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TOMORROWS
*A Dan Fowler
Mystery Novel*
By C.K.M. SCANLON

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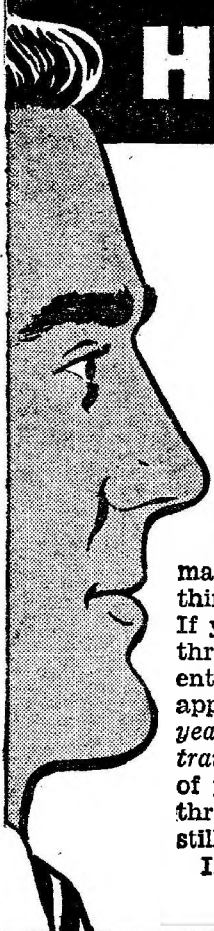
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G-MEN DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXV, No. 3

A Thrilling Publication

Summer, 1949

A DAN FOWLER MYSTERY NOVEL

CRIMSON TOMORROWS.....C. K. M. Scanlon 9



The ace of the F.B.I. and his aides get busy when old-time racketeers return with the "new look" in crime! Follow Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal as they plunge into a fight to save America from gangdom!

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FEDERAL FLASHES



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

DAN FOWLER was waiting in the hall when the door of the apartment was pulled open and a man started to come out. It was a man with squinty eyes, whom the crack operative of the FBI had seen at the Acme Jewelry Repair Company earlier that day.

The man was dressed for the street, and he carried a suitcase. When he saw Dan Fowler, he stopped short, and went three shades whiter than his usual complexion.

"Going away, Mr. Carson?" Fowler asked pleasantly.

The man blinked, and the corners of his mouth tightened. "What's the idea?" he snapped. "Who the devil are you?"

"You wouldn't know?" Fowler echoed, and let the man see the gun in his hand for the first time. "Turn around, Carson, and we'll go on back in your apartment. We've things to talk about."

The Cornered Cobra

The squinty eyes took on the look of a cornered cobra, and for a split second it seemed as though he was going to lower his head and charge, Fowler's gun notwithstanding. He did no such thing, however. Perhaps the grimly mocking challenge in the FBI agent's eyes decided him. He turned and started walking back into the apartment. Fowler slipped in quickly, shut the door and turned the key, and kept right in step.

"All right, Stacey," he said as the man with the suitcase reached the living room. "Drop that bag and turn around. You did a very nice job, changing your looks. Cost you many diamonds? Or did you have it done before you went into the gem-stealing business?"

The squinty-eyed man went stiff all over. Then he let go of his suitcase and turned around. His face was flushed.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he said. "My name is Carson. You know that. You were at my office with a stone to be reset not two hours ago. What is this, a holdup? Well, I have some cash on me, but—"

"Cut the act, Paul Stacey!" Fowler interrupted. "And I do mean, *Stacey!* You fell for the oldest trick of them all, Stacey. Your fingerprints. Those can never be changed. You gave me three perfect prints on that claim check for the stone I left with you at your phony Jewelry Repair shop. They matched yours on file at Police Headquarters. Stacey—remember Special Agent Bert Hall, just eight years ago?"

Showdown

Paul Stacey stiffened, and every last drop of blood drained out of his face. Dan Fowler regarded him with deadly calm, though all the furies in the world were raging inside him. Special Agent Bert Hall had been one of Fowler's best friends, and he had fallen victim to the bullets of three thugs he had in his custody. Paul Stacey was one of those thugs.

"We never forget in Washington, Stacey," Fowler suddenly said. "And I personally have never forgotten you three killers. One of your trio, Heftner, is dead. Killed by you when he tried to pull a double-cross on your racket, Stacey, of robbing women of their jewels, and then selling back fakes to them for a nice cash profit. And you killed Heftner's girl, Bessie Crane, because of fear of what she might know."

The cop killer let out a strangled cry and threw out his two hands as though to block off any bullet that might come from Fowler's gun.

"No, no!" he cried. "I didn't kill Joe Heftner, and I never heard of any Bessie Crane. I swear it, Fowler! Look, there's a hundred grand in stones in this suitcase. You can retire for life, Fowler. Just give me time enough to get out of town. A hundred grand for—"

The man stopped short as Fowler's gun whipped him across the cheek. The dammed up furies in the FBI man broke loose.

"You filthy, weak-livered swine!" Fowler said. "You think you can pay me off for what you did to my friend Bert Hall?"

"No, no!" the cringing man half screamed. "I didn't kill that Government man. I swear it! Let me sit down, and I'll tell you all I know."

The man's face had started quivering as though every nerve had been drawn beyond the snapping point. Fowler made a little one-handed gesture.

"Go ahead and sit," he said. "Just keep your hands in sight."

Swift Action

Paul Stacey nodded dazedly, and took a couple of half reeling steps toward a chair by an opened French window. Just a couple of steps he took, and then he galvanized himself into lightning-like action.

"Stop, you fool!" Fowler shouted, and jerked up his gun.

The FBI agent could have pulled the trigger, but it wouldn't have changed anything. Paul Stacey's feet had already left the floor, and his whole body was in midair. Like something catapulted from a gun, the man shot through the opened French window head first, and then arced down and out of sight.

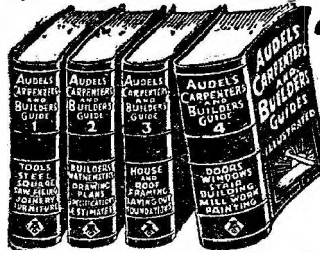
Fowler bit off a curse, leaped for the window, and stuck his head out. One look down at the huddled heap on the cement of a deserted court seven floors below was enough. He pulled his head back in and pocketed his gun.

"Exit the weak sister, Bert," he said softly. "That makes two of them, fellow. . ."

That's the kind of smashing, hard-shelled action you'll find plenty of in **THE GLIT-TERING COFFINS**, by Robert Sidney

(Continued on page 128)

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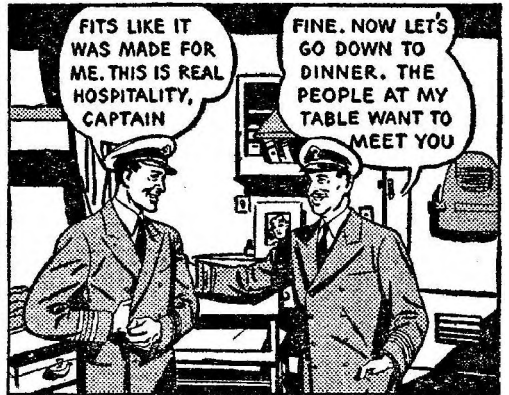
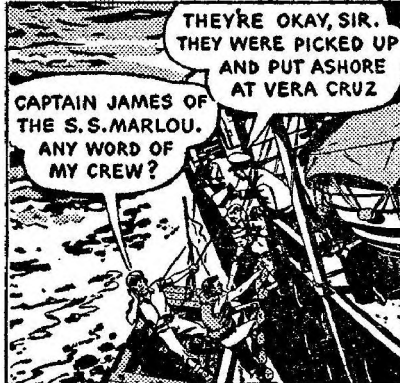
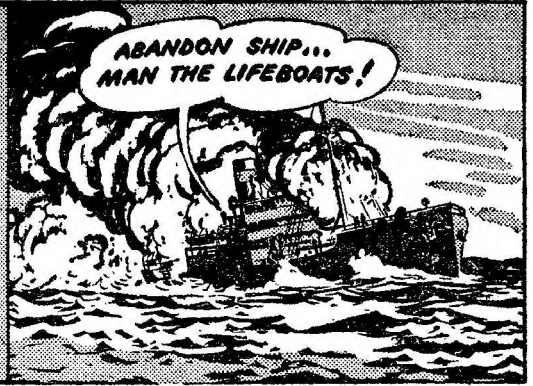
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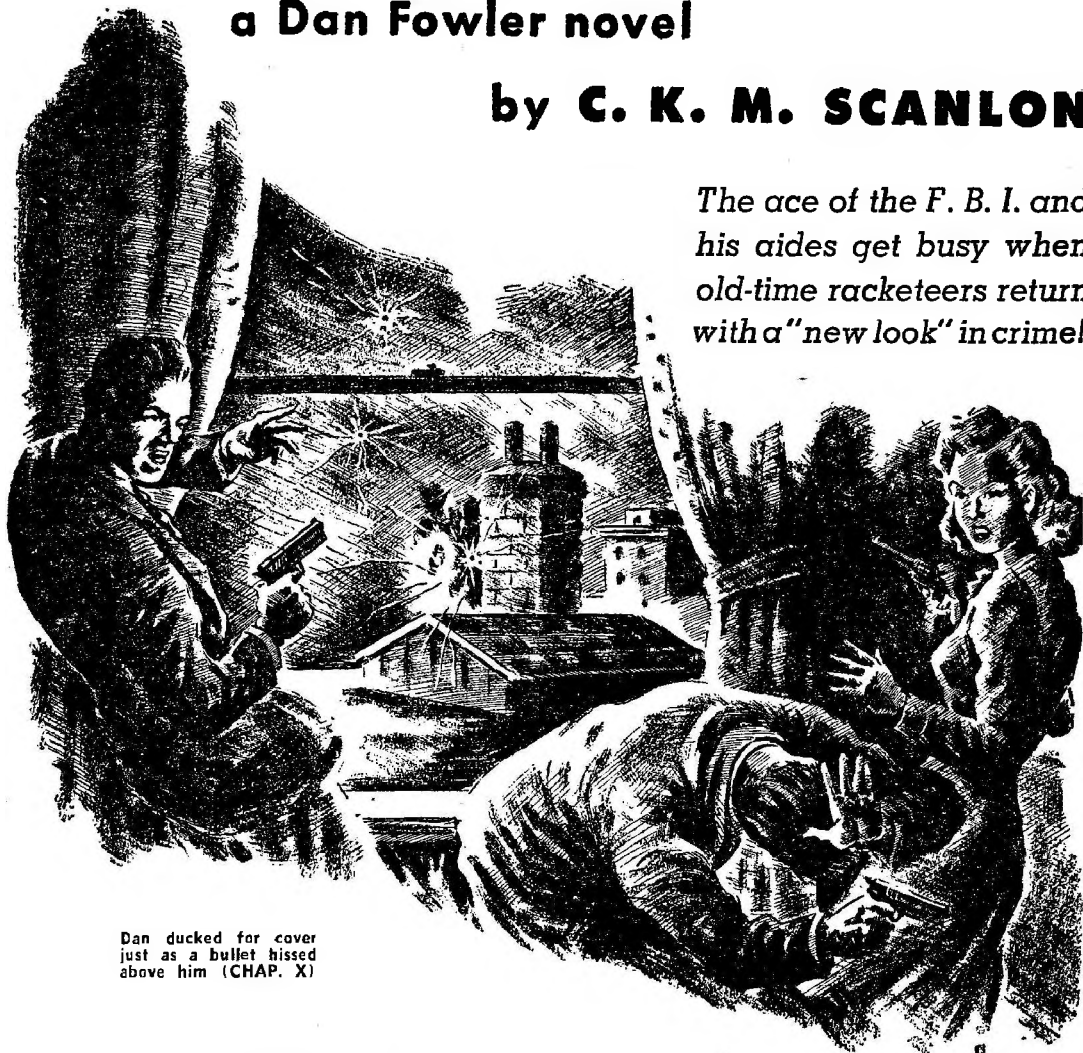
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by C. K. M. SCANLON

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Dan ducked for cover just as a bullet hissed above him (CHAP. X)

CRIMSON

TOMORROWS

CHAPTER I

Sleeping Crime

THE taxicab rolled down the level, wide avenue between rows of royal palms with their smooth, long trunks straight as sentinels. Ahead was the sea, skirted by a beach which bowed to no other strip of shoreland for smoothness, freedom from undertow, shells, litter and too many people.

For this was the Pink Heron Beach and a part of the Pink Heron Hotel, which jutted its way cloudward. It was a five-million-dollar pink colored, Castle-in-Spain type of place. The architecture was Moorish on the outside, furnishings were ultra modern within, and a nice room without meals could be had for

Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal Plunge Into the

about twenty-five dollars a day. Of course a room at this rate wouldn't face the ocean. Only the big and expensive suites did that.

The lobby was no less fancy than that of New York's finest hotel. There were bellboys and pageboys in pink and blue uniforms. The desk clerks wore white mess jackets. There was a large dining room in which elaborate meals were served and—toward the rear of the place were the gambling rooms. The real source of income.

Without gambling, this hotel couldn't have existed. The "nut" as the expense account was called, came to fabulous figures and only the take from roulette, dice, poker, *chemin-de-fer*, bird-cage, and the old fashioned *vingt-et-un*, made the venture a paying proposition.

The cab stopped before the massive stairway leading to the entrance of the place. A doorman opened the cab door and somewhat mysteriously, three bellhops appeared.

The man who got out was tall, slim and handsome enough. His face was inclined to be craggy but he had frank eyes and a ready grin. He wore good clothes well and looked as if he worked out in a gym once or twice a week.

He only had two suitcases and he marched behind the bellboys who carried them. At the desk he stated that he had no reservation but this being slightly off season, perhaps accommodations could be arranged.

"We have a nice suite at forty-seven dollars a day," the clerk said. "Of course that includes meals."

The slim young man smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid that's a bit steep."

"Ah, yes. Then thirty dollars a day, perhaps? One room, but large, airy and very comfortable."

"That sounds more like it." The slim man picked up the pen and wrote *Daniel Fowler, Washington, D. C.* on the registry card. He was taken on an elevator provided with air-foam cushioned benches, thickly piled rug and a mechanism which sent the car upwards without making a sound.

CERTAINLY the room was nice. It lacked absolutely nothing. A huge mirror filled fully one-third of the west wall, windows overlooked at least part of the beach. The chairs were extremely comfortable, the bed soft as down. Dan Fowler thought the United States government was getting quite a bargain at thirty dollars a day.

He opened his suitcases, hung up his clothes, laid out slacks and a sport coat and white shoes. He took off his business coat, unstrapped the .38 automatic he wore under his left arm and draped the rig over the back of a chair.

In half an hour he was cleaned up. He put the gun into his hip pocket, not using the shoulder rig with the sport coat. The leather harness had a habit of showing. He went downstairs, walked through the lobby and before he reached the door he had a good look at everyone who happened to be in the lobby.

Outside he found a swimming pool with a cocktail lounge arranged around it. He strolled completely about the pool, casually glancing at the guests. Finally he went down to the beach. There was a row of cabanas, a lot of big sun umbrellas and about a score of people sunning themselves. Only two men were in the water and close enough to shore so that Dan Fowler noticed their features.

"Young man," someone said in a cracked, wheezy sort of voice.

Dan turned, frowned and then shrugged. He couldn't see anyone. The voice came again. "Young man—you all dressed up like a circus horse! I'm hiding under this blasted tent they call an umbrella."

Dan laughed and went over to the huge silver and yellow umbrella which had been tilted just enough to hide the man beneath it. He was lying on what seemed to be a wheel table, propped up slightly against pillows. His arms were incredibly thin, his face scrawny and there wasn't even a semblance of hair on his shining scalp.

"Sit down," the man said. "Sit down. I'll send for a drink or anything you want. Just give me your company before

Crucial Fight to Save America From Gangdom!

I explode of boredom. My name is Bradley. What's yours?"

"Fowler." Dan offered his hand and had it taken by five bones with a slight amount of flesh around them. "How do you do, sir. I'll be glad to keep you company for a while. And never mind the drink."

"Good. My granddaughter is around somewhere but she takes to wandering off. Who can blame her? She's cute,

self and told the old, old man what he knew about the places this ancient had to forego. A smile of ecstasy came over the old man's face. By his expression you could tell he almost heard the motley noises of Manhattan and smelled the gasoline fumes of the street and the cigar and alcohol odors of the night clubs.

Dan was still talking when he noticed the shadow poised perfectly still beside him. He glanced up into a pair of the



DAN FOWLER

young and what the devil does she want to take care of an old wreck like me for? What's your business, young man?"

"I'm—an attorney," Dan Fowler replied honestly.

"Used to retain about a dozen of 'em," Bradley said. "Now just let me lie back and close my eyes. Then tell me about the New York crowds, the night clubs, Times Square, and the shows that are popular today. Take me back there in fancy, young man, and anything I've got is yours except Lynn, my granddaughter. She's got a mind of her own."

Dan Fowler smiled, leaned back him-

most striking violet eyes he'd ever seen in his life. The girl was about five feet five in shoes with stilts for soles. She was trim, undeniably pretty and had wavy red hair that never needed the operations of a beauty parlor to make attractive.

"Hello," she said.

Dan got up. "Good afternoon. I presume you're Lynn."

The old man stirred restlessly. "Dan, tell her to go away. Sit down and keep talking."

"I'm sorry," Dan said. "I've really got to be running along. But I'd enjoy talk-

ing to you again. Tonight—tomorrow, any time you wish. I'll make it a point to look you up."

The old man opened his eyes. "Lynn, this is Mr. Fowler—Dan Fowler. He's the first man who didn't mind taking a relic back to the life he enjoyed before seams started to crack. If Dan wants to take you dancing or for a drink or anything else, you go with him. Do you hear me? I like this young man, which is more than I can say for some of the stray flapdoodles you bring home occasionally."

"Yes, Grandfather," she said. "I think I'll like Mr. Fowler too. In fact I'd like to have him walk me back to the hotel. There might be some mail."

THE old man raised an emaciated arm. "Don't be gone too long. You know I don't like being alone."

The girl laughed at him and tweaked his nose playfully. "What are you afraid of, Grandfather? If a scorpion bit you, he'd die. If a holdup man came along, you'd talk him into giving himself up and joining the Salvation Army. If the mighty waves rolled in, you'd point a finger at them and they'd roll back. Come along, Mr. Fowler. I'll tell you about this old skinflint with a heart of steel."

"Don't let her scare you away," the old man called as they walked off.

The girl was laughing. "I'm Lynn Bradley, Mr. Fowler. The old buzzard is my grandfather. He's hard as nails and you have to treat him that way or he thinks you go soft and become worthless. He's been like—the way he is—for more than fifteen years. He can't move from the waist down but don't fool yourself into thinking the paralysis hit his brain. It didn't. He's as shrewd as the days when he turned a sixty-dollar savings account into a fortune of sixty millions."

Dan whistled. "Warren Bradley—the ex-railroad tycoon! Of course, and yet it never occurred to me!"

"If it had, and you'd fawned on him," Lynn Bradley said, "he'd have thrown something at you. Mr. Fowler, if it's possible, would you just look in on him now and then. He's so incredibly lonesome and there are so few people he likes."

"I'll make it a point to do just that," Dan promised. He led her to the desk, bowed slightly and looked at the row of mail boxes. The slot corresponding with the number of his room contained a single envelope. The desk clerk handed it to him and Dan excused himself, opened the letter and memorized the room number written on the page of paper.

Lynn Bradley gave him a smile and walked away. Dan went to the elevators and had himself taken to the ninth floor. There he rapped on door Number 909, the room mentioned in the letter. It was opened by a very large man with a florid complexion. He was well over six feet, weighed two hundred and fifty and plenty of that was brawn. He wore a wide-brimmed sombrero, linen trousers and a white coat.

"Jim Noonan," Dan cried and winced as the big man's hand nearly crushed his own.

Noonan said, "Dan, I'm mighty proud to see you again—and work with you. Always felt as though I owed you a great deal after the way you helped me land that kidnaping gang seven years ago."

Dan closed the door behind him. "I knew I could depend on you, Jim. In our files you're the best Sheriff in Florida. Now, what about Bernie Dixon?"

"He's here." Noonan lowered his huge form into a chair that groaned in protest. "Been here for weeks. Comes and goes now and then. Hard to keep track of. Right now he's in his room. I'd be obliged if you'd tell me what this is all about, Dan."

"Gladly," Dan said. "To be brief, the old time gangs are coming back. New Capones, Kellys, Floyds and men of their kind, are beginning to emerge as leaders. It's the new day of the gang—the resurgence of all the crime and murder we had during prohibition. Only different this time, they'll tell you. Smarter leaders with new ideas, are incorporating tricks of the European Underground, the ruthlessness of dictators, the new ways of murder discovered and perfected during war. But Jim, behind all this are the same men, the same faces, the same types."

"Do you mean the men who led those



Dan saw the men surround the half-submerged car (CHAP. III).

gangs years ago are back up in the saddle?" Noonan asked.

"They never climbed down," Dan told him. "They simply bided their time. Now things are ripe. Their activities aren't pronounced. You can't see their fine hand yet, but from one end of the nation to the other, crimes have been committed that bear the well-known stamp we battled in the hey-day of the gangs. They are completely organized, skilfully directed and so far the loot must run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. They miss no branch of crime, from rolling a drunk to sticking up a bank."

JIM NOONAN nodded. "And this man Bernie Dixon is one of the big shots?"

"That's right, Jim. He's a specialist in bank robbery. Few men ever pulled bank stickups as cleverly as Bernie Dixon, but his methods are too precise. They draw a picture—of Bernie—whenever a job is pulled. Holding up a bank is an art, Jim. It takes brains to do it right—brains and experience. Bernie has them both."

"There is an actual job you want him for?" Jim asked.

"Yes, a stickup in Utah. Three days ago and conducted with all of Bernie Dixon's strategy."

"Well, let's go pick him up," Noonan suggested. "Sooner we do that, the quicker I get to go home to Martha. Say, Dan, you're coming to dinner. Won't take no for an answer. And how is Larry Kendal and Sally?"

"They're fine," Dan said. "Both of them are standing by in case I need help. About the dinner date, you couldn't keep me away. Your wife could get medals for her fried chicken and corn bread, Jim. You're a lucky man."

"I know," Noonan slapped his copious middle. "Her cooking shows on me too. She's been after me to turn in my badge come next election. Guess I will. She worries too much and I'm not getting any younger."

"You'd die of dry rot without that badge," Dan chuckled. "Maybe though, I'll provide enough action to last you the rest of your life."

"What do you mean, Dan?" Noonan asked. "Why are you really here? It isn't

just to put the pinch on some cluck of a bank robber."

"He's much more than that," Dan explained. "Dixon is a master at the art. He robbed that bank in Utah with the precision a bomber group commander uses on an important air raid. Everything lined up, to the split second. Two men did the actual work, Jim, but outside, clearing the getaway path, were more than a dozen. That's Dixon's way—just about the reverse any average gang leader would adopt, and very, very effective. They got more than a quarter of a million dollars. They knew exactly when to hit—when the streets would be the most deserted, when the money would be at hand and the bank's defenses the weakest."

"All right," Noonan agreed. "Suppose Dixon is the best and biggest bank robber in history. Why wasn't he simply picked up? There's more to it than plain bank robbery, Dan."

Dan smiled. "You never were easy to fool. Of course you're right. We believe the headquarters of the gang leaders is right here in this hotel and that, possibly, there is one man heading the whole thing. My job is to identify him. I'm hoping I can do it through Bernie Dixon."

"Then let's go get him," Noonan arose ponderously.

They took the elevator to the seventeenth floor. Dan transferred his gun from his hip pocket to side coat pocket and Sheriff Noonan took the hint. He thrust a hand under his coat and let fingers rest against the butt of a large revolver. Dan rapped on the door of Room 1722.

Someone said, "Just a minute. Be right with you."

The door opened and a man with a wide face under gray hair, gave Dan Fowler one look and tried to slam the door. Dan put the flat of one hand against the panels and forced door and man back. He stepped in, followed by grim-faced Sheriff Noonan who closed the door behind him. Dan walked up to the burly man and seized him by one shoulder, spun him around and then searched him very thoroughly.

The man said, "This is an outrage! Are you a new member of the local police?"

"I'm not," Dan said, "so save your breath. You can't have me thrown off any force, Mr. Bernie Dixon. And you have no influence over Sheriff Noonan's office either. This is one time all your money and your influence isn't much good. Now go over there, sit down and behave yourself."

Bernie Dixon glared at him but obeyed. He licked his lips and asked, "What's the rap?"

Dan Fowler laughed at him. "One of the things I learned about you and all those associated with you is that after all these years you finally learned how to speak English and yet—when the first element of trouble comes, you forget. 'What's the rap?' Mr. Dixon! They talk like that in the Underworld. And certainly you do not belong in the Underworld."

DIXON kept scowling. "Friend," he said, "I don't know who you are and I don't care. Once upon a time I'd have snapped my fingers and you'd be dead but I gave that up long ago. I've been respectably retired for some years now."

"Just make that retired and forget the respectable part," Dan Fowler chuckled. "Mr. Dixon, you're going to tell me where you were just three days ago tonight. You'll tell me and your story will be checked."

"I'll tell you nothing," Dixon exclaimed. "Not one word. If this is some sort of accusation I'll consult my attorney."

Dan arose. "As you wish. You can call him from the Federal Building. Get your coat, Dixon! Sheriff, put the cuffs on him."

Dixon, half risen, sat back again heavily. The scowl on his face died and he looked genuinely scared. "Federal Building? Are you a G-Man?"

"Inspector Dan Fowler—Federal Bureau of Investigation," Dan said. "Does that make any difference in your attitude?"

"Yes, of course it does." Dixon rubbed his chin. "You fellows put us out of business years ago. You ruined every racket, gunned down the big boys like Machine-gun Kelly, the Barkers, Floyd—all the others. That's when I quit and

believe me, Mr. Fowler, I haven't gone back."

"Then give me the alibi," Dan Fowler said.

Dixon nodded. "Three nights ago it happens I remember very well indeed. I went to the track, stopped off at a crummy sea-food joint and ate lobster. That's what they call the crawfish down here, and this wasn't even good crawfish. Around ten that night I phoned Doctor Reed, the hotel physician. He put me to bed."

"Good," Dan approved. "I'll talk to Doctor Reed. Did anyone else see you?"

Dixon said, "Yes. A room service waiter named Grieb. He brought up some brandy about nine that night. I thought it might settle my stomach. Then the maid who turned down my bed, as she does every night. She came in after the doctor left. You can find her somewhere around the hotel. Her name is Lettie Hocken. She'd remember because she noticed how sick I was."

"I'll see them all," Dan promised. "If they have the same story, you're out of it, and I won't be surprised because I was shocked when I heard you were suspected of going right back into the old game."

"Bank stickups?" Dixon gaped. "Is that what you're after me for? Say, it's the job in Utah. I read about it. You think I did that?"

"Listen to the man," Jim Noonan exclaimed. "His innocence is heartbreaking."

"They say the job was so much like your handiwork that it couldn't have been a copy," Dan told him. "Besides, someone picked your mug out of a file of pictures. Sheriff, stay here with Dixon. His story sounds good, but don't believe a word of it—yet. Be ready to use your gun if he makes any sort of a tricky move."

"He'll be here when you get back," Noonan promised with a wide grin.

"I wouldn't try to leave if I was unguarded," Dixon said. "Can you imagine it! I'm supposed to have pulled another stickup, after twenty years. Mr. Fowler, I half regard the accusation as a compliment. But I don't want to spend the rest of my life in prison so please go see those alibi witnesses."

CHAPTER II

The Alibis

R. REED was a wiry, nervous type of man. His office was like the rest of the hotel—almost garish. The operating table and the glass encased instruments looked as if they'd never been used. Dr. Reed had small, shifty eyes of some undeterminable hue. They

didn't stay still long enough for Dan to notice their color. His hair was the shade of straw, and sparse.

Dan Fowler showed him his credentials. "I'm checking on Bernie Dixon who lives in the hotel, Doctor. When did you see him last?"

"Why, just recently. I can make certain." He thumbed back the pages of a record book. "Yes, it was three nights ago. He called around ten. Stomach ache, he said. But it was acute food poisoning. I put him to bed."

"Had Dixon been drinking when you got there?" Dan asked. "Even one drink?"

"He had a brandy breath and there was a room service tray and glass on the table. I presume he tried to treat himself in the only way his type knows how to do—liquor. It only made things worse."

"Thanks, Doctor," Dan said. "Mr. Dixon will appreciate this because you've just helped him tremendously."

Dan went down to the kitchen, found the room service section and located a waiter named Grieb. He was a tall, skinny, solemn looking man who seemed out of place in his white monkey jacket.

"Yes, sir," he told Dan in a deep drawl, "I brought a double brandy to Mr. Dixon's room. He signed the tab for it and gave me half a dollar. He was sick. I remember he seemed awful sick to me."

Dan made a few notes about Grieb's testimony and then hunted up the night maid named Lettie Hocken. She was short, hefty and good natured. She put down her pail, leaned a carpet sweeper against the wall and found a crumpled

pack of cigarettes.

"Let me know, if you see anybody coming. Can't smoke on the job but you don't look like a snitcher. What do you want to know?"

"It's about Bernie Dixon." Dan held a match to her cigarette. "Three nights ago—that would make it Monday—did you see him?"

"Three nights ago? Let's see. Tuesday was my night off. Last night I worked the tenth and eleventh floors. Monday? Oh, sure, I remember. I saw Dr. Reed come out of his room and when I went in Mr. Dixon was sick. He asked me to fix the bed right away and never mind the cleaning. So I did and he gave me a dollar, like the gentleman he is. And what's all this to you, mister?"

Dan smiled at her. "Thanks. You've helped a lot."

He walked away, in the direction of the elevators, and felt perfectly satisfied that Bernie Dixon couldn't have been involved in a bank stickup in a city two thousand miles away. Dixon had an alibi nobody could break because the people who provided it were genuine people, not the kind to lie for anyone: a hotel doctor, a room waiter and a hotel maid.

Dan returned to the seventeenth floor and rang Dixon's bell again. This time he didn't get an answer. He tried once more, heard the buzzer inside the suite, but that was all. Dan tried the door and found it locked. He drew back, ready to attack the door. Something had gone very wrong.

He didn't have to batter down the door. The elevator stopped and four men came barging out. The one in the lead wore a mess jacket and looked as if he might be the hotel manager. He marched straight toward Dixon's door, shook the door and then used a passkey on it. All four men hurried inside and Dan wasted no time following them.

One of the four, a burly sort with a pugnacious chin, grabbed Dan by the lapels of his coat and propelled him backwards rapidly.

He said, "Sorry, mister, but this is private."

Dan said, "So is this," and sunk a fist into the man's stomach that doubled him up. When he straightened again and started going for a gun in his hip pocket,

Dan had his identification card ready.

The man looked at it. "G-Man huh? Why don't you tell a guy? I'm the hotel dick. My orders were that nobody was to get in."

DAN pushed past the man. He saw Sheriff Jim Noonan first. The big lawman looked even bigger in death. He lay on his back, sightless eyes staring at the ceiling. There was a bloody wound directly over his heart and without even a close examination, Dan could see the powder burns. The murder gun had been shoved tight against Noonan's chest. Now it lay on the floor beside the body—a .38 automatic.

Dan closed his eyes for a second or two and murmured a prayer. He'd known few men as honest and decent as Jim Noonan. Now he was dead, the victim of a new birth of greed and avarice and crime.

The hotel detective was standing beside Dan. He said, "The guy who lived in this suite—" The word came out "soote"—took a dive out of the window, chum. They're sweeping him up now. Looks like he burned the sheriff first and then made like he was a pigeon."

Dan went to the wide open window, leaned out and far below he saw men standing around a sprawled out form. Dan straightened up and turned to the hotel manager.

"I'm an F.B.I. agent," he said. "I want this room cleared at once."

"Of course," the manager agreed. "Whatever you say. But, speaking from my standpoint, this is a terrible thing to happen on my hotel!"

"You didn't mind accepting a guest of Dixon's type," Dan told him coldly. "You should have guessed what might eventually happen."

"But why did he murder Sheriff Noonan?" the manager asked. "And then take his own life?"

"What makes you think he took his own life?" Dan queried bluntly.

"What makes me think that? Why, man alive, he left a note! It's on the desk in the parlor."

Dan turned on his heel and walked into the next room. There he found the note written on hotel stationery in a hand that slanted the letters far back, as if each letter in the line was a marching

soldier braced against a terrific wind. The note was as follows:

I'm sorry for this. I hope the Sheriff is a reasonable man because I have a gun in this table drawer and if Noonan tries to stop me, I'll have to kill him. There is no other way out for me. I thought I could go back to the old days, but I forgot I'd aged. One job and the F.B.I. is on my tail. I couldn't take a prison rap. Tell the G-Man I'm sorry and I hope Noonan doesn't try to stop me.

It was signed with the name of Bernard Dixon!

Dan slowly folded the note and thrust it into an envelope. The hotel manager, his assistant, a bellhop, and the hotel detective all stood around Dan. The manager gulped and thought he ought to issue some sort of protest.

"I think the local police should see that note. After all, this doesn't seem to be a Federal matter."

"It's Federal, all right," Dan told him, "But the local police should be on it too. Call them!"

"I already phoned Chief Slater," the hotel manager explained.

Dan said, "Thanks very much, all of you. Right now I want this room cleared just in case there might be clues."

"Clues?" the hotel dick grunted. "Clues to what? The guy jumped."

"Sometimes," Dan said very sweetly, "they get nudged out of the window. I think Dixon was nudged."

The manager held up both hands in horror and sputtered about what a double murder would be to business, with the season coming up. They all left the room. Dan immediately began going over every inch of the premises. He concentrated on Dixon's belongings first. In the desk he found a cashier's receipt for something that was being held at the hotel vault. Otherwise, he found nothing of much interest.

Some letters of credit, currency, check and bankbooks showed that Dixon still had money, but not in the proportions of six or eight years ago. There was a spell when his bank accounts zoomed. That was during the war when sucker money was ready to be reaped on all sides.

Dan looked for personal letters, perhaps a diary, but found nothing like that. He was going through the pockets of Dixon's twenty odd suits of clothes

when someone hit the door. Only a law officer knocked in such fashion.

Dan admitted a man who was a foot shorter than Sheriff Noonan, but weighed almost the same as the murdered man. He had a moon-shaped face, his hands were small and flabby and he possessed an unpleasant oiliness about him. He wore a uniform and it was quite apparent that he liked fancy dress. He had as much gold braid as the doorman of a nightclub given to sensationalism.

"I'm Slater," he declared pompously. "Chief of Police here. What's happened? Those idiots downstairs hardly make sense."

Sheriff Noonan and I," Dan explained, "came here to arrest Bernard Dixon, an old time bank robber who just went back to his profession. Dixon offered an alibi which I went to check while Sheriff Noonan stayed with Dixon. To all appearances, Dixon managed to write a suicide note, take a gun out of a table drawer and when Sheriff Noonan tried to stop him, Dixon shot the sheriff down. Then he went to the window and jumped."

Slater rubbed his fat chin. "Simple as that, eh? Well, these things happen. The best of us get careless at times."

"Noonan wasn't careless," Dan snapped. "He would never have permitted Dixon even to approach a table drawer, let alone write a letter and then pull a gun. Dixon was surprised. I think someone knocked on the door, gave my name and Noonan opened up. A gun was pushed tight against him and fired. There was little noise."

SLATER frowned and then started laughing. "A pack of nonsense. You G-Men always think all crimes are big. And what would Dixon be doing while all this went on? Especially if the man or men who killed Noonan were going to knock off Dixon too?"

"The murderers were Dixon's friends," Dan said. "He trusted them, thought they came to get him out of a jam. He didn't kill himself, Chief. He was thrown out of the window. There are too many marks on the window sill—scratches made by a struggling man. Besides, if Dixon was rescued, he'd have no reason to take his own life."

"I'm putting it down as murder and suicide," Slater declared. "I want the note Dixon left behind and I intend to conduct my own investigation. Personally it's my opinion you're trying to whitewash your own inefficiency in letting Dixon get away with this. You're trying to make something bigger out of it so your own carelessness won't be noticed. But I'm a fair man. I'm willing to be convinced; I'm for settling the whole thing right now."

Dan picked up the phone. "So am I," he agreed. Then he spoke into the phone. "Desk clerk, please. Hello, this is Fowler of the F.B.I. I'm in Dixon's suite. Send up his registry card, send along a package which is being stored for him in the hotel safe and ask Dr. Reed to kindly come up here at once."

The registration card arrived first. It was dated eight months ago. Dan laid the suicide note beside it and compared signatures. They were identical. He sighed, put the note away and left the card on the table. Dr. Reed came next. When Dan greeted him he gave the G-Man a blank look.

Dan said, "Doctor, I want you to tell Chief Slater exactly what you told me an hour ago. About Bernie Dixon."

Dr. Reed's blank look grew blanker. "I beg your pardon," he said. "To the best of my knowledge I had no conversation with you about Dixon or anyone else. There must be some mistake."

Dan's eyes narrowed. "Doctor, there is no mistake. You told me that you treated Bernie Dixon for an acute stomach condition three nights ago. You told me that when I called at your office an hour ago."

"I'm really sorry." Reed stared from one man to the other. "I realize this must be important, since our police chief is here, but I swear I don't know what this is about. I never saw this man before in my life." As he spoke he pointed at Fowler.

Slater said, "Did you treat Bernie Dixon, Doctor?"

"No. I never attended Mr. Dixon. Certainly I did not see him three nights ago."

"Well?" Slater's eyebrows were lifted high as he looked in Dan Fowler's direction.

"Doctor," Dan said, "you're flirting with the penitentiary and the loss of your medical license. However, unless you wish to correct your statement, you may go."

"My statement is correct," Reed insisted. "I wish I could help, but I can't."

"Get out!" Dan roared.

THE door closed behind Dr. Reed. Chief Slater licked his fat lips. "I dunno," he said slowly. "I dunno. Maybe what I should be doing is asking you for your credentials, Mr. Fowler. How do I know you're an F.B.I. man?"

Dan showed his card, picture and thumb print. "You can check my print against the one on the card if you like," he said. "You can telephone Miami where I'm known. I don't care what you do so long as you don't interfere with me now."

Dan reached for the phone again, called room service and asked that the waiter named Grieb be sent up. He paced the floor, deep in thought, as he waited. Grieb, as retiring as ever, merely stared at Dan when he was asked to repeat his previous statements.

"But sir," he protested, "I don't know you. I never talked to you. I didn't bring Mr. Dixon any brandy three nights ago. I don't know what you're talking about."

"You will," Dan said softly. "You'll understand every word, my friend. That's all."

Dan picked up the phone again. The floor maid wasn't the type to lie for anyone, nor stand for any sort of intimidation. If she told the truth, it would help. Dan called the housekeeper and asked for Lettie Hocken.

The housekeeper said, "I'm sorry, sir, but Lettie is off tonight. She'll be here tomorrow."

Dan slammed the receiver down on its cradle. His head was spinning. This was like some nightmare. A knock on the door brought him to his feet. He let a bellboy in. The boy carried a package wrapped in wrinkled brown storepaper.

"This is what Mr. Dixon had in the safe, sir," he said.

Dan gave him a coin. "Thanks. Tell



Yates rushed toward Dan, a snarl on his face, with his gun ready (CHAP. XIII)

the manager I'll open it in the presence of Chief Slater. I think in such honest and competent company no other witnesses will be required."

Chief Slater grinned a bit. "I detect a note of sarcasm in that statement, sir."

"I feel slightly sarcastic," Dan grunted as he studied the wrapper on the package. "I'm being made a fool of and I don't like it. Dr. Reed lied. The waiter lied and the maid who might tell the truth has disappeared. Oh, she was on duty tonight. I'm not given to wild imaginings."

Dan worried the string off the package, unrolled the box which turned out to be a large cigar box meant for a hundred cigars. He raised the lid, closed his eyes as if praying and then opened them.

"I said I wasn't given to wild imaginings. Now I'm not so certain. In this box is part of the loot from the holdup of the Memorial Trust Company in Utah. If you will excuse me now, I'd like a cold bath, some coffee and some time to think."

"Maybe," Chief Slater said sourly, "a psychiatrist wouldn't do you any harm either."

CHAPTER III

Shallow Lake



FUMING with anger, Dan Fowler returned to his room. There he sat near the window, forced himself to forget the fact that he'd been tricked and concentrated on what moves to make. He knew what he was up against—knew it very well. All the ingenuity

and skill he possessed would be called upon before he could finally run down the murderer of Sheriff Noonan and Bernie Dixon. Because Dan knew without question that they were victims of a killer who worked fast and smoothly.

Finally he picked up his phone and asked for the F.B.I. office in Miami. Shortly afterwards he was talking to Larry Kendal. Together these two—Dan

Fowler and Larry Kendal—made up a G-Man team which operated beautifully. They'd been with the F.B.I. even before its agents were armed and turned loose on criminals. They'd helped to carve the present day system of efficiency out of almost nothing, and worked with it to see the organization become the best criminal hunting bureau in the world.

They were about the same age, as a matter-of-fact Kendal was almost a year younger than Fowler. They were similarly trained in all aspects of this grim profession. Kendal was the more flamboyant of the pair, going in for fancier clothes and somewhat more bizarre methods. They were on a roving assignment and usually got the toughest cases.

Right now Dan Fowler thought he needed Kendal's help more than at any other time in his career. By the looks of things, a G-Man had tracked down a bank robber and then believed his story of innocence to such an extent as to delay making an arrest and giving the man time and opportunity to jump from the window, and for Sheriff Noonan to be killed. Because this was a reflection against the F.B.I., this G-Man then proceeded to claim that Dixon had not only stated his innocence but proven it through three witnesses. The trouble with those witnesses was the fact that two of them stated, without hesitation, that they'd never seen the G-Man before. The third witness had disappeared.

Dan Fowler sensed that he was over his head in intrigue and getting out of it wouldn't be a simple matter.

Dan said, "Larry, take a plane up here as fast as possible. Charter one or get the Army to fly you here. Hire a car in some nearby town and come in as a tourist. I'll meet you at nine this evening at the intersection of Route Three-Fve-Four and Monument Highway. Watch for me."

Dan hung up, straightened his tie and left the room for the lobby. Someone snickered as he went by a row of chairs but Dan paid no attention. He came to a stop in the center of the lobby and casually surveyed those who were apparently waiting for the dining room to open for dinner.

Dan saw two familiar faces, faces he fully expected to see. There was florid,

white-haired, arm gesturing Jeff Wilson who'd been a District Attorney in a northern state some years back and who'd left that office worth a million dollars. Which wasn't a bad trick for a man who went in broke.

Then there was George Yates, ex-sheriff of the county which Jeff Wilson had served as D.A. Yates was on in years too but still looked sturdy, and Dan had an idea he could draw and shoot as fast as ever. Yates had set a record for snap shooting and it had never been broken.

Yates was almost bald now, slightly around the middle but his eyes sparkled just as clearly and no doubt that warm heart of his beat steadily. Yates had one of the warmest hearts in captivity. When he'd bossed a large county jail, it was almost unbearable for him to keep certain inmates behind bars all the time. As a result the jail had become a sort of country club and Yates had become rich.

These two men were the souvenirs of an era that had glowed brightly and then died in a blast of G-Man gunfire. A crimson, bloody age that must never be permitted to return.

Dan ate an early dinner in a modest little place down the street. On his way he had a good look at some of the local cops. Two needed shaves rather badly, most of them wore seedy uniforms and he spotted one seated on a fireplug idly tapping the gutter with his nightstick. Chief Slater, it seemed, was no stickler for discipline.

AT SIX-THIRTY Dan was back at the hotel and seated near the swimming pool. He heard footsteps begin to pass, hesitate and then stop. He glanced up and Lynn Bradley was looking at him. She came over and sat down beside Dan.

"I've been hearing interesting things about you, Mr. Fowler. You're a G-Man. When I told Granddad he nearly ate my head off. You should have told him. He'd have questioned you for hours about your work. Granddad has to get his excitement second-hand but he enjoys it."

"Did you also tell him it seems as though I'm probably the biggest sap on record?" Dan smiled crookedly.

She shook her head. "No. Frankly, I didn't want to destroy the glamour that

he has thrown around you. And I don't believe one word they say."

"Thank you," Dan said. "It's nice to have at least one friend."

"I'm selfish about it," she confessed with a smile. "Granddad is a trial sometimes and you can keep him occupied. So, I hope you stay out of jail. When are you going to see him?"

"Your grandfather? Tonight, I hope."

"Good. We have the penthouse. It's big enough for a dozen people but it's what Granddad wants. He rides his hobbies up there, looks out over the ocean and is reasonably content. We have a private elevator that runs from the ground floor with a stop at the eighteenth floor and another at the penthouse. The elevator opens into the foyer. Also we never lock doors so just walk in any time. If I'm not there, you'll have to barge in. Granddad can't move off his stretcher-chair."

She walked slowly away, trim and attractive. Dan Fowler glanced at his watch. It would soon be time to meet Larry Kendal. Dan's car was at the side of the hotel, in a parking space. He made reasonably certain that he wasn't seen leaving the hotel, found the parking space unattended and drove out by a rear exit.

The rendezvous point was about seven miles south, along a level, smooth road which wasn't used a great deal. It was practically a bridge, being simply filled in land above one of Florida's typical sprawling, shallow lakes.

It wasn't a bright night. There were only a few stars and once out of town, the darkness closed in like thick fog. Dan was early, took his time and did as much planning as possible. Larry, working under cover, might be of great help. Someone had to be able to move about unsuspected and Dan knew that he'd be under almost constant surveillance from now on.

Within half a mile of the meeting place, Dan saw two trucks coming toward him. One was light, the other of medium size. Their headlights were very bright and dazzled him for a moment. Then the vehicle at the rear began to pull ahead of the other machine. They were blocking the road but there was still plenty of time for the rear truck to pass

and get back in line.

Suddenly Dan realized that the rear truck wasn't passing. It drew abreast of the other machine and stayed there. Both trucks were traveling at very fast speeds and the intention of the drivers was obvious. Dan was to be either crashed into or forced off the road into the lake that ran on both sides. The men in the trucks were comparatively safe and protected. He'd fallen into a trap. Of course, he reasoned, his phone call to Larry had been overheard. Everything he did at that hotel would be watched.

There wasn't much satisfaction in the realization of this. Not with two cars hurtling at him. Dan did wonder why they were willing to risk so much to get rid of him. Killing a G-Man is hardly the wise thing for any gang to do, no matter how organized or financed. Yet, he faced death right now and unless he took some sort of action, the whole thing would be over so far as he was concerned.

