A FELLOW LEFT THE SHIRT HERE WHO SAID HIS NAME WAS A. GINGRICH. WHEN HE CALLED FOR THE SHIRT HE USED THE NAME OF ARNOLD RESAK, BUT SINCE HE HAD THE CORRECT STUB, I GAVE HIM THE LAUNDRY.



MINNEAPOLIS WIRED THE NEWS TO THE F. B. I. IN WASHINGTON. A SEARCH OF THE FILES FAILED TO LOCATE THESE NAMES.

CHIEF, THERE'S NO MAN UNDER THE NAME OF GINGRICH OR RESAK. HOWEVER, SINCE OUR FILES LIST NAMES OF THE SWEETHEARTS OF CRIMINALS, I CHECKED THAT FILE. THERE'S A GIRL IN LEBANON NAMED RESAK. SHE'S A MOLL OF EARL YOUNG, ESCAPED CONVICT. HIS ARMS ARE TATTOOED! TWO GIRLS HAVE BEEN KIDNAPED RECENTLY AND NAME THEIR KIDNAPER AS A MAN WITH TATTOOED ARMS. YOUNG IS OUR SUSPECT!



SEND PHOTOS AND SEE IF THE GARAGE MEN CAN IDENTIFY HIM!

THAT'S HIM, ALL RIGHT! WHEN HE REACHED DOWN TO PICK UP THE MAP, HIS SLEEVE SLIPPED UP AND I NOTICED THE MASK TATTOOED ON HIS RIGHT WRIST!

THAT CLINCHES IT, YOUNG'S OUR MAN. I'LL PHONE WASHINGTON FOR INSTRUCTIONS!



WITH THE IDENTIFICATION COMPLETE, J. EDGAR HOOVER LISTED YOUNG AS A PUBLIC ENEMY.

GET YOUNG, KILL HIM IF NECESSARY, BUT GET HIM. WATCH ALL ROBBERIES AND TRACE ALL REPORTS OF STOLEN CARS -- THAT'S HIS METHOD OF TRAVEL!



G-MEN TRACED HIM TO OMAHA HERE THEY INTERVIEWED A TAXI-DANCER.

YEAH -- HE WAS HERE. I SAW HIS WRISTS SPOTTED WITH TATTOOS, AND THAT'S HIS PICTURE. HE WANTED ME TO TRAVEL WITH HIM. I DIDN'T LIKE HIS TYPE. HE LEFT HERE TWO DAYS AGO!



ANOTHER STOLEN CAR LED THE WAY TO MEMPHIS, BUT AGAIN THE G-MEN WERE TOO LATE. IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, J. EDGAR HOOVER HAD SET G-MEN TO WATCH HIS OLD HOME IN LEBANON. THEY INTERCEPTED A LETTER TO HIS MOTHER.

THIS IS YOUNG'S ONE SLIP! NOTICE THE POSTMARK -- LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS!



G-MEN MOVED INTO ARKANSAS IN FORCE AND WARNED ALL LOCAL OFFICERS AND SHERIFFS TO BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR YOUNG, ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 5. IT WAS HOT AND HUMID. TWO POLICEMEN NOTICED A YOUNG MAN, WITH SLEEVES ROLLED UP, SAUNTERING ALONG THE STREET.

LOOK, BEN! THAT FELLOW -- HIS ARMS ARE TATTOOED!

YEAH, JERRY, IT'S YOUNG! WE'LL TRAIL HIM AND CALL THE G-MEN!



THE OFFICERS FOLLOWED YOUNG TO HIS HOTEL AND WERE JOINED BY A G-MAN, AS THEY OPENED THE DOOR OF HIS ROOM HE FIRED AT THEM.



SURRENDER, YOUNG!

LET HIM HAVE IT!

BOTH POLICEMEN FIRED AT THE SAME TIME. YOUNG FELL, INSTANTLY KILLED BY THE STRAIGHT-SHOOTING OFFICERS. THERE GOES ANOTHER PUBLIC ENEMY -- A RAT IF THERE EVER WAS ONE!



UGH!

IN THE NEXT ISSUE -- ANOTHER THRILLING G-MEN ADVENTURE IN PICTURES



FUNERAL RACKETS

How the Relatives of a Deceased Person May Be Mulcted by Ghouls

ORDINARILY, when the grim spectre of death spreads its wings over a household, the sympathies of the neighbors, and of the world at large, are with the bereaved family. But there are any number of vultures who are willing to capitalize upon money-making opportunities provided by the presence of death.

Mrs. Leslie Turner found this out on the morning after the death of her husband. Mr. Turner had been fairly active in business and social organizations, and many of his activities were a complete mystery to his wife. He ran a number of charge accounts with various stores, and Mrs. Turner was more or less accustomed to having things come to the door, without wondering about how much they cost, and when they were paid for.

Therefore she was not particularly surprised when a florist's delivery truck drove up and a uniformed driver came to the door with a large floral piece. She receipted for the flowers, and they were placed alongside the bier.

An Embarrassing Position

Perhaps twenty minutes later a rather well-dressed man came to the door, looked at the crepe with some interest, then walked in. One of the undertaker's assistants greeted him, and he immediately asked for Mrs. Turner. The widow came forward, and ushered the visitor into one of the back rooms of the house.

"I am Mr. Garland," that gentleman introduced himself. "I was your husband's tailor. I am extremely sorry to hear of his untimely death. It puts me in rather an embarrassing position."

Mr. Garland seemed rather upset, and Mrs. Turner, in spite of her own loss, was interested in the tailor's difficulties.

"You see, Mr. Turner ordered a suit of clothes, and had several fittings. His suits usually ran to about one hundred dollars, and I have already laid out something like sixty-five dollars for cloth. Since this cloth has been cut to his particular size, there is nothing I can do with it."

Mrs. Turner listened to his story with

some interest, then said:

"I'm sure that Leslie would not want you to be out the money. I'll pay you the cost of the cloth."

She left the room to get her purse and also spoke to the undertaker. Finally when she returned she turned over the currency to Garland. The tailor thanked her, and took his departure.

Marked Money

He got something of a shock, however, when he was picked up on the pavement by a police officer who had been summoned by the undertaker's assistant. The money which had been marked was used as evidence, and the startled racketeer was informed that Mr. Turner had been an invalid for several months, and had had no need for new clothes, since his doctor had given up hope.

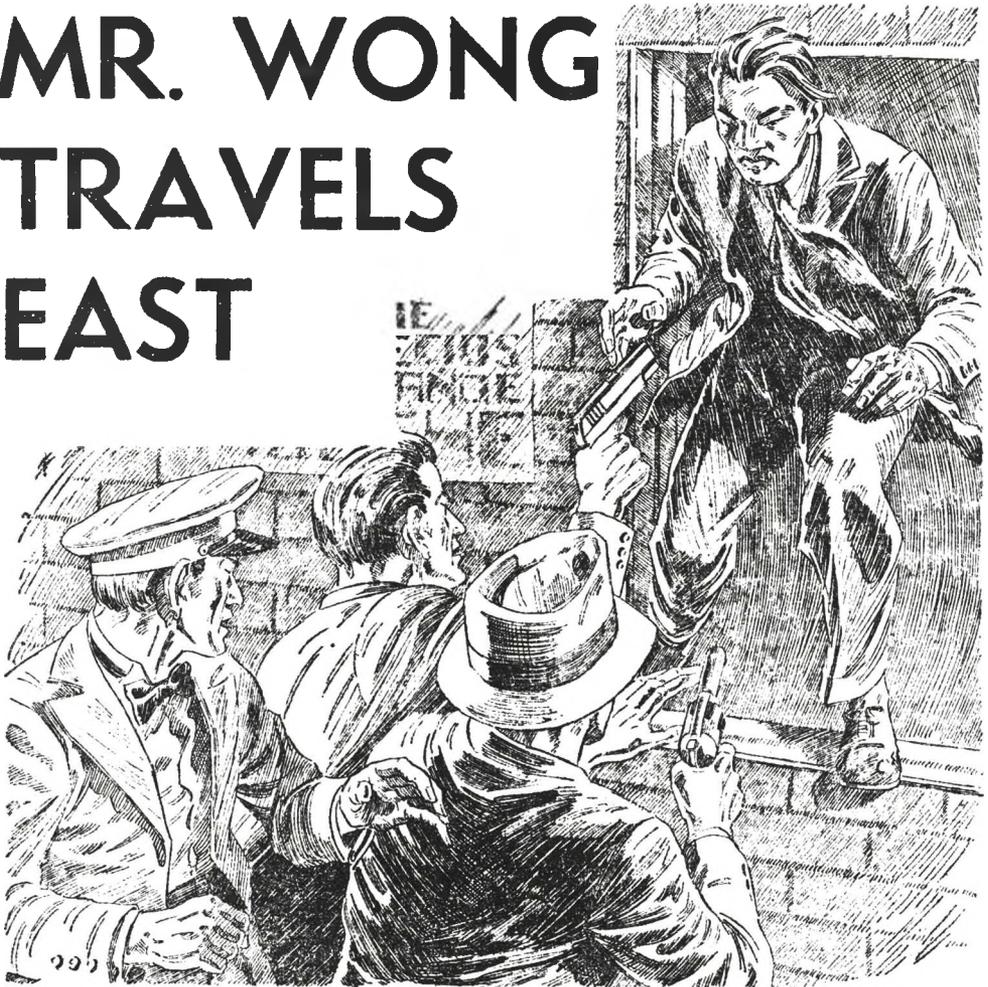
But all victims of these unscrupulous racketeers are not as lucky as Mrs. Turner. These swindlers get the names of recently deceased people from the morning papers, and immediately set in motion a series of spurious deliveries, ranging from fountain pens to flowers, clothes, shoes, tickets on fancied cruises, etc. If the widow or children are not receptive to the idea of paying for these things, the suave salesman or delivery clerk produces supposed signed orders and indicates that a law-suit may be forthcoming. Untutored and grief-stricken individuals will usually pay up, rather than go through any further trouble.

Be Carefull

Occasionally, where a person has departed this life abruptly, there may be unfilled orders which he or she has authorized, but generally speaking, members of the families of deceased persons will do well to scrutinize carefully post-mortem merchandise deliveries. When in doubt, refuse the merchandise. A reputable firm will be glad to cancel the order under the circumstances.

Be sure to tell your friends that you were warned of these funeral rackets by **BEWARE!** which appears exclusively in **G-MEN** every month.

MR. WONG TRAVELS EAST



He bunched his muscles like steel cords for the leap

**Mr. Wong, U. S. Secret Service Agent, Pits Body and Brain
Against a Plot to Blight the Philippines!**

A Chinese G-Man Story

By LEE FREDERICKS

Author of "A Matter of English," "Mr. Wong in Panama," etc.

