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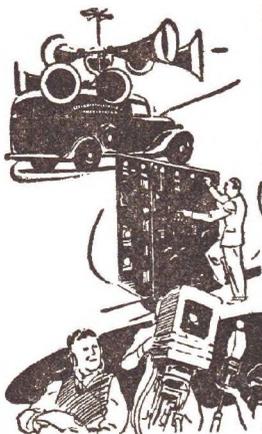
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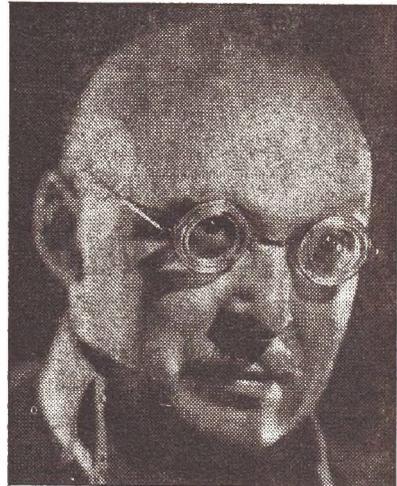
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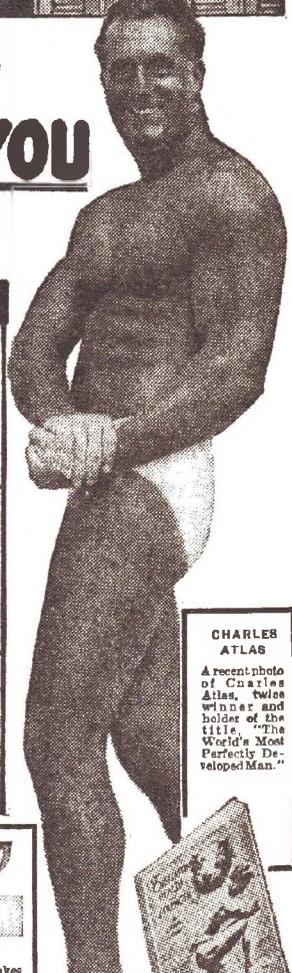
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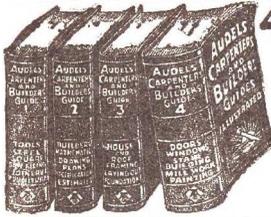
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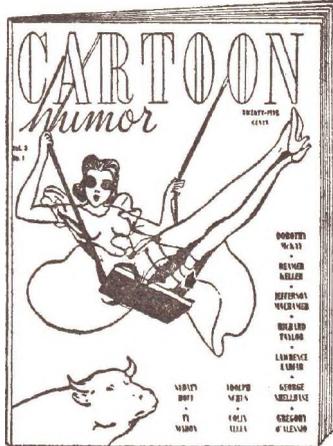
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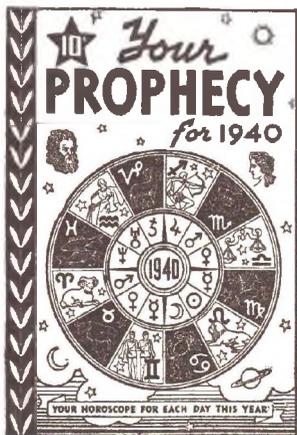
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iii