Dan tripped his headlights to the high beam. That would help to blind the other drivers. He slid far over to the other side of the seat, guiding the car with his left hand. He opened the door, let the slip stream hold it in place but put one foot against it. He watched the oncoming cars intently.

His machine, he guessed, would travel on a straight line for a few hundred feet. There was very little play in the wheel, no tendency for the car to weave. If they didn't see him jump, he might come out of this. If they did and there were enough killers in those cars, they'd probably find him.

HE WAS about four hundred feet away now and it was time to act. Dan kicked the car door open, held it there with his foot and slid out onto the running board. There wasn't opportunity to select any spot to jump but it didn't make a great deal of difference. He would hit water anywhere along here.

Dan let go of the wheel, gave himself a tremendous shove and went hurtling out into space. It seemed as though he traveled a long distance before he landed in the water with a great splash. At this same instant his abandoned car met the other two cars almost head on. It bounced off one, was struck by the other

and thrown over and over into water shallow enough only partially to cover the machine.

It wasn't necessary for Dan to swim. He stood up, carefully testing his arms and legs. Nothing seemed to be broken or badly bruised. The water had acted as an efficient cushion. He waded in the direction of some aqueous plant that looked like a three-foot high palmetto and crouched down behind that.

They'd soon discover he wasn't in the car and a hunt would start but first they'd sweep the lake near the car in case he'd drowned and was still on the bottom. Dan wanted to know why this attack had been made. A dangerous, desperate attempt on his life. What did they hope to gain by such risks? There'd been a chance that everyone in those two murder cars might have been killed too. As it was, one of the cars had gone off the road and stood in four feet of water.

There were four or five men in the group and each one had a powerful flashlight. They were wading out and he caught glimpses of them as they worked around his car and got the beam of one another's lights. Then two or three of the flashlights centered on the rear of Dan's car. He saw them open the trunk compartment and pull something free of it. For a moment Dan wondered what it could be and then he had a glimpse of a human face, gray in death.

He didn't know who it was and he decided this was no time to find out, but the trick was evident now. They'd claim Dan had arrested someone and both had been killed when their car went off the road into the lake. Perhaps a driver of one of the other cars would testify that Dan was driving at reckless speed. They'd have it properly sewed up and before they discovered all this trouble was in vain, Dan had things to do.

He retreated, grimly determined to find his way back to town somehow. Larry would have to fend for himself because it was impossible for Dan to get past those men now searching for his body. He climbed back into the road half a mile further on, shook as much water out of his clothes as possible and started hiking.

He saw their headlights ten minutes

later and promptly waded right back into the lake. The car was moving slowly. Its front left parking light began to blink in a signal for a left turn. But there was nowhere to turn off this road. Then the right parking light began to blink. It was a signal of some kind. Dan watched carefully. As the car rolled slowly past he caught the outline of a man at the wheel, dimly illuminated by the dome light. It was Larry Kendal.

Dan raced onto the road and waved his hands. He didn't dare shout. His voice might carry back to where those killers were still looking for him. But Larry had been watching and waiting for this—doing some praying about it too. He stopped and waited until Dan caught up to him.

Dan swung aboard the car and shook Larry's hand, thumped him on the shoulder, grinned happily and then told him to start rolling at top speed for the hotel.

Larry was a good looking young man with an appealing personality. He had a way of edging into affairs where he hadn't been invited and making everyone like it. He was quick-witted, like Dan, and just as resourceful.

Larry said, "I reached the meeting place almost an hour ahead of time, just in case somebody set up a trap. I saw these two trucks rolling past and one of them dropped off a couple of men armed with rifles. That was enough for me. I had parked the car half a mile away so I hot-footed it there and started driving in this direction to intercept you."

"I was intercepted by these trucks," Dan said tensely. "And it seems that in the trunk of the car I was driving, there was a dead man. I wish I knew who he was."

"What's it all about, Dan?" Larry asked.

"I'll tell you at the hotel. The idea is for you to get me back there as fast as possible so I can rig an alibi. Can you imagine it? The detective on the case has to rig an alibi to save himself. They'll say I killed that man, whoever he is. That's why the corpse was hidden in my car. They want to discredit me and the F.B.I. They tried it before in connection with Sheriff Noonan's murder. This is a follow-up."

"What about me?" Larry asked.

"You just drive up and check in under your own name. They know you're coming, but let them think we're not aware of their knowledge. I'm going to bring Sally down here, somehow. We can talk about that later. My room is Fourteen Ninety. Meet me there. I need my key just now but later I'll give you my key to my room and pick up a spare one at the desk."

CHAPTER IV

Hidden Ears



BY USING the freight elevator and the rear entrance, Dan Fowler reached his room unseen. He wasted little time in shedding his wet clothes and putting on fresh ones. He locked the wet garments in one of his suitcases. Next he used the freight elevator again

to reach the top floor. There he transferred to the private elevator for Warren Bradley's penthouse. He hadn't wanted to risk using the elevator from down below.

As Lynn had told him, the elevator opened into a foyer and there were no locked doors to bar his way. He moved softly on heavily carpeted floor, down a hallway. There was a very large living room with picture windows overlooking the ocean. The room was dimly illuminated and empty.

Further on he came upon Warren Bradley's bedroom suite which was also unoccupied. Then he prowled Lynn's rooms. Finally he came to a closed door at the end of the corridor. Light shone beneath it. He put an ear against the panels, heard heavy, rhythmic breathing and took a chance on letting himself in.

It was a medium sized room with half its space occupied by a short wave radio outfit. An elaborate, visibly expensive hobby of a rich man. Its owner, propped up in the wheelchair-stretcher, was sound asleep. His mouth hung open, he snored gently and one arm hung limply off the side of the stretcher.

Dan grinned, picked up a magazine and sat down. He took cigarettes from his pocket and broke four of them in half. He flicked on a lighter, took a couple of puffs off each half and crushed the rest out in an ash tray. Within three or four minutes the ash tray looked as if he'd been using it for at least an hour.

Bradley stirred, as if subconsciously aware that someone was in the room. After a few moments of this he finally opened his eyes. For one bare second Dan thought he saw fear in them. Rampant, brilliant terror. Then Bradley smiled and offered his hand.

"How long have you been here, lad? I'm a fine host. Did Lynn come back yet?"

Dan said, "No, sir. I talked with Lynn downstairs, at the swimming pool. After she went away I thought I'd come up and visit with you. She told me to walk right in and I did. You were asleep so—I just waited."

"How do you like my place?" Bradley asked. "Did you inspect my short wave radio? I can talk to any part of the world with it. I've got friends in Melbourne, Shanghai, even some misguided soul in Vladivostock who keeps telling me how wonderful his country is. Best thing for me, this hobby. It keeps up the illusion that I get around. An illusion that exists only within my own brain, mind you."

"I'd like to listen in sometime," Dan said. "Not right now. You know, of course, that I'm at this hotel on official business. It hasn't panned out very well."

Bradley nodded. "I heard you were after Bernie Dixon but he jumped out of a window."

"Maybe he jumped," Dan said. "I think he was pushed. Dixon gave me three people who could prove his innocence of the charge I was after him for. They alibied him beautifully until they found out he was dead. Then two of them swore I'd never talked to them and the third witness disappeared."

Bradley whistled softly. "All very convenient, eh? You're not giving up?"

"Oh, no. I've even sent for a little help."

"Good luck to you," Bradley said. "Keep me posted. Makes an old man's life more interesting. I realize you're not at liberty to tell me everything that

happens but even if you have to lie to me a little, make it an interesting case."

Dan chuckled and they talked for another half an hour. Finally Dan begged off, promised to return when he could and left Bradley wheeling himself toward the short-wave radio. Before Dan was out of the apartment he heard its strong signal start up.

Dan took the regular elevator down this time. The lobby was almost deserted. He saw the desk clerk working over his books and walked up to him and asked for a key to his room, explaining he must have misplaced the original key. The cashier was applying lacquer to long fingernails, the phone operator read a magazine. The hotel proper died a slow death around nine but the gambling rooms just began kicking into life about that time. They were going strong right now.

DAN moved into a short hallway leading to the manager's office. He made sure no one saw him and then he tapped on the door very lightly. There was no answer. The door wasn't locked so he walked in. He found himself in the outer office where there were two stenographers' desks. Passing one of these he noticed it had a stack of signed letters lying there, ready to be mailed.

Dan was after information and letters were sometimes good sources so he proceeded to read some of them under the weak rays of a desk light which had been left turned on.

The third letter was interesting. It was addressed to a Miss Martha Talbot of Baltimore and explained that her suite of rooms would be ready on the eighth—twenty-four hours away. The manager welcomed her as a new guest and felt certain she would return again and again.

Dan opened the desk drawer, found blank hotel envelopes and hastily addressed one to Miss Sally Vane, care of the Department of Justice, Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C. He scrawled a note telling Sally to use the enclosed letter as an introduction and hurry down to this hotel. She was to get in touch with this Martha Talbot, whoever she was, and prevail upon her to help the F.B.I. by letting Sally Vane take her place.

It would work and it was an ideal way of getting Sally in without the remotest stigma of suspicion upon her. Dan put stamps on the envelope for air mail, special delivery. He thrust it into his pocket and then examined the manager's office briefly. Nothing he saw interested him. He left the office as unobtrusively as he'd entered, mailed the letter, strolled through the lobby and bought a Miami newspaper at the newsstand. With this under his arm he wandered into the gambling rooms for a few moments. The hotel manager saw him and quickly came over.

"I hope," he stated sourly, "that you don't intend to raid our little game, Mr. Fowler."

Dan smiled and shook his head. "Gambling doesn't come under the jurisdiction of the F.B.I. I only wanted to look around. Good night, sir."

Dan reached his room, let himself in and turned on the light. There was a light tap on the door and Dan let Larry in. Larry dropped into the easy chair, crossed his legs, and smiled blandly at Dan.

"I've been hearing things," he chuckled. "About how a G-Man let the man he was after bump himself off and then tried to alibi the whole affair by saying the man was innocent and was pushed out of the window."

"You've been hearing what most everyone believes too," Dan confessed. "I'm in a spot, Larry. Things are rather reversed. I'm on the defensive and—I've got to prove an innocent crook is innocent."

Larry shed his coat, loosened his tie and settled down again. "Feed it to me

slow, Dan. Right from the start. I wasn't in on this affair at all until you phoned."

Dan also made himself more comfortable. He pulled a small table close to him and put a notebook and a pencil on it. He began talking.

"Back in the days when racketeers infested Chicago and a lot of other big cities, half a dozen so-called big shots bossed the works," he said. "They became rich, powerful and smart. Then the easy money ended but they'd seen this coming. Remember how all the rackets suddenly seemed to end? It was a temporary condition—others took them over—but the big shots had new plans."

Larry nodded. "I've heard about that. They pooled their dough, set up a syndicate and bought up all sorts of businesses from hotels to shipping firms. All of which they operated within the law—barely."

"They have been extremely careful," Dan went on. "They have millions invested, Larry. Much of it in such enterprises as dope, race tracks, book making, the numbers game and gambling. They've conducted some of the biggest gambling rings in history. From these enterprises came most of the profit, enabling them to go further and further into legitimate businesses which constantly require fresh capital. But something happened during the past year. Can you guess?"

"Uh-huh," Larry said from the depths of his chair! Sucker money and black market money ended."

BRISKLY Dan picked up his pencil and wrote on the pad, "Room probably wired. Just follow my lead."

[Turn page]

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Aloud, Dan said, "With this tremendous source of income cut they need money badly. So, what we of the F.B.I. have always feared is coming to pass. The big boys are reverting. They're going back into active crime, organizing their gangs. Only things are slightly different now. They've smartened up a great deal. They'll be just as ruthless but harder to catch. They brought crimson yesterdays, Larry, and they'll bring bloody, crimson tomorrows if they are not stopped."

"Bernie Dixon was one of these?" Larry read the note and passed it back.

"There was a stickup in Utah that had all the earmarks of Dixon's fine hand," Dan explained. "I found him here—this hotel is part of the syndicate's more or less legal business. He denied taking part in the stickup, gave me three alibi witnesses and I went to see them. They alibied him completely. During my absence, however, he shot Sheriff Noonan and jumped out of the window. So they'd like to have me believe."

"If he was innocent, he wouldn't jump," Larry commented. "Or kill a man in order to take his own life."

"Of course he wouldn't. This is what I believe happened. Dixon's room was wired and somebody knew Noonan and I were there and why we'd approached Dixon. After I went off to check, a killer convinced Noonan I was at the door. Noonan opened up, the murderer shot him and then tricked Dixon close to the window, shoved him through. Then he planted an already written note, presumably in Dixon's hand, on the desk."

"The facts point that way," Larry commented. "But what's the motive?"

"They are trying to get me—discredit me and that means something," Dan said. "I think they're afraid of the F.B.I. because we're grasping the idea that the syndicate is going back to its days of open crime. Apparently, as these big shots must have reasoned it, we had evidence against Dixon. If he was believed guilty, we'd think his was an isolated instance and that no vast crime wave is being planned. So—they killed him without knowing I'd just about proven him innocent."

"I'm beginning to understand," Larry grunted.

"It's quite simple," Dan said. "If I'd established Dixon's innocence, then I must be made out a liar. So witnesses were either intimidated, kidnaped or killed."

"Why not gather in those witnesses?" Larry suggested. "For their own protection."

"We can't. We've nothing on them." Dan sounded discouraged. He started writing again. "The F.B.I. never acts like a Gestapo. We have to have evidence and there isn't any. These people say I'm a liar. I know they are the prevaricators but I can't prove it. So they will have to wait."

Dan passed Larry the notebook again. On another page he'd written:

Leave here. Call Washington from outside hotel. See if anything on Doctor Reed. If there is—quietly take him away. I want him to vanish.

Larry scribbled: "I'll get right at it."

Aloud, Dan said, "We know that when the gangs were threatened with breaking up, someone came along, brought all the gang chiefs together and sold them this idea of going semi-honest. This man has remained their advisor and unofficial president. Whoever he is, not the slightest hint of his identity has ever come out. I doubt more than half a dozen men know who he is."

LARRY wriggled into a more upright position. "Say Dan, if these gang leaders, smart as they are now, are led back into active crime by a brain like that—the results won't be so good. For us and every other law enforcement agency."

"Nor for plain ordinary citizens," Dan said. "That's why this must be stopped and this well hidden leader exposed for what he is. I've ideas about him."

"Tell me," Larry encouraged.

"The syndicate maintains three headquarters. California, Nevada and—this hotel. Right now some interesting people are here as guests. There is Jeff Wilson from Chicago. Remember him?"

"Of course. The D.A. who was owned by the gangs."

"Quite correct. And George Yates, ex-sheriff. Another of Wilson's kind. A promoter, looking out for himself. Either one of these men could have brought

the gang leaders together and welded them into one efficient unit. Then there is a third man—whom I haven't encountered here yet. He is Earl Crandall, the famous criminal lawyer who got so many of those punks off in the so-called good old days. Crandall bled them for a fortune and apparently quit but the question is, are men like Crandall ever satisfied? He had one of the most shrewd minds I've ever encountered. If he is head of the syndicate, we're in for a great deal of trouble."

Larry said, "Well, it looks like we're going to have to work this time. Maybe, since they don't know me, I can dig a little deeper than you. I'll try at any rate."

"Good." Dan watched Larry scribble something on the pad. He accepted it and read:

I'll keep extra key. In one hour I'll leave something new in your room. A "citizen's radio." Looks like a camera but it's a modern version of the old walkie-talkie. Range of fifty watts, voice range limited to horizon. High frequency in radio spectrum. 460-470 megacycle band. Fits in your pocket, is two way, and we can talk. Okay?

Dan nodded. "Better go downstairs and circulate around the gambling rooms. No guest misses them. And Larry, a strange thing happened tonight. I drove here in a rented car and somebody stole it from the parking space. I was visiting Warren Bradley in his penthouse suite and while I was there, the car vanished. I don't know what it means but keep your eyes and ears open."

CHAPTER V

Two of Three



AFTER Larry departed, Dan switched on every light in the room and went over it. He turned furniture upside down to check for hidden mikes. He traced every wire or anything that resembled a wire. He examined the plumbing carefully, leaned out of the windows to

study the pink outer walls of the building. He pressed the rug over every inch

of its surface and when he was finished he still thought the room was wired, but by a master hand.

They had known of his intended meeting with Larry and set a trap, sprung it with a dead man. Dan wondered who it could have been. He was almost tempted to risk a trip back to that road passing across the lake and search for the body. But there were other things to do. If his meeting with Larry had been known, it was possible the telephone was tapped but a gang like this, with so much at stake, would take even greater precautions than that and have the room wired.

After midnight, when the gambling room began to clear out, the hotel would become livelier. Before that happened, Dan had urgent plans. He knew that hotel rooms have the same key pattern throughout the building and that one passkey will fit every door.

He carried a number of keys and tested them on his own room door until he found one that worked. He thought back on his training in the mechanics of locks, did some active filing with a small kit of tools he carried and pretty soon he had a key that would open almost any door in the hotel.

Armed with this, he proceeded to the top floor and began searching. He opened all the maids' closets, rummaged through their contents and paid especial attention to the big laundry baskets. On the twelfth floor he found a trunk in a supply closet. Dan pried open the lock and found what he'd been looking for.

Lettie Hocken, the maid who'd told him Dixon couldn't be guilty, was dead and her body stuffed into the trunk. Without touching the corpse, Dan saw that she'd been strangled. There were purple marks around her throat. He felt of the body. It was already cold and in rigor, which meant she'd been murdered immediately after he'd talked to her.

Dan stepped out of the closet, closed the door and went back to his room. On his bed lay the two-way radio which Larry had brought. It was compact enough for easy stowing in a back pocket or, carried over one shoulder, it looked exactly like a camera. He didn't try to use the instrument for he still had that eerie feeling that every word spoken in

this room could be heard over hidden wires.

He wanted to tell Larry about the hotel maid and have Larry hurry with his check on Dr. Reed. Dan himself planned to pick up Grieb, the waiter who had baldly called the G-Man a liar. These people had told the truth and, knowing the truth, they were dangerous to the plans of this syndicate. The men composing this super-gang had never been known to hesitate when killing anyone meant additional security for themselves.

Dan was at the door when he heard a knock. He patted his hip pocket to make sure the radio was concealed and then pulled the door open. Chief of Police Slater and a burly detective stood there.

Dan said, "Come in, Chief. This is a coincidence. I was on my way to see you."

"We'll settle my business first," Slater announced coldly. "About half an hour ago a car rented to you, was found off the road that passes over Lake Seminole. In the back seat we discovered a dead man."

Dan said, "My car was in the parking space at eight o'clock, Chief. I saw it there from the swimming pool, while I talked to Miss Lynn Bradley. I visited her grandfather right after that, came down shortly before nine and found the car gone."

"I hope you can prove that," Chief Slater said, "because the dead man happens to be that waiter named Grieb, who called you a liar. With him dead he can't call you a liar any more, Mr. Fowler. I'm making no accusations but people will think that way."

Dan opened the door again. "Then we'll really give them something to talk about, Chief. Because five minutes ago I found the corpse of Lettie Hocken, the hotel maid who told me Dixon was here the day of the bank stickup. But who never got to telling you and the rest that I was a liar and she not only never saw me before but didn't know a thing about Dixon. Her death evens things up, Chief."

"Like how?" Slater demanded.

"Grieb called me a liar. The murder of Lettie indicates she had refused to call me a liar and so she was killed. Come along. I'll show you where she is."

HALF an hour later Dan took a stroll along the beach. He found a bank where he could conceal himself well in the shadows, and sprawled out on the sand. He lay there, resting and thinking a bit and listening too.

When he was certain no one had trailed him here, or was within range of his voice, he took the two-way radio from his pocket.

He'd already examined it sufficiently to know about its operation. He snapped a switch, held the small mouthpiece to his lips and spoke into it.

"Calling L.K. Come in, L.K. if you're within range. Over."

There was no response. Dan leaned back, closed his eyes and tried calling Larry every five minutes. It was nearly midnight when he drew a response.

It came clearly, without a crackle of static.

"I'm speaking from a dark nook near the swimming pool, Dan. Don't dare use this instrument inside. Washington had a file on Doc Reed. Served time for helping gangsters but retained his right to practice somehow. Got out on parole and promptly disappeared. Therefore since his parole is still in force, he is a fugitive and within the scope of the F.B.I."

"Good," Dan spoke into the instrument. "I hardly expected a break like that—after what has happened so far. Go ahead."

"I popped in on Doc," Larry's voice came softly. "He didn't put up much of an argument and I took him out the back way. Nobody saw us. I drove him to a town ten miles off where the Chief of Police is honest. He'll be safe there."

"That's fine," Dan said. "The dead man in that car was the waiter who called me a liar. The hotel maid, who wouldn't, I discovered locked in a trunk. Strangled to death. They're taking big and risky steps, Larry, which means we're onto them and they know it."

"What comes next?" Larry asked.

"Go to bed. Lock your door and put a chair in front of it. Keep a gun handy. Tomorrow begin acting like a snoop. Don't even look my way. We're putting on a nice little game for them. Keep them guessing and they'll have less time for hatching schemes. I've an idea, Lar-

ry. If we can manage it, we'll break this combine and drag the smartest crook of recent history into the open."

"It has to work," Larry said. "If it doesn't, we'll have a crime wave to make the prohibition era look like a parlor game. What of Sally?"

"She should arrive tomorrow if the mails go through okay. Somehow we've got to provide her with one of these radios. All three of us must stay apart and under no circumstances can we risk Sally's life by indicating she is an F.B.I. agent."

"Signing off," Larry chuckled softly. "Pleasant dreams, Dan."

DAN returned the tiny two-way radio to his pocket and ambled back to the hotel.

The manager was at the desk and greeted Dan with just a bit too much enthusiasm.

"Ah, Mr. Fowler! I have been hoping you would return while I was here. There is a little matter I'd like to discuss with you."

"About two murdered hotel employees," Dan grunted. "I know."

"It is not that, Mr. Fowler. But, they are dead and you will probably remain until this is cleared up. You see, the room we assigned you was for only a brief visit. It has been reserved. Therefore, with your permission, I have taken the liberty of having your things removed to a suite on the top floor."

"Well, that's okay with me," Dan said, "if the cost isn't too high. After all, I am spending tax payers' money."

"There will be no change in the rate," the manager said promptly. "We realize the work you do and appreciate it. I hope that you will find out who killed my waiter and my floor maid."

"I'm going to try. Tell me—don't you suspect that I killed them? Like so many other people do?"

"That you murdered them? But why, Mr. Fowler? Because they called you a liar? I do not believe them. I am sure everything can be explained and while there is little I can do to help, I can make certain you are comfortable."

"Thanks," Dan said, in no way impressed. This hotel manager was merely executing orders and if Dan Fowler was



LARRY KENDAL

being changed to a suite of rooms, there was a reason for it.

A bellboy took him to his new quarters. Dan tipped him and then stood looking with open admiration at the suite he suddenly rated. The living room was large, with ceiling high windows forming almost all of three walls of the room. It was done in canary yellow, even to the deep rug.

The windows overlooked one wing of the hotel but there was also a panoramic view of the sea. On the wall opposite the main window were two enormous clocks.

Dan Fowler wondered why there should be two.

The bedroom was not as large nor as sumptuous, but still would have served as three ordinary hotel rooms, properly partitioned off. Dan removed his coat, hung it up and glanced at his suitcases. He knew without many doubts that they'd been opened and the contents inspected. Not that it mattered.

Dan stripped off his tie, gave one tired glance at the inviting bed and then started going over the room inch by inch for microphones.

He wondered if there was a conspiracy afoot to wear him down through the sheer force of fatigue.

CHAPTER VI

Lady of the F.B.I.

ALLY Vane, pert, vivacious and beautifully blonde, boarded a plane at Baltimore the following afternoon. She was armed with the letter Dan Fowler had sent her and she was using the name of Martha Talbot, by courtesy of the real Miss Talbot who'd con-

sented to go into retirement until this affair was concluded.

Sally found herself seated beside a man of about thirty who looked as if he'd played professional football, probably tackle. He was good looking with a certain toughness about him but he didn't suffer from shyness.

"Glad to have you aboard," he said pleasantly. "That's how we used to say it in the Navy."

"Hello," Sally answered. She held a small cosmetic case, lettered M.T. on her lap. "Are you going to Florida too?"

He grinned. "I've a weakness. An expensive one but every now and then I must cater to it. I like to gamble and there are certain places in Florida where it's all but legal."

"Oh, my!" Sally tried to look worried. "I hope the Pink Heron Hotel isn't like that."

"The Pink Heron Hotel?" the man asked. "My dear Miss—Miss—hang it all, my name is Ted Garrison. I'm going to the Pink Heron too. It's one of the best gambling spots down there but a good hotel as well. We'll probably see one another often so we might as well settle down and be friends."

"Of course," Sally said cheerfully. "I'm Martha Talbot. And I'll be more than glad to have—someone like you to show me around. Perhaps I'll even bet a dollar or two."

Ted Garrison kept her amused during the entire trip. He'd traveled a great deal, knew many people and Sally found herself liking him more and more. When they checked in at the Pink Heron, not many hours later, Sally produced the

letter which had presumably been mailed to Martha Talbot.

The desk clerk became super-efficient. Miss Talbot had the best suite in the hotel. There were fresh flowers in it, compliments of the management. Nothing would be spared to make Miss Talbot's visit a pleasant one. Even the bell captain unbent enough to escort her, leaving the ordinary bellhops to carry her small amount of luggage.

She offered Ted Garrison a small hand and gave him a bright smile. "We'll meet at dinner, then?"

"I'll be waiting in the lobby an hour ahead of time," Ted promised.

Sally looked around for signs of Larry or Dan Fowler but if they were nearby, they kept out of sight. Her suite matched Dan's for luxury and she promptly cleaned up and changed to a semi-formal gown. At six o'clock she received two orchids from Ted. At six-thirty she answered a knock at her door and found only a brown paper wrapped package on the floor.

She opened this, found one of the two-way radio sets inside it and a note from Dan.

Sally:—This is a new type walkie-talkie. Will fit in your handbag. Has only a short range but Larry or I will be listening for contact at eleven o'clock. Don't use the radio except outside, when you are alone. Your room may be wired. Can't tell if they suspect you but these men are cleverer than the usual kind. Will explain all details later.

Dan.

P.S. Who was the big hunk of man you were shining up to? Destroy this note.

Sally laughed, burned the note in the fireplace of her living room and carefully swept up the ashes and dusted them out of the window. She fitted the radio into her handbag without much trouble though it bulged slightly because of the .25 calibre automatic also nestling there. She saw Dan when she went to the lobby to meet Ted Garrison. Dan sat very close beside Lynn Bradley. Their heads were together and they laughed and joked over something. Sally's eyes met Dan's and he showed no sign of recognition. Then Ted Garrison was standing before her. Sally took his arm, laughed gaily and went into the dining room with him.

On the way she spotted Larry in the

bar, a solitary, lonesome looking figure intently gazing at the bottom of an empty highball glass. After dinner she looked for Dan again but he'd disappeared. Ted brought her to the gambling rooms, led her from table to table explaining the various games and she settled for roulette.

IN half an hour she'd won a modest amount, Ted had lost heavily and the gambling rooms were rapidly being filled to capacity. A short, pasty faced man weaved his way through the crowd. He had weak, watery eyes, a droopy chin and a big smile of recognition for Sally that made her heart jump into her throat.

But it was as Martha Talbot that he recognized her, proving then and there that he was a fake of some kind. He bowed elaborately.

"Well, well, the charming Miss Talbot?" he said. "The little lady who knows how to take a run-out powder on a man."

"Beat it," Ted Garrison growled.

The little man sneered at him. "See if Miss Talbot wants me to beat it. Go ahead, honey. Tell the big gorilla you want me to scam."

This was a play of some kind. Sally had to see it through. Apparently the idea was to make it seem that this watery eyed little man had something on Martha Talbot. Sally fell in with the game.

"Ted, please. I really don't know this person but if he is making a mistake, perhaps we'd better put him on the right track."

"He did know your name." Ted frowned. "Are you certain you don't know him?"

"Ted, I've never seen him before in my life."

The little man raised both hands in mock horror. "She does not remember! The great and wealthy Miss Talbot doesn't remember little Mickey Bode." He leaned closer, dropped his bantering attitude and spoke in a hissing voice. "Get this, beautiful! You can't run out on me again. When I call you, come hopping or—well, use your imagination."

He smirked at the two of them and went away, aiming straight for the bar.

Ted shrugged. "He's a lush, a free-loader. Places like this don't charge for

liquor, figuring the more a man drinks the more willing he is to lose his money. Now and then some tramp gets in and sponges on the house. He knew your name but that isn't surprising. I'll bet half the people in this room know who you are. Names—especially those of very beautiful women—get around fast down here."

Sally gave a shudder. "Just the same, Ted, I didn't like that man. He acted as if he had something on me."

"Forget him. Come on—maybe he brought us luck. Let's try the dice table."

It was after one in the morning when Sally said good night to Ted. She unlocked her door, went into the living room and sat down to think. Dan had apparently vanished with that redhead. Sally wondered if she was business or pleasure. At that moment Sally hated redheads. She and Dan had an understanding that some day, when they ceased chasing around the globe, they'd marry and live like normal people. Dan would be in line for a desk job; Sally planned to resign. It was going to be a delightful future, if no redheads cluttered it up.

Sally unbuckled her shoes, stepped out of them and relaxed for a few minutes. She'd been supposed to call Dan on that tiny radio at eleven but it had been impossible. She reflected that it was likely she'd have been unable to make contact anyhow. But now he'd certainly be waiting. There were many things she had to know.

She walked into the bedroom, snapped on the light and came to an abrupt stop. Slowly the color left her cheeks and her throat went dry. She'd seen death many times in her career as an F.B.I. agent but it always affected her this way.

The watery eyed little man who called himself Mickey Bode had come calling. He looked quite comfortable, lying there on her bed. His knees were pushed up around his chin, both hands were at his throat. Apparently he'd made some frantic efforts to undo the necktie tied around his throat so tightly that part of it had vanished deep in the flesh. His eyes were round, bulging things and no longer watery. Just dead looking.

Sally backed out of the room. For a

moment she almost succumbed to panic and phoned Dan or Larry. She recalled the radio in her purse, seized it and hurried toward the door. She came to a stop, returned and put on the shoes she'd slipped out of and forgotten. Sally fled down the hallway toward the elevators.

IN HER way she steadied herself. This had to look good. Before reporting the dead man, she wanted to talk to Dan. This was more than she'd bargained for and it seemed Dan must be right. This was a clever gang they operated against.

She walked around the swimming pool twice, discovered a path leading to a row of palmettos which formed a dark, quiet walk and halfway down this she found a bench. She sat there for ten minutes, listening and watching. Finally she took the radio from her purse, snapped the switch and put the instrument to her lips.

Dan's voice answered almost at once. "I was getting worried," he said. "What happened?"

"I couldn't get away. Dan, something slipped. They know who I am."

"But that's impossible," Dan's voice protested. "Unless this Martha Talbot was mixed up in it."

"No, no. Miss Talbot happens to be an heiress worth millions. A rather difficult character to live up to and keep the expense account down. Tonight, in the gambling rooms, Ted and I were stopped by a man named Bode."

"Ted eh? Well, we're getting cozy," Dan said.

Sally flared a little. "You seemed to be enjoying that redhead. Dan, something has happened. It's far more important than a spat over who sees whom. As I said, this man named Mickey Bode approached me in the gambling rooms and addressed me as Martha Talbot. Therefore we know it must be a set-up and he never saw the real Martha Talbot in his life. He was particularly nasty and insinuating."

"Why didn't your man mountain escort poke him one?" Dan demanded.

"Dan, cut it out. This Mickey Bode happens to be in my suite right now, dead! He's been murdered! What shall I do about it?"

She heard Dan's hissing intake of breath. "It may be a frame meant for someone they think is Martha Talbot," he said. "Or it may be aimed at you, as an F.B.I. agent. Either way, matters are complicated and we're slowed up. Go back, find the body and call Ted Garrison. It's natural you'd do that. Let him take over and see what happens."

"I'll keep in touch," Sally said.

"One more thing," Dan said. "Before you call Ted, take the dead man's prints. Ink them on a small piece of paper and roll it into a ball like waste. When you get a chance, drop this in the urn full of sand near the elevators. Good luck, Sally."

Sally returned to her rooms, worked fast and got the fingerprints of the corpse. It was a job she didn't enjoy but she realized how necessary it was. She cleaned up all traces of the ink from her fountain pen, even to carefully washing the dead man's fingertips. She slipped into the corridor with the balled up piece of paper, dropped it in the large urn which Dan had described. Then she went back to her room and phoned Ted Garrison.

He came up at once, still looking sleepy, but snapped awake when he saw the corpse. He took Sally's hands and led her into the living room, sat down beside her and looked worried.

"Martha," he called her by the name she had assumed, "you did know this man. You must have known him."

"But I didn't," Sally wailed. "I told you the truth, Ted."

"Okay. I believe you. But he knew who you were. People heard him making those shady remarks downstairs. Martha, if he is found here, there'll be all sorts of complications. You didn't kill him. I may be pretty much of an amateur at this sort of thing but I know a woman couldn't have twisted that necktie so tight."

"What—shall we do?" Sally asked. "What can we do?"

"I can find out where this man stayed. Get his room number. Maybe, with luck, I can—say, wait a moment. If he lives here he'll have a room key on him. I'll be right back."

He needed only two minutes and he was holding up a key in triumph when

he came back. He sat down again. "His room is two floors below. He isn't very big and I happen to be, so carrying him downstairs won't be much of an effort. We'll put him in his own room and let them find him tomorrow. He's been dead for some time—the body is already getting cold. Therefore, you have an alibi. You were with me."

"But Ted, you'll get into all sorts of trouble if they ever find out."

"Let me worry about that," he said cheerfully. "Now just go over there and look out of the window. Then go to bed as if nothing happened."

"In—in there?" Sally pointed an unsteady finger at the bedroom.

"You've got to," Ted said. "Or make it look as if you slept there. Muss the bed. Sleep out here if you like. Look as fresh and rested as possible in the morning. So far as you know, there never was a dead man in your suite. You didn't even dream it."

Sally faced the window and heard Ted tramp heavily out of the suite and close the door. She sat down weakly and tried to figure it out but nothing added up.

CHAPTER VII

Weakness in the Armor



N the morning Dan Fowler arranged to rent another car. He wondered how many pairs of eyes were upon him as he walked through the lobby and gave Larry Kendal a signal which was meant to be covert but just missed the mark.

Kendal wandered out soon afterwards. Dan drove his car very slowly away, proceeded up the road about half a mile and suddenly pulled over. Larry came out of a palmetto grove, jumped into the car and Dan stepped on it.

Larry was grinning broadly. "The big shots may be smart old-timers," he said, "but the mugs working for them need lessons in trailing a man. Two of 'em followed me and attracted my attention no more than a pair of elephants. We're

being tailed right now too."

"Good," Dan said, "because I want to throw them off. They must think they've followed us all day, but it'll be you they tail while I take a fast run up to that town where you have Doctor Reed under arrest."

"I'll keep them busy," Larry vowed.

"Good. Sally is in this over her pretty head too. A murder was framed on her last night. Some fellow made remarks suggesting past blackmail to her. Somebody strangled him and left him in Sally's room. She kept her wits and told me. I've got the dead man's prints."

Larry gasped. "Dan, she didn't report the murder or it would have been all over the hotel. She didn't—just stay in her suite with a corpse?"

Dan shook his head. "She phoned her wide shouldered gallant, Ted Garrison. Brother did he work it beautifully. I don't know what he told Sally because I haven't dared talk with her, but ten minutes after he entered her room he came out with the dead man slung over his shoulder. He carried the man to a room on a lower floor, left him there and went to his own quarters."

"Who are they trying to frame?" Larry asked. "Sally Vane of the F.B.I. or Martha Talbot of the many millions?"

"I don't know," Dan admitted. "I'm worried about it too. If they're wise to Sally, we ought to get her out of here before something happens."

"Like her falling for this wide shouldered gallant, as you call him?" Larry chuckled.

"I don't think that remark was necessary," Dan said in a stuffy voice.

"Okay," Larry shrugged. "I'm sorry. How do we meet again after I drop you off?"

Dan glanced in the rear view mirror at the black, low slung sedan trailing them. "Keep those birds far behind you," he advised. "After you drop me, pull up and go into some movie or restaurant. Anything so they'll believe the two of us are working on whatever business brought us away from the hotel. Then, at two-thirty be driving East on Terrace Boulevard. When you see a radio patrol car, break a few speed laws. That's all."

Dan reached one of the medium sized towns fifteen miles from the hotel. He

took a corner fast, opened the car door and climbed to the running board while Larry slid behind the wheel. Dan jumped off, darted for a doorway and took refuge in it while he observed the shadow car following Larry. There were three men in it, none of them particularly pleasant looking.

Dan chartered a cab, had himself driven in a completely different direction for twenty miles until he reached the town where Doctor Reed was secretly held in the local lockup. Dan dismissed the cab, went into Headquarters and identified himself.

"Sure, he's still here," the desk captain said. "I'll have him hauled out for you."

"No, I'd rather visit him in his cell," Dan said with a smile. "He'll subconsciously register the idea about how free I am and how free he is not. Tell me, Captain, in pure confidence, what you think of Chief Slater in charge of the department with jurisdiction over that fancy pink hotel."

THE captain was about sixty, easy going and competent. He leaned back, crossed his legs and said, "Slater may be a crook, I don't know. But he runs a police department that is a disgrace to the profession. Fact is, Slater draws fifty dollars a week from the town and two hundred from those tough boys who operate the hotel. Being Chief of Police is a sideline and no man handles a sideline with the skill and energy he uses on the work which provides his main source of income."

"How does he stay in office then?" Dan asked.

"Well, sir, that town is practically owned and controlled by the hotel. The hotel is everything. It provides most of the business for the shopkeepers. It gives jobs to three quarters of the people. In one way or another, some member of every family depends on the hotel. So—the hotel owners like Chief Slater, the townspeople like him too. Or they move."

Dan laughed. "Captain, all I hope is that Doctor Reed proves as informative as you. Thanks very much."

A patrolman let Dan into the tank, opened Dr. Reed's cell door and locked it again when Dan went inside. Dr. Reed

glared at him and didn't move from his prone position on the pallet.

Dan said, "Comfortable, Doctor?"

Dr. Reed offered Dan some advice about where he could go and it wasn't medical advice. Dan sat down on a three legged stool and grinned at the red faced medical man.

"Doctor," he said, "you're a plain ordinary fool. There's a parole violation you'll have to serve and before this is over with you'll get ten times as much when this gang is cleaned up."

Reed sat up. "Fowler, I don't know what you're talking about. Oh, I admit I was in trouble and you probably can send me back. But down here I've behaved myself and been as good a physician as I'm capable of being. I thought myself lucky to get a job with such a fashionable hotel. It provides an excellent and lucrative practice. But when you claim I told you that I treated this—this Dixon fellow on a certain evening, you lie. And you know it."

Dan said, "Doctor, they're using you. When they finish with you they'll throw you to the wolves. They did that to Grieb, the waiter who also said I didn't talk with him. They killed Lettie Hocken, the chambermaid who swore Dixon was sick the day of the stickup. They kill everyone once that person loses his value."

Reed shook his energetically. "I don't scare, Fowler. In fact, I don't know what you're talking about."

Dan said, "Of course you know Mickey Bode. Don't deny it. He was seen talking to you on several occasions."

"He came to me, professionally."

"He worked hand in glove with you, both of you paid by the gang. Doc, they killed Bode last night."

"I don't believe it!" Reed shouted and then relaxed. He knew he'd given himself away.

"I can't prove it of course, with you in here and Bode at the morgue. However, tonight's newspapers will carry the story. I'll see you are provided with a copy. Maybe then you'll be convinced that you work for ruthless men who often pay off their help in bullets, knives or what-have you. Locked up, possessed of the knowledge you do possess, you're dangerous to them, Doctor. They may

try to get at you, and they probably can do so. They own the local police department, as you know. Perhaps they own someone in this town. It won't require much—a touch of poison in your coffee!"

"I'm not being frightened," Reed insisted. "And you're wasting your time, Fowler."

"As you wish." Dan rattled the tin cup against the cell door to call the turnkey. "I'll phone here now and then. If you change your mind, let the desk captain know and he'll tell me. So far your friends don't know where you are but bank on it, they're turning the county upside down in an effort to find you."

Dan gave the desk captain some inkling of his plans and asked for the use of a phone. He called the Identification Division of the F.B.I. in Washington, gave them Bode's name and description and added details of the dead man's fingerprints which he had already classified. It took only a short time.

THE agent in charge of the Identification Section said, "That's his right name, Mr. Fowler. He has a record of eleven arrests, all for blackmail or extortion. Just a punk in our books."

"You can write 'Dead Punk' across the files," Dan said. "Bode had throat trouble last night. It proved fatal."

The desk captain arranged to help Dan reach Larry again. A white traffic patrol car was called in on the radio. Dan rode to the wide boulevard and when they parked, he slid down out of sight. In a few minutes Larry came by, saw the police car and stepped on it. The police car pulled out, siren wailing. The tail car, well back, dropped even further

back. Larry was ordered to pull over. The police car parked alongside him and in such a manner as to shield Dan when he climbed from the police car into Larry's sedan and sat beside Larry.

The cop finally waved them away. The tail car gained speed and distance. If they had missed seeing two men in the sedan, they were going to be considerably surprised and confused. Dan told Larry what had been accomplished as they drove back to the hotel.

"Reed will break," Dan prophesied. "He's the type. But it may take time. Meanwhile we're not waiting. Larry, you can't smash a gang like this by a frontal attack. Even if it were possible, the man who directs the whole thing would only slip deeper into the background and bide his time until it was right to strike again. He's our main objective. If we get him we break the morale of the big operators he controls and probably break the bank this mob has accumulated."

Larry nodded. "We've one thing in our favor. No gang leader ever trusted another gang leader. Held together as these men are, they function okay and obey orders because it means money, but they still don't trust one another."

"And there you have the one weak point, Larry. I believe my room, at least, is wired. They didn't give me that suite without a good reason. I can't locate the mike but it's there."

"I've a feeling they listen in on my snoring too," Larry grumbled. "But how I've checked that room. Go on, Dan."

"If we plant suspicion in the minds of whoever listens, some of it will get back to the various gangster leaders. We'll

[Turn page]

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bore from within, gradually push them apart until they are separated by channels of suspicion and when the right moment comes, you'll see action. Meet me in my suite at five o'clock and we'll discuss a few items to burn somebody's ears off. We'll be positive, in a short time, whether or not the room is wired."

Dan dropped Larry off to make his way back to the hotel and pretend they had no idea they'd been trailed all day. Dan put the car away, strolled around the swimming pool twice, just to let Sally know he wasn't missing the way she played up to Ted Garrison who looked even bigger in swim trunks. Dan felt like pushing the big ape into the pool.

He spoke to the desk clerk and the smirking manager, and then ran into Chief Slater, bowed down with his gold braid. Slater took him over to a lobby corner where four deep chairs had been placed for quiet conversation.

"We had another killing," Slater growled. "Man named Bode. You know him?"

"Should I?" Dan asked.

"Maybe. Found out he had a record for blackmailing. Just a no good. Sometimes his kind slip into town but not if I can help it."

"Did you find out who killed him? Strange, I heard no talk about the murder."

"And you won't either," Slater snapped. "Murders don't do hotels any good. This one's had two already. We sneaked the corpse out of here and I'm carrying on a quiet investigation. Maybe I'll need your help."

"Why certainly," Dan said. "Call on me any time, Chief. Any time at all."

He watched Slater walk away and wondered how the citizens of a whole community could be fooled into allowing a man of his caliber to minister their laws.



PROMPTLY Dan started to arise and sat down again when he saw three men coming toward him. Three men, any one of whom could be the secret top of this syndicate. George Yates, bulky ex-sheriff; Jeff Wilson who used the District Attorney's office years ago, to

make himself a million dollars. And Earl Crandall, disbarred attorney whose methods of getting racketeer clients off had been sadly lacking in ethics.

They sat down, all facing Dan Fowler and all smiled comfortably at him. Crandall, the taller and leaner of this grim trio, acted as spokesman to open the conversation.

He said, "Well, Fowler, here you are still chasing criminals for Uncle Sam. Don't you find it a vain sort of business? There's never an end to it."

"How right you are," Dan said with a grin. "But even you gentlemen will admit things are better than in those days when we went around armed with tommy-guns. Crooks are more careful now and therefore less dangerous. They stop and think for at least five seconds before they take a human life and they aren't indiscriminate in the way they fling their bullets around."

Ex-Sheriff Yates had fat lips, the only kind Dan had ever seen which answered to the description of slobbering. He moved them now, lazily, hardly forming the words that came out but he accompanied them with a deep laugh.

"Those were some days, Fowler. Yes, sir, some days! You fellows tried hard to get me and I don't mind admitting I lost a few pounds worrying. But you were straight shooters. I've no complaint. Not like Jeff Wilson here, whom you yanked out of his D.A.'s job, disbarred him, busted him financially and sent him to prison for a couple of years."

Jeff Wilson nodded and smiled coldly. "I haven't forgotten things either, Fowler. Especially your share in the pro-

NEXT ISSUE

THE GLITTERING COFFINS

A Dan Fowler Mystery Novel
By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

AND OTHER STORIES

ceedings. But we didn't gather here to do to reminisce. We came with a warning. You'll get nowhere chasing this will-o'-the-wisp. You want to break up an organization which exists only in the imaginations of fool newspaper men looking for by-lines."

"They must be marvelous reporters," Dan said calmly. "They've actually made the F.B.I. believe their stories. And gentlemen, if there is such an organization I'm certain you three will rank high in the list of officers. You think, because you've gotten away with this for a long time, that you're now immune to investigation and prosecution. You're not."

Crandall, the disbarred attorney pasted down his already slick and thin hair until it seemed painted on his scalp. He said, "Suppose there is such a syndicate," and Dan noted his use of the word, "it must have existed for a long time, is airtight and you can't break it, Fowler. You've never been able to break it."