MR. RICHARD WONG, United States Secret Service Agent, sniffed the air appreciatively as he descended the gang-plank and looked the docks over. Manila, the last Eastern outpost of the United States, was very much like his own native China from the water front.

For a few moments he stood at the end of the quay and looked at the crowds that were busy on the Playa Dewey. Gigantic-statured Sikh policemen, uniformed in khaki, with tur-

bans wrapped around their heads, directed traffic, while the automobiles and trucks set up a bedlam of noise with their horns. The clamor varied from the high honk honk of a French horn to the blaring air blasts that came from the standard American cars.

Several pompous Chinese dressed in native black loose flowing robes caught his eye. Mr. Wong smiled at them. He decided that he was going to like working here despite the fact that the duty ahead of him was possibly very grim.

He looked around the Playa for the car which was supposed to meet him. A few seconds later he spotted it, a closed sedan among all the touring cars for hire to the tourists from the ships. Slowly he walked across the street while he stuck his hand in his pocket and brought out his ornate gold and silver cigarette case. By the time he reached the car he was puffing on one of his own blend of perfumed oriental cigarettes.

The chauffeur looked at him steadily. When Wong came abreast of the car, the man opened the door. Wong saw Durbano, his boss, inside the car, chewing on a stogie excitedly.

"Gonna spend the day looking over the scenery?" Durbano asked sarcastically, as Wong climbed into the car. "I told you in my wireless message that I would be here."

Mr. Wong grinned. "Sze Low has written that one who rushes through life only hastens to his rendezvous with death," he said easily, "I believe that to hurry and save minutes may be to overlook such things as people who would follow."

Durbano started. "Then you were followed?"

"Not at all," Mr. Wong assured him, "I took the precaution only to see that no one followed me."

Durbano threw his stogie out of the car window and drew another from the pocket of his crumpled whites.

"Okay, you win," he said resignedly, as he stuffed the stogie into his mouth, neglecting to light it.

Mr. Wong blew a column of smoke toward the roof of the car and sighed. "Something about smuggling, isn't it?"

Durbano chewed viciously on the stogie.

"Something is more than right. With more than fifty large and small islands on a coastline that you could hide several navies in, they have to pick a place like this to run dope."

MR. WONG sat upright. "I wouldn't dream that this could be a profitable market for narcotics," he said slowly. "The people haven't the money to buy the poppy juice."

"Don't seem to need any," Durbano snorted. "Even the poorest laborer seems to be able to hit off a pipe when he wants to. I don't know where the stuff comes from, but the government here has asked us to clear it up."

"And clear it up we will," Wong said determinedly, "but there is the slight matter of finding out what has happened, and who, so far, is under suspicion."

The car drew up in front of the pink coral cement building that housed the Department of Justice and the Philippine Government Police offices. Durbano climbed out, followed by Wong, and they entered through the hand carved mahogany portals.

"You can do your talking to Ferrera Diaz," Durbano said shortly. "He knows the story inside out."

Ferrera Diaz was sitting behind a huge mahogany desk that seemed to dwarf him. To Wong, the man had kindly features and reminded him very much of the idealist, Francisco Madero, assassinated Presidente of Mexico. Diaz smiled his welcome and hastened to draw up chairs for both men to sit down, and then when he was sure that they were comfortable, slumped back in his own chair and put his forefingers to his temples.

He began without preamble after the introductions were completed.

"This is something that seems beyond the powers of all our government," he said sadly. "Our jails are filling to overflowing and our mad-houses are becoming jammed with people who have been misguided into the use of drugs. To say it is horrible would be a very weak word for the condition of our people, and yet, unlike other places, the people who are indulging in the drugs are those who cannot afford to buy the very necessities of life for themselves. It is uncanny."

Mr. Wong nodded. His eyes were bright with interest as he ground the cigarette out and reached into his pocket for another.

"This drug is perhaps opium?" he questioned.

Diaz nodded. "We have traced down several methods of making addicts out

of unwitting citizens, and to the best of our ability we have clamped down on them, but things get worse instead of better. In the past seven weeks we have found that the habit is even reaching to the outlying islands as far as Mindanao, and the native tribesmen have been going amuck with a disturbing frequency. It isn't safe to venture ashore in some places unless you are armed."

He sighed heavily, "There is a paper here that calls itself 'The Advocate of Liberty' that is calling for a change of government. This change would place the islands in a very close contact with the one country in the orient that we fear some day will be an aggressor on our shores, and I am afraid that the decent element of the island will be blinded by the issue of dope and vote them in."

MR. WONG'S eyes narrowed. "This method you mention," he said, "is probably the distribution of cigarettes that have been impregnated with a tincture of opium solution, am I right?"

Ferrera Diaz looked at Wong strangely and then shrugged. "You have probably been reading the editorials and the news in some of our more lurid papers," he said resignedly, "but for once these papers are more than right, and we are powerless to break the thing up."

"You have located some of the factories that turn these things out?" Wong asked.

Diaz nodded his head in the affirmative, "Cigarettes for native consumption are often manufactured in private homes. We have located several of these houses, but as fast as we close one house, a dozen more spring up."

"Something like the dragon with a thousand heads," Mr. Wong said. "Cut one off and ten new ones spring forth from the same neck." He shook his head. "The dragon was slain by cutting the neck as well as the head from the torso. Perhaps that will be the best method here."

He rose to his feet, "I think I should get one of the newspapers you mention." He bowed, and before the star-

led Diaz could protest, or Durbano could speak, left the room.

Outside the building Mr. Wong looked up and down the broad streets. The modern and the old jumbled together in weird contrast of ricksha and modern car all obeying the traffic light at the corner. He grinned to himself as a small Chinese newsboy ran through the streets crying the news in idiomatic Spanish. He took a nickel from his pocket and bought one of the sheets.

One glance at the news and he was convinced that this was the sheet Ferrera Diaz had mentioned. Running across the top, a scarlet headline announced a grim killing by a drug-mad fiend.

Mr. Wong didn't bother to read the story. He was sure that he could find its counterpart in any newspaper in any part of the civilized world. Instead he turned through the paper, idly glancing at the different items of news to see if by any chance it contained anything that would give him a clue.

The paper, he noticed, was printed in three languages, Spanish, English and Japanese. He skimmed through the editorials to find out what he could of the policy of the paper so that he would know in which direction the news was colored, and then turned to the Japanese page.

He went through the news with a feeling of disappointment. There was no lead in what was said. In fact, everything seemed to be a repetition of what had been said in other parts of the paper in both Spanish and English.

His eyes scanned the columns until they rested on the personal ads. Wong looked them over with avidity. He knew that a newspaper ad would be the only way that the people the drug peddlers wanted to reach would be able to get in touch with large quantities of the population at one time.

AT last his eyes caught an ad that seemed to satisfy him. It read:

"Bride of the White Flower: Will be in Evului this night."

It was unsigned.

Hastily Wong thumbed back through the pages. Again under "classified" he found the same ad in Spanish. The English page was bare of such advertising.

Wong put the sheet in his pocket and whistled thoughtfully. Islanders would think nothing strange of an ad of this type. All brides in the archipelago wore flowers. To the casual reader it would seem to be a tryst. But the fact that it was repeated in two languages made Wong think. That, and the white flower he knew of . . . the deadly white poppy from which opium is derived.

Mr. Wong's eyes narrowed. Quickly he turned and re-entered the building he had just left. He didn't call back in the office of Diaz. Instead he went to the executive office of the Customs Division. There he identified himself to a clerk and requested the accounts of importation for the firm that published the paper he had just read.

He had no trouble in getting what he wanted. The clerk brought out a folio that Wong scanned with minute intensity. There was nothing out of order. He noted that the paper on which the news was printed came from Japan, and also that for the last six months they had imported a surprising amount more than they could have used for the circulation that was stated on the top of the sheet.

From the Custom House, Mr. Wong had no trouble in locating the Evului. The very name, a corruption of the English Evil-way, was enough to tell him that the street was somewhere in the vicinity of the waterfront, a street where sailors were deprived of their money through drink or other pleasures that a seaman might be seeking after having been cooped up in a crew's quarters of a vessel for eighteen days or more. He walked to the corner and looked over the open windowless busses to see if there was one marked for the quay.

He didn't have long to wait for the bus. They seemed to stream down the long boulevard in a constant line. He climbed aboard the crowded vehicle, paid the driver, and found a strap to cling to.

The ride was a short one, for which Mr. Wong was thankful. The bus was hot. He felt sticky as he dropped off to the street in the vicinity of the piers. The clean salt air braced his lungs. He breathed it in with deep gasps.

The ship he had arrived on but a scant hour before was still at the dock, but with the tourists gone for the day, the regular passengers having left for their various destinations. The ship was deserted of all but the crew and the panderers that haunt the docks like ghouls.

MR. WONG watched the seamen as they strolled from the docks and down the quay. Most of them seemed to be going in one direction. He nodded to himself and set out in the same direction, waiting until they turned off into the evil smelling alleys before he brought up short.

At the corner of one alley a peddler's shop was set up, a small pushcart on wheels painted in bright and gaudy colors. Mr. Wong was about to pass by when he saw attached to the end of the cart a small white gardenia. He paused and looked over the cart more carefully. The owner, a wizened celestial, grinned and opened the rolling show case for him to look over the wares.

Mr. Wong put his hand in his pocket "Cigarillos?" he asked.

The man's head bobbed up and down and he produced several rumpled American cigarettes in an opened package.

Mr. Wong shook his head. "No señor," he said insistently, "*tener cigarillos de flora blanco?*"

It was a long chance to ask the man if he had the cigarettes of the white flower, but it produced results. Quickly the man lifted the tray of sweets and other goods for sale in the cart and exposed a compartment underneath, lined with evil looking brown native cigarettes. He drew out a long one and proffered it to Wong.

"*Dos centavos,*" he demanded.

Two cents for a complete jag on opium, enough to make any hop head in the world happy! Mr. Wong was amazed.

He jammed the cigarette down in the upper pocket of his white coat, counted the three cents change he received from the wizened old man and turned into the evil smelling alley that went under the name of Evului.

One after another he passed the little shops on wheels. His head spun at the numbers of them that carried the white flower on them in a conspicuous place. At least he had found the manner of distribution, but the real task was still ahead of him, to find where the stuff was coming from.

Mr. Wong passed out of the alley and started to walk back up the quay where the big ships came in. He noticed that the little cart where he had bought his cigarettes was no longer on the corner and his eyes opened slightly. As he went up along the quay he hurried his steps a little, sure that he was being followed.

A closed touring car came close in to the curb and seemed to keep pace with him. Mr. Wong looked about for a place to duck into and saw a saloon near the corner. He accelerated his pace just as the car came abreast of him, and slid in through the door just as the car was braked to a stop.