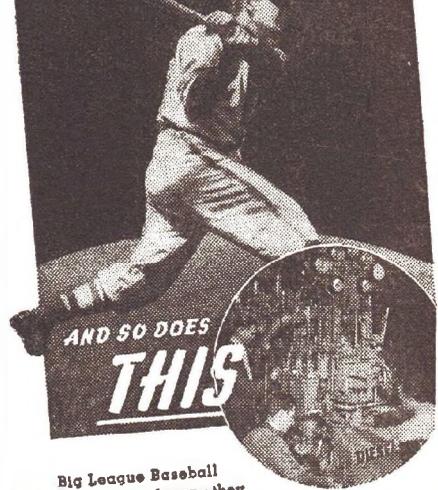
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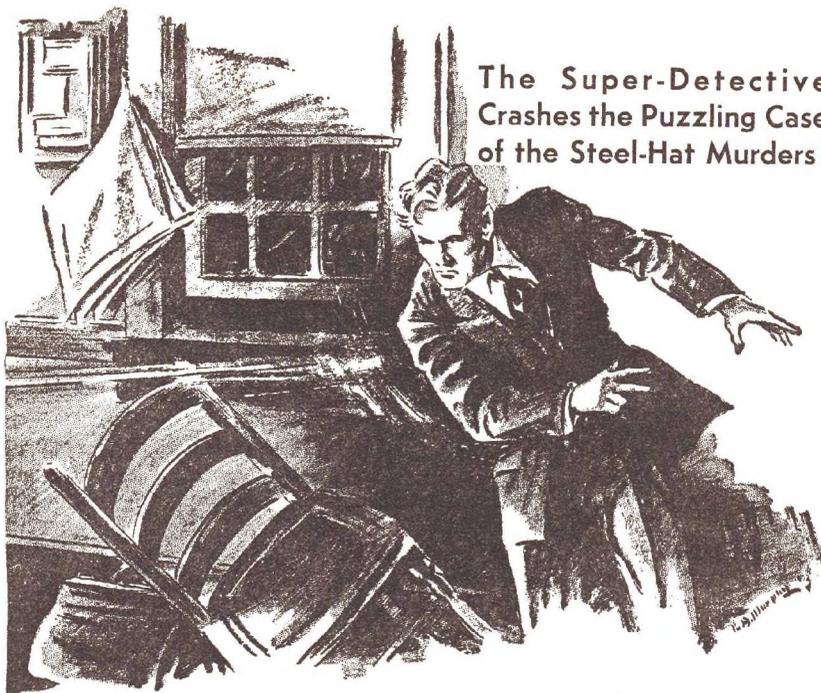
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*As the knife struck the master criminal his machine gun came up to threaten the Ghost
(Chap. XVIII)*



The Super-Detective
Crashes the Puzzling Case
of the Steel-Hat Murders!

MURDER MAKES A GHOST

By **GEORGE CHANCE**

Author of "Calling the Ghost," "The Ghost Strikes Again," etc.

CHAPTER I

Death Haunts the House

WHEN I got wind of this particular murder case, I was actually in no position to get wind of anything. At the time Commissioner of Police Edward Standish called me on the phone to tell me about it, I was sealed up in a coffin.

If you've ever been bothered by a per-

sistently ringing phone when you're in the bath tub, you have a very faint notion of the inconvenience of my position. Because, you see, the coffin I was in was at the bottom of a water tank in the basement of my brownstone house on East Fifty-fourth Street.

Also, I was a bit hampered by a set of leg irons and a pair of handcuffs. In short, I was having a tough enough time to assist myself, let alone the troubled Commissioner Standish.

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

The Ghost Flashes Into Action With His

It was my friend and assistant, Glenn Saunders, who finally answered the phone. Glenn was standing by the water tank just in case my thirty minute option on life ran out before I could escape from the coffin.

Such is the life of George Chance, the Magician—continually working out new tricks and practicing the old ones. This coffin and water tank escape depends a whole lot upon Houdini's principle of controlled breathing. Unless you practice it once in a while, you're apt to lose the hang of it and put yourself in a nasty spot.

As for the life of George Chance, the *Ghost*—that phone call typifies it. The Ghost is always being dragged into bizarre mysteries that happen in and around New York. Perhaps I shouldn't say "dragged in," for he goes willingly enough, pursuing his avocation of crime detection even harder, sometimes, than his profession of magic.

Glenn Saunders beat on the steel tank with a hammer, knocking out a code message. Ned Standish, I gathered, was up to his ears in a murder mystery and wanted to talk to me. That was all, but it was enough to put a spur into me. Standish never called the Ghost in on the unimportant or the ordinary. I got out of the coffin and tank in record time.

Perhaps I would not have been so

eager had I known that there would be times in the near future when I would look back with longing for the comparative safety of that coffin in the water.