"Perhaps we didn't want to," Dan said. He saw the flicker of interest in three pair of eyes. "Not until now, when you are going back to active crime. But during the years you've laid low, believed you were free of surveillance, it happens you've been rather well watched."

Yates made a raucous sound in his throat. "I don't believe it," he jeered.

Dan arose. "Gentlemen, not very long ago several hundred Nazi agents didn't believe they'd been tagged, tabbed, photographed, studied, followed and traced back to their second cousins. But, all of a sudden, they found out this was so. Good afternoon. I'm going to dress for dinner."

He had hit them where it hurt—hit them hard. Dan could see that. These men didn't frighten easily. They weren't frightened now but they were uneasy and in a mood to fall into the trap Dan was setting for them.

Larry was already in Dan's room. Dan indicated he could talk freely and for the benefit of any wired ear.

Larry said, "I saw the Chief of Police stop you and then those three prizes from a bygone era moved in. What was it, a peace conference?"

Dan laughed. "They wish it was. So far as I'm concerned it was a council of

war with me on one side and those three on the other. But they were simply sizing things up. Chief Slater had even more important news."

Dan scribbled a note and passed it to Larry.

It read:

Must prove to our own satisfaction that we are being overheard. Follow my lead now.

Larry slowly folded the note and said, "I didn't think there was an important matter in all of Chief Slater's career."

"I'll tell you about it later," Dan said. "It's six-twenty, Larry. Our instructions must have come in by now. A motor launch was supposed to put in to shore, someone wade to the beach and hide the message, records and instructions. You know the spot. See if they made contact. And be careful—because tomorrow more information is due and it will be put in the same place."

LARRY winked. "I'll go right down there. Nobody suspects me. I've been accepted as a vacationer without too much money but okay in every respect. Shall I return here?"

"Yes," Dan said. "And make it fast. We've a lot to talk about and I promised Lynn Bradley I'd drop in on her grandfather tonight."

Larry slipped out, acting like a man intent upon keeping out of sight as much as possible. Dan went to his clothes closet, opened one of his suitcases and took out a pair of field glasses. He went to a corner of the room, where he couldn't be readily seen despite all the glass on three sides of him.

Larry appeared soon and he seemed to be on an aimless before dinner hike along the beach. He picked up sea shells, examined them and kept some. He watched the waves and a crab waddling toward the water. Finally he took a long careful look around and then ducked behind a bank.

Dan swept the area with his glasses. He saw two men, one a bellhop engaged in walking a dog. The other was a balding, well-dressed man, probably attached to the gambling rooms. Both these men watched Larry and both were industriously engaged in moving in another direction when Larry straightened up and

appeared to shove something under his coat.

Larry came straight back and Dan let him in. Larry said, "Just a batch of routine stuff, Dan, but the Field Super says to expect something bigger."

Dan rattled some papers. "Bigger? Larry, you don't quite catch the significance of what's happened. I told you Slater had important news. It was about a man named Bode who was murdered in his room at this hotel sometime last night."

"Another kill?" Larry's voice had a surprised lift to it. "I never heard a thing."

"It was hushed up. This man was found in his own room but he wasn't murdered there. He happened to be a professional blackmailer working on some foolish young woman registered here. He was knocked off in her rooms and her escort had a mild case of insanity and carried off the body. That left the young lady—and her very gallant young man—wide open for blackmail. Which was what the plant was all the time. Not the cheap grifting stuff Bode had to die to set the stage for it."

"All a part of their plans for a comeback," Larry said. "They always did go big for blackmail. Which one of 'em made the approach?"

Dan laughed. "We've got a crooked ex-sheriff, a crooked disbarred lawyer and a crooked ex-D.A. They are the local representatives of the syndicate. Others are in California, Nevada and New York. But one of our local boys did it. Certainly not the sheriff. His methods consist of slamming a victim with a blackjack. Not the ex-D.A. He'd rig something more involved, but—take our disbarred attorney. His record shows he was a fine hand at it. I'm laying my bets that it was he who wheedled a check for fifty thousand out of that girl."

"Fifty grand?" Larry gasped. "And that's just the starter. How about her boy friend? Was he tapped?"

"Not yet. They have to get a line on him first, to see how much they can make the ante. The girl was already primed and checked for a take so they just walked in and made their demands. I warned those three downstairs just now that they've been watched for years, but

none of them believed me."

"Did you ever meet a crook who wasn't a fool?" Larry asked. "Are you going to take him in for blackmail?"

"No, not yet. I want to make certain he's working alone. Naturally these pleasant boys have been double-crossing one another for years, but this is the most flagrant double-cross so far. Fifty thousand, now clearing the First National Bank in Paldino, ten miles west of here."

Larry wrote on the pad, "What are you trying to do, start a civil war?"

Dan grinned, winked and made no comment. Larry said something about getting ready for dinner and departed. Dan hummed gayly, breaking into a merry whistle now and then, as if he had nothing on his mind and the entire case was breaking even better than he'd hoped for.

Flushing a smart leader of a gang syndicate wasn't an easy thing to do. Such a leader has to have tact, patience and skill to get where he is. He must have rigid control over his lieutenants, and there was where Dan hoped the chain would break. Let the leader think even one of his subordinates was pulling a double-cross, and the seeds of suspicion would be sown. Dan thought he might spread them far and wide and squeeze this mystery leader out of whatever slit in the woodwork he occupied.

DAN cleaned up and then took the private elevator to the penthouse. Lynn called from her rooms, that she was dressing and her grandfather was impatiently waiting in the radio room. Dan walked in and shook hands with the old man.

"Where have you been you young imp?" Bradley roared in make-believe anger. "I thought you were coming to tell me some hair-raising stories of your work. And my granddaughter has been moping around here all afternoon like she'd had bad news every hour on the hour."

Lynn laughed from down the hall and called out, "Remind me to hide your cigars and brandy for a week. Dan, I'm hurrying."

"Take your time," Dan called back. He sat down before the radio board and studied the dials.

Bradley said, "Go ahead—snap the

switch, put on earphones and leave her tuned as she is. You'll pick up Berlin. I was talking with a chap there just a few minutes ago."

Dan snapped the switch, the instruments hummed and there was a steady crackling in the earphones. He looked at Bradley and laughed. "All I get is static."

Bradley made a wry face. "He signed off. Naturally, I left the darn thing tuned in. Turn the center dial two notches. That's it. Now—what have you got?"

Dan chuckled. "That's South American Spanish if I ever heard it."

"Peru," Bradley announced with pride. "There is nowhere on the map I can't reach with that set. It's an expensive toy but an interesting one for a crippled and confined old man like me."

Then Lynn came into the room and posed. Dan was properly dazzled by the stunning gown, the new hairdo, the silver slippers. He promised the old man he'd return as soon as he foisted Lynn off on some stranger and had himself yanked through the doorway by Lynn.

CHAPTER IX

Showdown



HUNTING around, Sally managed to find a deserted spot not far from the hotel and immediately tried to establish radio contact with Dan or Larry. There was no answer to her call so she settled down to wait. In fifteen or twenty minutes she was to have dinner with Ted

Garrison but it had been some time since she was in communication with Larry or Dan. Things might have happened.

Close to the hour, she was very alert for a message and one came from Larry. He said, "We're framing the whole blasted mob. You are supposed to have been approached by Earl Crandall, an ex-attorney, who pumped you for a check for fifty thousand dollars. It seems he knew that a murdered man had been found in your room. The check is now clearing at the First National Bank in Paldino. You may be approached on this."

"What's behind it?" Sally asked.

"It would seem," Larry said, "that Crandall forgot to tell his partners in crime about putting the touch on you. They won't like it but before they accuse Crandall they'll try to confirm the story from you, so be prepared."

"I'll be ready for them," Sally promised. "How is Dan doing with that red-head? I don't like her eyes, Larry. They never miss a thing."

"Funny," Larry chuckled, "but Dan doesn't like that football player you're hanging around with either. You two should get together. I'm keeping tabs on you tonight, just in case we are crossed up somehow."

"And Dan? What's he doing?"

"Taking Lynn Bradley to dinner first, I guess. After that he's supposed to keep her grandfather company."

"I'll bet!" Sally snapped and signed off. She tucked the radio into her purse, walked briskly and angrily to the hotel and met Ted Garrison outside.

Garrison said, "I've been looking for you. How about having dinner somewhere else? I know a swell spot ten miles north of here. The chef is a friend of mine—knew him when he worked in New York."

"Why I think that would be fine," Sally said, but he didn't see her eyes narrow slightly in suspicion. They went to where Garrison had a rented car waiting. It was an open job, fast and sleek. He rolled it onto the highway and really stepped on the gas.

Sally tried to make light conversation but Garrison seemed preoccupied, worried. Sally opened her purse, reached down and removed the small automatic. She managed to slide this down behind the car seat. Very suddenly she didn't like Ted Garrison any more. Because she knew this deal from all angles, she realized that Garrison was taking her somewhere. The whole thing was becoming obvious and that meant Garrison had wangled a meeting in Baltimore with a girl he thought was Martha Talbot. He had cemented a firm friendship and been an essential part of the frameup. There was no other reason for his actions now.

They turned off the highway, drove along a narrower road and Garrison turned a corner. His foot slammed down

on the brake pedal. There was a big car blocking the road and beside it stood a man in a policeman's uniform. He was waving a flashlight.

"Now what?" Garrison grumbled. He brought the convertible to a smooth stop. The policeman whistled once and two men came out of the brush. Both held guns. They climbed into the back of the convertible. The policeman entered his car, got it off the road and let them through.

One man in back said, "We want to talk to you. Start driving."

Sally was half tempted to reach for her gun but realized the end result might be fatal. She glanced at Garrison and saw that he was pasty faced and badly shaken. Perhaps she's misjudged him and he wasn't any part of this scheme. Sally twisted around suddenly.

"If this is a kidnaping, you'll be sorry!" she began angrily.

"It ain't a snatch," one man told her. "Just behave yourself and nobody gets hurt."

"With both of you holding guns, you don't look as if you mean that statement," Sally accused. "How much do you want to let us go?"

They were coming out of the sideroad and back onto the highway now. Sally kept talking very fast, holding the attention of both men until Garrison reached the highway and without asking any questions selected what must have been the right direction without an order from his captors. He rolled along as if he knew he was on the right road too.

SALLY stopped her talking, turned around to face the front again and knew that Garrison was a crook—a smooth worker with enough glamour about him to hide the larceny in his soul. Sally fidgeted uneasily. Larry had said he'd watch her tonight but perhaps Larry hadn't reached the front of the hotel quickly enough to see them drive away. She would have given a great deal for three minutes at that little portable radio.

One of the gunmen gave some directions further on. Garrison turned into another sideroad, proceeded along this for three or four miles and then stopped at a house set in a group of cypress trees

with long whiskers of Spanish moss dangling from every branch. The place had a weirdly ominous look about it.

Sally and Garrison got out of the car, each herded along with prodding guns. At the door, Garrison was taken in first, then Sally entered a pleasant enough living room. Four men were there, one of them seated apart from the others with the fourth man behind him as if on guard. Sally recognized them all. She'd become familiar with everyone involved even before she entered the case. Yates, the ex-sheriff, and Jeff Wilson, the crooked D.A. studied her for a moment. Earl Crandall, to whom she was supposed to have paid blackmail, was the man under guard.

Jeff Wilson said, "Miss Talbot, we're sorry to take this means of talking to you but it's very necessary. We mean only to help you, but you must be frank. Not so many hours ago a dead man was discovered in your rooms. Am I correct?"

Sally shot a swift glance at Crandall who squirmed uneasily. "I thought," she said coldly, "all this was to remain a very strict secret."

"It will," Wilson assured her. "Did you pay money to anyone for that reason—to keep the matter a secret?"

"What is the meaning of this?" Sally demanded. "Yes, I did pay. Fifty thousand dollars. And I think the man who demanded it didn't keep his word otherwise you men wouldn't know about what happened."

"Tell us whom you paid the money to," Wilson suggested smoothly. "You see, Miss Talbot, we're after this blackmailer for another crime. If we involve him with you, he'll confess to the other job. It won't be necessary to bring this matter into the case at all. We're private detectives."

"Why didn't you say so," Sally grumbled. "Using guns to get me and my escort here, scaring the life out of us. Yes, I paid blackmail. To that man there—Earl Crandall. I gave him fifty thousand dollars. A check which is now clearing through the First National Bank at Palmdine."

"Who do we know at that bank?" Wilson asked Yates. "We've contacts in every bank for miles."

"Fellow named Tucker," Yates replied. "You want me to call him and see if that check came in? He'd know and remember because fifty grand checks aren't common down here."

"Go ahead and make it fast," Wilson urged. He turned to Crandall. "It looks bad, Earl. You should have known better than to try a stunt like this."

Crandall moved uneasily in his chair. Jeff, it's a plant of some kind. This Talbot girl must be in on it. I tell you I never even noticed her before. She's lying. There is no check and you'll find out when you talk to the bank."

"The bank is closed but Yates will find out," Wilson promised. "For your own sake I hope you're right."

They heard Yates hang up, push back a chair and walk toward the door. Then the phone rang and he went back. This time he talked only a few seconds before returning.

He glared at Crandall. "Our contact at the bank says a check for fifty grand made out to Earl Crandall and signed by Martha Talbot cleared today. It's supposed to be a real estate deal."

"That's a lie!" Crandall screamed. "This whole thing is a set-up."

"Earl," Wilson said chidingly, "we know that Martha Talbot is the genuine article and couldn't be part of any scheme. And if she's lying, why would that check have cleared through the bank?"

Yates parted his thick lips in a nasty grin. "The call I got was from a certain party who is coming here, but we're not to hold things up. Crandall gets it. Boys, take him out. Not too far away and make sure you get rid of him!"

CRANDALL jumped up with a scream of rage. The man standing behind him merely lifted a gun, smashed the muzzle down across Crandall's skull and when the disbarred attorney fell to the floor, two of the gunmen seized his wrists and dragged him away. In a moment Sally heard a car start up.

Wilson said, "Miss Talbot, don't be alarmed. And don't misunderstand my partner. He didn't mean that Crandall was to be—ah—eliminated. That's just his way of ordering our men to lock Crandall up. Now, if you don't mind,

we'll make you quite comfortable in another room until this whole matter is cleared up."

Sally didn't have much to say about it. She was led to an upstairs room which was provided with stout blinds, closed and nailed into place over the single window. The door closed and she heard it lock. Sally began pacing the floor. The one break she needed had been taken away from her. Wilson had insisted she leave her purse in the car.

Three or four minutes later Sally heard a shot, followed by two more. Then, distantly, a car motor started up and gradually faded into silence. That would be Crandall, well taken care of and his body in the process of removal to some spot where it would never be found. Sally shuddered. She would have been far more worried if she could have listened in on what went on in the living room.

After she was taken away, Ted Garrison entered. Yates had picked up Sally's purse and was already examining the radio.

He said, "Hey, look at this. I never saw a radio as compact."

Wilson seized the radio and yanked it out of Yates' grasp. "I am looking at it," he said in an icy voice. "This is no ordinary radio. It's a two-way set. That girl does know more than she's telling. People don't carry radios like this around. What else is in that handbag?"

"Just the usual junk," Yates said.

Wilson rubbed his chin. "You know, I'm beginning to think we've been made fools of and if so, that G-Man Fowler is behind it. And the Talbot girl is involved. That means Earl was knocked off without reason and he was innocent. Listen, we've got to get rid of that girl."

Yates hunched his shoulders. "I'll go wring her neck. Anything I hate is double-crossing females!"

"Don't be a fool. This must look good, whether we're right or wrong in our conjecture. Ted, here's how we'll play it. You drive the girl back. Just before you hit the highway, I'll have one of the boys planted. He'll act like a stick-up man. He'll wait until cars are rolling by, kill the girl and maybe give you one in the arm. He'll run for it—in your car. Motorists will see practically the whole thing.

You'll be in the clear."

Ted bit his lip. "I suppose it has to be done," he said. "She's a nice kid though."

"She'd still be a nice kid while they were turning on the juice in the prison at Tallahassee. That girl is pure poison to us. We've got to get her out of here before the boss comes. So get going. I'll assign one of the boys to take the part of the stick-up man. Hop to it."

Ten minutes later Sally was being assured that everything was fine. She was given back her purse with the radio apparently undetected. Ted Garrison took her to the car, helped her in and started driving away. Headlights swept the narrow lane and suddenly another pair came into view.

Ted promptly pulled far over and parked until the other car passed by.

Without comment he started rolling again and Sally could actually see him growing tense. Something was going to happen and very soon. Sally moved one hand behind her, dug fingers down behind the cushion seeking the automatic she'd secreted there. She found nothing and frantically began searching for the gun. Then she knew. The weapon had slid all the way down and was available only by lifting up the seat. She broke out in a cold sweat and almost screamed when a man with a gun stepped into view.

Garrison braked the car to a stop.

The man had his hat pulled down, looked disreputable and the gun he held was a blue-black .38. Sally grabbed at Garrison's arm.

He pushed her away. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm very sorry, but you shouldn't have tried a double-cross. Whoever you are, you should have had the brains to know what would happen."

Sally let go of him and shrank back into a corner of the seat. The gunman lifted his weapon. "Garrison," he said, "get out. Climb down and keep your hands up. You can have your choice—take it in the back or the front. I don't care which."

"Take it? Are you crazy? I'm Garrison. I'm part of the set-up."

"Climb down," the gunman said in a tired voice. "These are Wilson's orders. And the big shot's. You get it, Garrison. You and the girl."

SALLY screamed and fell back in an apparent faint. Automatically Garrison turned toward her. Sally spoke in a barely audible whisper. "Cover me as you get out. I'll get the gun in your back pocket."

Garrison uttered a long sigh, opened the car door and slowly got out. He felt the gun yanked from his pocket. Then a bullet almost burned his ear. The gunman let out a scream, twisted around and went down on one knee. He kept his gun half raised but didn't seem to own the strength to squeeze the trigger.

Sally said, "Ted, get us away from here. Hurry! There'll be others."

Garrison started the car and pulled away with a wild clashing of gears. Once on the highway he relaxed slightly and then stiffened because his own gun was pressed against his side.

Sally said, "We're going back to the hotel, Ted. You'll meet Dan Fowler of the F. B. I. there, and I think you'll talk to him. Won't you, Ted?"

"But they'll kill me," he cried in anguish.

"They'll kill you anyway," Sally told him smugly. "Your only chance is to talk enough so Fowler can lock your friends up. You might especially tell me who bosses that syndicate of crime."

"I don't know, Martha. I honestly don't know. Only Yates and Wilson know who he is."

"The leader is a man then?"

"Why, yes. Yes, of course. I've heard him give orders over the phone. You're right, Martha. I've got to talk. The leader of this gang passed us on that road. He was coming in for a conference, Martha."

"The name is Sally Vane," she told him coldly. "Of the F.B.I. You're not lying about the identity of the leader?"

"I told you I don't know who he is. But it is a man, I'm sure of that. Why do you keep asking me?"

Sally said, "I half hoped you might say the leader was a girl. A pretty girl with red hair. But then, nobody gets quite all they ask of life. Head for the hotel, Ted, and don't think for one second I don't know how to shoot this gun."

Sally was smiling a bit. Smiling in memory of the perfection with which she and Larry had pulled this stunt. About now Larry would be getting up from

where he pretended to fall wounded as the stick-up man. Sally had first recognized the gun and then Larry had given her enough of a glimpse of his profile so she could be certain of his identity.

CHAPTER X

Battle for Life

EAGERLY Dan Fowier opened the door of his suite in response to a knock which he recognized as Sally's signal. Relief swept over him as he saw her standing there in the hall, blond, lovely and smiling at him. At the moment, the young, husky looking man who stood be-

side her did not matter. The vital thing was that Sally was safe.

Then Dan grew conscious of the worried, almost frightened look on Ted Garrison's face.

"He wants to talk to you, Dan," Sally said, and she was careful not to use Garrison's name. "May we come in?"

"Of course," Dan said, stepping to one side so they could enter. "Come in."

Like a man in a daze, hands raised slightly as though to indicate he knew he was a prisoner of the F.B.I. Ted Garrison passed by Dan and all but fell into a chair. Sally stepped into the room and Dan closed and locked the door.

They were both conscious that somewhere about them were the hidden dictagraphs, and at the other end of the connecting wires ears that were eagerly listening to every word which was spoken in this suite.

"Okay," Garrison said abruptly, bitterly. "I've been fooled and I'll talk—"

He broke off, his eyes wide with surprise, that changed to horror as Dan leaped at him and clapped a hand over his mouth. To Garrison it seemed that Fowler had suddenly gone mad. That Dan was attacking him without reason. Instinctively he grabbed Dan's wrist and snatched the hand away from his mouth.

"What's the idea?" he demanded tensely. "Have you gone crazy, Fowler?"

"Sorry!" Dan moved back, raising his finger to his lips in a gesture of silence.

But he knew it was too late. Those listening ears had probably heard Ted Garrison's words and recognized his voice.

"I should have warned him," Sally began.

Again Dan motioned for silence. It dawned on Garrison that it had been in attempt to keep him quiet that Dan had clapped a hand over his mouth. An expression of relief swept over his face, now that he understood.

Dan picked up a pad and a pencil and wrote swiftly. Then he showed the hastily scribbled words to Sally and to Garrison.

"Let whoever is listening believe we haven't tumbled to the fact," they read.

Sally nodded and then dropped into a chair. Garrison looked wildly around the room as though expecting to find someone watching him from a shadowy corner.

"You'll get a chance to tell your whole story, Mr. Garrison," Dan said, as he sat down. "If you are not directly involved in any of the murders stemming from this investigation, I believe you'll find it profitable to talk." There was an ironical note in his voice as he went on. "Profitable in your future free time because if you don't there may not be any more free time for you."

"I'll tell all I know," Garrison said earnestly. "It isn't much. This syndicate is divided into many sections. I'm part of the blackmail and intimidation division. My assignment was to frame Martha Talbot and take her for all I could get." He stared at Sally bleakly. "I—I didn't know that Martha Talbot was an F.B.I. agent."

"Listen, Dan," Sally said. "Garrison told me that the leader of this new crime wave passed us on his way to a farmhouse where I was held temporarily. If you know who is missing there is a chance of finding the leader."

"I've been up with old man Bradley," Dan said slowly. "Lynn, his granddaughter, retired early and I've been keeping the old boy amused. I'm sorry, but I don't know what's going on."

Sally's lips grew tight, a strange feeling of jealousy sweeping over her. "Dan, this isn't like you," she said. "Are you letting that redhead make a fool of you?"

"Of course not, Sally," Dan remonstrated. "She's a nice kid, but after all—"
He let it go at that.

"After all she seems to have taken you in tow rather neatly," Sally said.

Dan glanced at Ted Garrison with a mild grin on his face. Sally colored and turned her back on them. Garrison was staring somberly at the floor, paying little heed to what went on around him.

THE phone rang and on his way to answer it Dan stopped long enough to kiss Sally behind the ear. "After all I'm madly in love with a blond," he whispered, and her eyes danced and sparkled.

Dan lifted the phone. It was a call from the captain of police in the neighboring town where Dr. Reed was being held.

"Mr. Fowler," the captain said, "our mutual friend, Dr. Reed, has found his tongue growing looser."

"Get him away from there, Captain," Dan interrupted tensely. "Get him to another spot as fast as you can! Hurry. Captain, hurry!" He hung up. "The line went dead," he told Sally. "Dr. Reed is talking, but if those killers have intercepted the phone call they'll know where Reed is and go after him. They're desperate enough to blast their way right straight through a small town police department."

Garrison had raised his head and was listening. Sally rose to her feet, an anxious expression on her lovely face.

"Dan, maybe we ought to get out of here, too," she said.

Dan nodded, a feeling of imminent danger sweeping over him.

"You're right," he said. "Garrison, I'm taking your word that you have surrendered. It's the only way you'll be safe because those former colleagues of yours will kill you on sight."

"I'll be good," Garrison swore. "I'd rather spend twenty years in stir than ten minutes on a morgue slab." He stood up, a young powerful man. "I'll even fight them if you give me a gun."

Someone rapped smartly on the door. They looked at each other, suddenly silent and wary. Sally moved to one side so she would not be visible to anyone out in the hall when the door was opened. Garrison also moved to the other side of the room.

Dan drew his gun and moved forward. The knock was repeated, seemingly more insistent now. Dan put his back against the wall beside the door. He turned the knob, yanked the door open and was set to fire.

"We're not that dangerous," said a familiar voice from the hall.

It was Larry Kendal who came in, preceded by ex-attorney Earl Crandall, who looked slightly the worse for wear. Dan put away the gun and locked the door. Larry glanced at Ted Garrison, quickly guessed what his presence meant and grinned widely.

"Well, well, it looks like we're all here at last," Larry said. "Dan, Mr. Crandall has decided the only decent thing to do is tell what he knows. I rescued him from a pair of gunmen who actually had him standing against a tree and were drawing a bead on him. I had to knock him cold, not knowing then that he could be trusted, while I went back to see about Sally. They were rigging her murder, but I fixed that. Now we're all here."

Dan felt it was useless to worry any longer about the listening ears. Those in this suite might just as well talk freely from now on the listener or listeners knew that Garrison and Crandall were here and willing to tell all they knew.

"How did you get Crandall in, Larry?" Dan asked.

"Through the back and the freight elevator. Crandall swears he isn't sure who runs the mob, but he thinks it is Wilson."

He's always taking command," Crandall offered sourly. "He says he isn't the boss, but he certainly acts as if he is. And the way he ordered my death—on a trumped-up charge. I know it was a frame and I figured the girl must be an agent of some kind. Now, seeing her here, I realize she must be a member of the F.B.I. Fowler, I'm prepared to bargain with you.

"We'll talk about that later, Crandall."

Dan went to the phone and picked it up. He was somewhat surprised to reach the operator. "This is an emergency," he said. "Get me the F.B.I. office in Miami."

"Yes, sir," the operator said. "I'll call you right back."

Dan hung up, glanced with a worried

expression at all the windows in the room and tapped a foot impatiently while he waited for the call to go through. Five minutes went by, time enough for the call to have been completed. He got the operator again.

"I'm very sorry, sir," she said. "There is some trouble on the line. I'll keep trying."

Dan put down the phone. "Well, that does it," he said. "They're stalling us. That operator isn't putting through any calls. I think somebody has a gun trained on her. The nervousness of her voice practically draws a sketch."

"What do you mean, Dan?" Sally asked anxiously. "Are we prisoners? Why can't we just walk out? After all, it's a hotel."

"You haven't been told that this place is owned by the gang," Dan said. "That practically everyone who works here is a member of the gang. They gave me this room just in case they had to keep me in one spot. I'll bet this floor hasn't another guest on it and that the elevators won't rise this far any more. That the fire stairways are blocked."

"Nice," said Larry grimly. "Then we really are trapped!"

"I'm afraid so," Dan said.

SALLY looked worried and Crandall scowled. It was then that Garrison's nerve broke. "Then they'll just come up here and kill us all," he wailed wildly. "That's what they'll do—kill us. I'm getting out of here before it is too late."

He dashed for the door. Larry and Dan tried to grab him, but he slipped away from their graps. He got the door open, and stepped out into the hall. The roar of a gun was loud in a little moment of silence.

Garrison's scream was bloodcurdling as the bullet hit him.

"They got me—they got me!" he moaned as he staggered back into the room nursing a wounded shoulder. "Two men out there with guns."

Dan reached the door, and peered around the edge of it, his gun ready in his hand. He fired as he caught a glimpse of a shadowy form for the hall lights had been switched off. There was a curse and two shots came from the shadows, one from the left and the other from the

right of the door. Bullets thudded into the door frame.

Swiftly Dan slammed the door shut and locked it. It was useless for him to try to shoot it out with the two men out there, while he was firing at one the other man would get him.

"We're trapped, all right," Dan said.

"Sure," said Larry Kendal. "But we seem safe enough in here unless they try breaking the door down, and a few bullets will convince them that isn't such a good idea.

"I've got to tend to this wound," Garrison said, and he was calmer. "Just ripped a gash in the top of my shoulder, but it needs washing off and bandaging."

He moved across the living room toward the door which led to the bedroom and the bath. The bullet made a sound like the popping of a champagne cork when it hit and passed through the big center plate glass window. It must have almost burned Garrison's ear off because he yelled again and dropped flat.

"Look out!" Larry shouted. "The windows!"

On the floor Garrison began crawling. The hidden rifle, noiseless as the approach of death itself, made another hole in the glass. A second slug seared Garrison's leg. He moaned and stopped crawling. Dan and Larry lunged for him, grasped his arms and pulled him away fast.

"Into that corner, everybody!" Dan commanded tensely. "Hurry! It's the one spot which can't be reached by shooting through the three glass windows."

Sally, Crandall, and Larry quickly obeyed the command. Garrison was lying on the floor in the corner. Dan joined the others there.

"Now I understand why I was given an expensive suite so cheap," he said. "This is a death chamber."

They stared at the three windows, two of them squares of glass through which was visible the darkness of the night, and in the third those bullet holes that were mute testimony that death lingered outside.

"Where are they shooting from?" Larry asked.

"The rooftop," Dan answered. "It's in line with three sides of this room. They've a perfect view of us by night and

by day. That is, so long as our lights are on."

"And there are no window shades," Sally said, gazing at the ceiling high windows which practically made three of the walls of the room. "This is pretty much like being in a goldfish bowl."

"Only usually the goldfish are much safer," said Dan dryly. "Larry, let's see if last year's fresher course improved your marksmanship. Unfortunately we can't reach the light switch from here, and I think we'd all feel much safer in the dark."

Larry drew his gun. "I wish I was in Quantico right now," he murmured. "Usually Florida is lovely, but somehow I don't care much for it tonight." He raised the gun, and took careful aim. "Here goes!"

His first bullet smashed the ceiling light and shorted every other light in the room. "That's better," Larry said as he put the gun away. "Maybe we can reverse our positions now and get a bead on those murderers on the roof. At least I intend to try."

Larry flattened himself against the further wall opposite the windows. He started sidestepping, certain that the darkness was sufficient to shield him. He was even sure that a killer with night glasses wouldn't be able to pick him off.

The others watched silently, anxiously, peering through the darkness as best they could as Larry edged closer to the nearest window.

"Larry, down!" Dan suddenly shouted.

LARRY'S reactions were perfect. No part of him questioned that order. He simply let his knees cave in and he fell quickly. The bullet hissed above him and smacked the wall. Dan and Sally were at either side of the window, their guns ready. Larry never crawled as fast in his life. He was helped up by Sally. All three moved back to a place of safety.

"What—how?" Larry asked dazedly.

"There are two clocks built into the wall, Larry," Dan told him. "Both are big, have luminous dials and when you pass in front of them the boys on the roof know their target is in line. We can't shoot twenty-four numbers off those dials either. We can wriggle past the spot but what then? Reaching the other

rooms will only delay the results a bit.

Garrison was moaning while Sally tied up his wounds, Crandall, the ex-attorney, had seated himself on the floor in a corner, a dejected figure in the pale light that came through the windows.

"It takes something like this to show me how ruthless I've been," Crandall said. "Fowler, you can't get us out of this. It's impossible. But I do have an idea."

"We're open to them, even from our captured enemy," Dan said.

"If one of us crawled into the bedroom, opened a window and dropped a message in a tin can or a pillow slip or anything to attract attention, a guest might pick it up and call the F.B.I."

"Crandall has something there," Larry said.

"You should have used those brains of yours in honest channels," Dan commented. "You'd have probably made more money than by being crooked and very likely not be in a mess like this now."

"Somebody should have told me," Crandall said with a sigh.

Dan dropped flat. He watched the numbers on the clock dials and realized that if he raised himself only a trifle, he'd block off some of the glowing numbers and a rifle would start coughing through a silencer.

"I'm going to try and carry out Crandall's suggestion," he called back over his shoulder. "The rest of you stay right where you are."

He inched his way along. At any moment he expected the glass of the windows to be cracked by another bullet. His progress was slow, but he finally reached the bedroom. Here he was able to get to his feet, for the windows were smaller and the room was dark. The lights had not been switched on.

There was no window in the connecting bath. Here he risked turning on the light and hastily wrote a note, then looked around and found a can of talcum powder. He switched off the light and returned to the bedroom.

He ripped a strip off the bedsheet, tied the note to one end of it, and using the can of talcum powder as the weight, raised the window a trifle and slipped the message through. He couldn't hear it land, but he had to know if this trick was

worth depending upon.

Silently he raised the window much higher, leaned way out and looked down. He was just in time to see three men pounce on the object that had drifted down from the window. Each one of them carried a rifle and they peered upward.

"About time they learned we also have guns and can use them," Dan decided, swiftly, drawing his automatic.

He fired as one of the men raised his rifle with the intention of aiming at the figure whose head and shoulders he saw outlined against the sky. Even shooting straight down Dan's aim was good. The man staggered, dropped the rifle and then fell to the ground. His two companions quickly ducked out of sight. In a moment there was no one visible but the wounded man squirming around on the grass.

All the same the presence of the three men with the rifles down there told Dan the whole grounds were being patrolled. He moved back, put away his gun and closed the window. His attempt to send a message for help had proved futile.

He left the bedroom and wriggled back to the corner of the living room. "It's no use," he said. "They've got the outside of the hotel covered. I dropped a message out the window, but three men with rifles grabbed it down below. I wounded one of them, and the other two ducked out of range."

"What are we going to do, Dan?" Sally asked. "We just can't huddle here until they are ready to storm the place and kill us.

"They'll do no storming," Dan said. "They know very well that we have guns, plenty of ammunition and there are enough of us to stand off quite a few of their men. Nobody wants to die. They'll just hole us up here until we rot or get sick of it and try to bargain."

Crandall lowered his head until it rested against his drawn up knees. "They won't bargain, Fowler. There is too much at stake. I know. Part of the stake was to have been mine."

"Suppose you give us the story, briefly," Dan said. "Just in case one of us gets clear.

Crandall raised his head, bit at his lower lip and remained silent.

CHAPTER XI

The Heart of the Web

RIMLY the others waited for Earl Crandall to speak, but the ex-attorney just sat there, mute and almost motionless. The room was very quiet.

"Crandall, this is no time to renege on your promise to talk," Dan said finally. You told Larry Kendal when he

brought you here that the only decent thing for you to do was tell us what you know. You told me that you were prepared to bargain with me—and now you won't speak. What do you expect to gain by silence?

"Nothing, I guess," Crandall said. "We'll all be dead soon anyway."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Dan. "We may find a way out of this. Go on, tell us what you know."

"All right. There are twenty ex-racketeers involved, though none of them have an active contact with the administration end of the group. That was handled by Yates, Wilson and myself. But those ex-gangsters have their money invested. We arrange the deals and if we need rough stuff, those boys are willing and ready to pitch in.

"We concentrated on gambling during the war and right after it. We put millions into gambling houses. Then the black market money and the sucker money died overnight. We stood to lose our shirts and maybe some of the investments those ex-gangsters trusted us with. So there was a council of war a month or so ago. Everybody was there. The F.B.I. could really have made a haul then. It was decided that we had to go back into crime to recoup our fortunes."

"And the bank holdup in Utah was one of the first moves?" Dan asked.

"Yes. Bernie Dixon cased the bank, laid out the plans and advised the men who pulled it so well that it seemed as if he'd led the mob in person. One of the boys looked something like Dixon and that's why witnesses picked out Dixon's mug when it was shown to them."

"But Dixon wasn't there?" Dan demanded.

"No. None of us higher-ups meant to get involved. Then you came along and Dixon figured he was in the clear so he alibied himself. But we knew that if Dixon was proven innocent, you'd start hunting deeper and we were afraid you might get at the truth."

"We'd already guessed it," Dan said. "So Dixon was murdered?"

"That's right. The room was wired. Everything Dixon and you and Sheriff Noonan said was heard. Yates got orders from somebody. He tricked Noonan into opening the door, shot him and then pushed Dixon out of the window. Some of the boys tipped Doc Reed to clam up, the waiter was warned and agreed to keep quiet. The chambermaid wasn't so co-operative so she—was killed."

"If this is a sample of the way this mob intended to operate," Sally said, "some one of us has to get out with the story. They'll murder and pillage and start a crime wave that will sweep from one end of the country to the other."

"All we have to do is get one of us out of here," Dan said. "Crandall, why was I framed with the body of the waiter in my car?"

"They were going to kill you—make it look as if you'd arrested the waiter, was taking him away and got at a gun. The car went off the road after he shot you and he was killed, too."

"I thought so," Dan answered. He squatted down beside Crandall and put lips to the crooked attorney's ear. Dan whispered for a few seconds, straightened up and stepped back.

"Crandall," he went on, aloud, "you know who the leader of this band is. The head of the syndicate. The man who had the brains to figure out when it was time for those gang bosses to go into retirement and when it was time for them to come back. Yates knew his identity, so did Wilson. You were one of that unholy three and you know too. Who is he?"

"I tell you I don't know," Crandall shouted.

"You're keeping the big secret because it might win you your life if they get at us." Dan's voice was harsh, angry as he spoke. "You're a fool, Crandall. They'll never trust you again, and yet you are

holding back—just in case."

"I tell you I don't know," Crandall half sobbed. "That's the truth!"

"Stop that blubbering, Crandall," Dan said. "Listen to me. If I get us out of here, then will you tell?"

"How? How can you get us out?" There was doubt mixed with eagerness in Crandall's tone. "There is no exit except the door and there are men on guard out there. We're prisoners in the sky. I tell you it can't be done."

"It can be done," Dan said firmly. "And I know how."

"Then tell us, Dan," said Sally, who had been listening. "I thought you would think of a way to do it."

THANKS, Sally." For a moment Dan's voice softened, and then it grew hard as he turned again to Crandall. "The situation stacks up this way. They can't rush us—at least I don't believe they will be foolish enough to try."

"Why not?" Crandall asked.

"Too many men would die and there'd be too much noise. They have to wait. Starve us out or pick us off when it gets daylight. Don't forget they will be able to see every part of this room then. But we can act too, with the dawn. But we can act too, with the coming of daylight. To shoot at us, those gunmen have to expose themselves and we can thin their ranks out some."

"But that isn't getting us out," Crandall protested.

"If they had one of us as a hostage things would be different," Dan went on. "I firmly believe they meant to trap one of us, but we were too fast for them. So we're still riding high."

"Still you said there was a way out, Dan," Sally said. "Didn't you mean that? Do you know of a way?"

"I do. If Crandall swears he'll talk, I'll take a chance and do what I can. How about it, Crandall?"

They all waited breathlessly, as Crandall hesitated before he spoke.

"Yes—yes, I'll talk," Crandall finally said. "But not until we're free of them."

"It's a deal." Dan drew his gun. "There's one little item I'll bet they missed. The private elevator to Warren Bradley's penthouse. It's just down the outside hall about fifty feet."

"But there are men out there in the hall," said Ted Garrison. "Men who will shoot to kill as soon as anyone opens the door of this suite. One of them got me in the shoulder when I tried to leave."

"I know there are men out there," said Dan. "But we only saw two of them, even if there are a few more we can fight our way through them." He smiled. "At least the rest of you can keep them busy until I reach the private elevator."

"And if you do reach Bradley's penthouse, then what?" Larry asked. "They'll listen in on all phone calls, they'll see notes dropped. What can you do there, Dan?"

"Bradley has a powerful short wave radio set in his apartment," Dan said. "He can reach all the way around the world with it. I'll call some ham, have him notify the F.B.I. to send enough men to take over."

"Dan, it sounds wonderful!" Sally cried.

"It will be if it works, and I think it will," Dan said. "My greatest worry is falling into the hands of the gang in some manner. Listen—if I am caught, the rest of you fight it out. Is that clear?"

Sally moved closer to him, she caught his arm and clung to it tightly for a moment. "Oh, Dan—Dan!" she said. "I—I." Then she raised her blond head proudly, and dropped her hand from his arm. "Yes. We'll do as you say. We'll fight it out. That's our job."

"Good," Dan told her. He moved away, and started toward the door, the gun ready in his hand. "Get set to cover me, Larry. This has to be done fast because when the door opens we'll be profiled by light if there is any turned on in the hall."

Larry joined him at the door, and Kendal also had his gun ready. Quietly, silently Dan turned the key in the lock. He twisted the knob and then swiftly drew the door open. Lights burned in the hall now, gleaming down on the evil faces of the two men who gaped at him in amazement. They were totally unprepared for such a bold attempt as this. In sudden panic they tried to raise their rifles, but before they could do so the automatic in Dan's hand roared. The nearest man moaned as a bullet caught him high in the chest. He reeled, swayed

back and forth for an instant, and the rifle thudded on the hall carpet as it dropped. Like a man diving into an invisible pool of water the guard pitched forward and hit the floor.

The sound of Larry's gun was loud in Dan Fowler's ears. The bullet smashed into the other guard's heart, and he was dead when he dropped.

DAN waited a few seconds, listening for the sound of other men approaching, expecting to see more of those hard faces loom into view, but no one appeared. The acrid scent of gunsmoke was strong in the silent hall. He glanced over his shoulder. Larry stood in the dark doorway, waiting—gun ready.

"Go back inside, Larry," Dan said, heading for the private elevator. "I'll be okay now."

"Good luck," Larry called softly.

Dan reached the elevator door and pushed the button that brought the car down. He leveled his gun as the car came even with the floor and the door automatically slid open—but the elevator was empty.

Again he glanced back over his shoulder. Larry was still standing there at the door of the suite, ready to help if Dan ran into trouble. He nodded and stepped back, and the door closed.

Dan got into the elevator, the door slid closed and he pressed the button that would take him up to the penthouse. The elevator did not move. He pushed the button again, and still the car remained stationary.

"What in the heck," he muttered disgustedly, and pushed one of the down buttons. Nothing happened. "Looks like I'm stuck."

He tried the door, but it would not open. Then suddenly the elevator started to descend. Dan pushed on the buttons frantically, for the last thing he wanted to happen was to be taken down to the lower floors of the hotel. There were too many members of the gang down there and the risk of capture was too great.

The buttons for the operation of the car were completely locked now, he could not move any of them and the car was still slowly descending.

"So nice to have you with us, Mr. Fowler," said a strange, metallic voice

that apparently came out of nowhere. "The pleasure is all ours."

CHAPTER XII

A Prisoner



HILLS ran along Dan's spine as he realized he was trapped. Since the gang who had taken over the hotel had installed dictagraphs that were hidden in the rooms and clocks with illuminated dials that made a man a target in the dark, it was not surprising that this private

elevator could be run by some sort of remote control, or that a two-way speaker had been installed in the car.

"The conversation in your suite has been very interesting," the voice went on, and Dan listened carefully, trying to recognize the man who spoke. "Particularly your plan to get up to the penthouse and use the short-wave set to call for help. Yes, very interesting, young man."

"I'm glad it makes you so happy," Dan said bitterly.

There came a wheezy sort of chuckle through the two-way speaker. "Fooled you didn't we," the voice said. "But now that the F.B.I. has Crandall and Garrison I'm afraid the situation is serious for you."

Dan did not speak. It had dawned on him that if he remained silent, there was no way for the man at the other end of the two way speaker to be sure he was still in the elevator.

"Fowler?" said the voice. "I have a proposition to make to you."

Still Dan remained silent. He touched something hard in the side pocket of his coat, and realized it was the little radio he had used to talk to Larry Kendal. He wondered if Larry was still carrying the other compact and modern version of the old walkie-talkie. He hoped so.

"What's the matter with you, Fowler?" demanded the voice that came through the two-way speaker. "Why don't you talk?"

The private elevator continued down and finally came to a stop. The door slid

open and Dan found himself facing four tough looking men with guns in their hands. Instead of rifles these four had revolvers, and one of them grinned when he saw Dan Fowler.

"Are you there, boys?" demanded the voice. "Did you get Fowler?"

"Yeah, we got him, boss," one of the men said stepping closer to the car. "And now we'll carry out the rest of your orders."

"Good," said the voice.

Two of the men grabbed Dan roughly and held him, while a third man searched him. Dan made little attempt at resistance, he had decided it was foolish to try and fight all four of the thugs.

"Here's his gun," said the man who was doing the searching. "Hey, what's this? It looks like a camera."

"It is," said one of the men who was holding Dan, with a quick glance at the little radio. "Let him keep it. He won't be much interested in taking pictures when we get through. Besides the boss said to take nothing away from Fowler but any weapons he might be carrying."

On the ground floor of the hotel the entrance to the private elevator that ran up to the penthouse was in a small room, with a door that was kept either closed or locked most of the time. There was little chance of the other guests in the hotel even knowing it was located in that room. Dan decided that since the elevator was for Warren Bradley and his granddaughter's private use they probably had keys to this room.

"Let's get going," said one of the men who held Dan. "I could stand a drink."

The man who had searched Dan put the little radio back into his pocket, and they led him out into a deserted hall that extended to the rear of the hotel. They reached the freight elevator and descended to the basement.

"You don't need to be so rough," Dan said to the two men who were still tightly gripping his arms. "I have sense enough not to try to get away."

"Hear that, Joe," said the man on Dan's left. "They said that Fowler was a man with brains." His tone was mocking. "Yeah, he's got sense all right. Our orders are to riddle him with bullets if he tries to make a break for it."

"Sure, he's smart," said Joe, releasing

his grip on Dan's arm. "And so we'll let him walk along all by himself, just like a little man." He laughed. "Let go of him, Mike."

DAN said nothing, but he longed to give both Joe and Mike a couple of good socks in the jaw. In his estimation, they were nothing but a couple of cheap gangsters, who thought they were real tough eggs when the odds were four to one against their prisoner. The other two men were older, quieter, and in Dan Fowler's estimation far more dangerous.

They walked on through the huge basement of the hotel and Dan found himself wondering why they had brought him down here. He switched on the radio in his pocket, hoping against hope that up in the suite on the eighteenth floor Larry Kendal might have also have switched on his walkie-talkie for some reason.

"I wish my partner, Larry Kendal was here," Dan said. "I'll bet the two of us could clean up this basement with all four of you."