Mr. Wong didn't stop at the bar, which was lined with seamen. Instead he went straight to the rear of the place to see if there was a telephone. He was relieved when he saw that the occupants of the car hadn't followed him inside. He found the instrument he wanted on the wall opposite a glassless window that opened on an alley in the rear of the saloon.

HE took the receiver from the hook, and when the telephone operator answered, asked for "Government house. . ."

He didn't finish the request. There was the sharp crack of a pistol and the ancient plaster on the wall crumbled at his feet. Mr. Wong spun around, reaching for his gun, but only saw a blur of a face as the sniper ran away from the window.

He turned back to the telephone to finish the call, but there was no answering buzz in the receiver this time. The line had been cut outside.

As he turned to go out of the saloon again he faced the window. One look was enough to convince him that he had lost for the moment. Two men were framed in the opening with guns pointed straight at him. A third lurked in the background. One look at the man and Mr. Wong knew how he had been discovered. The man was one of the Japanese stewards on the ship that had brought him to Manila.

The steward was the first to speak. "It is advisable that you come by way of the window," he said. "So sorry to inconvenience you."

Mr. Wong shrugged and advanced to the window. There was nothing else he could do for the moment.

"There is an automobile waiting for you," the Jap told him as he came to the window. "So sorry to disturb your clothing."

Slowly Mr. Wong climbed up on the open window sill. The men with the guns backed away to give him a chance to jump down to the concrete surface of the alley.

That was what Mr. Wong had been waiting for. He hunched his muscles like steel cords for the leap. The Japanese steward saw the movement and cried out a warning to the gunmen, but it was too late. Like a typhoon Mr. Wong sailed through the air at the two men and caught one with each foot. There was no chance for either of them to fire. They went down in a tangled cursing mass of fighting, kicking, biting humanity.

Mr. Wong's chances were slim against three men in a crowded alley, but he hoped against hope that the noise of the scuffle would bring some of the seamen from the bar inside. Shouting, he waded into them.

The guns sailed up the alley away from clutching fingers as Mr. Wong got his first hold into the Filipino gunmen. He caught one man by the arm at the elbow and shoved his own free arm under the elbow joint so that he could bend it the wrong way. There was a snap as the arm broke at the elbow and a howl of pain. Neither of the men were equipped to fight in jiu-jitsu.

The Japanese saw that things were

going wrong for his henchmen and dove into the melee. But the other man with the idea of helping his confederate got into the way.

The diversion was enough for Mr. Wong to get a firm hold on the lapels of the white mess-coat of the Japanese. There was a rending sound as he drew the man forward with steamshovel energy, then suddenly he threw the man from him.

THE little Jap could not help himself. He flew across the alley as though he had been shot from a cannon and crumpled against the wall.

Mr. Wong took advantage of the man's dazed condition. The second Filipino gunman was in no fighting mood, and the first with the broken arm was dragging himself out of the alley. Before the Japanese could gather his scattered wits, Mr. Wong dove past the men and out of the alley.

He got only as far as the alley entrance. He stopped completely when he was faced with another gun and this time in the hand of a grim oriental who had been left sitting in the gunmen's car. The man's voice wasn't pleasant when he spoke to Mr. Wong.

"Perhaps it will be better if you were to step into the car," the voice purred with deadly intentness "There is a matter of some questions to be asked."

Desperate Mr. Wong looked about. There was no one in sight on the playa anywhere nearer than the docks. He could be murdered without trouble, and the car could make a complete getaway. He started toward the car just as the steward and the two disgruntled gunmen came out of the alley. There was no helping himself for the present.

As Mr. Wong entered the car, the steward came in back of him. The man grabbed his arms the minute they entered the car, removed his belt from his trousers, and bound Wong's arms tightly together.

Mr. Wong looked at the oriental who had commanded him to get into the car. There was something familiar about his face, but for the moment he couldn't place it. The man

turned to the Japanese steward.

"You are sure that this is the man who received the wireless message aboard the steamer?" he asked in Japanese. "This man is obviously not an American."

"It has been written that the stupid cannot see the mountain for the grass that conceals it," Mr. Wong told the man in his own language. "Perhaps if your minion hadn't been so overly zealous in his work, you would not now have the full force of the law following you."

The Japanese gave a start, first at hearing his own tongue, and secondly at the warning that Wong had sounded. He looked apprehensively from the back of the car window, and when he saw no one was following he breathed a sigh of relief.

Mr. Wong was contented. He knew that he had the other going, and his life would be spared until the Jap thought he had pumped him dry of information.

The car left the outskirts of town and began a beautifully scenic ride through pineapple and tropical fruit plantations, but Mr. Wong's eyes weren't out for the beauty. He watched every turn the chauffeur of the car made so that he would be sure of getting back to town if he were successful in effecting an escape.

They turned off the main road and went over a bumpy road of hard clay for a short while, and then finally they came to a stop in front of a small hut of a plantation farmer.

QUICKLY the men hustled Mr. Wong out of the car and inside the hut. Several people were standing around when Mr. Wong was dumped unceremoniously on the floor. They looked him over without curiosity, and Mr. Wong could smell the musty odor of opium smoke about the place. The Japanese who had captured Mr. Wong turned to the steward.

"You had better remain," he said. "If what this man says is true, it will be unsafe for you to return to the ship until it is ready to sail."

He turned to Mr. Wong menacingly, "Perhaps you feel like telling

me who is running an investigation of the island," he said ominously, "If not. . . ." He left the sentence unfinished for the effect.

Mr. Wong grinned, but said nothing. He knew who this man was now. He remembered the face from the newspaper column on political comments. If only he could get to a telephone now he would be happy.

The man's face wasn't pretty to look at when Mr. Wong grinned. He turned quickly to one of the dull figures that inhabited the house.

"I am leaving," he told the biggest of them. "When I return, he will have to join the others. Is that not so?"

The man's face showed no sign of animation. He nodded dully, "Sí, mi capitán," he said quietly. "In the cave."

The man turned to Mr. Wong. "Of course, if you feel like changing your mind, you can always call for the steward and talk to him."

He turned suddenly toward the door. A few seconds later Mr. Wong heard the starter of the car grind, the thresh of gears, and then there was silence.

Wong worked desperately on the leather strap that bound him, as the heavy man lighted one of the brown cigarettes of the same type he had in his pocket. While the steward looked on with a nasty grin the big opium smoker advanced on Wong and picked him up like a sack of meal.

There was no use struggling, bound as he was. Instead he lay limp as though defeated and let the man carry him out into the open.

It was getting dark as the man carried Wong through the heavy vegetation. Wong flexed his muscles and then squeezed his hands together in hopes of getting out of the bonds. His heart gave a leap as the leather stretched under his exertion. The steward had forgotten, in using the belt, that the perspiration from Wong's body would eventually soften the leather so that it could be slipped down over his hands. With a new heart Wong squirmed and writhed, making the man curse in an undertone.

Bit by bit the leather slipped, until

he finally slipped the belt down past the wide part of his palms. Just in time he worked the last of the binding from his wrists. Ahead of him he heard a heavy roaring sound as though the very ground ahead was in torture.

MAN and burden broke through the thicket at last, and what Wong saw as the fate that had been reserved for him made him feel sick. A heavy stream of water came running down the hillside and then suddenly dropped from sight through a large hole in the ground. Evidently an underground river led into a cave beneath the earth from which there would be no escape.

The giant Filipino shifted Wong's weight preparatory to heaving him out into the rapid swirling current of the river. Again it was a thing Mr. Wong had been waiting for. Before the man knew what struck him, the nub of Wong's palm lashed out and caught him a deadly rabbit punch in the back of the neck. The Filipino didn't even grunt. He dropped as though hit by a sledge-hammer.

The drop rolled Wong right to the edge of the cataract. He quickly sprang to his feet and came back to where the Filipino had fallen. There was no need for battle. The man was breathing, but out like a light.

Mr. Wong didn't stop at the plantation house on his way out of the place. Soon enough the Japanese steward would miss the giant and start a search, then warn the other man that he was loose. Mr. Wong wanted to be back in town before that happened.

He was fortunate on reaching the road that a guaga, a native bus, came along in time to save him a long trek into town. Several passengers stared at his clothing as he boarded the bus and Mr. Wong realized he must be a mess to look at, but there was no helping his appearance now. He hopped from the bus on the outskirts of town and gave his boss a call from one of the *cantinas*.

"Will need a carload of police," Wong told the puzzled Durbanotersely. "We are going on a raid."

He gave the address where he was

located and then sat down and ordered himself a soft drink.

The car with his boss wasn't long in arriving. Durbano barged into the place and Wong rose to meet him. Ferrera Diaz was outside in the bar when Wong arrived and briefly outlined what happened.

"Several cars are needed to round up all the little carts in town that display a white flower," Wong told the puzzled Diaz. "They are the narcotic peddlers. As to headquarters," he grinned, "maybe we had better visit that newspaper plant that has been attacking you so violently for not being able to maintain law and order."

"Have you gone nuts?" Durbano demanded. "What will we find in a newspaper office?"

"It is through the want ad columns of the said paper that the addicts are told where to buy," Mr. Wong informed him blandly. "An ad is inserted in the paper daily and the addicts go to the places mentioned."

He paused. "In China the Japanese have been doing something of the same thing. Opium costs little. It demoralizes the public. That is what the drug peddlers want to happen here. When the United States gives these islands their freedom they will have an excuse to march in. A little job of putting the place on its feet — for Japan."

WHILE Mr. Wong was talking, the car had careened through the streets until it reached the office of the newspaper. The car had hardly slithered to a stop when Mr. Wong was leading the way out, followed by several officers. They piled into the office.

Mr. Wong found the man he wanted behind a desk, very busy pounding away on a typewriter. He looked up in consternation as Mr. Wong bore down on the desk and lifted him out of the chair by the collar of his coat.

"This is your political enemy," Mr. Wong said as he gave the man a shove toward Diaz. "He wanted to wreck the government so that he could elect his own puppets. The day the islands received their freedom from the

United States would be the time the new government would sign away the freedom again to *his* government—if things had worked the way he wanted them to."

Durbano scratched his head at the rapidity of the movements of the last few minutes. Suddenly he grabbed Mr. Wong by the arm.

"This would be swell stuff if only you had gotten to the source of the supply. So far you have peddlers, and we've got to make a case on this bird."

Mr. Wong smiled. "I think we can find the source right in this building," he said quietly. He pointed to the stacks of shipped newsprint that lay in boxes against the wall.

"Even the boxes advertise that it was made in Japan," he said, pointing to the characters that were painted there. "Could you inform me why he sends to his native country for paper, when the Japanese themselves must buy their own newsprint from the outside?"