Dripping wet, a bit chilly with nothing on but a pair of trunks, I snatched up the basement phone extension.

"Yes, Ned?"

And the story Ned Standish recounted to me, shifts the scene to the abode of a certain Peter Kendle in the Bronx.

PPETER KENDLE, owner of the Kendle Trucking and Transfer Company, paced the living room of his house on Haight Street. He gave the impression of an individual in the process of being quietly frightened to death—a thin gypsy of a man with a long face, sardonic lips, up-slanted black brows, and calf-brown eyes, who was afraid of something he couldn't see.

Racially, Peter Kendle seemed to belong to that vaguely outlined district between the Ukraine and the southern tip of the Balkans. Financially, he might have been expected to live in something swankier than this nice yellow brick house in the Bronx.

He was wearing slacks and a yellow silk dressing gown, the latter enhancing his foreign appearance. He paced the floor deliberately, like a man who tries to hide his nervousness even from himself. His twitching fingers were clasped behind him.

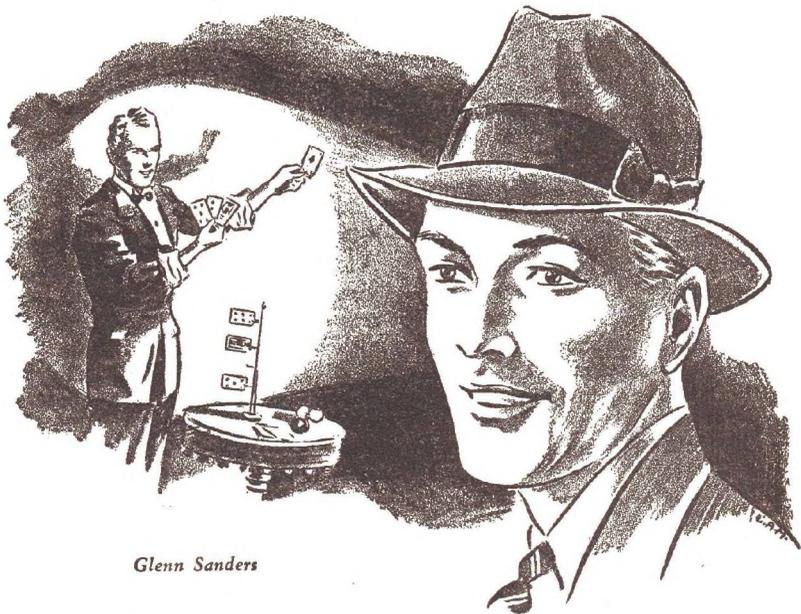
He was not alone.

The small, washed-out man with the yellow-brown eyes who sat in a teak chair and toyed with the carvings on the arms was Mr. Samson Andros. Mr. Andros looked as though he would be of slight help to anybody, yet he had helped himself quite nicely in a financial way. He was one of the key men of the manufacturing concern of Paton & Andros.

George Paton, on the other side of the room, was more impressive. He was as short as Andros but thick-



Magical Arts When Grinning Death Stalks!



Glenn Sanders

bodied. His shoulders were like halved watermelons. He had one of those beefy necks that was being sliced into by a wing collar.

Still another of the very nervous Mr. Kendle's guests was Calvin Pieper, corporation lawyer—a man with pink cheeks, a fit-at-forty look, white hair and no visible eyebrows.

Finally there was the furtive man with the red nose, who mumbled his words into his collar and seemed to have had a little too much to drink—Dr. Stockbridge, physician and surgeon, semi-retired.

The florid George Paton and the pink-and-white Calvin Pieper talked business in a general way—merely to make conversation. Dr. Stockbridge frequently put his red nose into his glass of whiskey and soda. Andros sat quietly, watching his pacing host with ugly yellow-brown eyes.

As Peter Kendle passed him once again, he leaned forward and took up a fistfull of the dressing gown. Kendle

stopped, looked down. Andros darted a glance at the others and then his colorless lips formed words for Kendle's ears alone.

"Any more warnings, Peter?"

Kendle nodded slowly.