"Who is this Kendal he's talking about, Joe?" asked Mike, who did not appear to be overly bright.

"That other G-Man they got trapped in that suite on the eighteenth floor," said Mike. "Fowler just said Kendal was his partner."

From the radio in Dan's pocket came a faint tapping sound. It was someone sending in Morse code. The four men did not notice it.

"Just happened to turn my radio on," Larry was tapping out with a pencil or something of the sort. "Voices coming in clearly. We are still trapped up here. What happened to you?"

"You'd never have got me if that private elevator hadn't been rigged up so it could be run by remote control," Dan told the four men. "And if the boss hadn't been tipped off that I was going to use the elevator by hearing us talking up in the room."

"Chatty sort of a lug," Joe said. "Maybe we ought to get him a soap box and let him make a speech."

"Shut up," said one of the older men, speaking for the first time. "You all talk too much. Mike, go get the rope."

Mike hurried away. The rest went on until they reached the bank of shafts of the main elevators of the hotel. Here they stopped. In a few moments Mike returned carrying a coil of rope. The two older men grabbed Dan and held him while Joe and Mike swiftly tied his wrists and ankles.

"So you are afraid I might get away," Dan said, hoping that Larry was still listening. "Four of you and you have to tie me up with ropes."

"You still talk too much," said one of the men who held him.

He reached into Dan's pocket and pulled out a handkerchief and quickly gagged him with it. When the four men really went to work the two older thugs climbed down into the well of the nearest elevator shaft.

"All right," one of them said. "Joe, you and Mike pass Fowler down to us now."

Joe and Mike picked up the tightly bound G-Man and lowered him down into the well. Above his head Dan could hear the hum of the elevators—there were four of them in the bank—as they went up and down. The cables hummed, and the heavy counter-weights glided up and down in their slides.

The two men down in the well placed Dan Fowler on the floor of the pit so that he was lying on his back, and his head and shoulders were between the two bars of steel that formed the slide for the counter weight in this shaft. With an extra length of rope they tied him there. Above him the huge mass of metal that was the counter weight moved up and down.

"The weight only comes all the way down when the car goes up to the eighteenth floor, Fowler," one of the men in the well said. "So you better start hopping there are no passengers going up to that floor tonight."

"Let's get out of here," said the other man nervously. "I don't like it."

The two men climbed out of the pit. Dan heard the murmur of their voices as they said something to Mike and Joe and then their footsteps as they moved away. In a moment there was only the sound of the elevators going up and down, up and down.

It was fairly dark in the shaft, even

though there were lights burning in the basement. Dan fixed his gaze on the counter weight moving up and down above his head. As the car descended the weight went up higher and higher, but on the "up" trip it came steadily down. It was then that Dan waited tensely, watching the weight slide lower and lower, and knowing that when it came all the way down it would crush him to death.

TWICE the elevator had made a trip up and down. The first time it had stopped at about what Dan judged was the third floor and then descended, the second it had climbed higher and the huge weight had come closer to him. It was like playing a weird game with Death and eighteen was the fatal number.

From his pocket Dan heard Larry Kendal again signaling through the radio—tapping out a message in Morse as he had done before.

"Where are you, Dan?" Larry telegraphed. "Have been listening to the voices of the men and know they must have tied you up and left you some place—but am not sure just where. Try to find a way to tell me."

Dan tried to speak but the gag prevented his voice from being heard, his wrists were tied behind him, and he tried to tap out an answer to Larry's message with his fingernails on the stone floor. The hum of the elevators prevented the faint tapping from carrying to the radio in his pocket.

"Answer me, Dan," telegraphed Larry, and from the way he was sending Dan knew he had grown anxious. "They have increased the guard. Six men out in the hall now, so we can't escape. We are depending on you. Answer."

There was no way Dan could answer, and that the four people trapped in the suite up on the eighteenth floor were depending upon him to aid them struck him as extremely ironical under the circumstances. He knew that before long it would be daylight, and that would mean that those in the suite above would present far better targets for the men with the rifles stationed on the roof of the other wing of the hotel. That would mean Sally and Larry would be in danger as

would Crandall and Ted Garrison.

"A lot of help I can be to them," Dan thought. "Unless I find some way to get out of here."

He felt around with his bound hands and found the rough edge of a narrow ledge. Desperately he began to saw the ropes that held his wrists fast against this. The elevator was again going up, and the counter weight was coming down.

The car stopped at the fourteenth floor and went up, at the fifteenth it stopped again. This is it, Dan thought wildly. It is going all the way up this time. Above his head the counter weight was closer than it had ever been before.

He felt a strand of the rope give and snap and he kept on sawing against the rough edge. The car went up. Another stop—the sixteenth floor this time. The huge weight loomed like a dark shadow of doom close above his head.

Dan strained against the ropes that held his wrists. He had succeeded in sawing the ropes nearly in two. They parted and his arms were free. Swiftly he pulled off the rope that held him in the sleeve and wiggled out just as the counter-weight came all the way down. Another instant and it would have crushed him to death.

"Gosh," Dan muttered as he pulled off the gag. "That was too close for comfort."

He swiftly unfastened the ropes that bound his ankles and climbed out of the shaft. It was then that he thought of Larry Kendal waiting anxiously up above. He glanced around, saw this section of the hotel basement was apparently deserted and drew the little radio from his pocket.

"This is, Dan," he said softly. "They had me trapped down here but I'm all right now. Don't say anything; they are probably still listening up there. Just hold the fort. I'll get help."

He knew there was a chance of the listening ears hearing what he said as his voice came through the speaker of the radio, but that did not matter. They would be on guard, try to catch him when he left the hotel, but he hadn't the slightest intention of trying to escape now. He was going to try to carry out his original plan of getting up to Warren

Bradley's penthouse in the private elevator. They wouldn't expect that.

"Good," Larry tapped out in answer to his message. "We're waiting. Luck, Dan."

Dan made his way through the basement, heading for the room in which was the entrance to the private elevator. Suddenly he ducked back into the shadow of some heavy wooden boxes as he heard footsteps. He waited anxiously, and in a moment the man called Joe appeared. The one who had searched Dan and taken his gun away from him.

Joe was whistling a popular tune, decidedly off key. He came closer to the boxes. Dan lunged at him, caught him around the legs in a flying tackle and they both went down hard.

"Fowler!" Joe muttered as he saw the face of his attacker, and then he cursed. "Thought you were dead."

Dan did not feel this was any time to be wasted in idle chatter. He smashed a hard fist against Joe's jaw and followed with a left to the body. Joe grabbed him, and they wiggled around on the floor, pounding at each other. A third blow from Dan released Joe's grip on him and both men scrambled to their feet.

Joe was big and husky, and he was tough. He aimed a swift kick at Dan, and missed. Dan caught the upraised leg and gave a hard tug. Joe went down hard, his head striking the cement floor of the basement. Then he grew limp and sprawled there unconscious.

Dan quickly searched him and found his own automatic and another gun that Joe had been carrying and thrust both weapons into his pocket. Then he dragged the unconscious man back behind the boxes and left him there.

"That settles you," Dan said shortly.

He drew out the guns; checked them to make sure they were both fully loaded. Satisfied, he put them back in his pockets and went on. He reached the door of the room in which the private elevator leading to the penthouse was located. To his relief the door was closed but not locked.

With his hand on his automatic he stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. There was no one in the room. He went to the entrance to the private elevator and pressed the button. He doubted that anyone would suspect

he might be using the car now.

All the same he was ready for trouble. He leveled his gun as the car came down and the door slid open—but the elevator was empty. He got into it, pressed the up button and got set for trouble again. At any moment he expected to hear the metallic voice again mocking him through the two-way speaker in the car, but there was only silence.

CHAPTER XIII

Big Shot



UNNOISELESSLY the car passed the eighteenth floor and continued on up to the penthouse above. The door slid silently open and Dan stepped into the foyer of Bradley's penthouse. For a moment he stood listening, gun in hand. There was no sound. It seemed quiet and

peaceful here as though the penthouse was remote from the world.

Dan tiptoed toward the entrance door of the penthouse, opened it and gazed down an empty corridor. At the end of the hall the door to the radio room was wide open and Dan could see old Warren Bradley propped up in his stretcher chair, his back toward the hall.

Dan closed the entrance door behind him and locked it. He glanced at the door of the living room at his left, at the doors of Bradley's bedroom suite, and Lynn Bradley's rooms. There was no telling how many people might be lurking beyond those doors. Still there was one way of bringing them out into the open.

He quietly leaned against the wall, leveled his automatic and fired one shot. The roar of the gun was startlingly loud in the silence, and the bullet must have zipped a fraction of an inch above Bradley's bald pate for it drew a howl of astonishment from the man.

"Bradley, if you move that chair, or anyone else moves it," Dan called loudly, "I'll put the next bullet through your head. If anyone comes out of any of these rooms down the hall, I'll blow your

scalp off. I can't miss you and you can't move."

"Fowler—don't," Bradley called. "Don't shoot! You're mad!"

"That's a mild word for the way I feel," Dan called back, a cold rage sweeping over him. "If your beautiful red-headed granddaughter happens to stick her nose out of the door I'll kill her, too."

"But why?" called Bradley. "We are your friends."

"Friends!" snorted Dan. "You're the brains of this syndicate. I recognized your voice coming through the two-way speaker in the private elevator tonight. Your men were ordered to leave me in that elevator shaft to be crushed to death. Friends!"

"Nonsense!" called Bradley. "Why would I be the head of the syndicate?"

"Because you are the rich man who wanted more. The powerful man who controlled men honestly until you were stricken down by sickness. Then you still wanted power and more and more money, so you organized these gangsters and got them under your thumb."

"That isn't true," the old man protested. "Fowler, I tell you someone has been lying!"

"You know they haven't," Dan said. "Bradley, if you jerk your head like that again I'll line one up and send it right through your brain. That short-wave radio set is more than a plain radio. It's the ears of the best eavesdropping system in the world. Every room in this hotel is wired. The mikes are built right into the walls where they can't be found, but you keep amused by tuning in. That's why every move I made was known at first."

"You can't prove any of this, Fowler," Bradley said. "Not a word, and you're only placing your friends downstairs in jeopardy."

With his left hand Dan took his compact two-way radio out of his pocket. His right still held the gun ready. He was sure there were people lingering in the other rooms along the hall. Members of the syndicate who had been listening to every word that he and Bradley had said and were saying.

"I've got a radio, too, Bradley," he called loudly. "I'm calling Kendal and Sally downstairs!"

"I don't believe it," Bradley said.

"Then listen," snapped Dan. He turned up the volume in his radio and Kendal's voice came through clearly.

"All right, Dan," Larry said. "We're listening."

"Take the prisoners out, Larry," Dan ordered. "If any attempt to get you is made by the syndicate's men, just tell me and Bradley dies."

"I—I don't want to die," said Bradley nervously.

"Of course you don't want to die, Bradley," Dan said. "You're not the type to give up while there is any hope at all, and who can convict a helpless cripple like you of murder? No, you'll get out of it all right. But I'm getting out, too, or you'll die. Make up your mind."

DAN was talking now for the others. He was sure were listening as well as Warren Bradley, trying to convince the unseen members of the syndicate that, when it came to a showdown, the old man would think of himself first. That what happened to the others would not matter to Bradley when the going got too difficult for him.

"I have to reach for the microphone to give those orders, Fowler," Bradley said. "I'll do it if you don't shoot."

"All right," Dan said. "Go ahead, reach."

Evidently ex-sheriff Yates couldn't stand it any longer. He stepped out of one of the rooms, a snarl on his thick, slobbering lips, and his gun flaming. Dan knew he had to shoot fast and shoot to kill. He fired just once and Yates fell with a crash, dead when he hit the floor of the hall. Dan pressed trigger again. The bullet hissed by Bradley's ear.

"Just a warning not to try any tricks, Bradley," Dan said. He glanced at the doors of the rooms along the hall. "Step right out if you like, Wilson. Yates is dead. I'll save you from facing the chair. Just step out any time."

He found he had guessed right when he heard the voice of the man who had used the District Attorney's office years ago to make himself a million dollars.

"I can't take this any more, Fowler," Wilson shouted. "I want to surrender. Bradley is going to turn us all in to save his miserable hide. I'm not buying that."

Here comes my gun and I'll be right after it."

A gun flew from one of the side rooms, hit the floor of the hall and Jeff Wilson emerged with his hands high. He flattened himself against the wall so that he wouldn't interfere with Dan's bald-headed target framed in the doorway of the radio room.

Bradley had the mike in his hand. "Men," he said in a shaky voice. "Men, it's no use. I thought we were rid of Fowler—that he had been crushed to death in the elevator shaft but he fooled me. He's up here now, safe and unharmed. I guessed wrong."

"You sure did," Wilson murmured.

"I'll pay for my mistake," Bradley went on. "But you men run for it. Notify those whom you work for that they must lie low. That this isn't the time to activate forces. I'll be back. They can't do anything to me. I'll be back and when I do, we'll make those G-Men pay!"

"Stop babbling like an idiot and give those orders, Bradley," commanded Dan impatiently. "Hurry up!"

"Listen, everybody," Bradley said into the mike. "You are not to molest Kendal, the girl who posed as Martha Talbot, Garrison or Crandall. They must be free to leave this hotel. Remember that," the old man's voice rose nervously. "Otherwise I'll die. I'm not dying until I've made a lot of rats pay for their treachery. That's all. Abandon your radios and run for it. You won't have long. Hurry!"

Dan went slowly down the corridor, he still had a pair of handcuffs in his pocket for the men who had captured him in the basement had not considered these a weapon. He stopped long enough to handcuff Wilson to a radiator and then reached the door of the radio room. Lynn was seated at her grandfather's feet, smoking a cigarette and trying to look cool despite her fright.

Warren Bradley glared at Dan, hate gleaming in his eyes.

"You're an old fool, Bradley," Dan said. "I've been wise to you for some time. In the first place this syndicate was organized like a tight corporation and you shine in such organization. Secondly, you were too anxious to meet me and keep me around where you could watch me. And third—I almost caught

you listening in on your eavesdropping system. You told me you'd been listening to some ham in Ferlin. But nobody in Berlin is permitted to use short-wave.

"Also, it was seven-thirty when you told me that, which made it one-thirty in the morning in Berlin. With heat and light the way it is there, nobody stays up to that hour. At least not tuning in any short-wave radio. I knew you lied and if so, you were a fraud all the way through. This listening set gave you away too—only something as powerful and big could have been used to connect with the mikes in all the rooms in the hotel. And you, a cripple, had an excuse for manning it at all times."

"You've got me, I guess," Bradley said dispiritedly. "But Lynn had nothing to do with it."

THE girl stared at him hopefully, and then frowned when she saw the stern expression on Dan's face.

"I'm afraid she did," Dan said. "Lynn did your errands. She carried messages to the men, handled all the outside work. She's like you, never satisfied no matter how much money she accumulates. Illness stopped you once, but not for long. That characteristic helped indicate you were behind these others." He looked at the red-headed girl and his expression softened. "I'm sorry, Lynn."

F.B.I. men and State Police arrived in a surprisingly short time. Dan learned that the captain of police, who had Doctor Reed in custody, had become alarmed when Dan was cut off while trying to warn him, and the captain had moved the doctor to a safe place then summoned help.

Dan and Sally watched the prisoners led out. Lynn walked beside the wheelchair in which her grandfather sat. She held her head up proudly and she did not look back.

"She wears handcuffs very well, doesn't she, Dan?" Sally said.

He grinned down at her. "That has the elements of a nasty crack," he said. "Your boy friend didn't come out of this with any medals on his brawny chest either."

Sally clasped his arm tighter. "All in the line of duty, Dan. I guess we can be silly, too, now and then."

WANTED BY

Crime does not pay! G-Men and your Department of Justice never give up the search for a wanted criminal and no case is marked "closed" until their man is behind bars or dead! As a good citizen, there are many ways in which you can help in this relentless war on crime.



DUSTEAN ALEXANDER
YOUNGS
FBI No. 847,799

Aliases: Ray Farnsworth, Floyd Harrington, Joseph Samuels, Roy Wells, George Wilson, etc. Born, Jan. 31, 1909, Trenton, Ont., Canada. Height, 5' 10". Weight, 200 lbs. Eyes, blue. Hair, brown. Married. Occupations, salesman, booking agent, bartender. Both index fingers amputated. Youngs has been convicted of larceny. Now wanted in Atlanta, Ga.

ANTONIO GONZALES
FBI No. 353,201

Born March 12, 1910, Juarez, Mexico. Height, 5' 3". Weight, 130 lbs. Eyes, brown. Hair, black, curly. Occupation, laborer. Tattoo of nude woman on right forearm. Has been arrested several times for burglary, assault with intent to murder, violation of immigration laws, etc. Now wanted in Texas for murder. CAUTION: Gonzales is armed and dangerous.



ALBERT ENOS BERRINGER,
JR.
FBI No. 409,823

Born Nov. 16, 1898, Franklin, Pa. Height 5' 5". Weight, 173 lbs. Eyes, blue. Hair, brown. Several teeth missing. Occupations, printer, garageman, truck driver. Large vaccination scar left arm. Nose broken. Has been arrested several times for robbery with firearms, forgery, operation of confidence game, etc. Wanted since 1942 for car theft.

THE F. B. I.

In cooperation with J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation we bring you these pictures and descriptions of fugitives wanted by the FBI. If you see any of these persons or have information which may assist in locating them, immediately notify the FBI, Washington, D. C.

ROY ELMER WRONE
FBI No. 43,784

Aliases: Bill McChesney, B. R. Rodecker, Charles Twelvetrees. Born 1903, St. Louis, Mo. (Not verified). Height, 5' 10". Weight, 185 lbs. Hair, brown, graying. Eyes, blue. Tattoo of rose on right arm. Has been convicted of passing bogus checks, forgery, auto theft, Selective Service violation. Wanted as probation violator. **CAUTION:** Wrone is dangerous and may be armed.



EARL DAVID BIRCHAM
FBI No. 387,873

Aliases: Harry David Cooper, William David Fuller, Otis McClain, Clarence William Orwig, Clyde Slade, etc. Born 1903. Height, 5' 9". Weight, 158. Partly bald, may wear wig. Occupations, clerk, molder, painter. Has been convicted for robbery and bank robbery, and has escaped prison several times. **CAUTION:** Bircham is believed armed and is dangerous.

HENRY HOLMES
FBI No. 904,233

Born 1895, London, England. Height, 5' 8½". Weight, 185 lbs. Occupation, gardener. Has British accent. Sometimes claims to be executive of large British industrial concern. Has British passport. No. 26-7175 issued jointly to himself and his alleged wife. Has been convicted for false pretenses, theft and bigamy. Wanted in Michigan.





a novelet by
ARTHUR
LEO
ZAGAT

CHAPTER I
A Deadly Hole

PLANTED before the closed door of my flat, the detective's stocky body had the solidity of granite. He seemed to be entirely unaffected by the stifling August heat that bathed me in sweat.

"It's no use, Mr. Hardy," he told me. "I can't let you in. That's a murder in there."

"That's my wife in there," I shot back at him. Ann had been my wife for just a week and a day. We had returned from our honeymoon only last night. "She needs me."

"That's what you think." I couldn't tell if the undertone in his low voice was

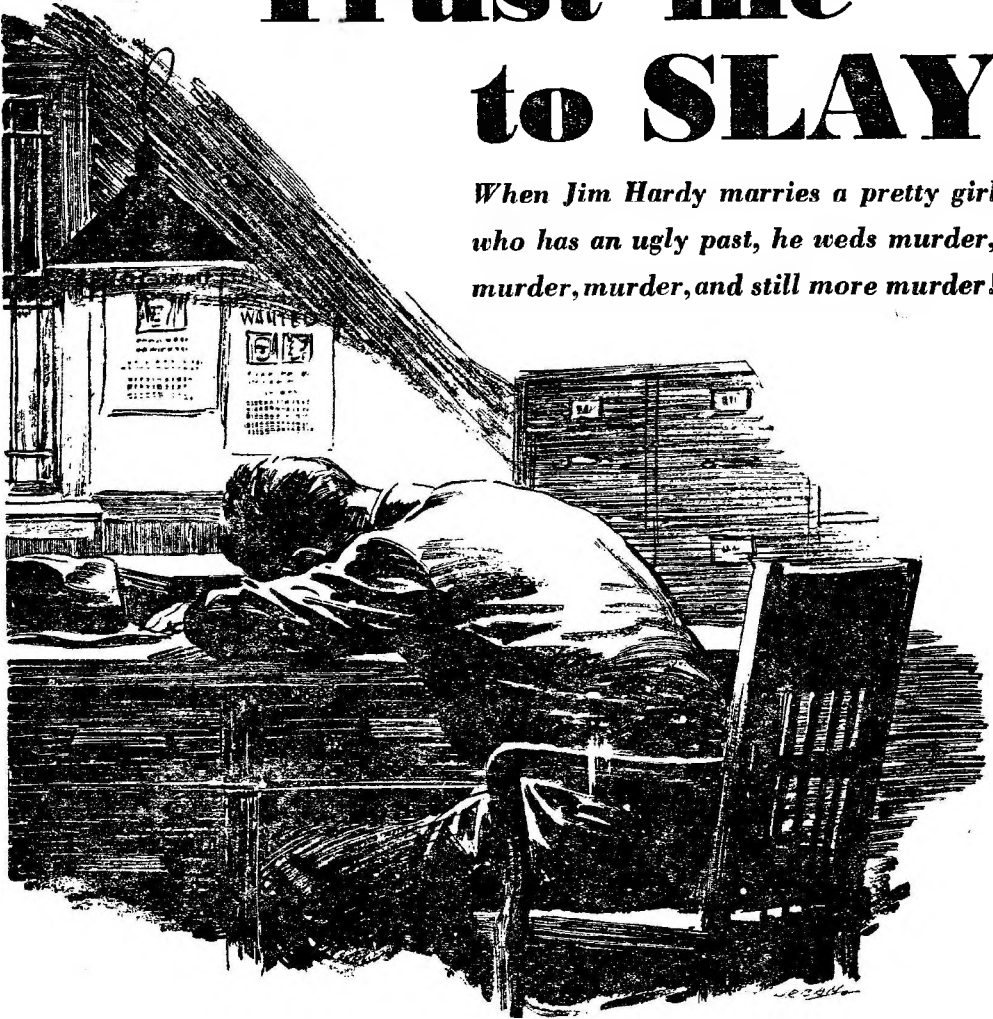
amusement or sympathy. "Take it from me, what she needs right now is a lawyer."

"I happen to be a lawyer," I said. I was, in fact, a very junior associate in the firm of Loring, Folsom and Carruthers, having been admitted to the bar a mere three years before. "What's going on here? Who are you?"

"I'm Detective Sergeant Dan Carson." The chunky man ran his hand up under his hat, scratched the clipped short, grizzled hair thus revealed. "But I can't tell you what's going on. All I know is your wife phoned us there was a dead man in her living room, and when we

Trust me to SLAY

*When Jim Hardy marries a pretty girl
who has an ugly past, he weds murder,
murder, murder, and still more murder!*



got here, there he was—with a bullet in his brain."

My scalp prickled. I'd seen corpses enough in Normandy and all across France, but to hear about one in my own home was not the same.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"She says she never saw him before." The 'says' was faintly stressed. "She says he told her the renting agent sent him to straighten out something about

the lease. So she let him in and went to that phone in the foyer to call you and ask you what she should do about it. But before she got an answer, she heard this *thump* behind her. She twisted around and saw this bird down on the carpet. When she got to him, he was dead."

I pictured Ann bending over the sprawled body, horror coming into her triangular face. She was such a little

thing, so almost elf-like, and so dependent, it was a wonder that she'd had the presence of mind to do the right thing, call the police at once.

"Perhaps he was looking for a place to commit suicide," I said. "Perhaps he rang this bell at random, and when Ann let him in, he shot himself."

"Could be," the detective agreed. "Except where's the gun he did it with? We'd have found it if it was anywheres in the flat. Somebody must have carried it off. But the way she tells it, there wasn't anybody except her and this bird."

HIS insinuation brought a burr of anger into my voice. "Are you implying that she's lying?" I demanded. "That she's shielding someone?"

Carson's eyes went stony, unreadable. "I'm just telling you what you want to know, mister. Come to think of it, maybe I'm talking out of turn. Maybe I ought to shut up."

I needed him, and I was a fool to antagonise him, I realized. "I'm sorry," I mumbled. "I guess I'm a bit touchy."

"Sure you are." There was something warming in the smile that briefly illumined his flinty mask. "Me, I'd be burning up if my old lady let me walk into a mess like this without tipping me off. She had plenty time to phone you before we got here."

He was dead right. Ann should have—wait a minute. I had the answer.

"She probably tried to call me, but I must already have left the office," I said. "It's way down on Rector Street, a good half-hour's subway ride from here, counting the walk at both ends."

"And you got here at—" Carson glanced at his wristwatch—"Yeah, at about twenty to five. You was in all afternoon, I suppose?"

"I certainly was. I was right at my desk till a few minutes past four, and—"

I broke off, abruptly aware how deftly this detective had extracted my whereabouts at the time of the killing. It was a trap into which I'd have almost surely stepped if I were the one Ann was shielding.

She was not, of course, could not be shielding anyone. But the only other

alternative, that she herself had shot the stranger and disposed of the gun, was just as unthinkable.

Was it? An iron band seemed to tighten about me as I recalled something she'd said that morning when I was leaving for my first Monday back at the office. She'd clung to me in the foyer just inside this door.

"Jim," she'd murmured. Just, "Jim," but I'd understood all she was saying to me, just saying my name. And then she'd said, "Will you always trust me, Jim darling? Will you always believe in me, no matter what?"

"How could I do anything else, kitten?" I whispered. "You're the other part of me, aren't you?" And I kissed, one more time, the lips that were the color of raspberries, and as soft and sweet.

Later, going over with Mr. Loring—George Hamilton Loring, head of my firm—an appeal brief he wanted me to draft, I'd found myself wondering what had impelled Ann to make that strange plea, and I found myself realizing how little I knew about her, although I knew her so well.

We'd met at one of the parties the Loring's loved to give for young people, being childless themselves. I enjoyed going to them mostly because of Rose Loring, even though she was twice my age.

Tall, slim and graceful, Rose had a quality of eternal youth that belied the traces of silver in her chestnut hair.

That night, Rose brought me a gray-eyed girl who seemed, in contrast to my bulk, no bigger than a minute. Before our hostess had finished saying, "You and Ann Dane ought to know one another, Jim," we were both caught up in a vast tidal wave that swept us out of that house and to far, shimmering horizons.

The next three weeks were a dizzy, glorious dream. Ann's silver laughter threaded it, and her gamin joyousness, but they did not mask from me her depth and wonder. It was the present that engrossed us in those weeks, and the future, but not the past. Then George and Rose Loring stood with us before the altar where a man of God pronounced us one, and afterwards— Well, a man

does not cross-examine his bride on their honeymoon.

When, at about four, Mr. Loring returned from a real estate closing uptown, he found me staring at a sheet of legal cap on which I had written, instead of preliminary notes for that brief, something like this:

Age—About 20. Home town—Montville, Penn. Education—Local high school only, but has done a great deal of reading, mostly history, and is well versed in classical music. Family—Mother died long ago. Father died last March. A. then came to N. Y. to look for job on magazine or newspaper, but had no success. Was living at the YWCA.

That was all, absolutely all, I knew about the antecedents of the girl I'd married. Perhaps, I thought, Loring could tell me more.

"You know, sir," I remarked casually. "I've never thought of asking how Ann happened to be at that party."

PORTLY, imposing, his white-maned head set on broad exquisitely tailored shoulders, Loring permitted himself a dignified smile. He adjusted the ribboned pince nez riding his aquiline nose.

"The person you should ask that of is Mrs. Loring, my boy," he said. "I've only a vague recollection of her telling me that she got talking to Ann at some lecture or concert or something, liked her and invited her to our next soiree." The smile became a teasing chuckle. "Can't get your little bride off your mind, eh? Why not call it a day and go home to her?"

I'd shot out of that office like a third string back sent into the crucial moment of the Big Game. When the crawling subway at last brought me to my station at 110th Street, I'd been too eager to get to Ann to be curious about the police cars parked in our block and the crowd buzzing on the sidewalk.

I'd taken the flight of stairs two at a time and at my own door had been confronted by a uniformed policeman who refused to permit me to enter.

Nor would he answer my startled questions, but when I told him who I was he'd gone inside. In another minute

this grizzled detective, this Sergeant Dan Carson, had come out to me.

Now he was turning at the sound of the doorknob rattling behind him. The door swung inward and the officer who'd gone inside came out.

"Okay, sergeant," he announced. "The lieutenant says it's all right for you to bring in Mr. Hardy."

I went across the threshold, over which I'd carried my bride the night before, into the furnished two room and kitchenette suite which Rose Loring—a friend if ever a young couple had one—had scoured the housing-starved city to locate for us.

The flat swarmed with men doing the things police technicians do at the scene of a homicide, but I had eyes only for Ann, bolt upright and pale, on the edge of a highbacked foyer chair. In beige shorts and flowered halter, that in deference to the sweltering heat were all she wore, she was like a frightened little girl waiting in the anteroom of some camp directress' office to be disciplined for some such heinous crime as filching a pie from the mess hall ice box.

But she was no child. She was the woman I loved with every fibre of my being. She looked up at me.

A wan smile trembled to her lips and she sobbed, "Jim." The sound of it was desolate. "Oh, Jim."

"Okay, kitten." I managed a grin. I knuckled her small jaw. "Papa's home now and everything's going to be okay."

I hoped that I sounded confident. I was not.

A hand touched my arm and I turned to Detective Carson. The man with him was not very big. He was a bit stooped in his old blue serge suit, and he looked like anything but a detective.

"This here's the boss, Mr. Hardy," Dan Carson said, "Lieutenant John Struthers of the Homicide Squad."

Struthers was soft-voiced and very polite. He apologized for the trouble he was causing my wife. He apologized for the shambles his men had made of the flat, hunting for the missing gun.

"Would you mind looking at the body, Mr. Hardy?" he went on, as if asking a favor. "It would help us greatly if you can identify him."

The two of them led the way through the archway into the living room. The lamps were all on there. It was still broad day outside, but the room was on a dark court and the technicians needed all the light they could get for their work.

The glare made the cheap rooming-house furniture seem more than ever, battered and tawdry. It made startlingly white the sheet that covered a long and narrow mound on the floor in front of the sofa. Carson bent and took hold of a corner of the sheet. I swallowed hard as he lifted it.

"Take your time," Struthers murmured. "Take a good look at him."

He was in his late forties, I judged. His tan gabardine suit was disarranged, and the dark brown shirt had been unbuttoned, I supposed by the medical examiner, to expose a hairy chest. The heavy, jowled face, dissolute even in death, glistened with a peculiar waxy sheen and it was altogether strange to me. The hole above his left ear seemed very small.

"No," I sighed. "I don't know him."

"Neither does the renting agent." Carson let the sheet drop. "There wasn't a thing on him to tell us who he is. The clothes labels are all national brands and there's no laundry or cleaners' marks. He had some money, but no letters or social security card or anything like that."

CHAPTER II

The Scarlet Clue



NN was hidden from me by the jut of the wall through which the archway was cut, but she could hear me, I know.

"Doesn't his having stripped himself of identification support my notion that he shot himself?" I asked.

"I've known men to light cigarettes just before they did the dutch, but not ever a cigar." The detective jerked his grizzled chin at one on

the rug nearby, a quarter inch of ash at its tip. "Besides, this bird would have had to have a rubber arm to hold the gun far enough away so's it wouldn't leave powder marks nor an exit wound."

"Not very far at that," Lieutenant Struthers disagreed. "The wound was made by a low caliber bullet, probably from a small pistol such as some women carry. It wouldn't have had to travel far to lose the velocity to carry it all the way through a man's head."

"About as far," Carson added, "as from the foyer to here."

They were talking to Ann too. They were working on her. They were telling her that the evidence against her was damning.

"I wonder, Mr. Hardy," Struthers was saying, "if you can persuade your wife that it would be to her advantage to be a little more—er—cooperative. You know, as a lawyer, that the district attorney always is willing to accept pleas of guilty to the lesser degrees of homicide. You might advise her—"

"As my wife's lawyer," I broke in, heatedly, "I shall advise her to stick to the exact truth. Which," I added "she has already told you."

"Oh, now, Mr. Hardy," Carson drawled. "You ain't talking like a lawyer, but like a husband. Not that you can help it." His eye corners crinkled. "You know that old saying. 'A man who's his own lawyer, has a fool for a client.'"

I realized my situation then. That adage is as ancient as the legal profession, and, like most old maxims, it is crystalized wisdom.

"Thanks," I growled, and looked at Struthers. "I presume I may use my own phone."

"Of course."

As I stumped stiff-legged out to the foyer, two policemen brushed past me, carrying a long wicker basket. Ann still sat stiffly in her chair, her hands twisting at one another in her lap. I threw her a kiss and then I was at the phone, jabbing the dial to my office number.

Miss Evans, our receptionist, must have departed for the day. It was Loring himself who answered.

"Ann's in trouble, sir," I told my

senior partner. "A man's been killed in our flat and the police think she did it."

"Good Heavens!" he gasped. "When was this?"

"Apparently about the time I was starting home. I wonder if I could ask you to represent her?"

"Represent her? Of course. I'd never forgive you if you didn't ask me to. Sit tight, my boy, till I get there."

As I fumbled the instrument back into its cradle, my hand stayed on it, tightening. Loring had been startled by my news. But if Ann had called me before the police arrived and found me gone, she naturally would have asked for him.

That meant she had not called me. *Why* hadn't she?

DETEKTIVE Carson was watching me, his faint smile grim, his lids narrowed and speculative. The two policemen came between us, their basket heavy now. They carried it out into the hallway, and Ann rose, as Struthers came toward her.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Hardy," he said, "but I am forced to place you under arrest on suspicion of murder. I suppose you will want to get into a dress—"

"One moment, lieutenant," I broke in. "I've decided now that I was being childish when I turned down your suggestion before. May I talk with my wife now, along the lines you suggested? In private, of course."

He looked pleased. "I will be very happy if you will," he said. "You can take her in the bedroom back there, but I'll have to ask you to keep the door open."

I took Ann's hand and it was ice in mine as I led her through the living room. The police had been in the bedroom too. They'd stripped the bed and dumped out the contents of the valises we'd not bothered to unpack the night before. I turned to Ann.

"All right, sweet," I said. "They can't hear us, so you can tell me exactly now what happened."

A pulse fluttered in the shadowed hollow of her throat. "I was putting your things away in the closet when the door buzzer buzzed. I thought it was Rose Loring—she'd promised to come at

about half past three and help me get settled—but it wasn't. It was this man from the agent, and he said there was something about the lease."

She was telling it without inflection, like a lesson learned by rote. "I said I didn't know anything about the lease. He'd have to come back tonight and talk to you. He said he couldn't. So I asked him to come in while I phoned you. I had to wait a long time for the dial tone, and just as it came, I heard him fall."

"And when you got to him he was dead," I said wearily. "Shot by a phantom gun. Who do you expect to believe that?"

"I expected you to believe it, Jim." Her hand pulled from mine, clenched into a little fist at her side. "I expected you to trust me." Her lips were ashen, stiff, and in her gray eyes there was outrage. "You promised me to, remember, only this morning."

I remembered. And I could not endure her look of accusation, of condemnation. My eyes went to the floor and were caught by a small band of scarlet-and-gold paper that was curled near a bed caster.

I brought my eyes back to Ann's face, but before I could frame the question that strip of paper suggested, a familiar voice boomed in from the foyer.

"Loring's the name. George Hamilton Loring. Mr. Hardy called me—"

"Yeah?" Detective Carson broke in, dryly. "You got here awful fast."

"I drove up the Hudson River Highway, and traffic stepped right along." It must have, I thought, for even his Packard to have made the seven miles from Rector Street to 107th and Columbus in less than twenty minutes. "Where's my client? Oh, there you are, Ann my dear."

As Loring came toward us, his big form blocked the detective's view of me.

Ann turned to him, and I stooped and snatched up the scarlet cigar band for whose presence in our bedroom there could be only one explanation. I do not smoke cigars.

But the man, whom my wife insisted she did not know, had just lit one when he was shot!

MISS Evans' eyes flared rather widely, when she saw me stumble into the office the next morning.

"Gosh, Mr. Hardy," she exclaimed. "You look like something the cat—Parm me. I mean, you look like you haven't slept a wink."

"Could you sleep, Miss Evans?" I leaned heavily on the top of her switchboard and let my weariness wash up in me for an instant. "Could you sleep, knowing that your wife—that someone you love—is in prison, held for the grand jury, without bail, on suspicion of murder?"

"It's just awful, Mr. Hardy." She tucked a stray blondined tress under the band of her headset. "Mr. Loring left word he wanted to see you soon's you came in."

"I want to see him, too, but first I'll ask you to do something for me. Please call Tom Greene, in the Patent Office in Washington." Our firm did a lot of business with that office and Greene knew it was to his advantage to give us quick service. "Ask him to look up the registered owner of this trademark." I handed her a description I'd written on a paper napkin in some grimy lunchroom somewhere on the waterfront, some time around dawn. "Hold the line while he does, and give me the answer as soon as you get it."

"Even if you're in with Mr. Loring?"

"Particularly if I'm in with Mr. Loring."

I went through the gate beside her, and was glad I met no one as I plodded past the door of my own cubicle and those of other juniors into Loring's big room.

"Good morning, my boy," he rumbled from behind the enormous bisque-toned desk where he sat sipping the coffee it was Miss Evans' morning chore to brew for him. "Have a seat." And when I'd sunk into the deep leather armchair, "Have some coffee."

I wondered drearily what he'd have done if I'd accepted. There was only the one cup.

"Have you thought of a line of defense for Ann, sir?" I asked him.

He put the cup down on its silver tray. "You know I can't do that until

she decides to tell us who the slain man was, and what justified her in killing him."

I winced. "You're certain that she did kill him?"

"Aren't you?"

I could not honestly deny it. "How about the gun?" I asked. "I understand it's still missing."

"Which means only that she contrived to hide it so cleverly that the police have been unable to find it."

Had she gained the time to do it, I wondered, by not phoning me?

"All right," I yielded. "Then, since Ann won't tell us, it's up to us to find out who the dead man is and what was the tie between him and my wife."

The cup clinked against the creamer as Loring shifted the tray so its edge was more precisely parallel to his desk's edge.

"What makes you think we can do a better job of identifying the dead man than the police?"

"A hunch that came to me last night, some time after I left you outside Night Court," I said. I hadn't yet told him about the cigar band. Fumbling it out of my wallet, I did so now. I told him that I had picked it up in the flat, but not where in the flat.

"The Homicide Squad men must have overlooked it because it was a gun they were hunting for," I said, "and because they didn't know I don't smoke cigars."

I laid on the desktop the narrow curl of scarlet paper with gold letters, FLOR DE AMAZONE, circling the embossed white silhouette of a woman's helmeted profile.

"Before coming here this morning," I went on, "I stopped in at the office of a chain cigar store on Fourth Avenue, and they confirmed my suspicion. This is not the trademark of any big national manufacturer. It's the private brand of one of those little cigarmakers you see on sidestreets, rolling cigars in their shop windows and selling them to neighborhood customers."

"I see." Loring poked the thing with a fingertip. "Your thought is that if we can locate him, he may recognize the dead man from his description. But there are dozens of such shops in the

CHAPTER III

Killer's Knife

city. It would take weeks to visit them all."

The burr of the intercom box at the desk's far corner interrupted before I could answer. Loring flicked a switch key. "Yes?"

The box's metallic voice rasped, "I have the information Mr. Hardy wanted from Washington. About who registered that Flor de Amazone trademark."

I was up and leaning across the desk and the pen I'd snatched out of an onyx stand was quivering in my fingers as I took over.

"Go ahead, Miss Evans."

"The name is Martin Stock. S for Samuel, T for theatre, O for—"

"I know how to spell Stock." I'd already scrawled it on a memo pad. "What's the street number?"

"No street, Mr. Hardy. Only some place in Pennsylvania. Just a sec." An embarrassed little laugh rasped from the box. "I can't read my scribble. It's—"

"Montville?" I cut in with the name of Ann's home town. It had to be. "Montville, Pennsylvania?"

"That's right. M-O—"

"Thank you." I flicked off the switch, looked at Loring.

"It seems your hunch has paid off," he murmured approvingly. "Good work." He held out his hand for the sheet I was tearing from the pad. "Let me have that and I'll send a private investigator down there to see what he can find out."

I folded the paper carefully. "No. No hired detective's going to dig into my wife's past."

"Surely you don't intend to turn that over to the police?"

"Surely not." I put the paper and the cigar band in my wallet, and flicked on the intercom switch. "Miss Evans," I said. "Please call Penn Station and find out the first train I can take to Montville, Pennsylvania."

NEXT ISSUE

LADY KILLER

A Baffling Mystery Novelet

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

AND MANY OTHER STORIES



HERE was no train direct to Montville. I had to change at Harrisburg and again at Fall River Junction, this time to something called a "combination local." Made up of an express car and a single antiquated passenger coach, it lurched interminably through the darkening

countryside behind an asthmatic locomotive belching coal gas and cinders. Grimy, sweated, bone weary, I was the only passenger to alight at Montville.

"Bo-oard," the conductor bawled to no one I could see. Awll abo-o-oard."

He waved his lantern, swung back into motion. A shadowy form dropped from the express car behind its tender then, darted across the end of the dimly lit platform and vanished into darkness. Some railroad employee, I decided, dead-heading home.

The train puffed up the tracks. Its racket was replaced by the shrilling of a million cicadas. From beyond the station, a hill rose ominously black against the overcast sky, a few lights scattered at its crest. The only other intimation of human life was the clack of a Morse sounder within the station and the yellow brightness of the window in its unpainted wall.

Despite the heat, the station door was shut. Its hinges squealed as I went through into the ammoniacal stench peculiar to rural depots the country over. Angling past the pot-bellied stove, I looked in the ticket wicket at a wrinkled face with rheum-ridden eyes.

"Can you," I asked the shirt-sleeved and weazened old man to whom the face belonged, "direct me to Martin Stock's place of business?"

"Why couldn't I?" The drooping ends of his mustache quivered.

"It's bin right in the same place fer more'n twenty year."

"And how do I get there?"

"What do yuh want tuh get thar fer this hour of night?"

The hour, I saw by the round clock on the wall behind him, was nine-twenty. "I want to get to Stock's place," I explained, "because I've come all the way from New York to talk to him."

"Yuh got plenty uh time, then. Mart won't be thar till mornin'. He closed up an' went home long ago."

A hinge creaking behind me pulled my head around to the door opposite that by which I'd entered. It could not have been wind that had swung it open an inch or so. The night was breathless. But I turned back to the station agent.

"Where's Stock's home?"

"Out Furnacebrook Road two, three mile."

Three miles. The way I felt, it sounded like thirty.

"Can I get someone to drive me out there?" I asked.

"Mebbe. Try Tom Stukely at the Eagle Inn up on Main Street."

I went toward the door that had creaked. Or had it? It was tight shut when I reached it. I stepped outside and paused to orient myself.

A road came past the station, paralleling the tracks. A branch road curved off toward the hill. At either side of the intersection were one-story buildings.

Both were dark, but in the glow reaching the larger one on my left, I read the sign: GRANGE HAY & FEED CO. I was almost abreast of the roofless porch fronting the other before I could make out the faded lettering beneath its eaves:

MONTVILLE WEEKLY COURIER
JOB PRINTING
Henry Dane, Prop.

I stopped short, my temples pounding. Dane. That had been Ann's name before she took mine!

This Henry Dane, I realized, must be a relative of hers, and it was a better bet I could get the information I wanted from him, rather than from the cigar-maker.

The prospect of again enduring the station agent's moronic routine, however, was appalling. Perhaps a card on the print shop's door gave the owner's

home address. I went up on the porch, fished out a book of matches and struck one. No card was tacked to the door's raddled wood. The padlock that hung from its hasp was rusted and a spider web, speckled by the husks of devoured insects, angled from it to the jamb. A window, a big one, took up most of the rest of the shop's wall.

I had to drop the match as I moved to peer in through the grimed glass. It seemed to me I glimpsed movement within. The movement wasn't within, however. It was the reflection of someone, or something, coming stealthily up behind me. I turned—I faced a squat black shape, arm upraised, steel glinting from its clenched hand.

The knife plunged down.

BECAUSE of my sudden turn, the blade intended for my back plucked harmlessly at my sleeve. I drove my fist to the knifer's chest.

It jolted him back, but not enough so that I could get away from his knife, lashing out again. All I could do was grab his wrist. It was corded steel and I barely was able to hang on to it as I blocked a vicious left with my own right elbow.

My counter missed. The fellow was faceless in the darkness, but although I had height and weight on him, he had the strength of a python. And the knife. That would give him the edge if he got it free.

But why did he want to kill me? Even as our feet thudded—the only sound of our fierce struggle—the question hammered at me. Why should anyone in this town where I'd arrived scarcely ten minutes before, utterly unknown, want to kill me?

Knuckles glanced off the corner of my jaw and I reached a dimly-seen shoulder with a blow into which I put everything I could. It staggered him—and freed his wrist from my grip! He was free to strike, but for a split-second he teetered off-balance. I dove in to make the most of that instant, found air instead of solid footing.

I'd stepped over the edge of the platform on which I'd forgotten we fought. Arms flailing, I hit ground, rolled,

saw the assassin leap after me panther-like, his blade lifted for the kill.

A gun went off. The knifer went rigid, his eye whites gleaming above me. Then hinges squealed and he whirled away into the darkness.

I shoved hands down on dirt, dazedly, but was only to my knees when the old station agent arrived.

"What's goin on here?" he panted. "Who fired that shot?"

I got legs under me, rose. The station agent's hands were empty. The road he'd crossed was empty and the feed store across the intersecting road was dark and silent. It was from there that the gunshot had pounded, I realized. The depot's door hinges squeal had come only afterward. The old man had seen nothing of the fight.