Mr. Wong swiftly crossed the room and grabbed one of the pronged crowbars used for opening cases.

"It was the import figures at the Custom House that gave me the clue," Mr. Wong said, as he ripped the top from the first case. "When a newspaper buys more paper than it uses there must be something else in the box."

He ripped the first dozen sheets from the box and disclosed where the paper had been cut out through the center. In that hollowed space lay fifty one-pound tins of opium, enough to make the whole flock of islanders smoke-happy for a month.

It wasn't until after the men were booked that Durbano came out of the daze of things that had happened.

"It was China again that came to your aid, eh?"

Mr. Wong smiled.

"I would hardly call Shakespeare Chinese," he said. "That was the only paper in town that seemed to be running a campaign against the government for laxity, and it seems to me that it was Shakespeare and not a 'Chinese' who said: 'The Lady doth protest too much.'"

Meet

THE BLACK BAT

**A Mysterious Avenger and Nemesis
of Crime Whose Exploits
Spell T-H-R-I-L-L-S**

DOOMED
TO
DARKNESS
BY A
MURDER
MONGER,
HE MAKES
DARKNESS
HIS
WEAPON!



THE
MOST
DARING
CRUSADER
AGAINST
CRIME
IN THE
ANNALS
OF
JUSTICE!

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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AT ALL STANDS



How to Solve Secret Ciphers Told by a World-Famous Cryptographer

By M. K. DIRIGO

SEVERAL readers have written to us stating that they are honestly and truly solving our limerick cryptograms without the aid of pencil or paper and that they are enjoying it immensely. It is not as easy as you may think but it is a lot of fun and it helps considerably to develop the sense of concentration. Try it just once and you will be convinced. After a while you will find that this practice will give you a new grasp on cryptogram solving and will improve your "cipher brains" for the more difficult crypts.

Let us glance at the clues given to last month's limerick. In the beginning you may have taken the one-letter word for "A." But after locating the "E" through frequency which gave you the necessary clue to the word "THE," and applying the "T" and "E"

to the word IGD (TE?) you could readily see that the word was TEA, and therefore the "M" could not be substituted for "A" and you then knew that "M" was "I."

Notice in No. 160 that the four two-letter words MU, UK, HU, and AU identified the "U" as "O." With the "S" appearing once as initial and twice as final, the rest of the solution followed easily.

No. 161 had to be subjected to vowel spotting and an adjacency chart. Since we received so few solutions to this one, we will extend to the readers the same courtesy as we promised for No. 163. The best solutions received will be printed in this column in a later issue.

No. 162 fell before such clues as the finality of "S," the suffix "ESS," and the frequency of "E" which further identified "THE" as the three-letter word.

SIX-LETTER PATTERN WORDS

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caBBle, caDDie, caDDis, caFFre, caLler, caLlet, caLLid, caLL-in, caLL-on, caLLow, caLL-up, caLLus, caNned, caNnel, caNnot, caPPed, caRrel, caRRot, caTTed, caTTle, ceLLar, ceRRis, ceSSio, cheEKs, cheEKy, cheEse, chEEps, chEErs, chEEry, chEEsy, choOse, ciPPus, ciRRus, coBBed, coBBle, coDDer, coDDle, coFFer, coFFin, coFFle, coGGed, coGGie, coGGle, coLLar, coLled, coLlet, coLlie, coLLum, coMMit, coMMix, coNned, coNner, coNped, coPPER, coPPin, coRRal, coRRie, coSSet, coTTar, coTTer, creEps, creEpy, croOKs, croOns, cuBbed, cuDDle,	daBBer, daBBle, daGger, daGGle, daLLop, daPPER, duPPle, daZZle, diBBer, diBBle, diFFer, diGger, diNner, diPPER, doBBin, doFFer, doGgar, doGger, doLLar, doPPER, doSSal, doSSer, doSSil, doTTle, droOls, droOps, duFFer, duBBin, duFFel, duFFer, duNner.
	faDDle, faGGed, faGGot, faLLen, faLLow, faNnel, faNner, faRRows, faTTed, faTTen, feLLah, feLLic, feLLow, feRRic, fiBBer, fiDDle, fiLled, fiLLer, fiLlet, fiNnae, fiNned, fiNner, fiTter, fiZZed, fiZZes, fiZZle, fiEers, fiEEts, fiOors, foBBed, foDDer, foGGed, foKker, foLLia, fuDDle, fuLLer, fuRred, fuRrow, fuZZle.
	gaBBed, gaBBle, gaBBro, gaDDer, gaFFer, gaFFle, gaLled, gaLley, gaLLic, gaLLio, gaLLon, gaLLop, gaLLow, gaMmer, gaMmon, gaNnet, gaPPed, gaPPER, gaRret, gaRRot, gaTTen, geMMho, giBBer, giBBet, giBBon, giMMal, giMmer, giNned, giNnet, giPeG, giEets, giEty, giOOMs, giOOMy, giBBet, goBBle, goMmer, goSSan, goSSip, goTten, grEEdy, grEens, grEeny, grPEts, groOms, groOve, guFFaw, guLled, guLLer, guLlet,

TRY TO SOLVE THESE CIPHERS—AND SEND IN YOUR SOLUTIONS

No. 164. *Not a Very Dignified Position for a Lady!*

RSTUT VWB W XYZAC DWEX GUYF CUHBB
 VSY BWHE UYDDTU BIWRHAC VWB JDHBB
 RSHB BST AY FYUT VHDD BRWRT
 GYU W VSTTD YGG STU BIWRT
 FWET STU GHABBS ZK BYFTRSHAC DHIT RSHB!

Clues: 1. The one-letter word is easy; 2. Spot the "S" through finality; 3. The Antepenultimate "T"; 4. Spot the "E" through frequency; 5. What more do you want?

No. 165. *The Tortoise and the Hare.*

IJKLMNOO PQJRNIO OS OISTIU PVJP WSRNQPU
 OSSM SRNQPJXNO VLY.

No. 166. *And There Was No Static, Either!*

CDF EGH IHJKM GKLHE MNI OKP QKNM GFRFGF
 ODE MGEKLSKPCFL EJ EJF QMNI.

No. 167. *Clever—But Not Clever Enough.*

OPQRST UVW OPXURYXPZ UPX OYX APUROQRX BC
 CBBDT OYUO YUEX VBO FQO XVBGHIY OB IX
 YBVXTO.

No. 168. *When You Have Solved This Cryptogram It Will Be a Well-Known Proverb Disguised in "Fancy" English. See If You Can Then Translate It into Its Original Version. It's a Lot of Fun. Try It.*

AND IDACOCKETH CRY ENCBRCFDH ANCA JHOLBBCAD
 LRMCAH OJA NCXD EKDXCLBLRF LRMBTDROD JR
 ADKKDHAKLCB HENDKD.

guMMed, guNNel, guNNer, guRRsh, guSSet,
 guTTed, guTTER, guTTIE, guZZle.
 haFFle, haGGed, haGGis, haGGle, haLLow,
 haLLux, haMMer, haPPed, haPPen, haRRow,
 haTTed, haTTER, hiCCup, hiDDen, hiGGle,
 hiLLed, hiPPed, hiSSed, hoBBle, hoDDen,
 hoGGed, hoGGed, hoLLas, hoPPed, hoPPER,
 hoPPet, hoPPle, hoRRrid, huDDie, huFFed,
 huFFer, huGGed, huLLed, huLLer, huMMed,
 huMMel, huMMer, huRRay, huSSar, huSSif,
 huTTed, huZZas, hyPPed, hySSop.
 JaBBer, jaGGed, jaGGER, jaRRid, jaZZed,
 jaZZes, jeTTON, jiBBer, jiFFey, jiGGed, jiG-
 Ger, jiGGle, jiLLet, joBBed, joBBer, joGGed,
 joGGER, joGGle, joSSer, joTted, juDDic, juGGed,
 juGGle, juTTed.
 kaFFir, keRRia, kiBBle, kiDDer, kiDDle,
 kiDDow, kiLLas, kiLLed, kiLLer, kiLLow,
 kiMMer, kiPPER, kiSSed, kiSSer, kiTTen,
 knEEIs, kuMMel.
 laDDer, laDDie, laGGed, laMMed, laNNer,

laPPed, laPPER, laPPet, laRRup, laSSie, laT-
 Ten, laTTER, leSSon, leSSor, leTTic, liGGer,
 liMMer, liNNet, liPPed, liPPER, liSSom, liTTER,
 loGGan, loGGER, loGGia, loPPER, luBBer, luF-
 Fer, luGGed, luGGER.
 maDDen, maDDer, maGGot, maLled, maL-
 Let, maLLow, maNNed, maNNer, maPPed,
 maRRed, maRRon, maRRot, maRRow,
 maSSed, maSSif, maTTed, maTTER, maLLay,
 meLLit, meLLow, meNNad, miDDay, miDDen,
 miDDie, miFFed, miLLed, miLLer, miLLet,
 miNNow, miSSal, miSSay, miSSed, miTTen,
 miZZen, miZZie, miZZly, moBBed, moLLah,
 moLLie, moPPed, moPPet, moRRis, moSSed,
 moTTle, muDDle, muFFin, muFFle, muG-
 Ger, muGGet, muLLah, muLled, muLLer,
 muLlet, muRRey, muSSal, muSSed, muSSel,
 muTTer, muTTON, muZZie,
 naBBed, naGGed, naPPed, naRRow, niBBle,
 niGGER, niGGle, niLLed, niPPed, niPPER, niP-
 Ple, niTTER, noBBle.

ANSWERS TO CRYPTOGRAMS IN JUNE ISSUE

No. 159

I sat next the Duchess at tea
 It was just as I feared it would be
 Her rumblings abdominal
 Were simply phenomenal
 And everyone thought it was me.

No. 160

Do not be ashamed of mistakes and so pro-
 ceed to make them crimes.

No. 161

Lost craft stretch bleached yardarms sky-

ward crazily athwart dark horizon.

No. 162

Superfluity of culinary artists renders
 worthless the consomme. (Too many cooks
 spoil the broth.)

No. 163

Abrupt hydrodynamic storm sprung dyke.
 Able youth held back mighty surf from
 chink. Embryo TVA plan.

Names of correct solvers of Cryptograms
 will appear next month.

Turn to Next Page for a BLACK CHAMBER Guest Article

INTRODUCING PHIL HURST

The author of this month's guest article is one of the youngest and brightest of America's cryptography experts. He was born July 1, 1917. Since July, 1934, he has been an outstanding member of the American Cryptogram Association and uses the nom de plume of Sabio in his cipher work.

Phil Hurst is unmarried and his hobbies are writing, table tennis, and guitar playing. His cryptography interests include the editing of the Cipher Exchange in *The Cryptogram* and he is on the Directorate of the Cipher Study Groups of the American Cryptogram Association.