"We're marked," he said. "I am, at least. And if I am, it can't be long before the others—"

LOUDLY from the other side of the room. George Paton's harsh voice cut in:

"Where's that remarkable Swede bodyguard of yours, Kendle?"

Kendle turned.

"Owen Marsh isn't a Swede," he objected.

"Looks like one," Paton said. "Same thing. Where is he?"

"My servant is out for the evening, so Marsh happens to be mixing drinks in the kitchen."

"Good," Dr. Stockbridge mumbled. "Nothing like a drink now and then."

"Looks as though you needed a

drink, Kendle," Calvin Pieper said, smiling broadly. "What's all this about warnings? Sorry, but I happened to overhear that remark Mr. Andros made to you. And you've got us on edge with your everlasting pacing."

Kendle looked sharply at Andros and then at George Paton. It was as if phantom wires linked the three men's eyes—wires along which mental messages were telegraphed. Kendle ran a hand through his thin, dark hair. There was sweat on his brow.

"It's a voice," he said, his own voice high and scratchy like a slate pencil moving along a blackboard. "I hope it comes tonight. Because if I'm the only one who hears it, then I'm a very sick man."

Kendle jerked his head toward Stockbridge.

"That's why you're here, Doctor—to help me if I'm sick. And you, Pieper—well, I may want to make my will if this danger is something real."

"You ought to call in the police," Pieper said distinctly.

"Owen Marsh is perfectly capable of protecting me," Kendle said. "If," he added, "the danger is a tangible thing."

"You calling me, Mr. Kendle?"

In the doorway of the living room appeared a tall, chesty man with a football player's build. Owen Marsh was blond, flat-faced. He had heavy brows and curiously brilliant blue eyes. His eyes compensated for his lax lower lip, which gave him a not-too-bright expression.

Marsh's huge fists were awkwardly clamped on the edge of a large tray which carried bottles, decanters, and two soda syphons.

"I just brought the stuff right in here, Mr. Kendle," he said. "When I mix drinks, I get to taking too many samples. I got to stay sober, don't I?"

Kendle smiled a little and nodded at Marsh. There was strange companionship between the dark gypsy who was Kendle and this blond muscle-man who was his bodyguard.

"So," said Marsh, "suppose the gents mix their own poison."

"Poison?"

Samson Andros tasted the word on his colorless lips. His small body shuddered. It was not a tactful word to use in the already strained atmosphere.

Kendle mixed the drinks, passed them out.

THE thing happened then—the whispering voices! At first they were low, but they were audible and brought a sudden silence to the men in the room. Dr. Stockbridge lifted his glass with a trembling hand. Who was speaking—what man, what ghost? The voices grew louder—Dr. Stockbridge gave up drinking, tried to balance his glass on the arm of a chair, dropped it to the rug where it overturned and dribbled beads of liquid on the thick nap.

The voices that came out of the dead air were muffled and weak, as though the dead in some graveyard crypt were arguing among themselves.

On George Paton's face a sick smile had frozen; it was as ugly as the grin of a skull. Andros got up from his chair and edged closer to Paton. Some of the pink drained out of Calvin Pieper's face. Pieper looked at Stockbridge. The doctor's furtive glance ducked away to follow Kendle, who had stepped to the front window, where he seemed to be listening intently.

But the voices were not coming from the window. The voices were inside that room—voices that babbled and clamored, yet spoke no sense.

"Listen," Dr. Stockbridge rasped, "does anybody understand that stuff? It sounds fuddled to me, but maybe I'm a bit tight. Can anybody understand?"

"It's crazy stuff," said Owen Marsh. "Ain't it, Mr. Kendle?"

"You weren't imagining things anyway, Kendle," Calvin Pieper said, nervously. "We all hear them. But what kind of gibberish—"

And then, remarkably enough, all within the room could understand the ghostly whispering—the whispering gibbering was coming in English!

"My shadow lies upon you from the ends of the earth. My shadow is death to you who have wronged my house. For every stain upon my house there shall be a stain of fresh blood to match. And one shall die tonight. Beware—"

Silence cut sharply through the sentence. A silence that was absolute. And suddenly the room was plunged into total darkness. There was a single sharp dot of sound from the blackness outside the house, like a period to the unfinished sentence. There was no flash of flame—nothing but that sharp, distant sound that could only have come from a gun.