"Who done that shootin'?" he asked again.

"Maybe you can tell me."

The drone of a car speeding away along the valley road told me that the knifer was now beyond reach. Reporting his attack on me, I knew would merely involve me with the local constabulary and delay, possibly defeat, my mission here.

"Do you folks in these parts, when you're out hunting at night, make it a habit of firing at anything that moves?" I asked.

"Huntin'? So that was it! Must of bin that tarnation Joey Belcher, then, out gunnin' fer skunks, the way he's ben doin' ever since he got the notion he'll make a skunk coat fer his gal. Was he my brat, I'd sure fan him good."

"Fan him!" I growled. "He ought to have the daylight whaled out of him." My gag for excusing the gun-shot had worked. "Look here, Mr.—?"

"Adams. Lem Adams."

"I'm thinking, Mr. Adams, that it's too late for me to try and see Stock tonight." What I really was thinking was that I had no desire whatsoever to climb that black-dark hill road alone now. "I might as well get me a room at this Eagle Inn you mentioned, and talk to him at his shop in the morning."

"Sounds like good horse sense."

"You wouldn't be going up that way soon, would you? I notice you've turned

off the platform lights."

"Yeah. Yeah, now the night train's bin through, I'm lockin' up. Yuh want tuh wait five minutes?"

I accompanied him back to the station and the five minutes stretched to ten and then to fifteen as Adams pattered around in his cubby behind the ticket window, but neither that nor the hardness of the bench on which I waited bothered me much. I had an engrossing puzzle to occupy me.

Two puzzles.

THAT anyone from Montville should have tried to knife me made no sense, but there was an alternative which did. Suppose the man I'd glimpsed dropping from the express car were not the railroad worker I'd presumed him, but someone who'd trailed me from New York. He would not have worried about my noticing him in the first two crowded trains, but he would have been conspicuous in the local's single coach. That would explain why he had kept out of sight in the express car.

I recalled my impression of an eavesdropper as I talked with Adams. I remembered that once or twice during my weary wanderings the night before I'd had the uneasy sensation of eyes on me.

I'd shrugged it off, too miserable to care if I was followed or not. Now, however, it seemed clear that I'd been shadowed ever since I'd left the Night Court where Ann had been arraigned—and that I'd been trailed here to Montville and attacked as soon as it became evident why I'd come there.

This meant that the detective, Dan Carson, had been right in the first place. Ann had not done the actual killing herself. She was shielding the murderer. It was the murderer who'd followed me, who'd tried to kill me when he'd made certain, eavesdropping, that it was Martin Stock I'd come there to talk with.

And this, of course, meant that Stock held the key to the mystery.

"Be ready in two shakes," Adams called.

The second riddle was more difficult. Who had fired the shot that had saved me, and then vanished? No farm youngster out hunting—no one who'd merely

chanced on one stranger in the act of knifing another and had taken a hand—would have failed to show himself. It seemed certain that the gunner was tied in with the rest.

The station's abrupt blacking out stalled me there. Keys jingled and Lem Adams demanded, "Yuh comin', or be yuh figgerin' on sleepin' here?"

"Sorry." I scrambled up. "I hadn't noticed you were set to go."

He locked up, and we started off up the steep slope. It seemed to me that there were fewer lights than before up there. It seemed to me that the black thickets crowding close on either side of the road held a sinister rustle which kept abreast of us.

"Whit kind of chap is this Stock?" I asked.

"Mart? Oh, Mart's steady-goin' enough now. Hard-workin'. Good husband, good father to them four kids he an' Jen's raised. Regular hellion once, though."

I pricked up my ears. "A hellion, Mr. Adams?"

"Shucks, he warn't no worse than the whole passel uh youngsters around here, right after the last war. They sure were a wild bunch, but they settled down when they grew up enough tuh get some sense. Most of 'em, that is. One er two left town two jumps ahead of ruination."

This was ancient history. It could not concern Ann. She was an infant in those days, or not yet born. "World War Two affect Montville's young people the same way?"

"Nope. Mebbe it's our not havin' Prohibition this time thet's made the difference, but they're pretty much all right. We've got a good town to live in now, mister. 'Course, some folks like Hank Dane are forever grouchin' 'bout this political gang thet's got the county sewed up, but I dunno, I guess if it wasn't one gang puttin' two tax dollars in their pockets fer every one they spend on roads an' sech, it'd be another."

Which, I thought but did not say, was the attitude that made so-called good citizens as responsible for corruption as venal politicians.

I meditated how I could bring the talk to Ann Dane without giving myself away, but before I could find an inspiration, the road flattened out into a wide

street running between small white houses, each drowsing in its own hedge-fenced garden. Adams stopped before one of these.

"Wall, this is whar I live. Inn's down yonder, just past the Town Hall."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot and good night," I said, and went on alone.

Literally alone. At ten-thirty of a mid-summer evening a New York street would be teeming. Here I was the only one abroad. Then I heard a footfall, some distance behind me, a footfall loud in the stillness.

I turned in time to glimpse someone duck into the cover of a high hedge a block back.

CHAPTER IV

Fatal Error



T WAS only some belated townsman turning into the path that led to his home. That's what I told myself, but I lengthened my stride till I was all but running. I passed a block of stores shut for the night. I passed the Town Hall's wide stairs that mounted to a col-

umned portico too pretentious for this two-by-four village. Beyond those stairs a narrow flight of steps led down to an open door above which was the sign, JAIL.

Across the street was a building with the sign, EAGLE INN, swinging from its porch. I went up on that porch, across it and through wire-screened double doors into a linoleum-floored lobby.

There was little light in there. No one was behind the counter-like desk. The only living being in evidence was a sandy-haired, rawboned youth in a plaid shirt and dirty white trousers who slouched in a wooden chair, intent on a magazine. I turned to him.

"How does one get a room here?" I asked.

He looked up, blinked startlingly blue eyes at me. "Maw," he bellowed. "Oh, maw," and went back to his reading.

An electric fan, bracketed to a square wooden pillar, whirred monotonously. I drummed impatient fingers on the desk. Then feet shuffled on the stairs angling over the counter. A woman appeared coming down them.

Her straggly hair had been the exact color of the youth's before the gray had begun to thread it, and her eyes were the same vivid blue, but what, in him, was simply bigness, in her, became an odd, disturbing voluptuousness.

She palmed sweat from her glistening forehead, looked across the counter at the youth.

"What is it, Tom?" she asked.

He jerked a thumb at me and mumbled, "He wants a room."

"With bath," I added, "if you have one, Mrs. Stukely."

She accepted my guess at her name without remark. "That'll be eight dollars a week."

"I'll want it only for one night."

"One night will be a dollar and a half."

"Fair enough. I have no bag, so I'll pay in advance."

I got out my wallet and it was an index to the state of my nerves that I jumped and dropped it as a phone bell shrilled into the stillness. The ring was short. It was followed by another, a pause, then three more.

"Ours," Tom grunted and was up and to the wall instrument with a lithe speed that belied his long-limbed gawkiness. He rattled the receiver from its hook, said, "Who is it?"

His mother's fingers touched her lips, and I thought some vague apprehension glimmered at the back of her eyes.

"Yes," her son said tonelessly. "I get it." And then, "Okay, Chief. I'll get right out there."

He hung up, vaulted the desk and stooped behind it, all in one fluid motion. I heard a drawer scrape open. He straightened up, a web belt dangling from his hand. A leather holster was attached to the belt, a revolver butt curving from the holster. As he buckled on the belt I saw the nicked star pinned to it, and its embossed words: Deputy Marshal.

"Trouble, Tom?" Mrs. Stukely asked quietly.

"Bad trouble, maw," he drawled, but

only in his tone was there indolence. "A knifing."

"Who, Tom?"

"Mart Stock."

I recalled the drum of a speeding car down there in the road near the station, recalled that someone had listened in on Adams telling me where Stock lived.

"Jen Stock told Fred," Tom Stukely was explaining, "that they heard a ruction in the henhouse. Mart went out to see if maybe a weasel hadn't got in there. When he didn't come back right away, she went to see why, and found him in the yard with a knife in his back, stone dead."

The attack on me had failed, but I saw now—I would learn nothing from Martin Stock!

TOM STUKELY went into the darkness under the angle made by the stairs and his mother stood looking after him, her fingers at her lips, the apprehension on her face now plain. Somewhere in there a door slammed, and then she turned to me.

She pushed toward me the ball point pen that lay in the center fold of a ledger open on the desk.

"If you'll sign the register, mister, I'll show you to your room."

I scrawled my signature. There no longer was any doubt that I was in danger every minute I remained in town, but I could not leave until I'd at least contacted the Henry Dane whose name was on that print shop. Yet if it became known that I was interested in contacting him, Dane too might be marked for death. Mrs. Stukely turned the register to read what I'd written.

"James Hardy," she read aloud. "New York." Her eyes lifted to my face. "Don't tell me you're the young man Ann Dane married."

I was too startled to deny it. "Why, yes." As far as I knew, Ann had not written anyone in Montville since we met, certainly not since our marriage, and there had been no notice in the papers. "How did you know that?"

"I—I don't dast say." A blush mounted into the woman's cream-tinted, smooth cheeks. "He made me promise not to."

She was obviously embarrassed, and I sensed either a third puzzle involving

Ann, or a clue to one or both of the puzzles with which I already struggled.

"Let me get this straight, Mrs. Stukely," I said. "Someone told you about Ann's marriage and made you promise not to tell anyone he had—is that it?"

"Well, no. That is, he didn't rightly tell me. The way it was, he wasn't around when Len Adams phoned up the telegram from the depot, Saturday, so I wrote it down. When Mr. Chester came in, I gave it to him, and that was when he asked me not to tell anyone about it."

It was something I had to look into, and at once. "Where can I find this Chester?"

"You can't, Mr. Hardy. He checked out right after he got that wire, and he didn't leave any forwarding address." The woman's hand rubbed the ledger page. "He was only here since last Thursday, but I had to air out his room all weekend to rid it of the stink of those cigars he was always smoking."

I thought of the cigar on our living room rug. I thought of the band in our bedroom. . . .

"Aside from that," the woman prattled on, "he was a perfect gentleman, even if he was awful close mouthed about himself."

"Chester," I mused, trying hard to seem only mildly interested. "The name doesn't ring a bell. What did he look like?"

"Kind of heavy set. Dark hair and dark complected. I'd guess he was maybe around fifty."

That settled it. Chester was the corpse under the sheet Detective Dan Carson had lifted yesterday afternoon. I was amazed that I could keep the slightly puzzled frown.

"No," I said evenly. "I don't know him, and I don't recall Ann's ever mentioning the name. Queer that he should have received a wire about her."

"I wouldn't say that," Mrs. Stukely objected. "'Cording to Lem, it was an answer to one Mr. Chester sent Friday. Lem didn't say what that one was, of course."

"Of course not. He knows that would be a Federal offense. Because he's an employe of the communications company," I added hastily. "The law doesn't apply to you, so you can tell me what

was in the telegram you took down over the phone."

She hesitated, then shrugged as if she'd come to the conclusion that having divulged as much as she had, she might as well go the whole hog.

"All it said was, 'Answering your query, find marriage license issued Ann Dane to James Hardy, July twenty-two. Shall we follow up?' Don't tell you much, does it?"

"Not much."

But it did tell me that Chester had employed some professional skip tracing agency to make at least the preliminary move in locating Ann. They always start their searches with an examination of public records like those of the License Bureau.

Ann had given the YWCA as her address on the license application, had notified the Y where she was moving.

"Did Chester drop any hint as to why he was trying to find Ann?" I asked.

"No-o-o. But from the questions he asked around, I got the notion he was interested in the *Courier*. Maybe he was investigating if it would pay to start it up again. If he wanted to, he'd have to get hold of her, wouldn't he?"

"Why?" I exclaimed. "What has Ann to do with the *Courier*?"

AS SOON as I saw the woman's stare, I realized I had made a mistake. I was already dredging my mind for a plausible explanation of my apparent ignorance, when she translated her surprise into words.

"You're her husband, ain't you? How come you don't know she owns the press and the type and all, now her father's passed on?"

That gave me my cue, that and the 'Henry Dane, Prop.' painted on the print shop.

"She doesn't own it yet, Mrs. Stukely," I said. "Not legally. The estate's still held up in the surrogate's office, and any sale would have to wait till it's settled. Which," I added, to forestall any further question, "is why I'm here, to try and hurry along the settlement."

I had plenty to think about now, and I knew I had to put a stop to these questions before I made another slip.

"Gosh," I yawned, "but I'm tired. How

about that room before I go to sleep on my feet?"

The woman started to say something, but changed her mind. She turned to the rack of keys behind her, took one from its hook.

The upstairs room to which she led me was a corner one, neatly furnished and almost comfortable despite the heat because of four screened windows open to the faint breeze that stirred their curtains. Two of the windows overlooked the street along which I'd come. The other two faced the Town Hall on the opposite corner. In the bathroom was a tub and a nicked showerhead goose-necking over it.

That was what I needed. Desperately. The moment she left me, I shucked out of my sweat-sodden clothes in nothing flat, padded into the bathroom and turned on the shower's cold tap full force.

I felt more like a human being when five minutes later, I finally stepped from the tub and started a brisk rubdown with the Turkish towel I lifted from its bar.

"Maw ain't going to like it," a voice drawled, "if you get the floor in here all slopped up like that."

The towel taut across my back, I stared at Tom Stukely, his shoulder propped against the frame of the bathroom door.

"Go on and finish drying yourself," he told me, "and then come out here. We've got some questions that we'd like to ask you."

"Tell him to make it fast," someone in the room behind Tom growled. "We ain't got all night."

The shower had deafened me to the rattle of the key and the entrance of these intruders. I dabbed the rest of the wet from my skin, knotted the towel around my middle and went out into the bedroom.

"That's him," Lem Adams squealed. "It's him, all right."

A nightshirt was stuffed into the old station agent's frayed trousers. They flapped around ankles bare above broken-backed carpet slippers, and he was fairly dancing with excitement.

"That's the feller was askin' me all them questions about Mart Stock," he jabbered. "Didn't yuh? Didn't yuh tell me yuh'd come all the way from Noo Yawk tuh see him?"

"I certainly did. Is that a crime in this state?"

"No." It was the third man in the room who answered me. Wearing a rumpled gray seersucker suit, he was tall and cadaverously thin. "It ain't no crime, but when a man who's been all-fired anxious to talk to someone don't blink an eye when he hears that man's been murdered, it calls for investigation."

"And who," I asked with what dignity my lack of clothes permitted, "are you?"

"Mowery." He jerked his coat open to show me the star pinned to his emerald-green suspender. "Fred Mowery, marshal of this township. It's your hard luck that Lem listened in on the line when I called my deputy at the inn here, an' then hurried over to tell me about you lookin' for Mart."

So I owed this visitation to a rural party line and an old codger's curiosity about his neighbors' affairs.

"Did Adams also tell you that I was with him in the station or on the road when Stock was killed?" I asked.

"He did," Mowery acknowledged. "Which is why I figured there was no rush about gettin' to you. But that was only till Mrs. Stukely called Mart's house and told Tom about the fairy story you handed her."

Tom Stukely chuckled. "You almost had Maw believing you were this Hardy that Ann Dane married—till you pulled that phoney about old Hank's estate not being settled yet. Maw knew full well the whole kit and caboodle was turned over to Ann before she went to New York."

CHAPTER V

Ley del Fuego



MY ONLY way out of this mess was to come through with the truth. I knew that then. I hitched the towel tighter around my hips.

"All right," I conceded. "I was embarrassed to admit that I know very little about my wife's business, but I am James Hardy."

"Sure," Mowery leered. "Like I'm

Harry Truman."

"I can easily prove it." I stepped to the bed, picked up my jacket and slid a hand into its inside breast pocket.

I felt only sweat-damp cloth. The pocket was empty.

"Is this what you're looking for?" The marshal held up my wallet.

"That's it." I recalled, now, dropping it on the desk downstairs when the phone had rung. The shock of hearing that Stock had been knifed had wiped it from my mind completely. "If you'll look in it you'll find cards and a letter or two that should convince you I'm James Hardy."

Something about Mowery's grim smile reminded me of the city detective, Sergeant Dan Carson.

"We have looked into it, mister," Mowery said. "We found forty-three bucks and the return half of a two-way ticket from New York. An' that's all." He shoved the wallet back into his own side pocket. "Okay. We've got a murder on our hands and the trail's gettin' colder every minute we listen to your lies. Maybe that's what you're after. Maybe that's why you shoved this pocketbook under the register. Well, you ain't gettin' away with it!"

His lips thinned into cruel lines in the narrow wedge of his face. "We're scootin' right back to Furnacebrook Road, but we ain't leavin' you here. We're stowin' you safe in the lockup. If you're smart, you'll decide by the time we're ready to deal with you that your best play is to tell us who knifed Mart Stock, an' why?"

"And," Tom Stukely put in, "since you've been doing so much talking about Ann Dane, maybe you'll tell us what you know about her father shooting himself last March."

The coat dropped from my hold. "Ann's father shot himself?" My voice was unrecognizable even to myself. "How? Why?"

"We ain't never found out." Lem Adams put in. "All we know is Hank was workin' late that night, an' when Ann drove down tuh fetch him home, she found him dead as a doornail, with that little pearl-handled pistol he give her to scare off tramps layin' right thar on his desk."

It thudded into my midriff like a two hundred pound tackler's shoulder, that 'little pearl-handled pistol he give her.' It stunned me beyond protesting at Mowery's curt order to get dressed.

I was only vaguely aware of being taken downstairs and across the street, of being handed over to someone who met us at the jail door, of being shoved into an unlighted cell.

I didn't hear what anyone said. I heard only Lieutenant John Struthers' soft voice murmuring, inside my head, "*The wound was made by a low-caliber bullet, probably from a small pistol such as some women carry.*"

THE dark cell reeked of disinfectant, and its heat was thick, all but tangible. My clothing had absorbed all the moisture it could. As I paced endlessly, the sweat trickled down my ribs and was clammy on my aching thighs.

I knuckled my throbbing brow and thought. They had no legal right to hold me, I knew. I reached the mattressless shelf that served as a bunk and turned and started across the four foot strip of stone floor for the hundred and first time. I would be out of there in the morning, and then I would go to work on the Stukelys.

I worked out that much in an hour of pacing. The fact that Mrs. Stukely had failed to ask me for her dollar and a half before taking me upstairs had given me the clue. She hadn't wanted to remind me of my wallet, and lose her chance to examine it.

She was the only one who could have taken my identifications from it unobserved.

Granted that premise, the rest followed logically. Mrs. Stukely had phoned Stock's house, out on Furnacebrook Road, to warn her son, Tom, that Ann Dane's husband was in town. Marshal Mowery had asked Tom who it was that called. Knowing what Lem Adams had told his chief, Tom had told Mowery it was his mother—but gave only enough of her message to send the marshal to the inn to question me.

All of which meant that the Stukelys were deeply involved in the mystery that had brought me here, probably were at

the heart of it. Well, I thought, pacing, I'll break them wide open in the morning. I'll—Hold everything! A new thought halted me in the middle of the cell floor.

Mrs. Stukely's stunt with my wallet could have had only one purpose, to land me in here and gain time for themselves. It still was barely midnight. If I waited till morning to tell my story, the Stukelys would have had a full night to hide their connection with the murders or put miles between themselves and pursuit.

I must get hold of the marshal right now, and I must do it, somehow, without Tom Stukely getting wind of it.

The only way I could reach Mowery was through the jailer. But would the jailer help me? I tried to recall what the jailer looked like, but could not. I hadn't slept for forty hours. I'd just learned that Ann owned a pistol like the one with which Chester was slain, and that a bullet from the same weapon had killed Ann's father. With those things on my mind, I'd been aware of the jailer only as a gruff voice and rough hands shoving me into this barred and stinking cubicle.

But what difference did it make what he was like? I had to depend on him. Still uneasy, I went to the cell door and grasped its rusty bars. I froze then, my heart sledge-hammering my ribs.

The door had moved to the pressure of my hands. It was not locked. The bolt of its antiquated, clumsy lock had not quite shot home when I was thrust in there.

The realization was like a whiff of ammonia, clearing my foggy head. This changed the picture. I might not now have to chance that the jailer might be in cahoots with the Stukelys. Tom Stukely probably was still with Mowery out there on Furnacebrook Road with his mother alone in the inn right across the street. If I could get to her unseen, perhaps could force her to tell me the truth about what was going on in this town. The truth about Ann.

A blank brick wall, its whitewash gray with dust film, faced me from across the corridor. Any other cells must be on the same side as mine. I could not see them, but I'd heard nothing to indicate that they were occupied. I heard nothing to

indicate that anyone stirred anywhere near.

I pressed the cell door outward. Slowly. When the opening was just wide enough to permit it, I squeezed through.

I'd been right about the other cells. The two ranged alongside mine were empty except for the striped shadows slanted into them by a single small bulb in the corridor. Just beyond where the bulb hung by its fly crusted wire, the passage right-angled away from the cells.

BREATH locked in my throat, I prowled toward that corner—went rigid again, flattening against the wall. From around the corner there had come to me the rasp of shoe leather on the stone floor. I heard it again. Then I realized—what I'd heard was not a footfall. It was a snore!

Sliding eyes past the corner, I looked into a room dimly illumined by the bulb above my head. The room held file cases, a wooden mourner's bench, a couple of desks. On the desk nearer the entrance a man's head was cradled on his arms, and it was he who snored.

No one else was in there.

I blessed the sultry heat that made an oven of the Town Hall's basement. The door straight ahead was fastened open to admit whatever breeze might be stirring, and through it I could see the short flight of wooden steps that mounted to the sidewalk.

The snore rose again, ended in a whistle. The next time it came, I was past the desk and climbing the steps, grateful that on one side at least I was screened by the casing wall of the stairs. Then a hoarse exclamation whirled me around from the top step.

In the doorway out of which I'd just emerged was the same squat, black figure I'd seen earlier on the porch of the print shop near the station, the same uplifted arm with metal glinting from its fist. This time, however, it was a revolver's barrel instead of a knife. And this time the killer did not have to get close enough for me to have a fighting chance. Nor be silent.

"Escapin', are yeh?" he rasped. "Not so long's Kurt Gaddin's got a gun." And

he moved out from the threshold to make certain of his aim.

His weapon steadied—then arced away as the edge of a hand chopped down on his wrist. A fist slammed against the base of his skull. It was not my hand nor my fist. A shadow had dropped from the stair wall above us and struck almost before it had alighted!

Gaddin's eyes glazed and he crumpled, but I heard only the thud, did not see him hit the ground. I was gaping at the chunky features of Detective Sergeant Dan Carson as he sprang up the steps and grabbed my arm.

"Let's go, Hardy," he gasped. "We've got to make tracks before we're spotted and I lose my badge."

I ran with him around the corner and along the hall's sidewall, then across a dirt road into a thicket whose brambles slashed at us as we crashed through them. Blackness closed around us. Carson dragged me to a halt.

"Far enough," he panted. "Till I catch my breath, anyways."

I listened, taut, fighting for breath myself. I heard only the shrill antiphony of the cicadas. I heard no shout, no trample of pursuing feet. The jailer must still be dead to the world. "He—he faked being asleep," I said. "He deliberately left the cell door unlocked so I'd try to get out, and give him an excuse to kill me."

"So that's the way he worked it," Carson rumbled. "I figured it was something like that when I saw he was going to gun you down without giving you a chance to surrender." He spat disgustedly. "I been told they got a name for it down in South America. The *ley del fuego*."

"The law of the escape," I translated, shuddering. "The police in this town are rotten, all right. They were all in on this thing, not only Gaddin and Stukey, but also the marshal himself. That's why Mowery hauled me off to the lockup without bothering to finish questioning me."

I turned to the blacker bulk in the blackness, that was all I could make out of my rescuer.

"If you hadn't been—" I broke off suddenly as the realization came through

to me. "What in the name of all that's holy were you doing there on the stairs of a Town Hall a million miles from your bailiwick?"

"Not on the stairs, son. On a bench up atop them, behind those columns. It was good and dark there and I figured it was a swell spot from where I could watch for what was going to happen to you next." Carson's chuckle was unamused. "You're more trouble to me than all my money, Hardy. This makes the second time tonight I've had to haul you off a hot spot."

"The second time!" A great light dawned. "Then it was you who fired that shot down there by the station!"

"Check."

I waited for him to go on, but he did not. I had to ask, "What brought you to Montville in the first place?"

"You, son." He groaned. "I swear the next time somebody rides on a camp chair in an express car, it won't be me. I'm getting too old for stuff like that." I heard him laugh softly in the darkness. "But you did give Tony Luccio a worse workout last night. You ought to see the way he was dragging his tail when he reported in to me this morning and told me how you'd led him on a goose chase through half of New York."

CHAPTER VI

Shot in the Dark



PIECES began to fall into the puzzle. The eyes I'd felt on me then, as I'd wandered the torrid city streets had been those of a police shadower. The man I'd seen drop from the train when I'd arrived in Montville was Detective Sergeant Dan Carson of New York's

Homicide Squad.

"We figured," Carson was explaining, "that your wife might have tipped you where she'd ditched that pistol. Matter of fact, that was why we let you talk to her back here in that bedroom, so's maybe you would lead us to it."

A bush thrashed as he plucked a leaf from it. "When the copper who relieved Tony, tailing you, phoned me from Penn Station that you'd bought a ticket to your wife's home town, I decided I'd better follow you myself and find out what she'd sent you here to do for her."

"Ann didn't send me here," I said. "It was my own idea to come here and try and dig up something that might help her."

"Just on the off-chance you could?"

"Just on the off-chance."

Carson made a disgusted sound in his throat. He put his hand on my shoulder. "Listen, Jim," he said. "You can't stop us from putting your wife in the chair if she did this killing, but if she didn't, we're just as anxious to clear her as you are. But you can make it hard for us to clear her. You might make it impossible if you hold things back from us. So if you've got the sense I think you have, you'll tell me what you expected to get out of this Martin Stock who was knifed to keep him from talking to you."

Carson could know that only if he were the man who'd listened behind the station door. An elusive pattern was forming beneath the surface of my mind.

"And—" Carson's quiet, urging voice kept me from concentrating on that pattern—"you'll tell me what you did find out in spite of Stock's being bumped."

"What makes you think I found out anything?"

"Gaddin's pulling that *ley del fuego* stunt on you. It means you're mighty close to something. And if you keep it to yourself it's liable to die with you yet."

I was convinced. "I did learn a little," I said, "but I still can't see how it ties to Ann. Suppose I start at the beginning. Maybe you can figure it out."

I started with my spotting the Flor de Amazone cigar band, went right through to the moment when the cell door had moved under my hands. Carson interrupted me only twice.

The first time was when I told of learning the dead man's name, Chester.

"Yeah," he rumbled. "Steve Chester. We got the FBI report on his fingerprints just before I took out after you. Used to be quite a hand with the con-

crete foot-baths back there in the hooch-running days, but since he finished his last stretch in Leavenworth, all they've got on him is suspicion—but no proof—that he now and then does an odd job of gun work."

The other comment came when I told of my despoiled wallet and my certainty that the Stukelys were somewhere tied in near the heart of the web.

"That's pretty thin figuring, Hardy," Carson said. "You'd never make it stick in court."

"Why not? Who else but the woman had a chance to get at my wallet?"

"Kurt Gaddin. Just about when the windows of your room upstairs lit up, I saw him duck in the lobby below. Mrs. Stukely couldn't have had time to get back down there before he popped out again and scooted across to the jail. With no prisoners there, and these woods handy, he could also be the bird who tried to knife you and did knife Stock.

"Which," he added, "leaves the Stukelys and Mowrey clean. That's the way I like my cases, as simple as I can strip 'em down."

"Simple," I snorted, and went on. As I finished my story the dark design had come clear at last, incomplete but distinct, and so incredible that I dared not put it in words, but waited for something from Carson that would tell me he saw it too.

It didn't come. Instead, his head cocked to the noises that shattered the black silence of the thicket—the hiss of steam, the clack of wheels on steel rails.

"You ever hop a freight, Jim?" he asked.

"Why no. I—"

"Well, you're going to hop that one." He was plunging down toward the railroad at the foot of the hill and I followed, perforce. "That train is going back the way we came, and we're going with it."

"What about Gaddin?"

"The devil with him! Let the Pennsylvania cops take care of their own murders. Me, I've got one in New York to worry about."

THE box car racketed through the sultry night. "This danged hard

floor's killing me," Dan Carson grumbled. "This is my last case, I swear. I swear I'm going to put in for retirement the minute I get back to Headquarters."

He shifted, growling. Then, "I was the only one tailing you, Jim. If there had been anyone else, I'd have been sure to spot him. Yet this Gaddin was waiting to knife you when you arrived and when he missed, he took right out after Stock. He must have been tipped off by phone from New York that you were coming, and who you were coming to talk to. Who in New York knew it?"

"My partner, George Loring," I said heavily. Miss Evans also knew it, but to think she was involved was, on the face of it, ridiculous. "Only George Loring."

"Which means that it's Loring who bumped Chester."

"It can't be!" Yet it was the conclusion to which I'd already been forced, but still couldn't accept. "Loring was in the office talking to me at four o'clock. Ann told us that Chester was shot in our flat at a little after three-thirty, and your medical examiner confirmed it. Loring's alibi is as ironclad as mine."

"The devil it is! You went home by subway and it took you a half hour, but he made it in his car in less than twenty minutes. It wouldn't take him any longer going the other way. Your boss is the killer."

And that meant Ann was his accomplice, shielding him. After all—the thought hammered—I had only Loring's word for it that he and Ann had known one another only since the party where I'd met her, and that it was at his wife's invitation that she'd come to that party.

"I don't get it," I mumbled. "Ann was only in New York a couple of months, and as far as I know Loring's never been in Montville."

"As far as you know." The detective understood what was running in my mind. "Do you know where he came from originally. How do you know it wasn't from Montville?"

"If it was," I said, "he must have left there years ago, before Ann was born." The phrase seemed to click. I remembered when I'd thought it before, and a few more lines of the murder pattern came clear. "Look, Dan. The station

agent, Lem Adams, told me something about a wild bunch of youngsters who used to raise hell around Montville right after World War I. He said that Stock was one of them, and that some of the others left town, back at that time, under a cloud."

"It could be Loring was one of them."

"And you just told me Chester was mixed up with bootlegger gangs about that same time," I went on. The nape of my neck was puckering with excitement. "Couldn't that be the tie-up? Suppose Loring got in a mess when he was a youngster, that if it were revealed even now would ruin him. Suppose Chester knew about it, and turned up to blackmail him, and got killed instead. Does that make sense, or doesn't it?"

Detective Carson swore softly. "It makes plenty of sense, son. Especially if Stock knew about this thing too, so Loring was afraid you might pull it out of Stock if you ever got to him."

"Loring tried to keep me from going to Montville," I recalled. "He tried to get me to let him send a private investigator there. He wouldn't have, of course. It looks as if you're right, Dan. It looks very much as if it was George Loring who fired the shot that killed Steve Chester, but with what we've got, we'll never pin it on him."

"And he's too downy an old bird to have left anything around that will. Except what that little wife of yours knows, and she won't talk."

The bottom of my stomach dropped away. I'd succeeded only in tightening the noose around Ann's neck. Under New York law, a murderer's accomplice suffers the same penalty as the killer himself.

"But maybe I can outsmart him," Carson was saying, "with your help. Like this."

He went on to outline his scheme, and I could not refuse my part in it. To do so would be to admit I was convinced of Ann's guilt. I could only hope against all logic, that the scheme would not work and that in proving George Loring innocent, it would somehow also absolve Ann.

We stopped over at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's capital, while Carson visited

State Police Headquarters, and then made a call to New York. It was not until nine Wednesday evening that I dialed George Loring's home number. It was his wife who answered.

"You're back, Jim!" she exclaimed.

"You—Did you find out anything in Montville?"

"How do you know I've been to Montville?"

I heard her breath whisper in the mouthpiece. "Oh," she said. "I had lunch with George yesterday and he told me you were going there. I hate to disturb him, Jim. Can't you give me the message?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Loring." My voice was flat with exhaustion. "I'm afraid what I have to say can be said only to him."

"Just a minute, then."

IT SEEMED more than a minute. It seemed unconscionably long before I heard Loring's hearty, "Jim, my boy. Where are you?"

"In a booth in Penn Station. I just got in."

"Did you learn anything from—er—the person you were to contact?"

Stock, he meant. He meant to convey that he didn't know Martin Stock was dead.

"I couldn't reach him, sir," I said. Or did—Loring really not know it? Was he innocent of any guilty knowledge? "But I did find out something I'm not sure I'm justified in keeping from the police. May I come out and talk it over with you?"

"We-e-ll—" He hesitated. "Frankly, Jim, we've a couple in for bridge and Rose would be upset if I broke up the foursome. You understand."

My fingers tightened on the phone. "I suppose it can wait till tomorrow," I yielded, dispiritedly. "I'll take a room at the hotel behind the station here, and—"

"Why go to a hotel?" Loring broke in. "Why not taxi home where you can get a change of clothes before you come down to the office?"

"You forget" I pointed out, "that the police sealed the flat and left a guard to make sure no one could get at the missing gun if it was still there somewhere."

"That's all over," Loring answered. "Lieutenant Struthers phoned this afternoon and left word that you're free to go home whenever you wish." He cleared his throat. "I'll tell you what, my boy. I'll call there for you on my way downtown, at about nine. And now you'll have to excuse me. They're waiting for me to deal."

I hung up. I looked at Dan Carson and said, dully, "He made sure I'd sleep here in the flat."

"I figured he would. Now how about your getting some sleep? You look dead for it."

I was. Undressing, dropping heavily into the bed that two nights ago I'd shared with Ann, I was certain I'd not be able to close my eyes. But fatigue welled up in me like a gray tide and washed me into oblivion.

When my lids came unglued, night still filled the room. The luminous hands of the alarm clock on the dresser showed ten minutes after two.

The phone bell shrilled, out in the foyer.

I swung bare feet to the floor, heaved up from the bed. The ringing stopped as I started out there to answer it, began again as I stumbled through the door into the living room and past the sofa where the sheet-covered corpse had lain. Chill fingers grabbed my ankles and pulled them from under me.

I seemed to fall for an eternity, my larynx clamped on terror.

"Play dead," Carson whispered, urgently. "Stall him." He squirmed out from under the sofa where he'd lain hidden for hours. "And thank your lucky stars I tumbled to how he'd crossed us up, ringing the phone to get you out here."

He crawled away from me fast, keeping below the window sills. "If I hadn't pulled you down, he'd have potted you from across the court, just like he did Chester."

Carson got past the second window, sprang to his feet and dove into the foyer where the phone's shrilling finally had stopped. Motionless on the floor, I watched him snatch open the hall door, and, as he closed it behind him softly for all his haste, I was sending to Ann in

her prison a silent plea for forgiveness.

Chester had been shot through the window which was open just above me, and Ann had never glimpsed the killer, had not from the foyer even heard the crack of his pistol. The trap in which I'd played bait not only had caught George Loring, but had proved Ann's story true to the last incredible detail.

My hint, when I'd phoned him, that I'd learned something, which he must keep me from taking to the police, had brought him here, but not quite as we'd figured. He'd gone to that other suite instead, dialed my number and hurried to the window to be ready to fire as I came out of the bedroom and across his sights. I— The door buzzer let go at that moment.

That must be Dan Carson, I thought. He'd nabbed Loring and was bringing him in here. I could get up now without fear of a bullet in my brain.

I padded to the door, opened it. The knob slipped from my fingers and I stepped back, gaping dry-mouthed at George Loring, not with Detective Carson—but alone!

HE CAME in and closed the door firmly behind him. His hand buried itself in the sidepocket of his double-breasted tropical jacket. His look probed past me into the living room, and there was light enough to show me the relief that came into his face. The lines that cut deeply about his mouth, the shadows under his eyes, were new since I last had seen him.

"Surprised, Jim?" he asked.

I swallowed. "Can you blame me?"

"Hardly. It is very late." His smile was haggard. "We played till after one, and my friends couldn't get a taxi, so I offered to drive them home. When I left them I recalled how dreadfully disappointed you'd sounded at having to wait till morning to tell me what you'd learned in Montville, so I decided to come and get it over with."

You evaded Carson somehow, I thought, and figured you still can kill me and escape down the fire ladder outside the bedroom window. You'll drop into the arms of the man Carson posted down there in case we slipped up, but

that won't do me any good. I'll be dead.

"Before I forget it," Loring was saying, "there's something Ann asked me to get out of her trunk."

My brows knitted. "What trunk?" If he wanted to stall. I was only too happy to play along. Every second's delay brought nearer the moment when Carson would give up the hunt and return. "Ann didn't have anything with her except some valises and a hatbox."

"Correct. The trunk would have crowded her room at the Y, so she stored it. But it was delivered here yesterday morning, and when the police guard phoned me for instructions, I asked him to accept it and put it in the bedroom."

I remembered now seeing it in there when I'd undressed, but I'd been too exhausted for it to make much impression.

"What does Ann want out of it? I asked.

"An envelope containing some papers she thinks have some bearing on her case." The lump Loring's fist made in his pocket jerked. "We're wasting time, Jim."

There was nothing for me to do save turn and start into the bedroom. I went as slowly as I dared. George Loring's feet whispering on the rug behind me and my spine crawling with the feel of the weapon bearing on it. I realized the setup. The business about the trunk was to get me as far from the door as possible, so the shot would not be heard in the hall outside. When I reached the bedroom, it would be death for me. Period. But maybe I could spin out the time a little longer.

"I'm glad you decided not to wait till morning, sir." I managed to make the remark sound casual. "I've been lying awake, trying to puzzle out something I was told in Montville that apparently involves you in this affair."

"Involves me?" The sharp exclamation told me Loring had stopped short. "Directly?"

"Not quite," I picked up the cue as I came around to him. "But I hardly think you want my informant to repeat it to the authorities." He dared not fire now until he learned who had talked to me, so that he could arrange to have him silenced too. "I hope for your sake," I

went on, with no clear intent except to keep him psychologically off-balance, "that you can convince me I should not take it to the police myself."

The ribboned pince nez dropped from his nose. "I didn't expect this from you, Jim. I didn't think you capable of blackmail."

Blackmail! Did he really think he could buy me off—when he'd used Ann as a pawn in his murder plot? When he'd tried to have me killed, and had tried to kill me himself?

"What the devil are you driving at?" I demanded.

"You know," he said easily. "You've read the papers in Ann's trunk, the evidence she took from her father's desk and his typewriter when she found him dead." There it was. The gap in the murder pattern, Ann's place in it, was filled in. "Even if she could not quite bring herself to burn them, she had the decency to make certain no one else would see the article that would destroy, for a youthful error, one who has lived in honor for years." Only Chester's role, the thing that had brought him here to his death, was as yet unclear and Loring's next words threw a light on that. "To you, those papers meant only a chance to line your pockets." His sigh was heartfelt. "Very well, Hardy. How much are you asking for those papers and your silence?"

"How much?" The wrath that made me forget this man held my life at his mercy was the more overwhelming because I'd so admired him, once almost loved him. "You haven't enough," I said. "I'm turning that evidence over to the police, and you with them."

"I don't think you will."

His hand came out of his pocket and I leaped for him. My headlong tackle pounded him down. I kned his soft belly, raised a fist to smash his face. Held it, staring incredulously at what I'd jolted from his hand.

A screwdriver! Nothing more lethal than a stubby screwdriver from a car's kit—a tool with which to force the lock of a trunk!

It was at that moment the buzzer sounded again. I don't recall getting to the door or opening it, but I shall never

forget what I saw when I got it open.

I'd expected Dan Carson, of course. I'd half expected the plainclothesman whom he'd posted in the backyard. But between them—and obviously their prisoner—was Rose Loring!

CHAPTER VII

Payoff



ROSE, in her crisply-ironed white summer frock, her head held proudly high, still seemed the gracious hostess of those parties in Rosedale, but on her always immaculate arms and on her meticulously tended hands were smudges of iron rust.

"By the time I'd picked the lock and got into her flat," Carson explained, quite needlessly, "she was going down the fire escape. Al Simmons here grabbed her and brought her back up."

All of which had taken time enough for Loring to come to an empty landing and be admitted by me.

"Looks as if I had his thing figured wrong" Dan Carson sighed, "in more ways than one. I told you I'm getting too old for this job."

Speechless, but with my thoughts racing, I pulled the door wider and the three came in. I closed the door, and Simmons switched on the foyer light. I turned to Carson.

"I don't get this, Dan," I said. "There must be some mistake."

"We took this off her, Jim," Dan Carson told me, holding out a bunched handkerchief in which nested a small nicked pistol. "Five will get you ten that the bullet we took out of Chester's brain came from this gun."

I would lose that bet, I knew. I felt physically sick, seeing the whole thing now, seeing it clear.

"George!" Rose Loring exclaimed. "You here!" Loring came into the archway from the living room, halted there, his eyes on the weapon in Carson's hand. "I thought," Rose went on, "that you

were going to stop and look over the brief Foster Randall was telling you about during the game."

Loring looked at his wife, his eyes miserable. "I suggested that Foster bring it to the office tomorrow, my dear." His right arm was behind his back in his habitual pose when pondering some difficult legal question, but the fat manila envelope in his left hand told me that he'd opened Ann's trunk. "Then I came here to see what I could do with Jim Hardy, as I promised you I would."

"You said you'd talk to him in the morning, George." For the moment, she'd forgotten our presence. "I was sure you would be at the Randall's long enough for me to—"

"Please, Rose," Loring interrupted. "Let me handle this." It was the attorney's usual admonition to a client about to say too much, but it held a note of tender sadness. "I'll do the talking for you."

"You will not," Dan Carson said harshly. "She'll talk for herself. Go on, Mrs. Loring. What did you think you'd have time to do before your husband got back from these Randalls?"

Now she was aware of the detective again and suddenly there was no expression on her face. Her hand made a little gesture of appeal, of despair, and she swayed, might have fallen had I not sprung to her and eased her down into the same highbacked chair where Ann had sat.

Something of the same pity I'd felt for Ann welled up in me for this woman, out of whom all the fine pride had drained. Less to accuse her than to protect her from Carson's bludgeoning dawned on me when I'd seen the iron rust on her arms.

"You're the one who was born in Montville, Mrs. Loring," I said. "Not your husband, but you."

She looked up at me, her eyes grateful. "Yes, Jim." I could barely hear her. "George was never there."

And it was something that happened long ago, before you left there, that Chester found out about, and it was that which led you to kill him and to attempt to kill me tonight."

"It wasn't Chester who found it out.

Not as first." Her hand opened in her lap, as if relinquishing something that it had held too long. "It was Henry Dane who found it out first. Henry Dane, back in Montville, was the first one I killed."

Loring groaned. His wife's white look fled to him, and the smile that quivered on her lips was more poignant than tears.

I didn't tell you that when Jim called tonight, George," she told him. "I told you only what was in those papers Ann had in her trunk."

I wanted to let it drop there. Ann was safely out of this thing, and for what Rose Loring had done to us, her agony was punishment enough. But the law would not have it so.

Carson, thrusting forward, would not let it rest there, so I said, gently, "Tell us the rest, Mrs. Loring. Tell us the whole story."

SHE told it, not to us, but to her husband—an explanation, a plea for forgiveness. The tale concerned a teen-age country girl, caught in the toils of post-war disillusionment and the disrespect for law spawned by Prohibition, and an older youth who led her on.

"Kurt Gaddin wasn't good looking, but he had what we called 'It.' When he picked me for his steady I thought myself the luckiest girl in Mont County."

She still thought herself lucky when she discovered that the car in which Gaddin took her for long night rides was loaded with illegal liquor, that he was using her as a cloak for his bootlegging. That was exciting. It was fun—till the night they were almost caught and escaped only after a running fight that came breathlessly near ending in murder. She made a break then. She came to New York, met and married George Loring and with him started to build a good life.

The break was not clean enough. She kept secretly in touch with Gaddin. He wrote her how the old bunch had settled down. He did not write her that others, himself included, had become cogs in the corrupt political machine that had Mont County by the throat. Not, that is, till the frantic letter which had come last March. Her old schoolmate Henry

Dane, this said, had raked up the old story and was planning to stir up the county people against the machine by publishing the unsavory history of its henchmen.

The piece, Gaddin wrote, would mention only her maiden name, but everybody in town of her generation knew whom she'd married. The story was sure to reach New York, one way or another.

"It would ruin you, George. You got most of your practice from the people in our social set, and they wouldn't have anything to do with the husband of a woman like me."

Feminine reasoning perhaps—the falsity of which her husband would have demonstrated if she'd gone to him—but she did not. She'd driven out to Montville, in her own car, to plead with Dane. Reaching there about midnight, she'd found the editor in his office, writing the article. He may have been threatened, he may merely have been cautious, at any rate the door was locked and when he admitted her, she'd seen a small pearl-handled pistol lying handy on his desk. When he refused to yield to her pleading, she snatched this up.

"I meant only to try and scare him with it, George, but he grabbed for it. It went off, and I saw that I'd killed him."

The pistol dropped from her gloved fingers and she ran out, panic-stricken, only to blunder into a burly stranger on the porch.

"Thanks for doing my job for me," the latter leered. "Only you forgot to bring the papers." He started in to get them, was halted by the sound of a car coming down the hill road fast.

"That must have been Ann!" I exclaimed, breaking in on Rose Loring. "Coming to get her father to come home. The stranger was Chester. The big shots in that political gang hired Chester to kill Dane and destroy the evidence he'd collected. You beat Chester to the printshop only by a minute or so."

"Cut it, Jim," Carson growled. "Let her tell it."

Chester hustled her into her own car, Rose Loring resumed, took the wheel and did not stop until they were miles away.

"I lose what I was going to get for this

job, Mrs. Loring," he said then. Skulking outside the office, Chester had heard Rose tell Dane who she was. "But you'll make it up to me. You'll hear from me soon." And with that, he leaped from the car and vanished.