Creating Original Ciphers

A BLACK CHAMBER Guest Article

By PHIL HURST (SABIO)

Famous Cryptography Expert

DEVISING a cipher system is not a difficult task. It is simply a matter of disguising the content of any text; and the imagination of the neophyte usually runs riot with queer figures and complex routes. Almost any idea can furnish material for a new cipher.

Because of this many varied types of systems constantly arise in the mind of the avid cipher fan, whose aim for the greater part is that of finding a truly indecipherable system, or one nearly so.

There are, however, a few criticisms of importance often applicable to the cipher of the ingenué, and at times even to the inventions of the experienced fan. Briefly stated, these are disguised simplicity, unoriginality, cumbersomeness, and inelasticity.

A Maze of Encipherment

Sometimes an inventor employs a long rigmarole that would seem to render his cipher unsolvable by dint of complexity. He builds up a series of operations and interwoven steps until he rests assured that a decryptor could never retrace the path through the maze of encipherment.

Though such a plan has merit, its faults are twofold. Frequently the constructor fails to analyze the final results and thus doesn't discover that one operation may duplicate his cipher; for quite often, as in mathematics, a series of reactions may be reduced to a simple equation.

Expert analysis drives at the core in the most direct manner, and, unless reduction of process is impossible, would uncover the hidden simplicity. The second of the two faults mentioned above is the cumbersomeness, discussed later, of any complicated encipherment.

Similarity to a known type of cipher can be avoided only by a close attention to existing systems. In fact, it is extremely difficult to evolve any apparently new cipher that does not have a basic idea similar to an older system. Consider that cryptography is ages old; isn't it natural to expect that the main principles of the science have all been discovered? But even though the groundwork has been laid for the constructor, his is still the right and privilege of improving and modifying.

Do not feel discouraged nor dismayed that your system can be paralleled in its basic essentials by an older cipher; hold your head high even if you find you have devised an exact replica of an older system.

For though someone has beat you to the tape, just remember that he had a head start; creditable is the fact that you discovered it for yourself.

No Apparatus!

Cipher systems, for practical purposes, should never require any apparatus which cannot be readily reconstructed from memory. The necessity for unwieldy physical

equipment is a dangerous matter; for tableaux, charts, slides, or code books can be stolen and copied by ruthless hands.

They require constant and diligent protection. The possibility of theft tends to offset the degree of impregnability attained by such a method.

In comparison, a mnemonically reconstructible system presents no point of attack to the decryptor save the cipher text itself.

It is best, therefore, to avoid devices of any complexity for encipherment; concentrate on boiling down the essential principles until simple methods achieve the same result.

Inelasticity

Perhaps the most vital criticism of the majority of new systems is that of inelasticity. There are two great tasks for the decryptor in the solution of any strange cipher: the identification of the encipherment methods themselves, and the consequent application of these principles to the individual cipher. Of these two, identification and application, the first would seem more obstructive, and thus more beneficial to the system.

Remember, however, that on this principle hinges the impregnability of every cipher in that system; the same basic rules are applied in every case. Once they have been discovered—and such a discovery is never impossible—the way to direct attack on the individual cipher has been opened. And since any system is merely a means to an end, concealing the plaintext, it is with the difficulty of the separate cipher that one must primarily concern himself.

The necessity is evident, therefore, of rendering difficult the application of known principles to any one cipher in a system. To achieve that result a cipher system must be elastic. The decryptor, once in possession of the rules of the game, should be met with a thousand and one possibilities, with numberless variations of encipherment, etc. The idea of elasticity thus suggests a quizzical test for any original system:

Does the system lose its difficulty by identification of its methods?

The Vigenere Cipher

It might be interesting to examine the Vigenere cipher* with reference to these criticisms. This standard system is popular as a puzzle in its simplest form, and is probably well known to most fans.

Can the system be accused of fancifully disguised simplicity? Certainly not. There is no simpler method of achieving the same result, no possibility of combining any series of operations. In fact, there is no series of operations; only one step is taken for any encipherment.

This is the action of substituting for a plain text letter that letter standing at a certain literal distance in the alphabet; and the true operation is basically the same,

* In a coming issue, M. K. Dirigo will describe the Vigenere cipher and give full detailed instructions for its use.

whether done by counting on the fingers, employing a tableau of twenty-six consecutively shifted alphabets, or applying a simple disk or slide of two alphabets.

Blaise de Vigenere described his cipher in 1586, and at the same approximate period a very similar cipher was described by the Abbe Tritheme. Another possibility of its unoriginality of principle lies in the fact that the Porta cipher had its origin over two decades previous, while Caesar used what might be called the real progenitor of the Vigenere in his Gallic wars.

However, it cannot be definitely and absolutely stated that Vigenere's cipher was unoriginal, which criticism is of subordinate importance, even if true.

Although one might think the original Vigenere tableau cumbersome to use, the system certainly did not require the possession of any physical equipment. The large alphabet square itself can be reconstructed from memory; and in its later improved form of the St. Cyr disk or slide the utmost simplicity in mnemonic reconstruction has been obtained.

Countless Variations

Out of the final test with flying colors comes the Vigenere. In exploring its elasticity we find the system presents countless different variations. When the cipher resulting from the use of a normal alphabet and single key proves too easily solved, a scrambled or methodically mixed alphabet may be employed in the same manner. Should this in time be deciphered by dint of periodicity and disturbing frequencies, longer shift keys of various types may be applied.

Progressive keys, interrupted keys, running keys, and autokeys—devices which greatly enhance the difficulty of the normal Vigenere tableau. Visualize their possibilities when combined with a mixed basic alphabet, or even two individually scrambled alphabets. Ah, yes, the Vigenere cipher is exceedingly elastic!

Quite a cipher, isn't it? Perhaps it seems to exhaust the possibilities of original effort in itself, including, as it were, so many attractive features. But don't give up! Many other ideas have been the foundation of equally practical ciphers, and still more ideas can be made the basis of new and difficult ciphers. Even discarding the original field, look at the limitless chance for improvement and variations of present standard ciphers.

If you wish examples of distinct ideas expressed in some existing ciphers, consider the Playfair, Bifid and Trifid, Grille Transpositions, double transpositions, etc.

So take your own invented system, iron out any unnecessary steps, improve it, and add features that make it flexible. Always examine it with the critical eye of the decryptor, rather than the blind faith of the fond parent. Who knows? In the end you may find a really difficult and practical cipher system.

BURNING OIL



The rope whirled through the air, struck Pedro across the wrist of his gunhand

**Jose Histana Taps Sealed Oil Wells with Impunity,
Until Reed Carton, Ace Revenue
Agent, Takes a Hand!**

by MILTON LOWE

Author of "Sky Delivery," "Double Death," etc.

IN THE darkness of the Texas oil fields the train of oil tankers looked like an odd creature of some prehistoric day. It shuttled along sporadically for a short distance. Then with a cough from the monstrous locomotive the train settled into a sustained drive forward.

Unseen by any of Jose Histana's henchmen, Reed Carton, ace revenue agent, clung to the curved ladder of the second tanker behind the engine. His eyes narrowed as the train gath-

ered momentum. His hands strained on the rung of the ladder. A biting wind swept across the mesa, whistling through the miniature Eiffel Towers that dotted the landscape. Its gale velocity struck Carton full in the face, making his precarious position fraught with peril.

But, with determination in his eyes and his jaw clamped, he held on. It was imperative for him to stay with that train of tankers!

Illegal traffic in oil had compelled

Uncle Sam to send Carton to East Texas. The government wanted proof against Jose Histana. Already two government operatives had died in the attempt to get it. Reed Carton did not intend to be the third.

By careful maneuvers he succeeded in reaching the scene of the illegitimate trade without detection. Crude oil was being smuggled from the network of subterranean pipelines into phony "pot and pan" refineries—refineries that were nothing more than dumping grounds for stolen oil.

Twenty minutes ago he had approached the empty tank train. Ever cautious, he had remained at the siding until the links of tankers were ready for the trip to the crooked refineries.

Just what the end of the journey held for him Carton had no idea. His one and only thought was to catch Histana redhanded. But he was not fool enough to play an open game. That's why Carton had refused assistance offered to him by Jeff Gately, the President of the Independent Well Operators' Association.

To beat Jose Histana he had to play a lone hand. He didn't care to prompt any more atrocities against the private well owners. They had suffered too much at the hands of the money-mad racketeer as it was.

Carton knew the fear which respectable citizens had for Histana. They had felt the racketeer's anger. Death and destruction were synonyms for the overlord of the oil racket. He had snatched holdings from small operators, threatening death if they so much as talked.

BUT Uncle Sam, keeping his ear to the ground, heard the rumblings. Yet, not until the oil industry as a whole found itself being undersold did it ask for government assistance. At first the cunning and guile of Jose Histana kept his nefarious activities under cover.

When two G-men died fighting, Reed Carton was dispatched. His order was simple.

"Get Histana!"

But without the proof to send His-

tana and his mob of murderers to the gallows the government would be stalemated. Carton, fresh from splendid work in the western mining districts, accepted the assignment. He made no promises, but his chief in Washington knew that if any of Uncle Sam's agents could succeed, Carton would.

Now as the train of tankers flew along the shining rails a grim smile curved Carton's lips. His sharp-featured countenance was grave. From the trunk line of the Texas Overland Railroad the train crossed to a single strip of track.

The roaring train and the galelike wind threatened to tear Carton from his mooring. The grease on the ladder rung made his grip insecure. Any second his hand might slip, any moment he might be torn from his perch and flung onto the railroad bed beneath. He braced his feet as best he could against the slippery rest at the bottom of the tanker's ladder. The stiff wind screamed past his ear and flying bits of gravel peppered him like buckshot.

On either side of the single track were oil towers. Furrows of doubt creased the G-man's brow. He dared not look ahead in the face of the wind, knowing he would be blinded by soot from the smoking engine and stoned by the shower of gravel.

Then the tanker train cut through a by-pass and rumbled over privately owned property. Carton glanced over his shoulder.

Assailed by this sudden switch in the train's destination Carton wondered whether he had been misled. He looked ahead, shielding his face with one hand, while the other gripped its slippery hold. Just then the train slowed down.

A short distance ahead, sprawled like a snake on the ground were ramshackle buildings, huddled together as though in conspiracy. These structures constituted a typical pot and pan refinery.

Carton glanced hurriedly along the length of the train to determine whether he had been spotted. But no sign of life greeted him. At least

he was safe for the moment. He recognized the refinery as one owned by an independent oil company. Its name was bannered across the roofs of the huts in white paint.

"White Rock Oil Refinery," he read.