By the time she did hear from Chester again, Kurt Gaddin had written her about the editor's apparent suicide, and that nothing pertaining to the exposé had been found. She was safe. She sent the would-be blackmailer about his business, but could not relax. Those papers still existed somewhere, and as long as they existed they were a threat to her.

"Ann had them," I interrupted again, recalling what Loring had said to me. "Being the kind she is, Ann couldn't endure the thought of anyone's being ruined by follies of their adolescence, so she hid them. And when she came to New York," I continued, "she came and told you that you needn't worry. No one would ever read them."

"Yes. That was what this little gray-eyed girl had done for me, and I'd killed her father. The only way I could make amends was to do for her everything that her father and her mother could have done, and more."

The invitation to the party where I'd met Ann was the first step in this program. When she knew that we would marry, Mrs. Loring bought this house—secretly and with her own private funds—to provide us with a home. To enable her to keep close watch over Ann's happiness, she arranged to have the suite across the court held for herself, under a false name.

MONDAY afternoon she'd driven here to help Ann get settled, and had seen Chester climbing the stoop.

"He had just about enough time to locate Ann," I whispered to Carson, "after leaving Montville. He'd dug out what had happened there. Now he was after the papers so he could use them to renew his demand for hush money."

"I knew," Rose Loring was saying, "I'd never be free of him till he was dead." From the car's glove compartment she'd taken the pistol Loring insisted she keep there for protection when driving alone, and hurried up to the vacant flat.

From its window she'd watched Chester sneak into the bedroom, while Ann was at the phone, obviously to make a hasty search for what he was after. And when he came out, Rose shot him.

It was not till her husband came home late that night that she learned how much trouble this had brought to Ann. And then he told her about my going to Montville to question Stock, whom she knew had been with her and Gaddin on that last wild ride. Afraid that I'd dig this out of him, she'd phoned Gaddin to keep me from Stock at all costs, and the latter had obeyed her all too literally.

Rose Loring did not know about the murder of Stock, but the way I'd spoken to her when I'd phoned tonight had convinced her I'd uncovered the past she was frantically trying to hide. If I went to the police with it, they would trace one or both of her killings to her. She was faced with the choice of silencing me or dying in the chair herself.

The choice she made was, all things considered, inevitable. "Okay," Dan Carson said as she finished her confession. "Let's go. I'm taking you in."

"No," George Loring said. "You're not taking her anywhere." His hand came from behind his back and this time it did hold a gun—a small, pearl-handled pistol. "I found this in Ann Hardy's trunk and it occurred to me that I might have a use for it. Please do not move, any of you, or I shall be compelled to put it to that use."

Simmons' arm lifted toward his coat's opening. "No!" Carson barked. "No, Al," and Simmons' arm dropped.

"That was wise," Loring sighed. "Rose. Please go to the door and hold it open." She pushed up, her eyes shining, and obeyed. "Jim," Loring said to me, "Be good enough to ask Mr. Folsom to take over any matters I have pending. I shall not be down to the office for some time."

He circled us, the pistol wary. Abruptly he was through the door, and it had slammed shut on him and his wife.

"Cripes, Dan," Simmons exploded. "I could have plugged him if you'd have

let me grab out my shoulder gun. Suppose he did fire that popgun first. It wouldn't have hurt me."

"It's killed one man already," Carson replied, heavily. "What was the use your getting the same dose when those Loring's won't get any farther than the cops I got hiding under the stairs down below, with orders to let anybody in that wants in, but nobody out unless I give the word?"

He plodded to the corner and picked up the phone. "I got to let Harrisburg know the State cops they got watching Kurt Gaddin can pick him up now without upsetting any applecarts here." He yawned. "Gosh, I'm sleepy. I'm getting too old to be staying up this late."

WHEN they'd released Ann and I'd brought her home, I asked her two questions. The first was why she'd not called me, after phoning the police.

"I tried to, Jim. I tried hard, but I couldn't get a dial tone till the police were already here. You know what a busy exchange ours is."

It was as simple as that.

The second question was not quite as easy to ask, nor the answer anything like as simple. "What made you tell me that business Monday morning—about my trusting you and believing you?"

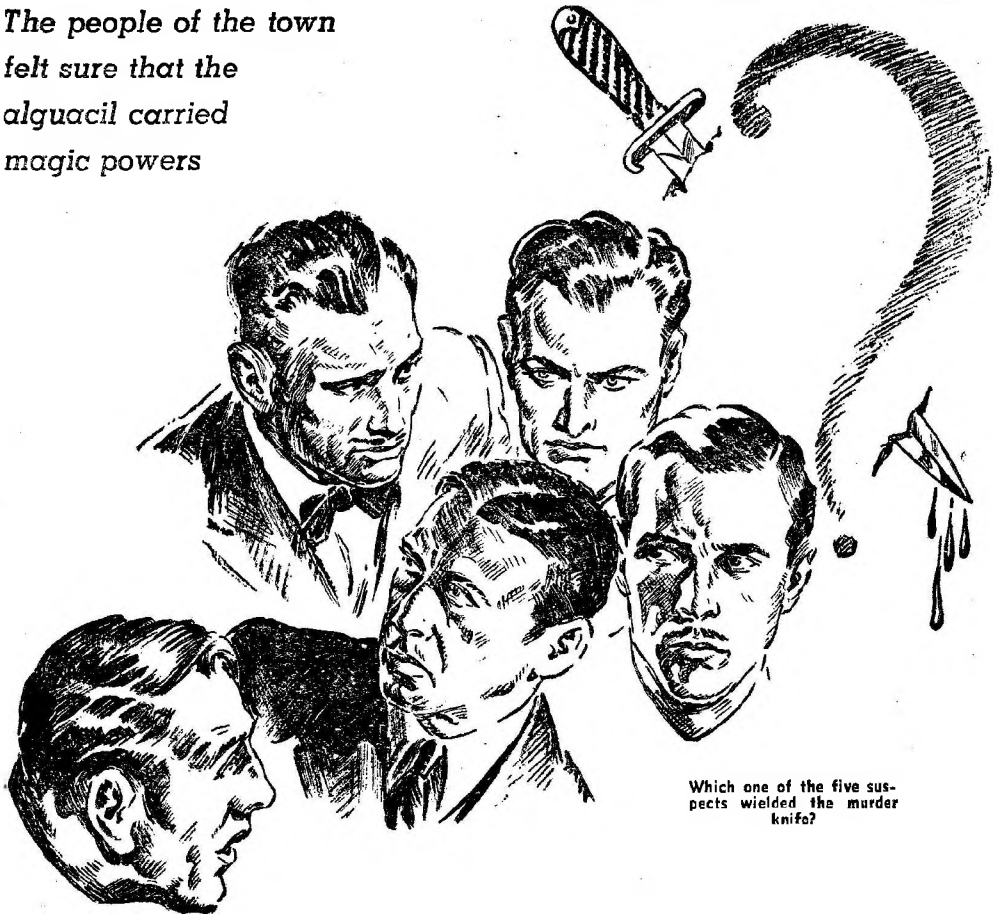
She watched her fingers twist my coat button. "I was saying it to myself, really. I was thinking about how poor Rose Loring had begged me not ever to tell her husband about what was in those papers, and I was telling myself I must always rely on your trust and belief in me, no matter what." Her head lifted and silver flecks danced in the gray depths of her eyes. "I want to hear you say it again, Jim, right now."

"I shall always trust you, kitten," I said solemnly. "I shall always believe in you, no matter what." But as my arms closed tightly around her tiny form and my lips found hers, I wryly recalled the moments in the past three terrible days when I had almost failed her.

I swore a silent oath that it would never happen again.

Next Issue's Novel: THE GLITTERING COFFINS, by Robert Sidney Bowen

The people of the town
felt sure that the
alguacil carried
magic powers



Which one of the five sus-
pects wielded the murder
knife?

Too Many Suspects

By HAROLD HELFER

WHEN Marie Avalando was found in a ravine with her throat slit, people said two things. They said with someone as wild as she had been, it was really little wonder. They also said it was not very likely that Pietro Manvelli, the alguacil, as the Town Constable is known, would ever be able to find the guilty party. There were too many likely candidates.

As usual, Pietro Manvelli, the alguacil, did not have very much to say. When-

ever a crime was committed, he never talked much about it. He seemed for the most part to just shut his eyes and think about it, or perhaps dream about it. Yet, somehow or other, he nearly always managed to put his finger on the culprit. It gave him the reputation of being somewhat mystic. But this time, everybody said, it was going to take more than sitting back in his chair with his eyes half shut to solve the crime.

For this Marie Avalando had five

known suitors. By name, they were Manuel Aqualla, Jose Prerez, Rudolph Spano, Jose Bronuva and Don Phillipa. When a woman is a runaround, how can you tell which one suddenly felt himself overpowered with a jealous rage and took the knife to her? It is easier to solve a crime when there is no suspect than to have five, one of whom is most surely guilty but any of whom could have just as easily done it. This is especially so when the killing has taken place on the night of a fiesta and no one can be sure of anyone's movements.

Even when Pietro Manvelli, the alguacil, called all five suspects to his office, people shook their heads. Routine, they said. What you would expect. It does not give promise of accomplishing anything.

"I am a little surprised at the alguacil," someone was heard to remark. "Perhaps he is what you might call slipping. What he has done is not at all subtle."

In his office, Pietro Manvelli, sitting at his desk, faced the five men standing before him and he said to them, "Senors, one of you five is the one who killed Marie Avalando. Perhaps she had it coming to her. That is not for me to say. My duty is to procure the one who wielded the knife. And this I intend to do.

"Now perhaps you have heard that I have an uncommon, even an almost supernatural way of ferreting out my culprits," Pietro Manvelli continued, giving each of the suspects a small smile. "Well, it is true. I cannot explain the gift myself. All I know is that I have it. Although at this moment I do not know which of you is the one who used the knife, in a matter of five minutes I shall."

He paused and looked intently into the face of the five men. "If the guilty person wishes to step forward and give himself up voluntarily, this is his last chance," the alguacil spoke somberly.

No one moved.

GRAPHICALLY, the alguacil shrugged. "You do not believe me," he observed dispassionately, "you do not think I have this power. Very well, we shall proceed."

He leaned forward and put his hands

into a bowl that was on his desk. The bowl was full of dry, parched rice. He brought up a handful of the rice and then idly watched it filter slowly through his fingers.

"Just plain ordinary rice," he said, looking up at the five unsmiling faces before him. "But it shall tell me which of you is the one who took the life of Marie Avalando."

Unhurriedly and with a little sigh, Pietro Manvelli got out of his chair. Then he proceeded to give each of the five men a handful of rice from the bowl.

"Now," he said, "I want you each to put the rice in his mouth and eat it up. I assure you there is nothing the matter with the rice," he added. "But it shall tell me what I want to know."

For the split second of a moment the five men looked at each other, then they one by one put the rice into their mouths. Pietro Manvelli went back to his chair and sat down. With folded arms, he watched in a strangely incurious way, almost with impassiveness.

Then, some five minutes later, he got up out of his chair. "Now you will be all so kind as to open your mouths," he said.

The men obeyed and, like an officer at inspection, went from man to man and peered into his mouth.

Standing rigidly by his desk, the alguacil didn't say anything for a moment but regarded the five suspects thoughtfully. Then, in a low-pitched voice, he announced quietly, "The one who killed Marie Avalando is Rudolph Spano."

The young man mentioned blanched and with startled, uncertain eyes looked at one and then the other in the room. Finally, with a benumbed expression now in them, his eyes came to rest on the alguacil. He did not say anything.

"Is it not so?" Pietro Manvelli, his eyebrows raising themselves a little, asked in a friendly way, addressing himself to the accused.

"Yes, yes, that is so, I am the one," replied Rudolph Spano in a somewhat dazed fashion.

When the news of what had occurred became known, everyone in town regarded the alguacil with more awe than

(Concluded on page 127)

the BLACK Chamber

A Department for Cipher Solvers By M. K. DIRIGO

THE MAGIC SQUARE OF THE FIFTH ORDER

IN THE previous issue we concluded our article on magic squares by demonstrating the construction of a 3 x 3 magic square and we arrived at the finished product as follows:

8	1	6
3	5	7
4	9	2

We reproduce this magic square again, for the convenience of readers.

Now, for its magic qualities, which were pointed out previously, note that the sum of any three numbers in a straight line, horizontally, vertically or diagonally, add up to 15.

In passing, it may interest you to know that there is an easy method of finding out what the total in a magic square will be, even before you construct the square. You first find the center cell of the square, and multiply it by the number of cells in each row. In the above square, the center cell is number 5, that is, it is the fifth cell in the square by a normal count, starting in the corner.

1	2	3
4	5	

So then, $5 \times 3 = 15$. In a 5 x 5 square, the center cell would be 13, which multi-

plied by 5 equals 65, and this is the magic total in a 5 square, etc. Mathematicians use an algebraic formula for arriving at

such totals, which is $\frac{N}{2} (N^2 + 1)$. "N"

here represents the number of cells in each row, while N^2 equals the total num-

ber of cells in the square. $\frac{N}{2} = \frac{3}{2}$, and

$\frac{3}{2} (10) = 15$.

This formula is also true for square of an even order, as the 4^2 , 6^2 , the 8^2 , etc.

After the 3 x 3 square, the next largest ODD Magic square is the 5 x 5 which may be constructed by so many different arrangements or routes, that its variations are considered unlimited and up to the present moment, your editor believes that no complete analysis of the squares of the 5th order has ever been completed or published, notwithstanding the fact that almost every college professor of mathematics has delved into its mysteries.

		1		
	5			
4	6			
			3	
			2	

Following the pattern of the 3 x 3 square, we produce here the 5 x 5 square.

We will use the same **ADVANCE** move and the same **BREAK** move as in the 3 square.

The first five numbers are written into the square using the upward diagonal advance explained last issue. Number 6



ADVANCE



BREAK

is the first **BREAK** move, and now you will note that you will need a **BREAK** move after each set of five numbers. Remember that in the 3 square you had a **BREAK** move after each set of 3 numbers, and you will find that this incident is encountered in all similar arrangements in squares of an **ODD ORDER**.

Now to continue:

		1	8	
	5	7		
4	6			
10				3
11			2	9

(11 is the 2nd **BREAK** move)

		1	8	15
	5	7	14	16
4	6	13		
10	12			3
11			2	9

(16 is the 3rd **BREAK** move)

17		1	8	15
	5	7	14	16
4	6	13	20	
10	12	19	21	3
11	18		2	9

(21 is the **LAST BREAK** move)

17	24	1	8	15
23	5	7	14	16
4	6	13	20	22
10	12	19	21	3
11	18	25	2	9

(The 5 x 5 **MAGIC SQUARE**)

The construction of this 5 square is just as simple as the 3 square. You begin with number one in the center cell of the first row and continue writing the numbers consecutively from 1 to 25. Check yourself with each set of five numbers to make a **BREAK MOVE**. If a **BREAK MOVE** does not appear at such intervals, you may be sure you have made a mistake someplace in your route, with either a wrong advance move or a wrong break move. For a final check, note that the last number, 25, will appear in the cell

opposite to the first number, 1, at the opposite side of the square, and note further that number 13, which is the closest number to half of the number of cells in the square (25) occurs in the center of the square.

The magic total of this square is 65. Check this yourself by adding any 5 numbers in a straight line, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

The center number, 13, also controls a magic principle by applying its double, or 2 x 13 (26) as follows: Notice that any two numbers which are geometrically equidistant from this center number, equals 26.

For example:

HORIZONTALLY—
4 + 22, 6 + 20

VERTICALLY—
1 + 25, 7 + 19

DIAGONALLY—
11 + 15, 12 + 14

DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSITE—
24 + 2, 8 + 18, 23 + 3, 10 + 16

By this time you should have a pretty good idea of the construction and some of the magical qualities of magic squares of an **ODD ORDER** and for practice purposes, try constructing squares of 7 x 7, 9 x 9, 11 x 11, etc., as far as you feel like going. The same principle of **ADVANCE** and **BREAK** will control each one of them.

You can check your totals with the formula given here, and don't be surprised if you find this a very fascinating game, possessing the charm of mystery.

PATTERN WORDS

Six issues ago we began running a new list of a different type of pattern words when we started printing words with three, four and six consecutive vowels. Then, four issues ago, we began printing our lists of three-letter consonant sequences, and so far have covered such sequences from **BBL** to **RSH**. This issue we go from **RSL** to **SCR**.

This new type of pattern word interrupts our regular list of pattern words, which will be resumed with the publication of nine-letter words in a forthcoming issue.

(Turn to page 88)

Try to Solve These New Cryptograms!

THE FIRST cryptogram in this issue's batch is an easy one for beginners, and this one is made up entirely of very short words—something *new*, and that's a hint, solvers! Here are some other hints:

The one-letter words are represented by "E" and "U". Notice they both appear in the word IUEL which should help you to decide which is "A" and which is "I".

The high-frequency letter of the English language, E, appears here sixteen times. You should have no trouble spotting it. In different words you will find it in varying positions as second, third, fourth and final, which is one of the important characteristics of the letter E.

Study the three two-letter words, OV, UI and GM. One letter of each word must be a vowel. They are really easy to identify. For example note that the "V" appears as a doubled letter in a three-letter word XVV and "V" appears nine times! In UI note that the "I" appears here in initial and final positions only. Is this a clue for a vowel or a consonant? What do you think of GM? "G" appears six times, "M" sixteen. Which is the vowel?

The second cryptogram is a quotation from President Coolidge it's up to you to unravel. No. 451 is one of our popular alliteration ciphers. As to No. 452, Mrs. Dolbee asks: "Is this transposition too hard for your readers?" You will find out soon, Mrs. Dolbee. Come on, fans, tell Mrs. Dolbee how you solved it! Our fifth cryptogram, No. 453, is one of those always-amusing pedantic proverbs. Answers—next issue!

Please send all solutions, comments and criticisms to THE BLACK CHAMBER, c/o G-MEN DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. From time to time, letters will be printed and communications acknowledged in this department. Thank you.

No. 449—A Limerick for Beginners

VTM LUK EDMTO VQO OV OGM XVV
 AVN E DUTOML OV IMM OGM VFL RTQ
 ZQO OGM VFL RTQ DUI LMUL
 UTL OGM TMD RTQ OGMK IUEL
 IQNMFK WTMD UI U RTQ GM DUI TMD.

No. 450—By Calvin Coolidge

LEUXLZEHJB HX UASB FA HAXJECZAJ
 JU RZ CXZW AUJ F WZHJB JU RZ
 MUEXIHLLZW

No. 451—Alliteration—Submitted by Lesley W. Katz, Long Beach, N. Y.

NHMPGNPI NQPXROHGX NWHGXBWOKOGA
 NPMPXBCROB NHMPX NHEP NCJAJ
 NWPHNZPGN NWTGA NC NWHGXYPW
 NWOJZRQHGNMT NC NWOBET
 NPMPFOXOCG

No. 452—Transposition—Submitted by Mrs. Bertha D. Dolbee, Norwalk, O.

BREAY AONES IWDNW NMLEE
 ARLYT OASMH YHTLA EHAYD
 ANDEI ATLAE KTORS E.

No. 453—A Pedantic Proverb

PL PA PVZWGLSKL LDSL HWIOKXPLJ
 ADWOTX YPCN ZGNINXNKIN LW SKJ
 WHIOZSLPWK DFPLOSTTJ NKYSYNX
 PK QWG YSPK

Note: First solve the cryptogram, then convert it into plain English.

A knowledge of words containing vowel and consonant sequences is of help in solving secret writing. Many times a word can be recognized once the vowel or consonant pattern is understood.

THREE-LETTER CONSONANT SEQUENCES

RSI

corslet.
nursling,
parsley, purslane.

RSN

parsnip.

RSP

intersperse.
perspective, perspicacious, perspicuity, perspicuous, perspire.

RST

athirst.
burst.
curst.
durst.
frist.
interstice.
superstition.
thirst, thirsty.
understand.
verst.
worst, worsted.

RSW

forswear.

RTB

hartbeest.

RTF

artful.
hurtful.
portfolio.
sportful.

RTG

mortgage.

RTH

berth, berth, berthage.
childbirth.
dearth.
earth, earthen, earthy.
farther, farther, firth, forth, fourth, further.
girth, girth.
hearth, henceforth.
mirth.
nevertheless, north.
orthoclase, orthodontia, orthodox, orthoepy, orthogonal, orthography, orthopaedia.
parthenon, porthole.
shorthand, storthing, swarthy.
worth.

RTL

artless.
courtliness, courtly.
hurtle.
kirtle.
myrtle.
partly, portliness.
shortly, startle.
turtle.

RTM

apartment, assortment.
compartment.
department.
mortmain.
portmanteau.

RTN

alertness.
fortnightly.
partner.
shortness.

RTR

cartridge.
fortress.
hairtrigger.
cartridge, portrait, portray, portrayal.
tartrate.

RTS

allcourts.
curtsy.
yourts.

RTZ

quartz, quartzite.

RWH

narwhal.

RWR

underwrite.

SBL

basbleu.

SCH

antepaschal.
discharge.
eschalot, eschatology, escheat, eschew.
maraschino, mischance, mischief, mischievous.
paschal.
schabzieger, schade, schaefferia, schab, schal, achatchen, schediasm, schedule, scheelite, scheellum, schefferite, scheik, schellingism, schelly, schelm, schema, schematic, schematism, schematist, schematize, schematologion, scheme, scheme-arch, schemeful, schemer, scheming, schemingly, schemist, schemy, schene, schenkbeer.
schepen, scherbet, scheref, scheroma, scherzando, scherzo, schesis, schetic, Schiedam, schilbe, schiller, schillerization, schillerspar, schilling, schindylesis, Schinus, schirrhus, schism, schisma, schismatic, schismatical, schismatically, schismaticalness, schismatize, schismless, schist.
schistaceous, schistic, schistocoelea, schistocyte, schistocytosis, schistoglossia, schistometer, schistoprosopia, schistoprosopus, schistose, schistosity, schistosomus, schitothorax, schizaea, schizaeaceae.

schizaeaceous, schizocarp, schizocarpic, schizocoele, schizocoeleous, schizodinic, schizogenesis, schizogenetic, schizogenic, schizogenous, schizognath, schizognathae, schizognathism, schizognathous, schizogony, schizomycetes, schizomycosis, schizonemerte, schizonemertean, schizoneura, schizopelmous, schizophyceae, schizophyta, schizophyte, schizopod, schizopoda, schizopodal, schizopodus, schizorhinal, schizotarsta, schizothecal, schizotrichia, schleichera, schlich, schmelze, schnapper, schnapps, schneiderian, schnorrer, scholar, scholar, scholarity, scholarly, scholarship, scholastic, scholastica, scholastically, scholasticism, scholla.

scholiast, scholastic, schollaze, scholcal, scholium, scholly, schomburgkia, school, schoolable, schoolbook, schoolboy, schoolcraft, school-dame, schooldays, schoolery, schoolfellow, school-fish, schoolgirl, schoolhouse, schooling, school-maam, schoolmaid, schoolman, schoolmaster, schoolmate, schoolmistress.
schoolroom, school-ship, school-teacher, school-teaching, schooner, schori, schoriaceous, schor-lous, schorly, schottisch, schout, schreibersite, schrode, schult, Schwann's sheath, schweitzer-kase, schwenkfelder, seneschal.

SCL

corpuscule.
disclaim, disclose.
muscle.

scloff, sclandre, slav, slaviv, slavism, sclavonian, sclavonic, sclender, scleragogy, scleral, sclere, sclerema, sclerenchyma, sclerenchymatous, sclerenchyme, scleriosis, sclerite, scleritic, scleritis, sclerobase, sclerobasic, scleroblast, scleroderm, scleroderma, sclerodermata, sclerodermatous, sclerodermia, sclerodermic, sclerodermous, sclerodermite, sclerogen, sclerogenous, scleroid, scleroma, sclerometer, scleromucin, sclerosed, sclerosis.

scleroskeleton, sclerostoma, sclerotai, sclerotic, sclerotical, sclerotinia, sclerotitis, sclerotoid, sclerotium, sclerotome, scleros,

SCR

ascribe.
describe, description, descry, discreet, discrepancy, discretion, discriminate.
escritoire, escrow.
miscreant.
prescribe, prescription, proscribe, proscription, rescript.

scrab, scrabble, scraber, scraffe, scrag, scragged, scraggedness, scraggly, scragginess, scraggly, scraggy, scragly, scrag-necked, scrag-whale, scramble, scrambler, scrambling, scramblingly, scran, scranch, scranky, scannel, scran-

ny, scrap, scrapbook, scrape, scrapepanny, scraper.

scraper-chaser, scrapiana, scraping, scrapingly, scrap-iron, scrapper, scrapperly, scrapping, scrapple, scrappy, scrat, scratch, scratchback, scratchbrush, scratch-coat, scratch-cradle, scratcher, scratchweed, scratch-wig, scratch-work, scratchy.

scrattle, scraw, scrawl, scrawler, scrawly, scrawny, scray, screeble, screek, scream, screamer, screaming, scree, screech, screech-bird, screecher, screech-hawk, screech-martin, screech-owl, screech-thrush, screechy.

screed, screen, screener, screenings, screeve, screw, screwable, screw-bolt, screw-cutting, screw-driver, screwed, screw-elevator, screw-er, screw-eye, screw-fish, screw-gauge, screw-hook, screw-jack, screw-key, screw-machine, screw-molding, screw-nail, screw-peg, screw-pile, screw-pine, screw-plate, screw-pod, screw-quin, screw-rod, screw-shell, screw-pike, screwstem, screw-stick, screw-stock, screwstone, screw-tap, screw-thread, screw-tree, screw-tunnel, screw-wire, screw-worm, screw-wrench, screwy.

scrib, scribble, scribaeous, scribal, scribbet, scribble, scribblement, scribbler, scribbling, scribbling-machine, scribblingly, scribe, scriber, scribling-awl, scribism, scrid, scriggle, scrim, scrimer, scrimmage, scrimp.

scrimping-bar, scrimpingly, scrimpness, scrimption, scrimpy, scrimshaw, scrine, scringe, scrip, scripee, scrippage, script, scruption, scruption, scriptory, scriptural, scripturalism, scripturalist, scripturally, scripturalness, scripture, scripturian, scripturist, scrit.

scritch, scribe, scrivello, scriven, scrivener, scrobe, scrobicula, scrobicular, scrobiculate, scrobiculus, scrod, scrode, scroddie, scrofula, scrofulde, scrofulous, scrofulously, scrog, scroggy.

scroll, scroll-chuck, scrolled, scroll-head, scroll-saw, scrollwork, scroop, Scrophularia, Scrophulariaceae, scrophulariaceous, scrophularineous, scrotal, scrotiform, scrotocole, scrotum, scrouge, scrouger, serow, seroyle, scrub, scrubbed, scrubber, scrub-bird, scrubboard, scrubby, scrub-cattle, scrub-grass, scrub-oak, scrub-pine, scrub-robin, scrub-shrub, scrubstone, scrub-turkey.

scruff, scrummage, scrumptious, scrunch, scruple, scrupler, scrupulist, serupulize, serupulosity, scrupulous, scrupulously, scrupulousness, scrutable, scrutatton, scrutator, scrutin, scrutineer,

scrutinize, scrutinizer, scrutinous, scrutinously, scrutiny, scrutoire, scruze, scry.

ANSWERS TO CRYPTOGRAMS
IN THE MAY ISSUE

No. 444: There was a young lady named Harris
Who nothing could ever embarrass
Till the bath salts one day
In a tub where she lay
Turned out to be plaster of paris.

No. 445: Things don't turn up in this world until
somebody turns them up.

No. 446: Diaphanously dressed damsel dashes
downstairs drowsy drunk drops decanter
devoutly disdains distraction devas-
tates decanter.

No. 447: Transposition solution, Square 8x8:
This type of cipher is interesting once
its method of solution is understood.

T H I S T Y P E
R E H P I C F O
I S I N T E R E
C N O G N I T S
E I T S M E T H
U L O S F O D O
T I O N I S U N
D O O T S R E D

Route of inscription: Simple vertical,
beginning at upper left corner, and let-
ters taken out by alternate horizontal
beginning at upper left corner.

No. 448: Substitution of quadrupeds is inadvis-
able while traversing currents. *In plain
English:* Don't change horses in the mid-
dle of the stream.



Matt Collins returns to New York to seek out his wife, whom he has not
seen in five years—only to find her freshly murdered, and to be
thrust into the shadow of suspicion by a ring of fortune-
hunters in **LADY KILLER**, a novelet by **NORMAN A.**

DANIELS that packs suspense and action on
every page—coming next issue!

by Colonel George F. Chandler

*The amazing true story of railroad criminals
and rackets — as vividly told by the former
superintendent of the New York State Police!*

Pirates of the



Corrigan pointed at the window. "Whassat?" he croaked

HIGH IRON

THIS is only partly my story, for although I did the planning in the case, the dramatic action was carried out by the tough and smart troopers under my command. It is at least their story as much as mine.

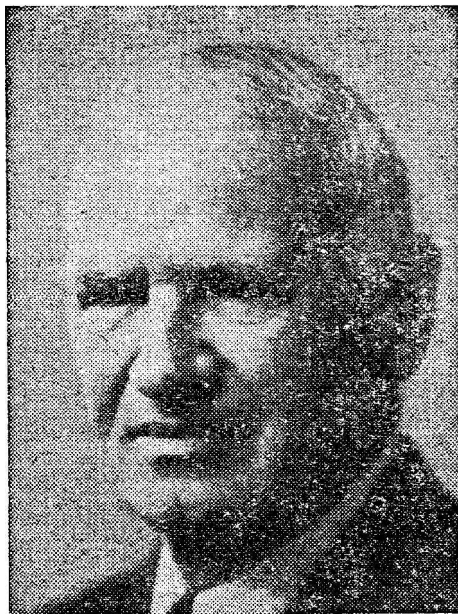
The case of the roisterous railroads began for me one summer night in 1918. A good-looking young man named Corrigan boarded the night train from New York to Albany at Grand Central Station and established himself comfortably in his seat.

As the train pulled out of a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, an attractive woman came out of a compartment at the front of the car and passed his seat, going toward the rear. As she passed, she gave him a little smile, which might have been friendly, or might have been an invitation. Corrigan, not ordinarily a forward man with the ladies, nevertheless noticed it with a slight quickening of interest.

He returned the smile and went back to reading his paper. The woman did not come back that way. After a while, Corrigan put down his paper and went back to the diner. He had a leisurely dinner and when he had finished, he headed further back in the train for the club car instead of returning to his seat.

Pick-Up

As he came into the car, he saw the woman who had smiled at him seated there, reading a magazine and sipping a soft drink. He took a seat opposite her. After a few minutes she looked up, met his eye and smiled again. It was all the invitation Corrigan needed. He crossed over and took the chair next to her.



COLONEL GEORGE F. CHANDLER

"Will you join me?" he asked, drawing a flask from his pocket and motioning the porter to bring ice and soda.

"Thanks, I still have this," she said, holding up her half-empty glass.

She was a dashing brunette, well-dressed, with an expensive fur coat slung over her shoulders and diamonds flashing from her fingers. She looked like a career woman, intelligent, sure of herself, competent.

They talked easily together, as train companions will when there is more than a hint of flirtation in the air, and shared several drinks, some from Corrigan's flask. Finally the porter approached and told them he was closing the car.

"Stop at my compartment for a night cap," the woman suggested. "I have a bottle that's just waiting to be opened."

They entered her compartment and she closed and locked the door.

"You know Pullman porters," she said, with a smile. "They have a way of popping in at the most unexpected and sometimes most inappropriate times."

The implied suggestion was an exciting one and Corrigan did not miss it. He took the bottle of whisky from her and looked at the label.

"It's good stuff," she said. "I get it in Canada."

An Old Trick—But Good

Corrigan took two glasses from the shelf over the washbowl and poured a stiff drink in each. They raised glasses, clinked and drank. They had two more. Then the liquor appeared to be getting the man. He passed an unsteady hand over his forehead.

"Getting hot in here," he said.

The woman raised the window a little and then, with her back to him, poured another drink. Corrigan, drunk as he seemed, still noticed how she shielded with her body his view of what she was doing.

She handed him the glass and sat beside him on the lower berth. Corrigan's speech was thicker now, and he was more relaxed, slumping back into the berth. Once he nearly spilled the drink in his hand.

"Getting tired and sleepy," he mumbled.

"Bottoms up!" said the woman, raising her own glass.

Corrigan suddenly pointed at the window. "Whassat?" he croaked.

She turned to look and swiftly he poured the contents of his glass behind the berth, then raised it to his lips and tilted his head back. As the woman turned her head back toward him, he appeared to be in the act of draining his glass. He made a wry face and wiped his mouth drunkenly on his coat sleeve.

"You must be seeing things," she said, laughing. "There's nothing there."

Presently Corrigan drooped more and more and at last he fell back on the berth and seemed to pass into a deep sleep. The woman waited, then raised his legs to the berth and sat down to watch him. He breathed heavily and regularly.

She glanced at her watch, then consulted a timetable, picking out the train's next stop. She got up to press the buzzer and unlock the door. In a moment the porter came in.

"I'll be getting off at the next stop, Harry," she told him, passing a bill into his palm.

The porter merely glanced at the man sleeping in the berth. "Looks like that

one was the easiest of all, Miss Edith," he said.

He backed out and closed the door.

Surprise for the Lady

The woman went over to Corrigan and now sure he was drugged into insensibility, began going through his pockets. She found a wallet stuffed with bills and emptied it. She was just putting them into her bag, when the drugged man came to life.

"All right, Edith," he said in a voice clear and without a trace of drunkenness, "you're under arrest. You can hand the bills back to me and don't make any disturbance."

The woman wheeled, her face gone suddenly livid with terror and rage.

"A copper!"

"State Police," Corrigan said, showing her his shield. "Now shut up and sit down over there."

She obeyed, limp now with fear, all her defiance gone.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Turn you over to the police when we get to Albany. Unless you decide to do some fast talking and tell me who you work with on the trains."

By the time they reached Albany, Corrigan had the whole story. The woman said she worked with several Pullman porters and two railroad detectives, whose names she gave. She signed a confession, implicating seven other persons and telling in detail the experiences of many of her victims, none of whom had dared report the robberies because they did not want the attendant publicity, nor the embarrassment of admitting they had fallen for a badger game.

The business had been lucrative for two years until Corrigan caught up with the gang. The seven named by Edith were picked up and charged with larceny. But evidence against all of them except Harry, the porter, was weak because we had only the woman's word against theirs. So six escaped punishment, but the woman and the porter were convicted and sent to prison.

The Governor Worries

This was the kind of thing which had

become so prevalent on the New York railroads by 1918 that I was called in by Governor Smith to clean it up.

"Colonel," he told me, his lean face more than usually grim, "the railroad cops are so corrupt in this country—and particularly in New York State—that we've got to clean them up before we have serious trouble."

I had been superintendent of the State Police since I had organized the Department a year and a half before. I knew a little about the crime situation on the railroads and had heard many rumors, but I had not yet had time to investigate thoroughly the stories of crooked gambling, thievery and prostitution on the passenger trains, and the huge losses in freight by robbery in the railroad yards. However, there was a growing thunder of complaint by individual shippers, business concerns, and insurance companies.

"Here's a typical case," the Governor said, looking at a letter he had picked from a pile on his desk. "This letter is from a doctor in New York. He says his patient was lured into a compartment on the Albany night train by a woman, given knockout drops and robbed. The man nearly died from an overdose of the stuff."

Like all these cases, the doctor wouldn't divulge the man's name and the victim himself would not come forward to press charges. He had, however, given a fair description of the woman and stated that he had seen her before on the Albany-New York train and believed she worked this run regularly.

The Role of Sucker

The doctor, a prominent man, demanded angrily that the Governor do something about it. Moreover, he made the constructive suggestion that railroad detectives be investigated and their licenses revoked if they were found negligent or corrupt.

"All right," I said to the Governor, "I'll put a trooper in plainclothes on the train for several nights, and we'll see if we can't set a trap for this woman—or any others who might be working the run."

"Good. And you'd better get busy on

the freight yard robberies right away, too. Let's get it cleaned up all at once!"

That's how it came about that Sergeant Corrigan, in plain clothes, played the role of the sucker on the Albany night train.

Meanwhile I was back in my office getting the ponderous machinery of the law into motion and rounding up all the reports I could find on the situation. I found it even worse than I had realized.

An insurance company stated that the losses in one New York City railroad yard alone had been more than a million dollars in a period of six months. This was the result of systematic looting of freight cars after they had reached their destinations and were sidetracked to await unloading. Guards had been assigned to watch them, but nevertheless freight had disappeared right under the noses of the guards.

Nor was robbery the worst that happened. Bodies had been found along the right-of-way. We had no doubt that murder had been done aboard the trains, but the deaths were attributed to accidents by the local sheriffs in whose counties they were discovered, and there seemed to be little chance it could be proved that the killings had actually occurred on the trains.

A Sleuthing Sinecure

The special railroad police, who seemed powerless to prevent this crime wave, had been in operation many years. After the great transcontinental lines were built, railroad men realized they must have some kind of protection not offered by the states and local communities through which the trains passed. So the lines employed their own guards in plainclothes, who rode the trains and patrolled the yards and station properties.

Later some states, including New York, passed laws licensing railroad detectives and giving them police powers. The commissions were granted and signed by the governors of the states.

It may not be generally known, but it is a fact that the conductor of a train has the same authority over his crew and passengers as does the captain of a steamship. But many people did not

understand this and train crews were fearful of taking action against passengers because of the possibility of a lawsuit that might follow.

The job of railroad detective was regarded as desirable and was much sought after. The result was that most of the posts were soon filled with the relatives and friends of railroad officials or men for whom they wanted to do favors. These "political" appointees had no training and knew nothing of crime detection or prevention.

At first they were eager and conscientious enough. They even got the railroads into trouble a few times by making unwarranted arrests. But after a while, with no competent or satisfactory supervision over the men, the jobs turned into sinecures and many of the individual operatives turned crooked.

Public Protest

The railroads found themselves helpless to correct the situation. Even when the losses from theft became staggering, they accepted them as unavoidable. Where a thief was actually caught in the act and a public prosecutor called in, the accused detective was generally found to be a friend or relative of a railroad official, whereupon no charges were pressed, and at most the man was fired and replaced by someone no better.

With a rising tide of public protest, the railroads tried to whitewash the situation. Receiving no help there, the railroad users turned to the governors of the states.

Almost simultaneously with Corrigan's coup against the badger artists, a big freight robbery broke and gave us the needed incentive to go after this end of the corruption. A freight shipment of silver fox skins worth more than \$300,000 were stolen out of a car in the New York yards despite the detectives on guard there.

The car had come in from Maine just the day before, had been shunted to a siding and was waiting for the consignee to haul away his furs. The car was sealed and two detectives had been assigned to watch it. Despite which the furs had disappeared and the insurance company was now clamoring at the

Governor's door and demanding that the State Police step in.

It seemed possible to me that this fur theft tied in with other reports concerning a gang of fur thieves which was operating out of New York City. Several silver fox ranches in the northern part of the state had been raided, as well as similar establishments in Massachusetts and other New England states. Perhaps, I thought, a well-organized inter-state mob was operating, taking advantage of the fact that local police could not pursue them across state lines. At that time the F.B.I. was not as efficient as it now is, and lacked the authority to operate freely throughout the country.

Disappearing Furs

At once I got in touch with the superintendents of the State Police in Maine and Massachusetts and was assured of cooperation. Then I called in one of my most efficient men, Corporal Dan Fox, later promoted to Captain, and explained the situation to him.

"Dan," I said, "I want you to go down to New York, work in plainclothes and see what you can dig up about this mess."

Fox was delighted with the assignment and assured me he would get to the bottom of it.

He went to New York and called on the official of the insurance company, who had complained to Governor Smith. From this man he learned the names of the two railroad detectives who were supposed to have guarded the shipment of silver fox skins. Let's call them Fred Hamilton and Mike Smith, which are not their names.

Dan Fox read their report on the robbery. They said they had left the freight car for about an hour to eat a customary midnight supper. On their return they had noticed nothing wrong or unusual about the car. Yet in the morning it was discovered that the seal had been broken and the car looted. The thieves had had ample time to drive their trucks of swag out of the state and hide it in some secret warehouse. From the way they worked, we suspected this warehouse to be in Connecticut or Massachusetts.

After a couple of weeks of undercover work, Fox learned of a wholesale fur concern that specialized in silver fox hides. Its reputation, he discovered, was somewhat on the shady side, according to gossip. And its business had boomed in recent months, boomed out of all proportion to the rail shipments coming in.

Motor trucking was not important in those days and it was easy to check the amount of business a firm did merely by figuring up its railroad freight tonnages. The shipping did not warrant any such business as this outfit seemed to be enjoying.

Keen Ears Rewarded

Fox learned the name and location of the cafe where the truck drivers for this fur concern hung out. Dressing as a workman, he made it his business to become a fixture there. When he had become as familiar as the furniture, he began to hear things. One night while hanging around and pretending to drink, he overheard two characters known as "Chuck" and Billy, discussing a job. He pretended to be drunk and the two men carelessly paid no attention to him.

"Hope this trick will be as easy as that last haul from Sunnyside to Hartford, don't you, Bill?" Chuck said.

"Yeah," Bill grunted, the men had another drink and went out.

Fox staggered up the street after them.

He stayed far enough behind to avoid attracting attention, but kept them in sight until they went to ground in a five-story building on Ninth Avenue, in the section once known as Hell's Kitchen. Fox jotted down the number and set himself to wait until the men came out again. He had a long wait, for it was not until the following noon when the men came out, and then they did nothing but go back to the saloon.

Meanwhile the Massachusetts police, activated by my tip, raided a suspected warehouse in the outskirts of Boston and came upon a quantity of silver fox furs. Through the warehouse records they traced the furs to a man named Simon Coulter, in Hartford, Connecticut. They called in the original shipper of the hides stolen from the freight car

in New York and had him examine these skins. He positively identified them as part of the loot from that robbery.

Some Worry for Chuck and Billy

Now the case began to open up and pick up speed. Coulter was traced and arrested. Defiant at first, he finally broke down and admitted he had acted as agent for some New Yorkers in storing the skins. He denied knowing they were stolen.

"Where are the rest of the skins?" he was asked.

"Were there more? I don't know anything about them."

"Who delivered these to you?"

"A couple of truckmen. I knew them only as Chuck and Billy."

When this report reached us, we realized we had a lead to the very men Corporal Fox was trailing. We put a continuous watch on the two, but made no arrests in the hope that they would lead us to the big shots. We also wanted to learn, if possible, what part the railroad detectives, Hamilton and Smith, played in this whole setup.

A few days later, the detectives trailing Chuck and Billy reported to Fox that the two had met in the saloon and had seemed much upset over some information Chuck had just received. They had been obviously excited and alarmed.

Fox had dug into their background and found something else that was curious. They were regular employees on the pay roll of the fur company, but they did not work every day, sometimes loafing around for days before being called to a job. The watch on them was doubled.

The Rub-Out Treatment

Up in Massachusetts, Coulter, released on bail, disappeared. His wife reported that two men had come for him and he had gone with them, saying he would be back shortly. He had not returned and his wife was worried for his safety.

In New York, a trooper watching Chuck and Billy, reported he had overheard them talking about someone who was apparently being held a prisoner.

"The boss wants him rubbed out,"

Chuck had said, "but I told him that wasn't my racket."

"Do you suppose," Fox asked me, "that this fellow is Coulter, and that he might be in the building where these two punks live? Maybe they learned he talked, grabbed him as soon as he was released on bail, and want to shut his mouth for good!"

It seemed like a good hunch and we decided to take a chance and raid the truckmen's place and really put the screws on them.

The next night, Fox and another trooper followed the suspected men home. The officers went up three flights to the apartment door.

"Shall we knock or crash it?" the trooper asked.

"Crash it," Fox replied.

They hit that flimsy door together and burst it off its hinges as though a tornado had struck it. Four hundred pounds of law burst into the center of a dirty, dingy, sparsely furnished room. The two men, Chuck and Billy, were caught with their mouths open.

"What mob are youse guys from?" Chuck asked. "We don't have nothin' here."

Fox grinned at the thought that these two had mistaken the officers for hoods from another gang.

"The boss said to bring you punks in," he told them, "and that other squealer you have here."

Release of a Squealer

Chuck and Billy, somewhat over the first surprise, showed fight. Billy moved as though reaching for a gun. Fox lashed out with a hard fist, caught him on the jaw and knocked him flat. The other trooper put Chuck out of action without waiting for any belligerent moves. A minute later, both tough truckmen were starched and ironed and had decided to be good.

They led the troopers to a back room where Simon Coulter was found trussed up and gagged. Released, he said he had expected to be killed because he had talked in Hartford. Now he was anxious to tell all he knew and implicate the whole gang.

When Coulter talked, he spilled the

whole story. We rounded up the entire gang, and recovered most of the stolen silver fox hides in two other warehouses in Hartford and Boston. All the crooks went to jail for a nice long stretch.

The two railroad detectives, Hamilton and Smith were implicated as well. The crooks had paid to be notified when a shipment of hides was in, where it would be spotted for unloading, the number of the car and all the other information the thieves would need to loot it quickly and safely. At a certain time the detectives obligingly went to eat and the mob moved in for the job. The detectives were paid two hundred and fifty dollars each.

A Cleanup Begins

The case against Hamilton and Smith was the only one that fell through, for the usual reason—the railroad refused to prosecute. However, the insurance company didn't have to pay any loss at all, for the railroad settled for the few furs that were not recovered, as well as for those that had been damaged.

I had been suspicious of the tie-up between racketeers and railroad detectives, but now I had specific cases on which to act, even though the detectives escaped prosecution. We began making arrests, not only of the freight thieves, but of hustlers, gamblers and badger artists on the passenger trains.

But at this point another factor entered the case. Governor Smith had been defeated for reelection by Nathan Miller, who was due to take office in a couple of weeks. Governor Smith had ordered this cleanup, but I didn't know where I stood with the Governor-elect.

One afternoon, between Christmas and New Years' Day, my phone rang. It was Governor Smith.

"Colonel," he said, "come right up. Your next boss wants to meet you."

The incoming Governor was more than interested in the State Troopers and the job they were doing.

"I have told the next Governor what you have done," Smith said, "and he thinks it is splendid. He asked me for suggestions and I told him you are the man to make them, for you know more about this than anyone else."

I was startled, but pleased at such confidence in me. But before I could say anything, Miller spoke.

"Governor Smith has suggested, Colonel, that you sign all the commissions for railroad detectives in the future, instead of the Governor, and take over authority for their activities."

This was even more startling.

"I agree with him," Miller went on, "but in order to do that, the law must be changed. As soon as the Legislature convenes, I will propose such a measure. From there on it will be your baby to rock."

Railroad Czar

He was as good as his word. The bill was signed in January 1919 and made me virtual czar over the railroad detectives. In fact I was a little worried about the power it gave me. Even the Governor could not interfere with the State Police Superintendent in his control of the railroad dicks. The only thing he could do was fire the Superintendent.

Uncertain of my legal rights under such a sweeping measure, I submitted it to the attorney general and to my own lawyer for a legal opinion. Both assured me that I really was in complete authority over the railroad detectives, and I stopped worrying about it. But I have often wondered if the legislators realized how that law they passed was worded.

After a careful study of the situation and my powers connected with it, I held several conferences with Governor Miller and outlined a plan.

"I have full confidence in your judgment," he said. "Go ahead with whatever you think best."

When we broke the news to the railroad officials, there was general consternation all up and down the tracks. The plan was simply this: I had decided to revoke the licenses of every railroad detective on every line operating in, or sending cars or freight, into New York State. The order became effective on May 1, 1919. And that ended the licensing of these alleged detectives in New York.

Then the heat was turned on. Railroad officials, politicians, shippers and

all the others who had a finger in the pie, brought pressure to bear. But I knew what my authority was good for and I sat tight. Only the insurance companies were with me.

Big Men Plead

The presidents of twenty railroads operating in the state, paid me personal visits. They coaxed, pleaded, threatened, stormed. They promised to take their business away from the state, to make their terminals in New Jersey or Pennsylvania, and ruin the Port of New York. But I knew a bluff when I heard one. I sat tight.

They quit screaming and asked what I wanted.

"Nothing except an honest and efficient railroad police force."

"Will you take charge and hire our police?"

"No," I said. "That's your job."

"Will you take a job with us to organize and train a police force? We'll pay you more than you're getting here."

"No. This is my job and I like it. The other is your job. You are going to hire competent, honest men, who have been trained in crime detection and prevention, or you are not going to operate your trains in the State of New York. If you hire crooks in the future as detectives, you will be held responsible and the New York State Police will get indictments and convictions against the railroads as well as against the individual criminals."

New Era

That day marked the end of the old, corrupt era, and the beginning of a new. The railroads organized a police force, as I knew they could, that was efficient, honest and as well trained as any in the country. New York was first, but it spread throughout the nation.

I had little to do with it except to offer advice as called upon. A few of the old-time detectives who were known to be honest, were trained and rehired, but the others were glad to be allowed to drop from sight without investigation or charges being brought against them.

One of my suggestions was a uniform

for the railroad police, which was adopted.

They imitated the State Police at first, but later settled upon a uniform which was standardized for every railroad in the country.

New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts followed New York, and the other states fell into line as the years passed.

Today the railroad police service is virtually uniform in every state and there is no graft or corruption of which I have ever heard.

The men are trained in schools set up by the railroads and they turn into fine efficient crime fighters who know their business and cooperate in every way with local and state police. More than one crime that has baffled the regular cops has been solved through the work of the railroad police.

The first year after the change, the New York Central alone saved over one million dollars in freight losses because of the elimination of crooked detectives.

Those early railroad police remind me

somehow of old Mike McGuire, the shotgun guard who rode atop the stagecoach from Sacramento, California, to the goldfields, in the 1850s. Mike was there to guard the stage against road agents who were thick as fleas in the gold-rich Wild West.

As a gunslinger, Mike was said to have no peer in California. He could hold out both hands, palms down, with a silver dollar on the back of each, drop the coins, pull both guns and send the silver pieces spinning before they hit the ground.

Mike was honest and conscientious and proud of his reputation. But after a while he found he could make a fast dollar by joining up with the road agents, letting them get the drop and hold him up, while they went through the passengers for their valuables, or helped themselves to the strongbox with a shipment of gold.

It didn't last. Mike was caught and the vigilantes hanged him high on a cottonwood tree. Greed has hanged more than one good man.



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Hefferdin beat Carlson
until he was exhausted



DEATH ISLAND

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

It was one thing for Omar Carlson to kill Mannie Hefferdin, but quite another to keep the murdered man from haunting him!

ILD Mannie Hefferdin did not stop until he was exhausted and had hammered all his sudden fury deeply into the body of Omar Carlson. His erstwhile friend and partner lay dead at his feet. Not until that moment did Mannie realize how often he had wished to kill Carlson. Since the time they had come to Murder Island, proba-

bly ten years ago.

Murder Island! What macabre humor had caused the two hardcases to call it that, just because it had no other name? It was one in a nest of small islands which lay in the Cururu River, a few kilometers below the first rapids of Creputia.

Hefferdin and Carlson had come upon

it after spending four years in the Unknown Land, southeast of Creputia, where they had found gold, taken out all they would themselves need for the rest of their lives, headed out for civilization, only to settle on Murder Island for the strangest possible mixture of reasons.

"If we settle here," Carlson had suggested, "and live off the country, we'll never have to spend any of our money. Personally, I've prospected so many years of my life, in the States and here in Brazil, that just to possess gold is about all I want."

"Done!" said Mannie Hefferdin, as if he had just been waiting for the other to say it. "Of course, if we don't like it, we can always move on. What'll we call the place?"

"Let's call it Murder Island," said Carlson.

Hefferdin laughed raucously. He required no explanation. There had been a third partner in the mining venture. He had argued about division of spoils since he had actually found the first color that made them all rich—and Hefferdin and Carlson had killed him. So, by calling their new home Murder Island, they remembered, and did some kind of honor to their dead "friend." Yes, "friend," for if they had taken time to think they would have kept him as a friend instead of killing him.

They had a queer sense of humor, those two, which always provoked arguments.

"Why don't we feel very badly about killing Rollins?" asked Omar Carlson, their first night on Murder Island. "Because where we were there is no law, that's why. We could go out to Santarem or Belem and confess and nobody would even listen to us. Here on Murder Island it's just the same. There's a Mission downriver, but our island is off the main stream and nobody will ever find us. We'll hunt with bows and arrows, same as we've had to do since our cartridges ran out, and not even the Indians will know we are here."

"A place without law, for all the rest of our lives," said Mannie Hefferdin, the older of the partners, "where nobody will bother us, and we can enjoy wealth that won't trickle through our fingers. No right and wrong here, either. It just

goes to show, Omar, there's just no such thing as plain ordinary *natural* justice. That *must* be why our consciences are so clear about Rollins."

And not once, from the day they began life on Murder Island, did either old man waste a minute's sleep regretting the murder of Rollins. Hefferdin was sixty-five years old, Omar Carlson sixty. They did not wear hats and their hair was long and snowy as were their beards. They both enjoyed their appearance. It proved that one didn't have to be good to look good. They knew they were bad, from a worldly viewpoint, they also knew they looked like saintly patriarchs. They wore shirts and pants of leather made from animals they shot and trapped, and no shoes at all. They were happy men.

BUT the time came when they were not so happy *together*. Cabin fever? Barracks antagonism? What was it? Dangerous as it was they even preferred to hunt alone, and eat alone. It was good that they got their really exquisite house built—all of carefully hacked out hardwood from right on the island—before they began to be so sick of each other, for when they couldn't endure each other another second they could withdraw into their separate rooms and sulk. Invariably, after a prolonged bout of the sulks, they would be friends again—until something else happened, usually an argument.

"I'll probably murder you some day, or you'll murder me," said Carlson, the very day Hefferdin murdered him. "There's no reason why not, is there? I don't believe in haunts, so the dead one wouldn't haunt the other. The killer would have the gold, which would prove that crime pays after all. It would not be wrong, but who's to say so? I haven't done it, and you haven't done it simply because, if the truth's to be known, neither one of us wants to stay here alone—and it's a lot worse at our ages, out in the world we left. Crooks would have all our gold in a week!"

"I don't believe that," said Hefferdin. "I don't believe any crook could get the gold off *me*."

"Yes, you do, or you'd have knocked me on the head before now and gone out!" said Carlson. "We both like it

here, is what, and don't want to stay here alone. That's all that keeps us from being murderers." Carlson began to cackle, a sound that had grated on Hefferdin's nerves for years now. "Keeps us from being murderers! That's rich, ain't it? We're *already* murderers!"

"You struck the first blow," said Hefferdin. "You really started the idea of murdering Rollins. I'm no murderer, not really."

"What difference if you *are*?" said Carlson. "That's the point we've always argued about. Whether you are or aren't makes no difference here. Nobody cares except the victim and what's he going to do about it?"

"I'm no murderer," said Hefferdin.

"Yes, but you will be," said Carlson, cackling again, "if you don't get over pouting every time I get your pout up about something—my cackling mebbe!"

"I *won't* be!" said Hefferdin.

"You *will* be, if—"

And almost before he realized it, Hefferdin was. This was the argument to end all arguments. Before now he had seen red, this time the red exploded into action, and almost before he realized it had, had got his hands on Carlson's throat under his beard and hung on until both sank to the ground, Carlson limp and Hefferdin unable to hold up the corpse. Then, quite unreasonably, because Carlson wouldn't answer when he called him, Hefferdin began hammering him with his fists. He kept at it while he could lift and lower his fists, until exhaustion burned out the last of his fury.

When he realized that he was a murderer at last, as Carlson had told him only a few minutes before that he would be, something happened to Hefferdin. The years of half-dreams fell away. The fever delirium under which old prospectors sometimes traveled in the unknown lands died out of him. He hated Carlson now more than he ever had during one of his rages, because Carlson had talked him into being a murderer.

"You wanted to die, I'll bet, Omar," he addressed the corpse. "You didn't have the nerve to kill yourself, so you made me do it."

Hefferdin knew that sounded foolish, as so many things did now that memory came rushing back, but it made him

angry again, so that he kicked at the body of Carlson, hating him because Carlson, for the second time, had inspired him to slay. When he hurt his bare feet he realized his foolishness.

A task remained, burial of the dead. Hefferdin was now master of Murder Island. He could almost hear Omar Carlson correct him: "*Double* Murder Island!" The gold was his. But silence, which had always been so good and soothing when Carlson had been away hunting, all at once became a deep, lonesome thing. It would be worse when he had hidden Carlson away. He wondered if he should shave him, give him a haircut, or let him meet his Maker as he was.

"Whichever dies first," Carlson had proposed when they took over the island, "the other will simply heave him into the Cururu. What good are bodies? Maybe the *piranhas* will like even tough old ones, like us. Why waste strength to dig a grave when the water level is two feet down anyway? If I'm left I'll heave you in; how about it?"

Remembering their ancient pact which hadn't been discussed for years, Hefferdin now said softly: "After what you just made me do, Omar, I ought not to do it, but a bargain's a bargain!"

Hefferdin left the dead man lying in the sunlight which streamed down into their small clearing wherein perfect gardening methods with jungle fruits and plants had kept them supplied with the best. He walked to the edge of their island as if he did not know it by heart these many years, to make up his mind just where to free the corpse of Omar Carlson.

SULLEN black water surrounded the island. Tall trees stood knee deep in it, so that the water was always in shadow. Their *canoe* swung easily against the small dock, held fast by a tough old vine. Never again would they quarrel about who would use it. It, like the nuggets and dust, belonged to Mannie Hefferdin now. The waters of the Cururu were as black as strong coffee as if perpetually in mourning for the dead the river knew. . . .

"A new one now, old-timer," said Hefferdin, addressing the river. "How will you have my friend? This side of

my island, or one of the others?"

The river did not answer, or if it did, its whisper meant little to Mannie Hefferdin except goose pimples.

It always had for some reason, maybe because the water was so black, and because there were such queer things floating in it sometimes—dead things and living things. There was just such a living thing now! Floating *aninga*, the great waxy water-plants which sometimes ripped loose from the banks and went drifting away. The perfect funeral barge, the perfect Charon's ferry, for Omar Carlson!

Hefferdin hurried back, lifted Carlson with surprising ease, carried him to the *canoa*, pushed off with him, shoved the *canoa's* nose into the matted mass of *aninga*, and heaved Carlson over onto the watery green mat. Carlson fell on his back, and sank to his elbows and his ears, his face to the sun, his eyes staring into it without blinking.

"You'll sink through, finally, Omar," said Hefferdin, "but far enough downriver that you won't be any trouble to me—just as you wouldn't want to be."

Slowly the *aninga* floated on, turned the bend of the island, carried away the dead bearded, whiskered face of Carlson. Hefferdin rowed back to the dock, brisker than he usually was with the paddle, secured the *canoa* hurriedly, pranced to the cabin. Now it was all his, cabin, island, *canoa*, *gold!* He walked to his own room. He would clear out the other one and move into it tomorrow, just to prove to himself he could, without argument. He looked at himself in the tiny, dull mirror.

"Mannie," he said soberly to his reflection, "not only have you wished for ten years or longer to do that, you've *mediated* on it. You have been a cocked pistol for years and Omar pulled the trigger. You're a born murderer. You don't care, and you've got away with it twice. Not only that, you'll be a free man until you die!"

All at once, because he realized he hated his beard since Omar Carlson wore one, he wished to rid himself of his beard and moustache. There wasn't much he could do about his hair, but his beard—Well, he was turning over a new leaf; why not in the matter of appearance?

It was a miracle that the old straight-edge still served after he had pared the beard down to handling size with rusty scissors. When he finished Mannie Hefferdin wished he had left on the facial adornments. The face he looked at was pale, deadly, fifteen years younger than Mannie Hefferdin knew himself to be—the face of a vicious, greedy, murdering savage. No sooner did he wish he had kept his beard than something flowed into him, something evil, and he was glad to see his face, to know just what kind of a man he was. The face was resolute, too. That face, with the head and body properly dressed, and backed by the nuggets and gold dust, would make him a power in the outside world. He would prove out there that murder paid dividends.

"I've known it since we landed here," he told himself. "What kept me here all these years? Why didn't I murder Carlson when we reached the Cururu, when I wanted to? I was afraid, that's why, afraid about Rollins, afraid about Carlson himself. But ten years, and who has asked about Rollins? Ten years from now nobody will have asked about Carlson! And I am a man of wealth, a man of wisdom and of wealth. The world is what I make it after this."

It was the gist of all the morality arguments he and Carlson had had since they murdered Rollins and asked each other what might come of the murder—and nothing ever had, unless it were Carlson's murder. Ten years was not too much time to wait for Carlson's death to become a rich man.

Now he would go out. He began preparations at once. He had murdered Carlson at about ten o'clock in the morning. He had no watch or clock but he could tell closely enough by the slant of the sun into their clearing. By two o'clock he was ready to go. He had all provisions for the trip downriver to the Mission, to the mouth of the Cururu—and out. He went out to the dock to load the first provisions.

The *canoa* was gone! He knew very well he had carefully moored it. *Nobody* was ever careless about mooring a *canoa*, when carelessness might mean marooning forever on some island, or taking a chance with alligators and *piranhas* to

swim off. Hefferdin himself had never left the *canoa* without making sure it was fast. Carlson had been careless. Several times Hefferdin, after Carlson had used the *canoa*, had gone to the dock just in time to keep from losing it.

"Omar," said Hefferdin to the river, "if I didn't know you were dead I'd swear you had deliberately unfastened the canoe to keep me from getting away!"

He knew it wasn't true, of course, but he raised his eyes to the waterway beyond the fringe of trees, where a raft of *aninga* had matted—the matting on which the corpse of Carlson had drifted away.

HEFFERDIN almost cried out, for Carlson had come back! It wasn't possible, and he knew it, but there was Carlson, on a raft of *aninga*, slowly drifting downriver—when, hours ago, he had *already* drifted downriver! He had shifted a little on his *aninga* bed, so that he appeared to be half-reclining instead of supine, and for a moment or two Hefferdin thought the murdered man was grinning at him! Not only that but he had to wipe his eyes to make sure that Carlson wasn't alive out there on that raft, leaning back with his hands clasped behind his head!

"So you *did* unfasten the canoe!" railed Hefferdin. "Now you come back to laugh at me about it!"

But it couldn't be, for rafts didn't float upstream, and he had distinctly seen Carlson carried away by the black sullen waters at least three hours before. Of course in this area the river was split up into dozens of rivers to run among dozens of islands and the main stream was half a kilometer away to the southwest, but all the small "rivers" emptied into the main river within a kilometer or two downstream and *none* of the rivers ran up-hill! Hefferdin knew the currents in the Cururu as he had known the face of Carlson before he grew his beard, as he knew the palms of his own hands.

For the second time the body of Carlson, on its bed of *aninga*, vanished downstream. Hefferdin rubbed his eyes, convinced that he had been seeing things. A great deal of *aninga* had been breaking free upriver during the last few

weeks and often several of the river's branches were choked with it. Once the Mission launch had come upriver in the main stream and been caught in it for hours. Hefferdin and Carlson had listened to the voices of the priests and the Indian crew—snickering because neither the Indians nor the priests knew they were on the island, after all these years.

"I wish they'd come now," thought Hefferdin, beginning to be ever so little doubtful of the situation in which he found himself. He was an excellent swimmer, and often Indian canoes passed on the main river. He could yell and maybe Indians would hear and come to him, but more likely they wouldn't; they would be afraid of strange sounds from an uninhabited area. Indians were superstitious. And to reach the main stream without a canoe he would have to wade snake-infested swamps up to his hips and swim four or five deep black "rivers."

He shuddered. Carlson and himself had always got all the alligator they wanted, within a few hundred yards, when they became hungry for alligator-tail steak. There were hundreds of them between Murder Island and the main stream. There were three varieties of *piranhas*. There were innumerable snakes, land snakes in the brush, water snakes invisible in the black water.

Hefferdin, whether he liked it or not, was stuck. In the back of his mind he could hear the high cackling of Omar Carlson, could almost hear his comment—because he knew exactly what Carlson, if he were alive, would say in the circumstances.

"Left the mooring vine off, soon's I wasn't around to check on you! And you always accusin' *me* of carelessness!"

When you had listened to a man every hour of every day for a dozen years it was quite easy to hear him when he wasn't there—when he was dead, even. Hefferdin recalled how many times he had heard Carlson when he *knew* the younger man was miles away hunting wild ducks.

"I must remember what habit can do to a man," he told himself, "or I'll be imagining all sorts of things—as if I could really hear Omar Carlson!"

"We could be wrong, Mannie!" he could hear the hateful voice say. "There may be natural retribution after all!"

That did it! If anything would restore him to normal it was the idea that he could have heard any such nonsense—especially from Omar Carlson, dead or alive.

There was no such thing as retribution, even human retribution, if you knew how to evade it, if you had brains, like Mannie Hefferdin.

Now, he had to figure out how to get off the island, downriver. A raft was difficult to handle, but it was the easiest transportation to make. Hardwood would not float, so he must take time to select woods that would. And they'd have to be dried a little. He'd have to fell the trees, drag them into the clearing, take off the limbs. . . .

"It'll take *weeks!*" he told himself despairingly. "I might as well take the time to hollow out a log and do the thing right. Then I'll be sure not to swamp and lose my provisions, and the gold dust and nuggets."

A strange unaccustomed fear smote him at the idea of staying on the island alone for weeks on end. Before, when he had known Carlson would return, it hadn't mattered. Now, he was somewhat unsure. And while he didn't look at the river again, in the eye of his mind he could see Carlson out there, floating past again, laughing at him because his canoe had drifted away. Only now, when he saw the dead man as he had seen him before, there was a difference: Carlson had raised his hands and clasped them behind his head for the sake of greater comfort!

"Habit again!" he jeered at himself. "I hated him when he did that during an argument, with such an air of authority. I just *imagine* he's doing it, when I *imagine* he is floating past again on the *aninga* raft."

Too late now to begin the boat or the raft. The sun would soon be down. Just time enough to select the tree and estimate where to fell it. But what good was that? He knew by heart every tree within four kilometers of Murder Island, every limb on every tree on the island itself.

He could sit right in the cabin and decide what was to be done.

HE COOKED his supper, making it good as he always did, happy that Carlson wasn't there to keep bragging that he was the better cook. When he had finished, and smoked a cigar made from their own tobacco, he felt more expansive than ever, and more happy to be alone and monarch of all he surveyed. He was none too sure, when he became a bit more accustomed to it, that he would not remain right here to the end of his days.

The instant that thought came he knew he would not do it. Who buried old men who died alone? And what if he were ill for days on end, and could not get out, and *starved* to death? No, he would go as soon as he had the canoe built, or if he delayed thereafter, the second he felt anything threatening his usually perfect health.

It was a moonlit night, and he loved the moonlight. He stayed inside, making his plans, building his dreams exactly as he would have had he been forty years younger. He sat in the dark until the moon came out.

Then he rose, walked out into the clearing, all bright and Christmasy in the moonlight, to look at the little kingdom he ruled alone, king and subjects all rolled into one person. There were the bananas, *papayas*, sweet potatoes, corn, wheat, alligator pears, oranges, mangoes, all the grand things he and his partner had planted, providing riches of food that even his money would not buy in the world outside. And there was plenty of the money. He didn't know just how much gold was worth an ounce, but he was sure that it was enough. And he had looked at their hoard before supper, would look at it again by candle light when he had got enough of the moon. . . .

The urge struck him to go to the dock to make *sure* that the canoe had indeed disappeared. He always enjoyed sitting on the dock and looking in at the clearing—the dock in deep shadow, the clearing in moonlight, looking out of the blackness into the light. By day when the sun was bright, by night when the moon and the stars were shining, he loved that view—from the river inward.

He walked out to the dock, his senses alert as always for the black shape on

the path, for the slithering sound, for the buzzed warning—for the odor of snakes. He owed his life to a kind of sixth sense about snakes. He did not fear them, but he respected them and was not careless about them.

He stood on the dock. A patch of moonlight lighted up the river's branch before him. He noted first that the canoe was gone, no question about it. Then he saw a great raft of *anнга*, the great water plant with its waxen stalks and leaves, come slowly, horribly slowly, into his line of vision—out of blackness into the lighted area through which it would pass in a minute or two into darkness again. Now, one raft of *anнга* was like another raft, except perhaps for size. They all floated about the same because they could not travel faster than the current of the river.

Yet there was a quick feeling of familiarity about this one!

He knew it was the same raft seconds before he saw the corpse of Omar Carlson in the midst of it. Carlson had shifted position a little, but there was no doubt about it whatever. He was lying, or rather half-lying, about as Hefferdin had seen him last, except that he had turned slightly to the right, as if to find a more comfortable position!

And as Hefferdin shut his mouth on a scream, Carlson turned back to the left, as if just now conscious of Hefferdin and anxious to see him, perhaps even to call out a greeting, before he, Carlson, should vanish downriver once more. For the second hideous time the impossible had happened!

But Carlson was far downriver by this time; he *had* to be. There was no murdered man upriver—except Rollins, and after ten years he wouldn't be anything but a skeleton, and even if he were not, what would Rollins be doing here at Murder Island?

For just a second before the raft vanished again, the bearded face of Carlson looked much more like the beardless face of the long-dead Rollins. But Hefferdin knew very well that it was, it *had* to be, a trick of the moonlight. The slight lazy wave of the hand by which Carlson greeted him just as he vanished into the darkness proved that it wasn't Rollins! But Carlson was dead, how could he

wave a hand, however negligently? Memory of habit again, nothing more! Or else the body had rolled slightly with the slow undulating of the *anнга* raft.

Hefferdin must have screamed four or five times, the loudest he possibly could, before he realized that he was screaming. And when he realized it it frightened him so that he hurried back to the cabin, entered, closed and barred the door, went to the door of Carlson's room and fastened it shut with a chair, then entered his own room, panting like a spent runner.

"Why did I shut Carlson's door?" he asked himself. "And why did I scream because I only imagined I saw Omar Carlson just now?"

Men were not afraid of ghosts, for they knew there were no ghosts. Besides, that body wasn't a *ghost*; it was just the body of Carlson, going downriver, coming back upriver, going downriver . . .

As he pictured it in his mind, Mannie Hefferdin screamed again, in his own stout room, and was amazed how the echoes sounded. He had never screamed in the room before. He screamed again. . .

WHEN they found him finally, after some days, Mannie Hefferdin was working aimlessly on a shapeless kind of a canoe. He had felled a tree but didn't seem to know just what to do with it. He kept staring at it, then at his adz, at his axe, then at his saw—as if he had never seen any of them before. Really he was a pretty good workman, but he couldn't seem to make up his mind what to do with his tools.

"You're right, there *is* a man here," said the priest to the Indian who had induced him to come upriver from the mission.

"Did I not say I heard a man screaming in terror?" replied the Indian.

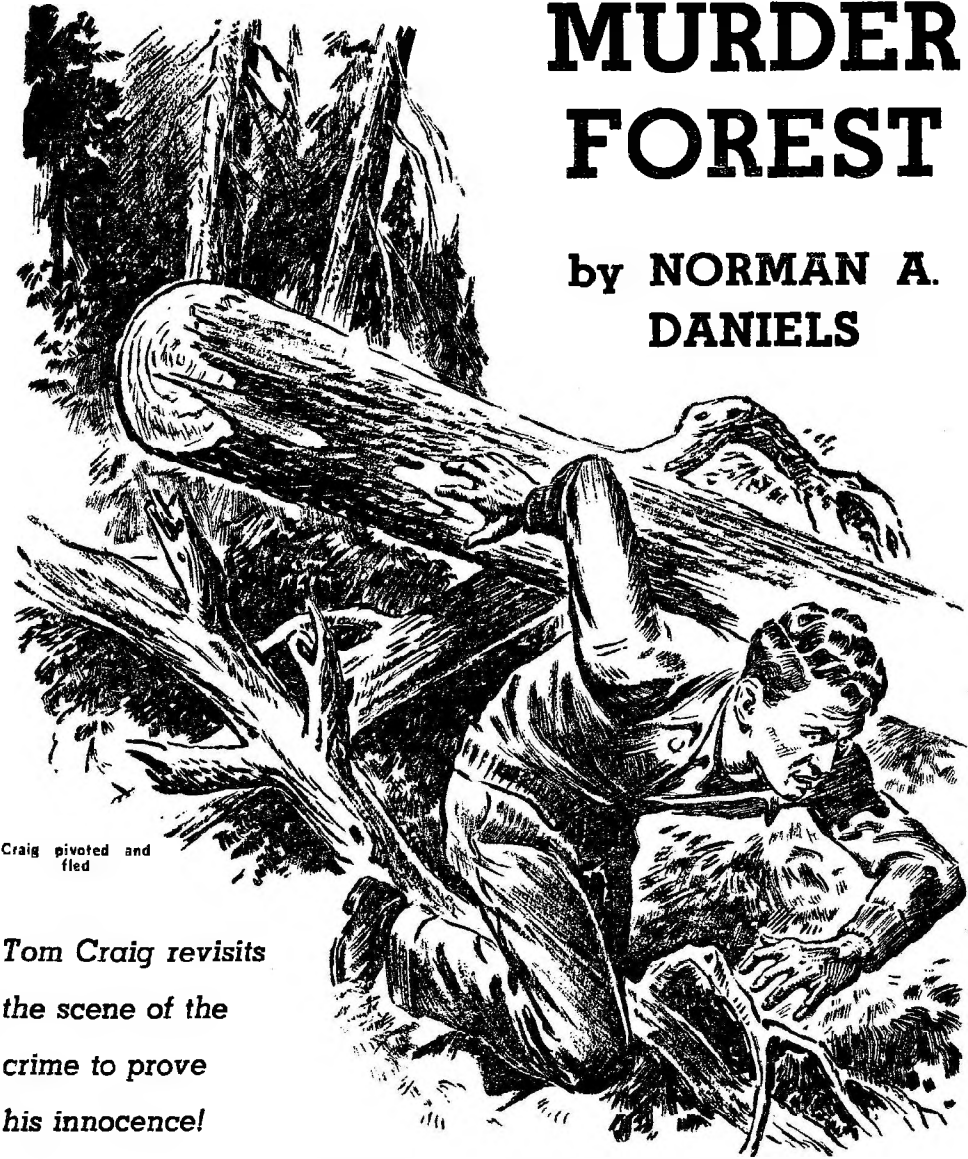
The two went up to the man working aimlessly on the tree trunk, and the priest spoke to him, but he did not answer. Then the Indian tried, but got no answer either. Mannie Hefferdin didn't seem to be aware of either of them.

"How," he kept saying over and over to himself, "could the *anнга* raft keep going downriver, then, a few minutes

(Concluded on page 126)

MURDER FOREST

by NORMAN A.
DANIELS



Craig pivoted and
fled

*Tom Craig revisits
the scene of the
crime to prove
his innocence!*

CRAIG had a face too pale for this northern country where skin is usually tanned by a summer sun and made leathery by the ferocious winters. He looked worried and unsure of himself. During the long ride from Bel-laire, he never uttered a word and fellow passengers in the bus decided that he was bashful, had a great worry on his mind, had recently suffered the loss of

some loved one, or was just plain unso-cialable.

However, Thomas Craig, late Num-ber 59704 of the State Penitentiary was none of these things. He was simply con-fused. For three tedious years he'd stamped out car license plates and won-dered if he was gradually going insane. Not from the monotony of prison—he could take that—but from the circum-

stances which had sent him there.

The lumber town of Fontaine was still thirty miles away when the bus stopped at another lumber town to gas up and take on water. A single passenger climbed aboard. Craig had seen him shaking hands with a man who wore a sheriff's badge on his blue denim shirt as the bus had air-braked to a squishing halt.

THE newcomer was about thirty, didn't have the appearance of a lumberjack but looked like a nice friendly gent. He sat down in the seat which Tom Craig half occupied. The bus started up again. The newcomer glanced curiously at Craig.

"Nice day, isn't it?" he said.

Craig replied, "Mmmm."

The newcomer smiled. "Been traveling far?"

Craig said, "Far enough."

"Communicative sort, aren't you?" The newcomer grunted. "When did they let you out?"

Craig's head jerked around and he scanned his fellow passenger critically. "Do I look as bad as that?" he demanded. "Or, maybe, you happen to know me."

"I never saw you before, but I know the signs. You're too pale, even though they may have let you exercise a bit each day in the sunlight. Your manner—you keep your voice low, your eyes averted as if you expect something to happen at any moment. But most of all it's those clothes. No place on the face of the earth makes shoes like our State Prison does."

Tom Craig allowed himself a wan smile. "Thanks, mister. Now I know what to correct first. You're a very observant man."

"It's my business. My name is Arthur Ashton. I'm a private detective, just finished a little work back in that last town and I'm on my way home now."

"So that explains it," Craig said. His manner grew wistful. "What I couldn't do with your talents right now."

Ashton gave him a sharp glance. "What's it about? You can tell me."

Craig put his head back against the so-called white headrest cover. "Sure I'll tell you. I've been aching to tell

someone who'd listen. A constable wouldn't. A whole town thought I was crazy. A judge—the way I figure it—handed me an extra year because he believed I lied. The prison warden listened and then told me his job was to punish, not investigate his prisoners' stories. The convicts rotated a finger near their temples when I strolled by. To them I was plain bats."

"You act quite normal to me," Ashton said. "I'm interested. Maybe I can help you."

Craig shook his head. "I haven't more than the twenty dollars the state gave me when I got out. Less the price of the bus ticket here. But I'll tell you what happened. It was three and a half years ago. I worked as a salesman for the Buford people. Not a bad salesman either. Well, about one o'clock in the morning I was driving over this same road. The one we're on now."

"I see," Ashton said encouragingly.

"I turned a corner, right on the outskirts of this particular town and I saw a man lying by the side of the road. Naturally I stopped and got out to see if he needed help. He didn't. The man was dead. I started back to my car to summon the cops and then a second man jumped out of the brush and started yelling that I was a hit-and-run driver!"

"Do you think he saw the real accident?" Ashton wanted to know.

"Who can tell? At any rate, more people showed up and finally the constable arrived. He took me in. Not that I blame him. I was treated all right and they listened to my story but—and get this—twenty-eight people identified me as the man whose car hit that dead guy, and then tried to get away."

Ashton looked incredulous. "But didn't you say there were no witnesses?"

"There wasn't a soul around when I stopped my car to help the man in the road," Craig said. "I fought the case, got myself a good lawyer and my firm even put up some money. But those people climbed on the witness stand and swore I was the man and my car was the car. My lawyer pointed out that my car didn't have a mark on it and the prosecution came right back and proved my car could have done it anyway. What was I to do? Twenty-eight people lied to put me

in prison. I didn't kill that man—they knew it—and not one of them could possibly have witnessed the accident. Yet they swore they did."

ASHTON whistled softly. "If true, that's a highly interesting story. What do you intend to do about it?"

"I'm going back and find out why half a village lied to put me in prison. What did they have against me? I'd never been in their stinking crossroad town before in my life. I've spent three years trying to figure it out, but figuring is tough when you're a couple of hundred miles away and there are a lot of bars between you and the freedom it takes to fight."

"So you're going back," Ashton mused. "What's your name?"

"Craig. Tom Craig. And can you offer me any suggestions why this happened?"

"I can't, unfortunately, but I may be able to help you find the truth. I'm not interested in being paid for the job unless you prove your innocence and win a civil action against the town. What sort of a place is it?"

Craig shrugged. "The usual type of logging town. Been there for centuries, and used to be farming country until they found cutting timber was more profitable. The population was exactly sixty-one persons. It nestles in a little valley with virgin timber on one side of it. Timberland which, incidentally, the victim of that accident had just sold to the town council."

Ashton said, musingly, "You'd never been to the town, knew no one there and about half the population testified under oath that your car hit that man and you were driving it. Frankly, Craig, it does sound as if you are either a liar or a psychopathic case. I don't think you are either one. Therefore, I'll put in a little time helping you."

Craig offered his hand. "If I can ever pay you back, rest assured that I will."

Ashton closed his eyes and was silent for a mile or two. Then he said, "We've got to work this right. You go on alone. I'll reach town later and we don't know one another except in secret. That will give me a chance to work without it being known I'm your friend. Is there a hotel?"

"An inn, of sorts. Highway goes close by and they get a little trade."

"Check in there and wait until you hear from me. Don't go barging around the village browbeating people or trying to punch someone into admitting you were innocent!"

Craig got off the bus alone about an hour later. He picked up his shabby suitcase and trudged down the road toward the village proper and its two-story log-cabin style inn. He walked up to the desk and the red-cheeked little man who ran the place looked at him curiously. Craig signed the register and the owner glanced at the name.

He looked up from the old fashioned ledger type register, with startled eyes. "You the man who ran down Ed Morley three years ago?"

"Yes," Craig said without further comment.

"Hmmm! You aiming to make a lot of trouble, mister? I recall how you said we were all low-life liars."

"I'll make no trouble unless I'm forced to," Craig told him. "If you don't want me here, say so, and I'll pitch a tent somewhere."

"You can stay. Feel kinda sorry for you, myself. Always did. Had my own theories about what happened too."

"I'm interested in theories. Any kind of theories." Craig leaned against the ancient counter.

"You were in the war. Had a good record with plenty of action. I think you got sick in the head from all you went through and you honestly didn't believe you'd killed young Morley."

"Thanks," Craig said. "Now will you show me to my room?"

THE little man took Craig's suitcase and carried it upstairs. Craig closed and locked the door. He spent a few minutes cleaning up and wished he had the price of another suit. The long bus trip had wrinkled the prison suit badly.

He felt better though, lit a cigarette and sat down to consider things in general. Every word he'd told Ashton had been the truth. At least so far as he knew it. He'd spent three years in prison as an innocent man and he wanted to wipe out that stigma.

And yet, now, as during the long pris-

on nights, he wondered if he had dreamed part of that episode. Maybe the hotel owner had the right idea. He was mentally sick as a result of his war experiences. God knows, he'd been through enough. Perhaps when he hit that poor guy, something had blacked out in his mind and it began functioning again only after he honestly believed he'd just reached the scene and never struck the man at all.

Craig had plenty of reason to entertain such a theory. How could twenty-eight people have actually witnessed the accident when he hadn't seen a soul around those lonesome outskirts? One or two people might have lied but hardly half the entire village. Those old and bitter doubts began to make him squirm.

Someone knocked on the door and sent those thoughts flying. He admitted the only man in the village whom he'd gotten to know well. Constable Geer still wore his highly polished star and that enormous and ludicrous horse pistol strapped to one hip.

Geer came in without greeting and sat down. He crossed his legs and studied Craig for a moment. "You look fair to middlin'," he commented. "What brings you back?"

"Curiosity, Constable. Plain curiosity."

Geer rubbed his chin. "So you still think we're a pack of liars here, do you? Still claim you never killed Morley? Well, you've got a right to think any way you like. Far as we're concerned you paid your debt, though I ain't one to say that serving three years in prison is enough to pay for the life of that young fellow you killed. No sir!"

Geer raised his arms and stretched. Then, like a cat springs, he was on his feet. Both big hands gripped Craig by the shoulders and yanked him close. Geer had a faint taint of whiskey on his breath.

"But listen here, you start acting up and I'll see you go back to prison. That was a five year term you drew and it's only three years since you were sent up. That means you must be on parole. Parolees ain't got many rights and one of the things you can't do is act up in my town. Got that?"

Craig shook himself free. His fists

doubled but he held back. He had an idea this constable was waiting for him to throw a punch or two and that would have meant a fast, direct trip back to where he'd just come from.

"I got it," Craig said slowly. "I know just what you mean. I also know exactly how far I can go before you are legally able to clamp down on me. And Constable, you'd better not try to frame me as I was framed before. Because this time it—won't—stick!"

Geer moved back and laughed. "Always did admire spunk. Sorry I was a little rough but I figured maybe prison life had changed you. Now see here, Craig, I'm an honest man. I've been elected constable of this village every two years for the past two decades. If I wasn't honest they'd have thrown me out long ago. There wasn't any frame three years ago and there won't be any now. Just behave yourself."

He walked out, closing the door softly. Craig sat down to wait for Ashton. By evening there was no word and his patience had run out. He had so little money that he couldn't afford to waste any time. He possessed a list of the witnesses who had testified against him, with notes about the peculiarities of each.

One woman stood out starkly. Mrs. Cranford had proclaimed herself a dutiful housewife with a long period of residence in town. But Mrs. Cranford had been sixty though she tried to look like thirty, a feat which she had accomplished rather well. Only someone very nicely versed in the art of makeup could have altered her face so radically. Also, she'd been given to courtroom gestures that were supremely theatrical. No non-professional could ever have adopted and used them so successfully.

It was flimsy stuff but Craig had nothing else to go on. He set out for Mrs. Cranford's home. Almost everyone on the street looked at him curiously. There was no word of greeting, but neither were there any looks of annoyance or hatred.

HE found Mrs. Cranford as theatrical as ever. She didn't look a day older except for the way she walked. Any other old woman would have resort-

ed to a cane. She was also a trifle flustered, but let Craig in.

"Young man," she said, and her arm went out in a gesture that was all ham. "I'm sorry for you. I know you think I and all the others lied about seeing the accident, but we didn't. It was the truth."

Craig nodded. "Mrs. Cranford, all I'm trying to do is prove that something must have happened to my brain if, and when, I hit that man. I'm an ex-service man, as you know. If something is wrong with me I'm entitled to compensation, but the prison doctors say my mind is clear and I'm not, nor ever have been, crazy. Just tell me again exactly what you saw that night."

She clasped both hands impassionately. "Of course, young man. Of course I will help you. It was about eleven o'clock—"

"It was around one in the morning," Craig reminded her gently.

She seemed startled. "Why so it was. I guess my mind needs a little attention. I seem to forget things so easily these days." She put a hand to her forehead in another of those hammy gestures. "One grows old and the mind ages with the body, I suppose. Yes, it was the time you said."

"And then?" Craig prodded.

"We'd all been to Millie Smith's birthday party. Seemed to me as if she wasn't old enough to have her thirty-seventh birthday because I remember when she was so-high. But there she was—thirty-seven. We sang and ate and joked. Then we all started for home. We heard a car coming. Someone screamed and then there was the impact. We saw that boy thrown to the side of the road. You never stopped—"

"But I did stop. That's how I was caught. Hank Nelson found me kneeling beside the body."

"So he did, so he did. I'm forgetting again. It happened that way. I wish it had never happened. I wish you'd not driven to our village that night because you're a nice boy. I hated to take the stand against you."

As Craig recalled it, she'd seemed delighted to face an audience. He thanked her politely, said he'd call again if he needed more information, and got out

of there, more confused than ever.

Then he started down the list of witnesses and interviewed four with precisely identical results. Their stories were pat. Too pat. He started back to the hotel. The inn keeper crooked a finger in his direction.

"Got a letter for you, Mr. Craig. Can't say who delivered it. Found the thing on the counter an hour after you left."

Craig's fingers trembled slightly as he ripped the flap. It must be word from Ashton, the private detective. Perhaps he'd found something. But the even dozen words were written distinctly in a woman's hand.

The message read: *Walk Morley Forest Path at Nine. Will Meet You. Truth Will Out!*

Craig's head swam. Here was someone on his side. Those words meant hope. Whoever had written them was afraid of something and that fear, in itself, was good evidence the writer had plenty to tell. Craig crumpled the letter, walked to the porch and set the letter afire.

He knew what was meant by the Morley Forest Path. Young Morley, whom he'd been convicted of killing, had inherited this tract. It ran two and a half miles, clear to the Canadian border. He'd been in town to look it over and he'd sold out to the lumber mill enterprise which ran the village. It was a co-operative business, owned and operated by villagers.

Apparently they hadn't cut through that tract yet and the tree bordered walk was still there Tom had walked it himself, during those hectic days before his trial, when he was free on bond. Now he'd soon do it again, by night, to meet someone who might know the full truth. Craig's hopes had never risen this high before.

He had dinner at the Inn and found it was on the house. The owner waved his hand and said it was nothing. He clearly indicated how sorry he felt for Craig.

FROM seven-thirty until eight-thirty, Craig stuck to his room waiting for Ashton but he heard nothing from the private detective. At ten minutes of nine he entered the forest. There was no moon and the tall trees looked like tow-

ering poles against the dark sky. He saw that the foliage had been stripped off most of them by some ravaging disease. Smaller trees and shrubs were thickly foliated though. The air was cold, crisp and clean. He enjoyed it.

He walked slowly, alert for the first whispered sign of whoever had written that note. He heard no sound and wondered about that too. Forests are full of night sounds and the lack of them placed him on guard. There was a certain terror in him too. A city man never likes to prowl a dense wood by night. There were creepy shadows, deceptive formations and, now and then, the dismal creak of some ancient branch.

He progressed for about a mile and nothing happened. His watch showed fifteen minutes after nine. He wondered if the writer of the note hadn't arrived—due to fear or physical restraint.

There was a creaking sound, not too loud under ordinary conditions, but here in the eerie silence it was enough to make his eardrums ring. A tree was falling. One of the tallest of them. One with only bare branches but it was coming down straight at him. He pivoted, picked up his feet and ran as fast as he could.

The creaking had turned to a crash now, as the falling tree splintered others and sent dry branches cascading down. Branches that weighed upwards of a hundred pounds, any one of them capable of crushing in his skull as if it were a ping-pong ball.

He saw then, that he was running into the path of a second tree on its way down and he knew this couldn't be coincidence. The letter had been the lure of a trap and he was in it, up to his neck. The only satisfaction he could get, during the fleeting instant when he was permitted to think about anything other than self-preservation, was that he had been framed and they were afraid of him.

Hemmed in along the path by two falling trees, with nothing but underbrush to dive at for protection, gave him little choice. It had to be the underbrush. He wheeled again and leaped at some shrubs. A thick bush of some kind ripped his cheeks and the backs of his hands as he plunged into it.

Something struck him on the shoulder and he went toppling deeper into the brush. Something else hit him on the head and he fell, too stunned to move, not caring much any more if he was crushed to death. It seemed to Craig that all this had taken hours but he knew very well it had only been a matter of three or four seconds.

He was pinned down, when his wits cleared a little. Pinned securely by branches of the bush into which he'd plunged and these branches, in turn, were held down by the weight of half a ton of tree top. Only the resiliency of the bush had prevented the old, weather beaten tree from killing him.

He started to squirm his way to freedom when he heard the voice. It came from some distance.

"He's got to be close by. I know the tree got him. It had to. He was right between both of 'em and they smashed up a lot of territory."

"Well, keep looking," someone else urged. "If you find him and he ain't dead, bust him one and make it look like the work of a branch. You two—Rickey and Mac—get those ropes out of here. Untangle 'em from the trees so there won't be any evidence that they were dragged down. And make it snappy. There'll be something coming through in the morning."

At least, Craig mused unhappily, he knew where he stood. He used more caution in extracting himself from the brush but despite all the caution he could muster, dry twigs and thin branches crackled as he broke them. Someone yelled an alarm. They were coming his way.

Craig started running. He didn't even know which direction to take but that didn't matter so long as he could put some distance between himself and his pursuers. He had to reach town now, and tell the State Police and that private detective about this.

Two men appeared out of the gloom and Craig dropped flat. They had flashlights and rifles; were using the former and kept the latter ready for fast action. They skirted the underbrush a dozen yards from where Craig lay, not even daring to breathe.

When they were gone, he crept on all

fours to a clearing, sprinted across this and was certain now that he'd made it. At that moment he stumbled into a gopher hole and fell with a resounding crash. They were after him again, like a pack of hungry jackals. A rifle flamed but the bullet didn't come too close. Craig realized he was hardly an open target in the darkness.

BUT these men knew their way around and he didn't. They'd fanned out and sooner or later they'd form a circle through which he could never pass. It was up to him now. He had to make it within the next ten minutes or not at all.

He found that his ankle pained badly and knew he had a sprain but he hobbled on, covering ground after a fashion. He was on the verge of despair when he saw the tombstones, eerily raised in the darkness. He was on the outskirts of town and this was the village burying grounds.