There was a hiss of air pressure being applied to the brakes under the tank cars. The train quivered, couplings clanked and rattled, wheels groaned to an abrupt halt. Carton dropped to the ground and darted between the next tanker and the one he had been riding. He was concerned with the switch in the train's destination.

He scouted the train and raced to the next space between the tank cars. He was not a second too soon. A hoarse shout knifed the silence of the night. The sharp, staccato report of a gun burst the air asunder. A bullet winged past Carton's head, inches away. He had been seen!

LIKE a flash his right hand streaked to the gun under his armpit. Gripping it expectantly he waited. Voices shouted and grew in volume as their owners hustled down the track.

Carton dove quickly under the tank car, wiggling his way to the arched supports of the car's axle. There he flung himself on the supports of the undercarriage, nestling in the utter darkness safe from prying eyes. He braced himself with elbows and feet, keeping his ears alert to catch the drift of the conversation not far from him.

The booming voice of a Texan reached him. It was harsh with authority.

"What's the meanin' to this here shootin'?"

Garbled English, spoken as only a half-breed Mexican can speak it, answered in a whine.

"Man, he jump down from tank. I yell heem for to stop, *senor*, but he runs so I shoot heem."

A snarl and a curse broke from the lips of the Texan. "Pedro, yuh half-breed dog," he shouted, "yuh're a-seein' things. Better lay off that *tequila* or yuh'll be seein' yella elephants next."

Volubly the Mexican protested, mixing his broken English with injections of hurried Spanish. The Texan listened for a moment, then commanded Pedro to shut up.

From his position beneath the tanker Carton saw four pairs of legs. One pair, probably that of the loud-mouthed Texan, was encased in high boots. Carton speculated about the Texan's voice. It possessed a ring familiar to Carton. Where he had heard it before the G-man was uncertain. But he was certain that he *had* heard it.

The footsteps stamped away. Carefully the G-man shifted from his hiding place. Almost flat on his stomach he searched the immediate vicinity for lookouts, if any. Seeing none he scooted back to the space between the tankers.

Climbing up on the coupling, peering over the roofs of the tankers, Carton saw the bright light shining from the first house of the pot and pan refinery. Two figures were engaged in hoisting a foot-wide hose connection to the first tanker in the train. Another figure leaped aboard the tanker and started to screw the hoseline into position against the intake valve for the transfer of the oil.

On the surface it appeared that the independent White Rock Oil company was within its rights in transferring refined oil. The law, Carton knew, limited the output of crude oil from the wells. Each well was permitted to flow daily one-fifth of its hourly output. In figures; if a well flowed one hundred gallons an hour, then twenty gallons were allowed for one day.

But the bullet fired at him and the belligerent attitude of the Texan stimulated suspicion in Carton. The thought occurred to him that the private company could never produce enough oil to fill five tankers in one shipment.

Only one conclusion could be drawn. Histana was working his racket in White Rock also. But there he operated under the guise of a law-abiding company.

Gun poised for instant use, Carton

emerged from between the tankers. Slowly he treaded his way toward the bright light. He hugged the side of the train, crouching low as he moved ahead. His feet made a slight scraping sound as they touched the loose gravel banking the roadbed. In the weighty silence the sound was amplified to monstrous proportions.

A STRANGE hiss, like a swishing sound, fell upon Carton's ears. He stood stock-still, eyes strained, all senses keen. He scanned the area about him. In the blackness he could see nothing to deter his advance. He blamed his nerves, keyed as they were to the utmost, for his premonition.

He pressed forward. His sixth sense rebelled, vainly trying to exert itself. Still he refused to listen to its heeding. The darkness, the ominous quiet, the crooked practices of the oil racketeers, all added to the dread that would unnerve even a robot.

The swishing noise grew more distinct, like the onrushing of a tidal wave. Carton ducked instinctively. But he was too slow. He found himself in the coils of an unusual, seemingly unreal foe.

In his predicament the very notion of battling something he could not see and touch sent tremors racing up his spine. The thing constricted about him, pinning his hands to his sides. Then, as though he were a paperweight, Carton was knocked off his feet with a jerk. Not until that instant was he aware of what rendered him powerless.

With startling clarity he realized he had been lassoed. The swishing noise had been the looped lariat as it was being prepared to snare him. Before Carton could reach for his knife a group of men rushed up to him. He had been outwitted by the Texan.

"So we got you," he laughed down at Carton. "Tie him up, boys."

Rough hands whipped Carton to his feet. Anger burned in the G-man, not so much because he had been trapped, but because he had been tricked so simply. He tried to get a glimpse of the Texan, but the man was too clever.

Instead of chancing detection by Carton, he blinded the G-man with a flashlight.

To Pedro he barked, "Frisk him!"

Pedro manhandled Carton as he whipped away the service gun and government shield. A snicker of disgust broke from the Texan's lips at the sight of the badge.

"Throw him in the shack," he snapped. "I'll deal with him later. We've got to get the oil out of here."

Pedro laughed in Carton's face. The smell of garlic on the man's breath was asphyxiating. Pedro saw Carton's expression of distaste. His eyes flared with hatred.

"*Senor*," he motioned to the towering Texan holding the light. "Ees okay I do dees?"

As he ended his question he banged the butt of Carton's gun on the head of the defenseless G-man. Only his felt hat saved Carton from a fractured skull. The Texan's chuckle floated through a blanket of dizziness to Carton's numbed brain.

He struggled to remain conscious. His head reeled and the sticky warmth of blood oozed down the left side of his head. His knees buckled and an empty feeling invaded the pit of his stomach. A galaxy of frenzied colors dazzled Carton as a bottomless void opened up to receive him. He began to fall away, going down, down, deeper into the engulfing blackness until he sank into complete oblivion.

It was some time after Carton's return to consciousness that he was able to remember what had happened. His head throbbed maddeningly and the choking smell of oil gas nauseated him. Noise of activity a short distance from the shack informed him that he had not been unconscious very long.

He listened attentively for a moment. Words of men talking wafted to him. What they were saying was drowned by the chug of a running motor. Carton's experience in the oil industry explained what the motor was. He could visualize how it sucked the oil from a secreted reservoir and pumped it quickly into the train of tankers on the siding.

THE sickening odor of oil gas presented a problem. Ordinarily the natural gas, a by-product of gushing oil from the Earth's storehouse, was caught by specially devised traps. But the strength of the odor that attacked Carton's nostrils was sufficient to prove that no trap had been used to separate the gas from the bubbling oil.

Carton moved his body, but the strong bounds of the lariat kept him rigid. His feet and hands had been well tied and a gag had been thrust into his mouth. Only his eyes remained free to roam the pitch black shack.

He knew that oil gas could asphyxiate him. The association of the smell with that of Pedro's malodorous person caused him to think of his captors. He wished he had seen the husky Texan. But the density of the smell of escaping oil gas drove coherent thought from Carton. Sweat poured from his forehead and face. The air was oppressive and revolting to his stomach. He rolled in the direction from which a breath of fresh air came.

His shoulder struck an object that tinkled as it was pushed aside. By its sound Carton guessed it was a bottle. Hope sprung within him. Feverishly he twisted his body so his feet touched it. In the darkness he found the bottle difficult to locate. Finally his thigh brushed against it.

With a sudden effort he raised his bound feet. They crashed down on the bottle, breaking it. A piece of glass cut through his trousers and gashed his skin. Carton ignored the cut.

His fingers fished about for a fragment of the glass. Splinters from the bottle jabbed him before he succeeded in grasping a sharp-edged piece. Working his fingers like a pair of pincers he held the glass with its sharp edge against the rope. He sawed away. His head pained him and dizziness all but sent him insane. Yet he persisted.

He was rewarded when a strand of the lariat snapped loose. Perspiration bathed him and his fingers were chewed from the constant sawing.

Wiggling his fingers he freed one hand, then the other. The next few minutes went fast as he cut the rope about his legs.

He finished his arduous task and tried to arise. Weary to the point of exhaustion, he tottered to the wall. His eyes were accustomed to the darkness and he was able to locate the door. His hand fell upon the knob as footsteps approached the shack.

Unable to wage a decent fight for freedom Carton took his one and only chance. He snatched up the rope that had held him prisoner. The footsteps halted outside the door. A man spoke in Spanish. Carton gathered its meaning.

"*Vamos*. Let's take that hombre to—"

He lost the last of the sentence in the flurry of words that contained Pedro's answer. There were two men with whom to contend. Carton squared his jaw and raised the rope. Either way death awaited him. He would not think of dying without a struggle.

A bar was removed from the outside of the door. A foot kicked the door open. Pedro was outlined, squat and apelike, on the threshold, a gun in his hand.

"Franco," he muttered in Spanish, "*Venga*, pronto."

The second man, taller and slimmer, joined Pedro at the doorway. Both peered into the shack.

"I don't see heem," growled the man called Franco.

CARTON flanked the door, the rope in his hand ready. Pedro stepped into the shack. *Swish!* The rope in Carton's hand whipped through the air. It struck Pedro across the wrist of the gun hand. The weapon clattered to the floor.

Like a projectile Carton dove for it. A spurt of fire belched from Franco's gun. The missile whizzed by the G-man's shoulder, tearing his sleeve. Then Pedro's gun, now held by the Government man, responded. Franco slapped his left palm to his chest, then toppled into the shack.

Pedro launched himself at Carton. Again the G-man fired. The Mexican

howled with pain. He coughed and fell to his knees, yelling for mercy. Then he sprawled on the floor as though dead.

Glancing out into the night Carton saw the train of tankers moving away. He threw a rapid glance at his fallen foes, then raced out of the shack. He had to stick with that train! If he could prove that the oil taken from the plant was plain crude oil, not re-

perate effort he sprang to the tail of the last tanker.

His hands caught the bottom rung of the iron ladder. The grease of the oil on the rung almost spelled his defeat. But gravel and soot flying about had covered the oil. It acted as a brake for his slipping fingers. Using all his strength Carton curled them tightly around the rung.

Heaving himself onto the eight inch

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in the July Issue of Our Companion Magazine

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ON SALE AT
ALL STANDS

fined oil it would be one step toward the apprehension of the gang of racketeers.

He ran to the siding as the last tanker pulled abreast of him. Weakened though he was by the loss of blood he forced himself to run with the fast gathering speed of the train. His throat was parched and hot breath burned his lungs. With one last, des-

shelf of the tanker's catwalk he was able to gasp a few fresh inhalations of air. It renewed his strength miraculously. The dizziness left him at once and his vision cleared. The stiff wind that threatened him earlier that night was now his ally, stimulating new vigor in him.

After a few seconds he grabbed for the second rung, then the third. Soon

he was sitting on the catwalk, face into the wind, eyes shut. His brow was cooled and permitted him to think of his next move.