Craig climbed an ancient wooden fence, tottered toward the largest of the stones and fell down beside it. He lay there for a long time, listening to the hunt, hearing someone say that he couldn't possibly have entered the graveyard because it had been under close observation. But it would have required a dozen men to properly patrol that fence. Craig had made it by seconds.

Gradually the sounds died away as the hunt switched direction. He removed his shoe and nursed the swollen ankle and nodded pleasantly at the tombstone which had saved his neck. He got the shoe on again, without tying the lace, and started limping out of the graveyard. Then he came to a stop, bent and began studying the headstones in the faint moonlight showing now. They were all plain, flat granite with the names and dates faded by decades of time.

He pulled the list of witnesses from the village out of his pocket and slowly made his way through the entire cemetery. When he was finished, he had a strange smile on his lips.

He got back to town, unseen and unheralded. The Inn keeper gave him a startled glance as he limped through the lobby. Craig said nothing. He unlocked his room door and gasped. The place

had been thoroughly, though expertly, ransacked. And—seated in a chair near the window, was Arthur Ashton.

The private detective jumped up when Craig entered. "What on earth—" he began.

Craig said, "Am I glad to see you. Things have happened and, believe me, I wasn't crazy three years ago. Tonight I got a letter telling me to enter the Morley Forest and meet someone. I went there and a couple of trees fell on me. Also about a dozen men were ready to shoot me down."

Ashton dropped into his chair. "Craig, if that's true, I'll have to change my whole opinion of this. Frankly, I've interviewed three quarters of the village and I've come to the conclusion you must have been in some sort of a mental fog three years ago."

"Just take a walk along Morley path," Craig suggested. "See for yourself how two big trees fell across the path, right where I was walking. This whole thing is a set-up. I was used as a stooge and served time for a crime someone else committed and this village was trying to protect. Now that I'm back, they're all scared stiff."

Ashton lit a cigarette. "They didn't act scared to me. I told them I was a writer, interested in the case because of its odd features. They talked openly and honestly. But, of course, I either didn't interview the right people or they fooled me as they fooled you and a judge. What are you going to do about this?"

"I'd hoped you'd have some results," Craig said slowly. "Now that you haven't, I'm going to the State Police. The local constable must be part of the fix."

"Yes, I agree. Craig, just to be on the safe side, give me an hour or two. I'll go see for myself where you were trapped in the forest. I'll check around a little more so that when we do go to the State Police we won't go off half-cocked. Is that agreeable?"

"Anything that gives me a little rest," Craig said. "And look up a widow named Mrs. Cranford. Three years ago she testified against me and was pretty sure of her answers. Right now she isn't. I figure she must be getting old

and can't remember what she was supposed to say. I've an idea she might crack."

Ashton crushed out his cigarette. "I'll do that. You're in pretty bad shape, Craig. Rest up. I'll be back as soon as humanly possible."

"Good luck," Craig said as he sat down on the edge of the bed and started removing the shoe from his injured foot. "I'll be waiting."

FIVE minutes after Ashton departed, Craig was going down the rather rickety fire escape, and wondering why Ashton hadn't commented on the search of the room. Craig also wondered why whoever had done that had been so careless about it.

He skirted the inn, kept to the shadows as much as possible and headed toward the Town Hall. Constable Geer had his office there but it was dark. Craig went around to the back, smashed a window with a rock muffled by his hat. He got the window open, hoisted himself inside and located the room where town records were kept. There he looked up the birth certificate of one Millie Smith. That satisfied him a great deal. He did some other checking too and located the bill of sale for the Morley Forest tract. It bore a signature that seemed a trifle shaky.

He put everything back, got out of the building through a door and limped toward Mrs. Cranford's home. There was a light in the living room. He crossed the porch and the light was extinguished. He knocked on the door. There was no answer. He banged with both fists and drew no reply. Then he put an ear against the thin panels and he could hear someone talking faintly. A one sided conversation. Mrs. Cranford was on the phone.

Craig got out of there as fast as he could travel. When he reached a parallel street he could look across a yard and pretty soon he saw Constable Geer drive up and leap from the car with drawn gun. Craig faded from sight.

He returned to the vicinity of the Inn, found a dark spot and sat down to rest. Pretty soon Constable Geer arrived, went inside and stayed there. An hour later Arthur Ashton came along and headed

for the back entrance of the Inn.

Craig said, "Ashton—over here."

The private detective turned fast, spotted Craig in the gloom and came his way. Craig let him get close before he swung. It was difficult because he couldn't balance himself well on one leg but he administered a roundhouse that ended the fight before Ashton could even wind one up.

Craig knelt beside the unconscious man and quickly searched him. He found no identification that Ashton was a private detective but he did find a few papers to indicate Ashton's real name was George Baker and that he came from Chicago. There was also a letter of introduction to Constable Geer, but by the looks of the envelope and letter it had never been read. Craig stuffed this into his pocket and then proceeded to rip some of the phony private eye's clothing into strips.

With Baker, alias Ashton, trussed up like a mummy, Craig dragged him to a tool shed, opened the door and put him inside. He rubbed his hands, permitted himself a grin and hurried as fast as his ankle would allow, to the bus station where he knew there was a phone. He also knew that there was no telephone exchange in this village and all calls went through a larger town some eleven miles South. He could phone the State Police with impunity and not worry that a local operator would tip off the forces acting against him.

At four A. M. he met the two cars of State Police, backed up by a pair of U. S. Border Patrol officers. They listened to Craig politely enough but it was clear that they took no great stock in his story. The parole card he exhibited did nothing for him either.

But the lieutenant in charge of the Troopers was fairly sympathetic. He examined the letter which Craig had taken from the fake private detective, and put it into his pocket. He was in plain clothes and obviously had been routed out of bed.

"We'll see it through, Craig," he said, "but if this is a lot of nonsense you're either going back to prison or to an asylum. Now what about this mysterious convoy that's supposed to be coming through?"

Craig told them, as much as he knew, and they were not impressed. But the troopers took up positions along Morley Forest. At dawn, Craig was being given some suspicious looks because the spot he'd pointed out, in darkness, as being the place where he'd almost been killed by falling trees, looked like any other part of the forest. The debris had been cleaned up.

Only the fact that one of the Border Patrolmen found a spot of fresh earth, dug into it and exposed a lot of fresh sawdust, saved Craig from being handcuffed then and there.

AT NEARLY nine-thirty they heard the tractor rumbling along the trail. It came into sight. Two men were riding it and the trailer was loaded down with newly cut logs. Just a routine operation for this section.

Craig put his lips close to the lieutenant's ear and whispered. The lieutenant nodded, pulled a gun and pressed the muzzle against the small of Craig's back. He forced Craig out onto the road and stopped the tractor with a wave of his free hand.

The lieutenant said, "Well, I've got him, though it took some doing."

The tractor driver was one of the men who had testified against Craig. "Yeah? You got who? And who might you happen to be?"

The lieutenant kept Craig covered and handed up the letter which had been taken off the fake private detective. The tractor driver glanced at it and scowled.

"Okay, Mr. Baker. Knock that punk out, lay him down in front of the tractor and I'll mash him so he'll do no more snooping."

"A good idea," the lieutenant said but his gun wasn't prodding Craig any more. "However it might not be safe. What about your cargo?"

"Only two of 'em," the driver waved toward the log-laden trailer, "and they can't see a thing, boxed up like they are."

The driver and his assistant were too surprised to move when the troopers swarmed out. In town once more, a lot of other people were equally surprised, including Constable Geer who took a poke on the nose when he remonstrated

too strongly as his badge was ripped off his shirt.

Craig said, "It's pretty clear to me now, Lieutenant. Half this village is composed of crooks working for some Chicago outfit which that phony private detective represents. He was put on my trail to see what I'd do and his job, apparently, was to convince me that I was crazy. I would have fallen for it too because I didn't need much to be convinced.

"I knew he was in on it when I found my room searched and Ashton, or Baker, there. He heard me coming and sat down quickly. But he never expected me. He thought I'd been taken care of by a couple of falling trees. Not once did he mention the fact that my room had been searched."

The lieutenant nodded. "At least we know what is behind it. Wholesale smuggling of contraband to undesirable people. The underground route led right up to where the Morley tract ends at the Canadian border. That's where the contraband was taken on."

"Yes," Craig agreed, "and you can see how necessary it was to preserve that tract. If it was cut down, the work would have been much more difficult. So when young Morley came here three and a half years ago, with the intentions of cutting down his forest, they forced him to sign a bill of sale but they used so much force he died. That was when they dropped him by the side of the road to make it look as if his fatal injuries were caused by a hit-and-run car. But I came along and they used me for the sucker."

"Now tell me how you became suspicious?" the lieutenant asked.

Craig grinned. "All those witnesses—every last one of whom belongs to the gang—established themselves here more than twenty years ago. When rum running was profitable. Then they converted to running other stuff. But on the witness stand, testifying against me, these people were all eager to state how they were life-long residents of the village and their forefathers had helped develop it.

"But when they tried to kill me and chased me into a cemetery, I happened to notice that not one of the names of

the witnesses was on any of the tombstones. I figured if their forefathers weren't around they must be dead and certainly would have been buried in the village graveyard. So, I assumed they never existed.

"Then I checked with Mrs. Cranford, an old vaudeville actress who was part of the gang. She stumbled so much I knew she lied and proved it by checking her story that the witnesses had all attended Millie Smith's birthday party. Millie Smith was also in the gang and was born in December. They celebrated in April—or so they claimed. Then I began wondering why they hadn't cut into the Morley tract. The trees are all dying anyway. I realized the forest was necessary to their plans."

The lieutenant wagged his head. "Just goes to show how smart crooks can be. They lived sedately, seemed to work hard and never showed they were growing rich from illicit activities. It was a perfect set-up until they had to account for Morley's death and the wrong man came along to blame it on. You'll get a pardon, Craig, because with twenty-eight prisoners, they're going to break down. Some of them anyway, and admit you were framed."

Craig emitted a long sigh and grinned broadly.

"I don't mind being an ex-con, or hardly the years I spent in prison, but I'm certainly glad I've got a brain that isn't twisted. With me, proving my sanity was the main thing."



THE F. B. I. IN ACTION

G-MEN pay little attention to ordinary confidence men. But William Elmer Mead was unusual. His crimes brought him more than two and a half million dollars. When he sold hundred dollar bills for fifty dollars, F. B. I. agents moved in. Checking on a doctor who had changed Mead's fingerprints, they found Mead. The capture came in the lobby of a hotel in Omaha, Nebraska. Here G-men closed with ready guns. Mead was sent to Federal Prison.

MARTIN James Durkin, big-time car thief, was a trigger-happy killer who shot three Chicago policemen and killed Federal Agent Edward B. Shanahan. Durkin was located at Pecos, Texas. The fugitive had taken the Texas Special to St. Louis. And a compartment on this speeding express train saw the climax of one of the greatest manhunts in F. B. I. history. At Webster Groves, Missouri, F. B. I. men and St. Louis police boarded the train and captured Durkin at gunpoint.

ELDERLY Mr. Bladgett helped two confidence men "prove" to an accomplice that they had enough money to make good had they lost, so that they might collect \$300,000 on a bet they pretended to have won. Mr. Bladgett never again saw the men or the \$70,000 he had loaned the two "winners," but his description was all the F. B. I. men needed. The pair was trapped, one in Florida on a train and the other in a Chicago hotel room.

NORMAN Miller, young kidnap victim, was alert—and while in captivity he heard Dorsey music, the clicking of pool balls and a church bell ringing. These clues helped him when he directed F. B. I. men in their search for the kidnapers' hideout. The hideout was finally located near the Williamsburg Bridge in Manhattan. Spotted, the criminals were rounded up and a vicious cycle of kidnappings brought to a halt.

Brunton ran his hand caressingly over the shiny stock of the rifle



MURDER CAN COUNT

*Sheriff Brunton proves it's
a good idea for a killer
to understand his weapons!*

by **MORRIS COOPER**

SHERIFF BRUNTON lifted the Garand from the ground and pulled the bolt open with his forefinger to make certain the gun was unloaded. His eyes glinted appreciatively as they ran over the weapon.

"Mighty nice," he said, squinting down the barrel, "mighty nice. First time I ever seen one, but my son wrote me a lot about it when he was in the army."

The tall man at his side scuffed his feet against a fence post, and cleared his throat.

"This is no time to be admiring that

thing." There was a sharp edge in his voice, and brown eyes flicked away from the small group of men who were gathered around a huddled form.

"Pshaw, Mr. Lucius, there ain't nothin' to be nervous about." The sheriff jerked a thumb at the corpse that was stretched across the meadow grass. "Old John Mill can't hurt you."

Mr. Lucius glared at the sheriff. "It's not that at all. I can't understand how you can gloat over a gun that just killed a man."

Sheriff Brunton looked at the rifle in his arms, and ran his palm over the shiny stock. "The way I figure it, Mr. Lucius, this gun ain't to blame. No more'n anything else man uses to kill."

Albert Lucius grunted and turned his back to the sheriff. He heard the coroner call "all finished," and watched him walk over.

The sheriff squinted and waited patiently. Doc Nard polished the lenses of his glasses carefully, peered through them, and said:

"Right through the heart. Could have been an accident."

Mr. Lucius glowered. "Could have been? Are you trying to say I'm a liar?"

Doc Nard put his spectacles on. "Old man Mill could have stumbled." He spoke to the sheriff, ignored Mr. Lucius. "And if he was carrying that gun just so, and if it went off just so—" He stopped and spread his hands. "Mighty big ifs. All I know for sure is that he's dead as they come."

Sheriff Brunton nodded his head. "Thanks a lot, Doc." He turned to Mr. Lucius. "How about comin' over to the house with me?"

Albert Lucius looked at the body, and the sheriff said: "We can't do him any good. The boys will take care of him."

THEY started toward the small farmhouse that lay at the foot of a knoll, about a quarter mile away. Sheriff Brunton cleared his throat.

"I didn't get the whole story over the phone." He grinned confidentially. "Might be my hearing ain't as good as it used to be."

"Well," began Mr. Lucius, "we were walking and—"

The sheriff interrupted. "How come you were here? Vacation?"

"Business. I am—was Mr. Mill's partner. Came down early this morning to discuss some important matters."

The sheriff shifted the rifle slightly. "Didn't know Mill had any business. Thought he was retired."

"He wasn't very active, but he still had a finger in the pie."

The sheriff glanced at Mr. Lucius. "You don't sound like you was too grieved."

Mr. Lucius snapped. "I'm not. The old fool kept meddling and wouldn't leave me alone." He stopped talking and started to walk faster.

"Whoa!" The sheriff grabbed his elbow. "Take it easy," he laughed. "I'm

not as young as I used to be."

They walked in silence for a moment, and then the sheriff said: "John Mill only came to live here about a year ago, and I don't know too much about him. Any relatives?"

Mr. Lucius shook his head. "None." "Then who gets his share of the business?"

"I do."

The sheriff whistled. Mr. Lucius glared at him and said. "I might as well tell you we carried partnership insurance. You'll find out anyway."

"That's a nice motive, Mr. Lucius. How much insurance?"

"A hundred thousand."

The sheriff whistled again. "A mighty good motive."

Mr. Lucius said nothing, and Brunton asked: "What time did you get here?"

"About eight this morning. I drove down."

"Did Mill know you were coming?"

"I phoned him last night. When I got here, he sent his man into town for some things."

The sheriff stopped in front of a shade tree, and sat down. He waved a hand at Mr. Lucius.

"Sit down and rest."

Mr. Lucius shook his head. "I'll stand."

The sheriff stretched his feet out and leaned his back against the tree trunk. He sighed contentedly and patted the rifle.

"How come the two of you were out with this gun?"

"Well, Mill couldn't sit in one place longer than a minute. He was like a flea." Mr. Lucius looked at the comfortable figure of the sheriff. "He couldn't rest like some people."

The sheriff grinned. "Guess I am a bit on the tired side."

Mr. Lucius fumbled for a cigarette, offered one to the sheriff. Brunton shook his head.

"Anyway, Mill wanted to show off that new gun of his. Bragged he was one of the few to have one, and for me not to tell anyone." Mr. Lucius flicked the match away, and Sheriff Brunton watched it arc toward the ground.

"Interested in guns?"

"Not a bit," snapped Mr. Lucius. "But I had to humor him or he would never have started talking business. We went out into the meadow and he blasted away at a target."

The sheriff nodded.

"I saw it."

"He insisted I try a couple of shots." Mr. Lucius dropped his cigarette and ground it out viciously with his heel. "Almost broke my shoulder."

"They'll do that if you don't hold them right." There was sympathy in the sheriff's voice. "Ever fire a rifle before?"

"A couple of times. Why?"

"Just askin'," said the sheriff. "Just askin'."

MR. LUCIUS looked at him, and then continued. "Well, we finished with the gun and started back. Mill took the bullet holder from the gun—"

"Clip," said the sheriff.

"What?"

"Clip. That's what holds the cartridges."

"Oh. Anyway, he put it in his pocket, and we started back."

"Did he close the bolt?"

"Certainly. And he must have forgotten that there was a bullet left in the barrel."

"You're certain he closed the bolt?"

"Of course I am." Mr. Lucius looked down at the sheriff. "I admit I know very little about guns. But I do know that when this one is fired, another bullet automatically falls in place. Mill must have forgotten."

The sheriff nodded his head.

Mr. Lucius continued. "I had a lot on my mind and I must have walked ahead of Mill. Suddenly, I heard a shot, and when I turned, he was falling and the rifle was on the ground. I made certain he was dead, came back to the farmhouse, and phoned you."

Sheriff Brunton stood up. "It won't do."

"What won't do?" Mr. Lucius stared at him. "What are you talking about?"

"About murder."

"Murder?"

"That's what I said."

Mr. Lucius' eyes narrowed. "Are you

trying to tell me I murdered John Mill?"

"You catch on fast."

"But I told you what happened. And the coroner said it could have been an accident."

"Could have," the sheriff admitted, "but it wasn't."

Mr. Lucius laughed.

"Your head must be as feeble as your legs. Go ahead and arrest me and see what it gets you."

"You're already under arrest, Mr. Lucius. Just didn't get around to telling you."

"You're making a fool of yourself, Sheriff, and my lawyer will make a bigger fool of you when he gets you on the stand."

"Maybe," said Sheriff Brunton. "Maybe not. But I got a witness."

"Witness?" Mr. Lucius looked startled. "I didn't see anyone."

The sheriff patted the rifle. "This is my witness."

"Oh." Mr. Lucius sounded relieved. "If you mean the nitrate test, I admitted I fired the gun."

"That's not it at all." The sheriff inserted a cartridge into the M1 and closed the bolt. "Watch." He pointed the rifle into the air and fired. Then he held the gun close to Mr. Lucius.

"See anything?"

Mr. Lucius shook his head. "Not a thing."

"The bolt," said the sheriff, "is open."

"So what?" asked Mr. Lucius.

"You shot John Mill, took out the remaining cartridges, closed the bolt, and then called me. When I found this rifle, the bolt was closed."

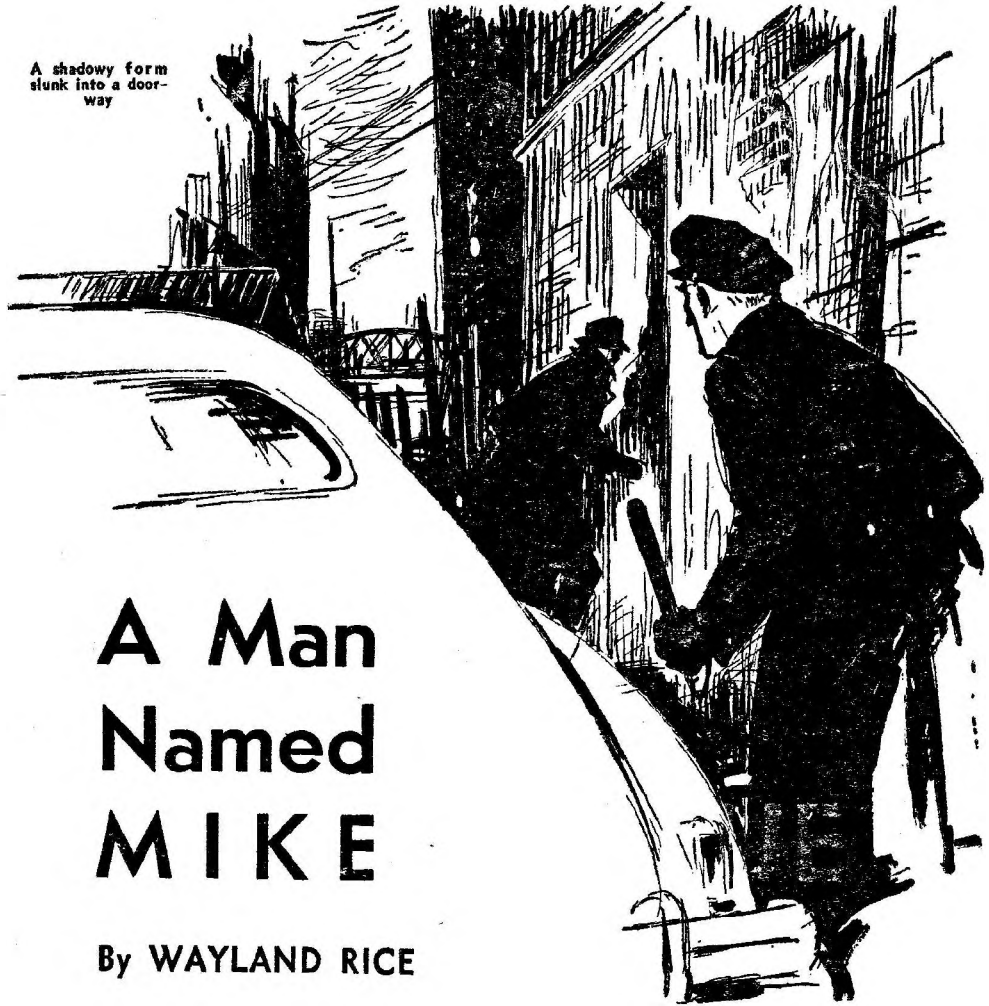
Mr. Lucius stared at the sheriff.

"You admitted you knew little about rifles, nothing about the M-One. What you did notice was that the bolt automatically shot back and closed whenever the gun was fired."

"What you should have noticed was that the bolt stays open when the last shell is fired."

The sheriff chuckled. "My boy wrote me about that. Said it was a wonderful improvement over the Springfield for a feller who wasn't counting how many shots he fired."

A shadowy form
slunk into a door-
way



A Man Named MIKE

By WAYLAND RICE

PATROLMAN Terry Dolan hung his nightstick from his badge and wrapped both arms around himself to try to gather in a little more heat. The wind off the river was strong and bitter and Dolan wondered why he had ever cursed those South Sea Islands during the war.

The beat was one of those which nobody wants and rookies get. There were big, somber warehouses along the riverfront and the wind whistled between

them with wails that were blood-chilling. Nothing much happened here from midnight, when Dolan's tour of duty began, until dawn when the first trucks rumbled up to loading platforms.

He saw the car as he rounded a corner. It stood at the curb, as close to the river as a car could get. It didn't belong here, at this hour of the night—or practically any hour of the day. The section didn't go in for sleek four-thousand-dollar jobs.

Rookie Cop Dolan Lets a Killer Get Away — Once!

Dolan had veered to the edge of the sidewalk toward the car when he caught a glimpse of a shadowy form slinking into one of the deep and dark doorways. The rookie freed the nightstick from his badge, transferred it to his left hand and reached into and through the ulster pocket to get at his service pistol. He walked to within ten yards of the doorway, and stopped.

"Come out of there," he ordered crisply.

There was no reply. The shadowy form didn't move. Dolan raised his voice.

"Come out, with your hands up, or I'll come in and get you."

Only an eerie silence answered him. He could faintly see the form, and a little reflected light illuminated a pair of highly polished shoes and trouser legs with a knife crease.

There was a low moan from the doorway. The form began sliding down. Fingernails scraped against the wooden wall of the doorway. Dolan let go of his gun and jumped forward to seize the figure before it fell.

There was a crash. The figure didn't fall, but Terry Dolan did. What felt like a sledge-hammer swept out of the darkness and struck him squarely on top of the head, where his uniform cap gave no protection at all. The weapon was heavy and Dolan felt the cold pavement against his cheek. He was dimly aware of someone running. He turned his head. The person in the doorway was lumbering toward the big car. He ran clumsily, as if he were not used to running. Then Dolan lost interest in all such things. . .

HE HAD no idea how long he had been unconscious when he opened his eyes, but he guessed it had not been for long. He sat up, with a splitting headache and a scalp so sore he couldn't touch it. Nothing had changed, except that his assailant was now gone. He still recalled the floundering footsteps.

Dolan got to his feet, retrieved his hat and nightstick and looked around again. The big, sleek car had been moved. It was now crushed against a light post. He went over there, wondering if the fugitive was in the car, injured.

The car was empty. Dolan got out his flash, turned the beam onto the front of the car and saw how both headlights had been smashed, fenders badly dented, and the bumper hung by one pin.

The front seat gave him nothing of interest. He opened the rear door—and gasped. The seat cover was linen and cream colored. Or had been. It was now decorated with wide splotches of blood. There was a lot of it and even more on the floor. There was also a length of iron pipe. Dolan guessed this was what had struck him. He didn't touch the pipe.

Using his flash, he went around the back of the car to the opposite side. There he saw marks where something—or someone—had been dragged across the sidewalk toward the river wall. On that wall he found more smears of blood. His flash darted down to the swirling high water but picked out nothing. If a corpse had been dumped in here, it was probably a mile downstream by now.

Dolan went to the nearest call box and made a terse report. Then he returned to the car, sat on the running board and waited. They were not going to compliment him on this feat of police work. He had been easily tricked into range of that length of pipe. He had let a murderer get away, even after the killer had wrecked his escape car in his haste to run for it.

Captain McMillan was one of the first to arrive. He was a dour, uncompromising detective-captain in charge of the Bureau on the night shift. He sat on the running board beside Dolan and listened to his story.

"All right," McMillan said. "At least you're not trying to hide anything. No facts could be any worse for your record. But you're new. We don't expect miracles, and the same thing might have happened to the best of us. I'm taking you off the beat. You'll come with me after we find out who owns this car. Just in case we run across someone who might remind you of that shadowy figure."

Dolan nodded. "Thanks, Captain. I know I bungled it. I also know I haven't a prayer of working on the case."

"That's right," McMillan said. "This is strictly Homicide stuff now. Of course

we'll find a corpse in the river somewhere. Go get in my car."

McMillan had a two-way radio system in the official car and he called Headquarters, gave the marker plate numbers of the wrecked sedan, and waited while they were checked.

"Put down the name and address when it comes over," McMillan told Dolan.

The information came quickly and Dolan dutifully wrote, "Carl Webb, 1369 Waverly Boulevard." There was no report on file about the car having been stolen.

A detective hurried over. "Captain, he said, "we found three strands of blond hair on that pipe. Woman's hair. There are also prints on the vanity mirror. That is, the vanity that is built right into the car."

"Thanks," McMillan said drily. "Now all we have to do is find the woman whose prints match. Take over. I'll be back soon."

The address turned out to be in a good section, a large house and obviously an expensive one. The first floor was well illuminated. McMillan rang the bell. "Dolan," he said, in a low voice, "if you see anybody who corresponds to the size and shape of the killer, don't say a word. Just give me a nudge."

"Yes, sir," Dolan replied. "But I didn't see much of the man."

The door opened and a man of about forty, dressed in a rather gaudy lounging robe, stood there staring at them. He held a half-finished highball in one hand. He saw Dolan's uniform and slowly backed away from the door.

"Something has happened," he said.

"That's right. Are you Carl Webb?"

"Y-yes. Yes, I'm Carl Webb. Is she—badly hurt?"

"Who?" McMillan asked bluntly.

"Why—why I thought you came here to tell me something about my wife."

MCMILLAN stepped in, waited until Dolan was in the hallway, too, and had the door closed. Dolan eyed this man carefully. He wasn't the assailant. He was too tall, too broad-shouldered. Besides, his shoes were brown while the man in the doorway had worn black shoes.

"Mr. Webb," McMillan said, "so far as we know, nothing has happened to your wife. That is, we have no direct evidence. But I'd like to know why you jumped at such a conclusion."

Webb slowly raised the glass, took a short drink, then led the way into a nicely furnished living room. He sat down, motioned to a couple of chairs, and had another sip.

"I think you're holding back," he said. "Yes, I did half expect my wife was in some sort of trouble. We had an argument tonight—around eleven o'clock. We—"

"An argument about what?" McMillan broke in.

Webb shrugged. "If you must know, Irene was seeing too much of another man. I called her on it tonight. We'd been at a social affair and my wife made a phone call from a room upstairs. She refused to tell me whom she had called, but I thought I knew. At any rate, when we were on our way home the argument became hotter and hotter. I was out of cigarettes so I pulled up in front of a drug store and went in to buy some. When I came out, Irene had driven the car away."

"Anything else?" McMillan asked.

Webb hedged. "Tell me first, what brings you here?"

McMillan told him, in detail. As he spoke, Webb grew paler and paler. Finally he arose, went to the sideboard and poured himself half a glass of straight whisky. He downed this in two swallows and poured some more.

"All right," he said. "Irene is dead. After the way she treated me, I shouldn't feel sorry for her but I do. He killed her. This man Mike, whom she was seeing on the side. He was a clever one and Irene never did have too many brains. I also know why he killed her."

"You're assuming a lot," McMillan said, "because we haven't found any corpse. But then, you may be right. Go ahead."

"When I returned home, just a short time ago, I started looking through her desk. To see if she had written down Mike's full name or anything about him. She hadn't, but I found our bank book. She had cleaned out our account this afternoon. Took every dime of cash we

had—and this man Mike engineered it. All he wanted was money, and he got it.”

“Did you ever see this Mike?” McMillan wanted to know.

“Only once, and then just from the back. He was running away when I returned early one night. He was about five feet five, slim-waisted and narrow-shouldered. That’s the best I can do.”

McMillan glanced at Dolan, who gave him a nod. The description fitted about as well as any. After that McMillan really went to work. Dolan was sent home because of his headache. Molly, his wife, put him to bed and nursed him as she had taken care of those G. I.s during the war.

Two days went by before the body was found, some six miles downstream. Carl Webb identified it. The fingerprints checked with those found on the vanity mirror. A blood type compared with the blood in the car and on the iron pipe. The hair was identical with the strands left adhering to the murder weapon. By the time the week was out Carl Webb had buried his wife.

Out of sheer curiosity, Dolan drove his old car to the cemetery. There was a fairly large crowd and McMillan was present, too. The dour detective-captain saw Dolan and came over to climb into his car. It was raining hard, and he was grateful for the protection of the car.

“Well,” McMillan said, “what brings you out here, Dolan?”

Dolan smiled. “I’m plain balmy, I guess. It’s just that I’ve had a feeling about this case. It doesn’t smell quite right, and yet it must be right.”

McMillan nodded. “I know how you feel. I was full of suspicion too, when I was a young pup like you. It’s cut and dried, Dolan. All we have to do is find this man Mike, though nobody seems even to have laid eyes on him. Far as I can learn, Mrs. Webb’s two-timing was kept under wraps and no one suspected.”

“She was pretty badly banged up, wasn’t she?” Dolan asked.

McMillan gave him a swift glance. “She was in that boiling river for darn near three days. But there was no question of identity. Dolan, do you know something?”

Dolan shook his head. “No, sir. I

swear I don’t. It’s just that—well, this funny feeling I have.”

“Get over it,” McMillan advised.

DOLAN drove home and on his way stopped for groceries. He got soaked during the trip from the car to the store and back again. He was still thinking of the Webb affair when he walked into the house, dripping water on Molly’s freshly scrubbed kitchen linoleum. She faced him, arms akimbo, in a defiant gesture.

“The lord of the house returns, dripping wet. He forgets the groceries.”

Dolan sat down and took off his heavy shoes. He slid them under the stove.

“The groceries are in the car.” He grinned, not at all fooled by Molly’s pretended impatience. “I’ll get ‘em in a minute.”

“You will not,” Molly said. “And drip more water on my floor. I’ll get them myself.”

She went out on the back porch, took a look at the rain and the soggy ground between the house and the garage. She came back into the kitchen and kicked off her slippers with the bright red pompons. With a grin at Dolan, she pulled his heavy shoes from beneath the stove, slipped her small feet into them, and fled.

Dolan watched her running toward the garage. He thought he had never seen anything so funny in his life. She floundered around, encumbered by the big shoes. She threw sprays of mud and ran practically pigeon-toed. Dolan was laughing his head off when she scrambled back onto the porch. Then his laugh died. Suddenly he seized her by the arm.

“Molly—do that again! Run to the garage again. Please—and don’t ask any questions. I’m all right in the head. But please do as I say.”

She obeyed without question, though she regarded Dolan with a strange look when she was back in the house. She sat down and Dolan took off her shoes. He put them on his own feet.

“I’ll be back in time for dinner,” he said. “Keep it warm, like a good girl. This is important, darling. Believe me, it is.”

“If I didn’t think it was, I’d sue you for divorce.” Molly helped him with his

raincoat. Her hand touched his hip pocket. "You're carrying your gun, Terry."

"Have to." He kissed her nose. "Rules say a cop is on duty all the time. See you at dinner."

He hurried to the garage and drove downtown. There he changed his mind and drove over to the riverfront where the murder had been committed. He studied the light pole which still bore marks of the crash. He idly kicked a few bits of headlight lens lying in the water-filled gutter. Then he went to Headquarters and talked to the sergeant in charge of the Missing Persons Detail.

There was no lengthy list of missing persons on file and Dolan became immediately interested in the one listed under the name of Thelma Morely who had lived near the Country Club, and had disappeared one evening only a few days ago. Dolan made a few notes and went out to face the rain again.

He drove to Carl Webb's home and found the house tightly locked. Dolan knocked on a neighbor's door.

"Webb moved out," the neighbor said. "Said he couldn't stand living in the house any longer. He didn't own the place anyway, just rented it. Matter of fact we expected him to move away even before his wife died. The business he ran was on the rocks."

The neighbor was one of those priceless sources of information which a policeman looks for, but she was a garrulous woman and Dolan had difficulty in getting away from her. Even then she said something that made him stop.

"Sometimes I hardly blamed Mrs. Webb for running off. It wasn't that Carl isn't a nice man. Her husband, I mean. But I was at the party they both attended that night at the Country Club and Carl drank too much, as usual. We were worried about him when he drove off."

There were things to do and Dolan had to do them himself. If he had had anything definite to go on, he would have called Captain McMillan, but he didn't want to be laughed at. Dolan drove to the one railroad station in town. Webb's suitcases and a trunk were still there. They were neatly tagged and he made a note of the hotel address in a big city five hundred miles away.

Then he had to call McMillan.

"It's that Webb affair," he explained. "I'm still worried about it. Was there any insurance?"

"Five grand," McMillan said. "Listen, Dolan, if you know anything—"

"I don't—not yet—but when I do, it's all yours, Captain. I'll be seeing you. Oh yes, call my wife, will you? Tell her I may be late."

Dolan took the next plane out. By nine-thirty he had checked his raincoat in a station locker and walked through the streets of the city to the hotel where Webb had ordered his bags sent. Dolan showed his badge, examined the register, and found that Webb had checked in. The man was certainly not acting suspiciously.

Terry Dolan went up to the room on the ninth floor. He listened outside the door for a moment, then knocked. There was a rather long pause before Webb opened the door. He seemed startled at the sight of Dolan.

"What in the world—" he began.

Dolan grinned at him, looked over the man's shoulder and into the room behind him. There was no one else there, but a door to the adjoining room was closed.

"The Captain sent me, Mr. Webb," Dolan said. "There were a few more routine questions, but I thought I heard a woman's voice in here."

"Nonsense," Webb snapped. "Well, go ahead with the questions."

Dolan brushed by the man and didn't stop until he was halfway into the room.

"I know I heard a woman's voice," he insisted.

"I tell you there's nobody here!"

Then a woman's voice came from behind the closed door.

"What was it, Carl? Is it safe for me to come out now?"

Webb developed a sickly grin. "Okay, so you know. My wife had her Mike. Well, a man can't live like that. I found someone I liked, too. That's why I never made much of a fuss with Irene."

"Sure, I understand," Dolan said. "I guess I've been pretty thick-headed not to have understood before."

Webb bit his lip. "I—don't like that tone, Officer."

Dolan suddenly twisted Webb around, held one arm pinned to the small of his

back where it would break if he moved. He clapped his other hand across Webb's mouth.

Dolan spoke loudly. "I'm going to see who that woman is, Mr. Webb. I'm going in there."

He propelled Webb across the floor, opened the door and shoved him through it. This time the club was a whisky bottle. It was wielded by a woman wearing too much rouge—or maybe it only looked as if there was too much, for otherwise she was deathly pale. The bottle hit Webb across the head and floored him.

Dolan leaped over the fallen man. He snapped a handcuff on the woman's wrist.

"That'll be all, Irene Webb," he said. "And don't attempt to lie out of it. I know darned well you'd try to club me again, just as you did in that warehouse doorway. So I sent your husband in first this time."

It was morning when Captain McMillan arrived by plane. In the big city police station, Dolan told him the story.

"Check the Missing Persons' Bureau," he said, "and you'll find a Thelma Morely missing since the night of Mrs. Webb's supposed death. You'll also learn that Thelma Morely lived near the Country Club where Irene and Carl Webb were attending a party, and where Carl got himself pickled. Thelma Morely left her home to take a walk. The Webbs, with Carl driving even though he was drunk, hit Thelma Morely and probably killed her."

McMillan didn't look too happy. "Okay, okay, I've guessed as far as that. The Webbs had a body to dispose of if Carl didn't want to face a manslaughter rap. So they piled the dead woman in the car and made some plans. They could get rid of her, get out of facing a prison term, and pick up a little insurance money on the side."

"That's right," Dolan said eagerly. "The amount of the insurance confused me though. Five thousand isn't enough to risk a plan like this, so there had to be something else. When I learned Carl had been at the Country Club, had got himself drunk and driven off in that condition, it tied up with the mysterious disappearance of Thelma Morely, who

had vanished not far from the road to the clubhouse. Furthermore, she about matched Irene Webb in size."

McMILLAN did an unusual thing. He handed Dolan a cigar and even held the match for it. Dolan puffed appreciatively and went on with his story.

"Then they had to rig an alibi for Carl. Irene, dressed in man's clothes, drove the car to the waterfront and waited for a sucker to come along. That was to set the time of the supposed kill so that Carl could prove he was elsewhere. And Irene Webb donned men's clothing because they didn't want anyone else in on the scheme, and naturally a woman couldn't have set the stage because they also planned to have us chase this Mike whose identity they made up."

"Okay—keep talking," McMillan said grimly.

"I saw the car, saw Mrs. Webb hiding in the doorway and she lured me close and slugged me over the head. The body was already in the river, with bloodstains neatly arranged to prove it. She drove the car into that lamp post. The accident would obliterate all signs of the first accident when Thelma Morely was killed. Webb, meanwhile, alibied himself very well indeed. Mrs. Webb changed clothes somewhere and went to the city. That's all there is to it."

"All except how you got wise," McMillan grunted.

Dolan chuckled. "Molly—my wife—told me. She doesn't know it, though. Something about the affair puzzled me. I couldn't make up my mind what it was, but when Molly put on my brogans and ran to the garage from our house, she flip-flopped all over the place. Women can't wear men's shoes and not run funny. It was exactly the way that figure in the warehouse doorway had run after knocking me down.

"So I guessed I had been struck by a woman, and there was no woman involved expect the victim. Only a man named Mike. A purely mythical Mike, Captain. Still a woman's corpse was found. Carl hadn't been fooling around with women. Then I found out about Thelma Morely being missing and her description as to size tallied with that of Mrs. Webb. I found out Webb was

drunk that night. The rest I guessed, but it wasn't a bad shot in the dark. I came here—"

"Without telling me," McMillan thundered. "I'm in charge of this case. Harness bulls don't handle murder stuff."

"Murder?" Dolan's features were purely innocent. "Oh—that. Sure, murder is your business, Captain. I don't deny it, and I wasn't working on any murder case. I was after Mrs. Webb who had slugged an officer while he was on duty. All I'm charging her with is assault. You can book her for murder. I just didn't want any black mark against my record for letting myself get banged on the head by someone who got away from me. . . ."

Back in their home town, McMillan drove Dolan home from the airport. Molly was on the porch, arms akimbo again.

"A fine time to show up for dinner," she said, in the sternest voice she could summon. It wasn't very stern. There was too much pride in it.

Dolan gathered her in his arms. "Sure, kid." He grinned. "I said I'd be home for dinner, but I didn't say what day. You're not going to make trouble because of a little technicality."

Molly didn't make any trouble. None at all.

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DEATH ISLAND

(Concluded from page 105)

later, or even hours later, the same raft go downriver again, past the island? It isn't possible."

Something warned Hefferdin not to mention Carlson, perhaps something deep inside him.

The priest looked out at the river. "What's he talking about, I wonder?" he mused. "About the same raft of *aninga* drifting past the island more than once? Hasn't he ever noticed that before, in all the time it is clear he must have lived here alone? Or is it that the river is changing its bed again—and this is new: that the current keeps going 'round and 'round the island, wearing it away. Look! There's a canoe drifting—right around the island!"

Hefferdin had been right about one thing: Omar Carlson had sunk through his *aninga* raft somewhere, for he was nowhere that either the priest or the Indian could see him.

The priest touched Hefferdin on the arm.

"You'd better come down to the mission with us," he said kindly. "You're

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sick. You need to be treated, taken care of."

Hefferdin looked up at the two, his pale face terrible to look at.

"Yes, Carlson!" he said softly. "Yes, Rollins, I've been expecting you both!"

TOO MANY SUSPECTS

(Concluded from page 84)

ever, and Pietro Manvelli moved about town in such a quiet and thoughtful way that it added to the impression that perhaps he was able to commune with certain supernatural forces.

But with his excellency, Senor Benito Mangua, the judge and his good friend, Pietro Manvelli was more down to earth.

"It does not hurt my job of law enforcement if people choose to give me mystical powers," he stated with a little smile. "But, in all fairness, I must give the rice a great deal of credit for the selection of Rudolph Spano as the killer. He was the only one who hadn't eaten his. He couldn't. His mouth was completely dry. He couldn't get up the spit to swallow. Which is an indication of a guiltily frightened man if ever I saw one."

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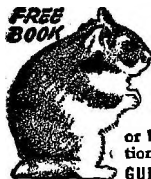
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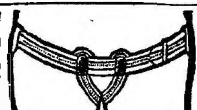
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(Continued from page 7)

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LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

WE WELCOME complaints as well as compliments here, so let's hear what you have to say. Drop us a letter or a post-card and we'll be glad to publish your comments. Yes, it's your valuable advice and ideas that have helped make **G-MEN DETECTIVE** the fine magazine it is!

Here are letters from two readers who have one and the same question to ask.

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[Turn page]

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and especially those concerning Dan Fowler, Larry Kendal and Sally Vane. One thing I would like to know. How is it that more than one author uses the same characters? I have read stories by Robert Sidney Bowen and by Norman Z. Daniels, and they both use the three above-mentioned characters in their stories. How come?—*I. Cohen, 1040 Anderson Ave., New York 52, N. Y.*

By all means have Sally and Dan get married. No more danger of scandal when they are forced to be together all night on a case.

I enjoy them very much, but the constant change of authors causes confusion. Dan, Sally and Larry develop chameleon characters, as each author has his own idea about what they know and how they solve cases. Scanlon and Daniels portray them best. Why change?—*Mrs. G. W. Hunt, 347 Rondo St., St. Paul 3, Minn.*

That's a good question. But instead of answering it ourselves, we'll let this letter we've picked out of the mailbag speak for us. Do you agree with this reader?

I like the way you have different writers do the stories about Dan, Sally and Larry. I find that if one writer does a series of stories about the same characters, after a while the stories all get to sound the same and I can almost tell—without reading ahead—what is going to happen next. But fresh writers usually have fresh ideas, and they keep your G-Men novels full of punch.

There's nothing like fresh blood, and Daniels, Bowen, Scanlon and the others sure know how to supply it! Keep it up!—*Andrew Peeps, Sierra Madre, Calif.*

What do you other readers think on this important point? Please let us know.

The minute Dan and Sally get married that's when I quit reading G-MEN DETECTIVE. Who wants to read about people who are married?—*Jack Kitcher, Jr., Urbana, Ohio.*

Who agrees with Jack? Or does he stand alone?

I have been reading G-MEN DETECTIVE for years. I would like to join the G-Men Club and receive my membership card.—*Hylton Wadsworth, 2 Charlotte St., Hamlet, N. C.*

We'll be back next issue with many more letters. Will there be one from YOU? Address all letters and postcards as well as requests for membership in the G-MEN CLUB like the one above, to The Editor, G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Thanks, everybody, and until the next issue—good luck!

—THE EDITOR.

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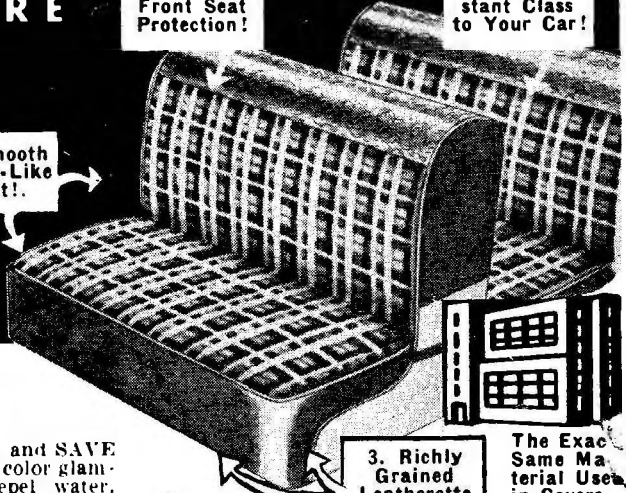
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