He knew he had to keep some of the oil in that train of tankers for evidence. He also realized the necessity of discovering how the big Texan and Jose Histana succeeded in getting oil to the White Rock property.

Every well in the state was under the supervision of the Texas Railroad Commission. Inspectors checked the valves on the oil gushers every day. This in itself should have been sufficient to safeguard legitimate enterprise. But it wasn't. Somehow Histana and his gang were able to thwart law and order. Oil was being poured from the wells, literally under the very eyes of the inspectors.

Carton shook his head savagely as he came to his conclusion, "I'll investigate that gas leak."

An idea ran through his brain. It was dangerous as it was daring. It invited an attack by the culprits who were smuggling out millions of dollars worth of oil each month. But it offered Carton the chance he sought.

Fully recuperated by his brief rest, Carton lifted himself to the oval roof of the tanker. On hands and knees he crept forward. He had to be doubly cautious. The surface of the tanker was oil-soaked and smooth as ice. Besides that, he had to keep low in order not to be seen from the cab of the locomotive.

SLOWLY he pushed on, his trousers soaked with oil and his face

black with soot. Once he slipped. He floundered wildly until his finger nails dug deep into the dirt, saving him from being thrown off the tanker.

It seemed ages until he reached the wheel of the tanker's emergency brake. A sigh of satisfaction escaped from between his dirt caked lips. But the thought of his plan urged him to continue.

He slid between the two tankers, one hand gripping the brake rod while the other fished for the coupling pin. He had to bend low to grasp it, then turn it. His sleeve caught in the pin and he was almost torn from his perilous position. But by a sudden shift of his feet he balanced himself and finished unloosening the coupling pin.

A smile of grim pleasure touched his lips as the coupling broke free. Instantly the last tank car separated from the rest of the train. The grade of the siding was at an incline, enough to cause the lone free tanker to roll slowly uphill. The rest of the train sped onward.

By the time the racketeers aboard the locomotive realized what had happened Carton hoped to be miles from them.

By degrees the car came to a momentary standstill. The next second it moved down grade—towards the White Rock Oil Company holdings!

The tanker gained headway and fairly flew over the rails. Carton clung tightly to the brake wheel, ready to spin it to an emergency stop.

The rails were a silver ribbon in the darkness and the ties were a grey-

College Humor

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ish blur as Carton glanced down at the roadbed. Faster and faster the tanker flew, singing on the rails, as though happy at its new freedom.

Carton saw the dirty, insignificant array of huts that formed the White Rock Oil Company. They grew in size as the roaring tanker raced wildly toward them. Before he could take another breath the tanker rushed into the heart of the so-called refinery. Another instant and the refinery was left far behind.

The figure of a squat man caught Carton's eye. He recognized the familiar figure of Pedro. The Mexican had not been killed. He had evidently feigned death to save himself. Carton smiled coldly. If his excursion into the fields further on netted him what he wanted, Pedro would not be able to cheat justice.

On flew the tanker, gaining velocity as it went. Fear that it would jump the track surged through Carton and he spun the wheel around to brake the mad rush. With each turn of the brake fear mounted within him. The tanker would certainly explode if it left the tracks!

Suppose the brake failed to work. Harder and harder he whisked the wheel, but still there were no signs of slowing down. Sweat popped out on the G-man's forehead and trickled unheeded down his face.

He clenched his jaw as he labored anxiously. Had all his plans gone wrong? Would he fail now, after he had faced what had seemed like inevitable death? The tricks of Chance seemed destined to rob him of victory. But with renewed courage and undaunted effort he spun the wheel.

His arms began to feel the force of the exertion and once again he was visited by fatigue. Another twirl of the brake rod brought a gasp of fear. The tanker acted as if it had skipped a length of rail!

ACHING from his shoulders to his finger tips Carton would not give up hope. It had to work—the brake had to take hold!

This idea drumming in his brain, he
(Continued on page 106)



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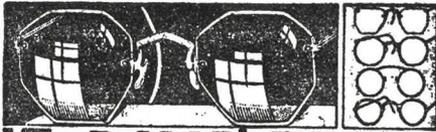
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(Continued from page 105)

suddenly wondered whether he had not been turning the wheel in the wrong direction. It opened a new avenue for him. Calling upon his reservoir of vitality he changed the direction of the turning. Lips compressed, eyes shut tight he persisted.

His hands became tired, his arms refused to work faster. Each turn demanded more strength than he seemed capable of giving. Every ounce of energy went into each twist of the wheel. He seemed unable to continue. His muscles were taut, refusing to relax between efforts. Yet he gritted his teeth and tugged mightily. Would he fail after all?

Once again he jerked the wheel. It moved a quarter turn. His strength obviously appeared to have been dissipated. Wearily he opened his eyes, then stared unbelievably. The tanker had slowed down to almost a crawl.

His strength had not left him. The hard turning of the brake meant that he had been successful in braking the wild run. This heartened him considerably. With renewed determination he urged the brake to another quarter turn. It was sufficient to cause the grinding of the brake band against the wheels. The next minute the tanker was standing perfectly still on the tracks.

Panting from his exertions Carton eased himself to the roadbed. He glanced back to see whether he had been pursued by the locomotive. Not yet at any rate, he told himself with a queer feeling of delight. He walked around the end of the tanker only to bring up short.

Not a hundred yards away was Jose Histana's own refinery. Instantly Carton's hand reached for the revolver he had taken from Pedro. His lips curved ironically and the trite expression of "from the frying pan into the fire" formed on them.

His back was toward the wind that swept in from the wide expanse of open oil lands. As he turned on his heels the obnoxious odor of oil gas filled his nostrils. He coughed despite himself. The dangerous gas inundated the surrounding area. It was as inflammable as it was asphyxiating.

"Oil's flowing somewhere," he muttered aloud to himself. "Otherwise there would be no gas."

Straining his eyes he looked over the level ground. A patch of grass an acre square seemed to stand out. It had evidently been groomed as a small park. White stones had been laid to mark off paths and flower beds had been cultivated. More flat faced white stones spelled out the name Belle Villa Oil Company.

Carton narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips. His long legs moved like pistons as he ran to the well a hundred feet to the right of the grassed area. He pressed his ear to the ground when he reached the well. His first few attempts at learning whether oil was flowing proved to be failures—or that no oil was flowing in the well.

But two successive tries in the direction of the green sward bore fruit. A slushing, bubbling sound came up through the ground. He surmised that an engineer would have located the exact position of a well by testing the sounds. But now that the well had been opened and capped with a valve, there was no reason for the bubbling noise.

HE stalked to the valve and scrutinized the markings on the arrow. It pointed to the word OFF. A frown clouded the agent's face. He opened his mouth to exclaim but the words died unspoken. His eyes widened as they beheld a locomotive, smoke belching from her funnel, tearing down the grade toward the unattended oil tanker.

The sight answered the question that had been annoying Carton ever since he had heard the big Texan's voice. He banged his fist into his palm. Of course he had heard that voice before! No wonder the Texan had blinded Carton earlier that night with the flashlight! The G-man would certainly have recognized Jeff Gately. It was not Histana the authorities were searching for. It was the Texan, who had been using the alias, Jose Histana, to protect himself.

The Bureau at Washington would certainly raise its dignified brows in astonishment when Reed Carton wired that Jose Histana was none other than

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

the president of the Independent Well Operators' Association.

With this sudden discovery tingling his blood, Carton dashed toward the tanker. Perhaps if he could surprise Jeff Gately, alias Histana, he might be able to wind up the whole affair that night. He jumped on the rear end of the tanker while the onrushing locomotive came down the tracks. A minute later it screamed to a stop, not fifteen yards from the idle tanker.

The booming voice of the Texan thundered across the fields.

"Tie her fast."

"Can't," shouted the engineer. "I'll have to push her to the next switch, then back up to her. Don't forget she carries oil."

"Okay, start pushing."

"Jump off and see how I hit her," yelled the engineer.

Carton grinned to himself. With the brakes applied to the tanker not even ten locomotives could push it. The engineer would not chance smacking head on into the car, understanding that the hot engine and the crude oil would scarcely mix to good advantage.

Peering with one eye at the activities at the other end of the tanker Carton could hardly repress a snicker. He saw two other men beside the tall Texan. They wore Sam Browne belts and pistol holsters.

The grin on Carton's face vanished suddenly. Smears as it was with soot and grease his face paled. His lips tightened into a hard line.

Instead of paying heed to the locomotive the three men had drawn their guns and were scouring the neighborhood with glinting eyes. All the talk about pushing the tanker had been purely a bluff. What Gately and his killers wanted more than the tanker was Reed Carton!

This fact was obvious, and its starkness of purpose rooted the Government man to his point of vantage. Only twenty yards of tankers separated him from certain death. Even from that distance he read unremitting cruelty in the faces of the men. This way and that

Read G-MEN Every Issue

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

they searched, murmuring to themselves while the engineer shuttled his locomotive to sustain the bluff.

OPEN combat suggested itself to Carton. He dismissed the notion quickly. Armed with a revolver that held but four bullets he would certainly end up the loser. Three men, four including the engineer, were against him. Yet to remain inactive was foreign to Carton's nature.

Hot blood coursed madly through his veins, tightening his muscles. Impassively he watched the killers. One coughed as a whiff of oil gas choked him.

"Let's look around," suggested Gately. "He can't be far from here."

Pedro's voice came from the locomotive cab. Carton realized he had to contend with five men.

"I see heem on tanker before. I know for sure."

Gately waved for silence, nodding. His implicit trust in his lieutenant was vouchsafed by the gesture. Gately conversed with his three henchmen. They fanned out, headed for the assemblage of shacks that comprised the Belle Villa Oil Company. Carton held his breath, knowing they would be sure to spy him should he so much as move.

Gately led the trio. They disappeared around the end of the tanker, approaching Carton's hiding place from the other side. A bold plan formulated quickly in the government agent's mind.

It was the lesser of two evils. His success depended upon the vigilance of the two men in the locomotive cab. Should they see him he was cornered. If not—he had a long chance of winning!

Silently he dodged around the right of the tanker, bending low to see the three pairs of legs on the opposite side. Swiftly he scurried for ten yards. Then diving suddenly beneath the tanker he emerged on the left side five paces behind the three murderers.

"Up with your hands," he growled.

The steel in his voice denied reprieve for any false move by the trio. "Drop your rods!"

A lanky gunman twirled his pistol
(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)
and fired without looking behind him. The bullet seared Carton's left arm. Carton's gun roared and the lanky killer died with a bullet through his heart.

The G-man failed to notice the squat, ape-shaped Pedro sneaking up on him. Not until Pedro scraped the gravel directly behind him was Carton aware of this new threat. He whirled and fired, but Pedro flung a knife.

It embedded itself in Carton's right shoulder near the armpit. Using his left hand the G-man pulled the blood soaked blade out. For this Pedro earned himself a slug between the eyes. But Gately and his other henchman had snapped out of their predicament. They converged on the G-man.

Carton saw them and dove under the tanker. His brain raced for an avenue of escape. And he saw one when he looked across the oil fields to the acre of green sward.

Wasting no thought upon it he sprinted in that direction. The two killers had followed him under the tanker and fired at him. Then they took up the chase.

Carton ran without looking back until he touched the grass. He coughed as the oil gas filled his lungs, but when he found Gately and the other killer gaining appreciably, Carton raced across the lawn. He was headed for the oil well he had inspected a short time before.

SUDDENLY he stopped short and turned. He gripped the knife and aimed it at the oncoming pair. With a snap of his wrist he let it fly. The throw was purposely low.

It compelled Gately and his henchmen to drop to the grass in order to avoid being hit. In the darkness they had no idea just where the blade was going. But when it whizzed over their heads, Gately fired.

That was precisely what Carton had depended upon. Just as he sent the knife on its flight he whirled and continued toward the oil well. He hoped that the darkness would mar Gately's answering shot. But it didn't. The slug pierced the muscle of Carton's right leg, throwing him.

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

He cast his eyes backwards and the spectacle sent a thrill of victory through him. Fire blazed from more than ten points and was gradually spreading. Knowing it would cover the entire grass area soon, Carton limped to the protection of the sandy fields.

Gately and his pal were trapped in the ever-widening field of flame. Gately yelled as the red tongues licked at his clothes. His henchman fared the worst. The heat of the flames set off the cartridges in the Sam Browne belt.

Carton watched as the killer loosened the belt and hurled it as far from himself as he could. Gately dropped his gun quickly and ran as fast as possible for the grassless ground nearest him. His clothes were smouldering and his hands were covered with blisters.

When he stumbled, blinded and dazed from the flames, Carton met him.

"Roll on the ground, Gately," he ordered. "It's the only way you'll put out the fire on you."

But Gately was beyond understanding. He shouted and cursed, pranced about and waved his arms crazily. Carton grasped him and flung him to the ground. Gately leaped to his feet with a bellow.

He ploughed at the G-man, fists flailing. He had disregarded his burning clothes and blistered hands. He remembered nothing but his hatred for the government agent.

A striking right cross landed flush on Carton's jaw. It stunned him for a second. Then gauging a wicked left he buried it in Gately's midsection. It doubled up the murderer and primed him for the short, hard jab to the chin. Gately fell forward on his face, out.

Carton glanced around hurriedly to see where the other murderer was. He saw him rolling on the ground, trying vainly to put out the fire on his clothes. Then he lay perfectly still.

Carton rushed to him and started to tear the man's clothes off. At a glance he realized that the fire and the bullets from the Sam Browne belt had fatally wounded the man. He let him lie there and went back to Gately.

The crunch of the locomotive's ponderous wheels attracted Carton. He
(Continued on page 112)

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28x4.50	20	2.35	1.00	22x4.50	2.35	1.25	34x4.75
30x4.50	21	2.40	1.10	22x4.50	2.35	1.25	30x4.50
30x4.75	20	2.50	1.20	22x4.75	2.45	1.30	32x4.75
30x5.00	19	2.55	1.30	22x5.00	2.55	1.35	32x5.00
30x5.00	20	2.65	1.40	22x5.00	2.65	1.40	32x5.00
32x5.25	18	2.90	1.50	22x5.25	2.90	1.50	34x5.25
32x5.25	19	3.00	1.60	22x5.25	3.00	1.60	34x5.25
32x5.25	20	3.05	1.65	22x5.25	3.05	1.65	34x5.25
32x5.25	21	3.15	1.70	22x5.25	3.15	1.70	34x5.25
32x5.50	17	3.25	1.80	22x5.50	3.25	1.80	34x5.50
32x5.50	18	3.35	1.90	22x5.50	3.35	1.90	34x5.50
32x5.50	19	3.45	2.00	22x5.50	3.45	2.00	34x5.50
32x5.50	20	3.55	2.10	22x5.50	3.55	2.10	34x5.50
32x5.50	21	3.65	2.20	22x5.50	3.65	2.20	34x5.50
32x5.50	22	3.75	2.30	22x5.50	3.75	2.30	34x5.50

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tube Size	Tires	Tube Size
28x5.25	18	2.90	1.50	22x5.25	2.90
28x5.25	19	3.00	1.60	22x5.25	3.00
28x5.25	20	3.05	1.65	22x5.25	3.05
28x5.25	21	3.15	1.70	22x5.25	3.15
28x5.25	22	3.25	1.80	22x5.25	3.25
28x5.50	17	3.25	1.80	22x5.50	3.25
28x5.50	18	3.35	1.90	22x5.50	3.35
28x5.50	19	3.45	2.00	22x5.50	3.45
28x5.50	20	3.55	2.10	22x5.50	3.55
28x5.50	21	3.65	2.20	22x5.50	3.65
28x5.50	22	3.75	2.30	22x5.50	3.75

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tube Size	Tires	Tube Size
30x6.00	20	3.40	1.80	22x6.00	3.40
30x6.00	21	3.50	1.90	22x6.00	3.50
30x6.00	22	3.60	2.00	22x6.00	3.60
30x6.00	23	3.70	2.10	22x6.00	3.70
30x6.00	24	3.80	2.20	22x6.00	3.80
30x6.00	25	3.90	2.30	22x6.00	3.90
30x6.00	26	4.00	2.40	22x6.00	4.00
30x6.00	27	4.10	2.50	22x6.00	4.10
30x6.00	28	4.20	2.60	22x6.00	4.20
30x6.00	29	4.30	2.70	22x6.00	4.30
30x6.00	30	4.40	2.80	22x6.00	4.40
30x6.00	31	4.50	2.90	22x6.00	4.50
30x6.00	32	4.60	3.00	22x6.00	4.60
30x6.00	33	4.70	3.10	22x6.00	4.70
30x6.00	34	4.80	3.20	22x6.00	4.80
30x6.00	35	4.90	3.30	22x6.00	4.90
30x6.00	36	5.00	3.40	22x6.00	5.00

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See
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(Continued from page 111)
turned his head as the big engine gathered speed.

The engineer, seeing that the tide had suddenly turned against Gately and his murderers wanted to save his own neck. But the big numerals on the side of the engine were his undoing. Carton memorized them. It would be simple to trace the runaway engineer later.

Carton dragged Gately to the tanker where he armed himself with the lanky murderer's gun. Gately stirred when Carton glanced down at him. The heat from the fire was endangering the tanker of oil. Flames shot skyward, reddening the murky clouds.

FROM somewhere in the distance repeated clanging of bells sounded the fire alarm. Carton knew that help would soon be on its way. Gately opened his eyes, then rubbed them. At the sight of Carton, oil-smeared and crimsoned with blood, clothes ripped, Gately started. But the gun in the G-man's hand halted any rash move by the racketeer.

"You didn't get me the way you did the other two government agents, eh, Gately?" rasped Carton. "President of the Independent Oil Operators' Association!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," shouted the Texan. "I found four tankers loaded with crude oil and started to investigate when you came up behind me with a gun."

"Stop lying," barked Carton. "You'll have a tough time explaining how you happened to have LEFT handed valves in your wells. When the inspectors turned them OFF, they unwittingly put them ON."

Gately stared dumbly at the G-man. "Surprised I found out about them, eh?" came coldly from Carton. "You gave me the tip yourself."

"I—I—" stammered the oil racketeer. "Yes, you," Reed Carton exclaimed harshly. "You were running oil twenty-three hours a day. You had to get rid of the oil gas that comes up with the oil. So you devised the bright idea of faking a park and fitting outlets in the grass."

In the vivid red of the flames Carton saw Gately's jaw sag. The G-man had

BEST FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

bested him at every point.

"When I threw that knife at you I had one purpose in mind. I wanted you to duck or fall on the grass. You fell on the grass. Then you fired at me from that position. The flash of your gun-fire ignited the escaping gas and trapped you."

With a snarl Gately jumped to his feet. He started to move toward Carton, but the G-man stopped him with a jerk of the gun. Hopelessly beaten Gately dropped his hands limply.

From all points bells could be heard. From the village of Belle Villa strong automobile headlights signalled the coming of fire fighting apparatus. Gately muttered suddenly.

"It's getting too hot here. This tanker is liable to blow up. Let's move away."

Carton laughed at him. "Afraid, eh? We're staying put until some of those men get here. And as far as this place being too hot for you, Gately, just think of the electric chair. That ought to cool you off somewhat right now."

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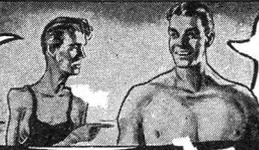
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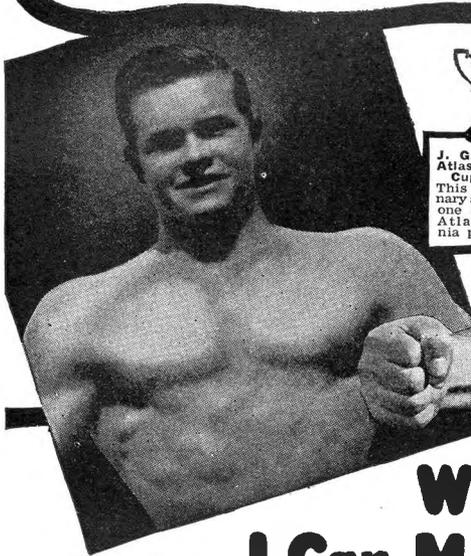
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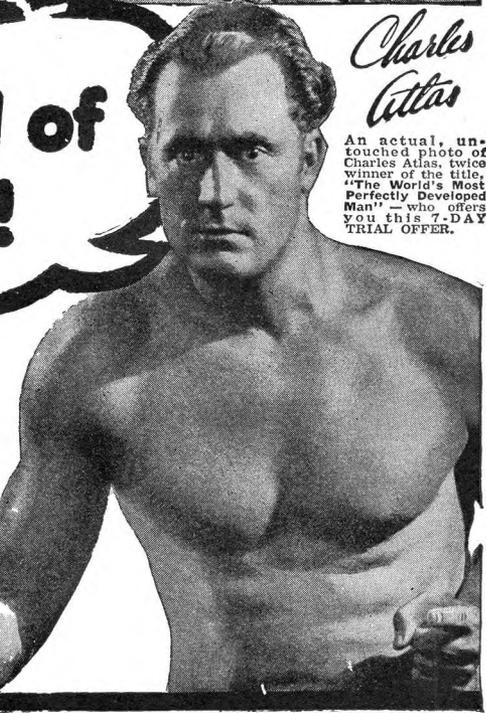
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