Owen Marsh jumped toward the window, cursing. The silhouette of Peter Kendle, which had been pasted against the dim light-glow for an instant, had been wiped out. Kendle was on the floor.

"Blood!" Marsh's voice sounded sharply. "It's Kendle. He's hit. Somebody give me a hand."

"Get him to the couch in the study," Calvin Pieper snapped.

The lawyer stumbled forward, got his hands on Kendle's legs, helped Marsh lift the man.

FLICKERING flame from George Paton's lighter guided them into the next room. They stretched Kendle out on the couch. Andros shouted for Dr. Stockbridge. The drunken doctor staggered forward. Whispering sounds came from Kendle's lips:

"No good."

"What's no good, Peter?" Andros asked quietly.

"I—I'm dying." Kendle's eyes stared fixedly at the flame of Paton's lighter, his gaze going out toward it as if to some distant star.

Dr. Stockbridge elbowed Andros out of the way, all but fell down on his knees in front of the couch. He

fumbled for Kendle's wrist, trying to feel the pulse. Kendle was trying to speak and Stockbridge's head bent low over the man's lips.

"What's he saying?" Andros demanded, his voice shrill.

"Something about jewels," the doctor mumbled. "I think just the one word 'jewels'. He—he's dead."

Paton's lighter went out, but Paton's deep voice sounded from the darkness.

"Oh God!" he said, and covered his face with both hands.

CHAPTER II

Vanishing Dead



Y the time Inspector Magnus and his Homicide Squad arrived at the Kendle house in Haight Street, Owen Marsh had replaced a shorted fuse and repaired the lights. Magnus tramped through the confusion in the living room and entered the study where the body lay alone.

He stooped ponderously over the couch with its dead Mr. Kendle, reached out puffy fingers toward Kendle's wrist, felt for the pulse, could not find it, then suddenly jerked around. The door of the study had been quietly opened.

Standing in the door, wearing an unnecessary top coat and flop hat, was a figure well known and not to well loved by Inspector Magnus. The man was Ronald Wick, a police reporter on the *Trib*, and at the present time a portion of his shrewd, hatchet-edged face was hidden by his Graflex camera.

As Magnus uttered a roar and lunged at the reporter, the flash gun on the camera popped off and Wick had taken a pix of the corpse and possibly Inspector Magnus along with it.

Wick didn't begin his retreat soon

enough. Magnus managed to get his hands on the camera. He wrestled it out of Wick's grasp, booted Wick out of the door, and then followed him into the living room where he could issue orders for Wick to be taken in hand by the cops.

To be perfectly sure that no one got near the body until after the medical examiner had taken a look, Magnus cautiously locked the door of the study and went to the telephone to see what was detaining Dr. Robert Demarest.

MMAGNUS finally located Demarest at Bellevue Hospital.

"On my way," said Demarest. Magnus grunted, was about to hang up when he heard the sound of breaking glass. He dropped the phone, bounced into the living room in time to see Samson Andros and George Paton pounding at the door of the study where the body lay.

"Here, what goes on?" Magnus belated.

Andros shrivled at the sound of the inspector's voice, but George Paton turned from the door in defiance.

"Didn't you hear?" Paton shouted. "Somebody in there broke something—a piece of glass."

"You're crazy! There's only a dead man in there."

"Sounded like a window," Attorney Pieper suggested.

Magnus crowded Paton and Andros aside, rattled the doorknob. He took a moment to recall locking the door. His mind was a whirlpool of impossible conjectures. There wasn't anybody in that room. There was a body but not anybody.

On the third stab, Magnus got the key into the lock, twisted it, stepped into the room. His eyes went first of all to the couch. The corpse wasn't there! His eyes went to the window. The pane had been shattered!

Magnus got to the window, quickly, saw at once that the glass had been smashed from the inside. Short hairs

on the back of his neck stood up. No one could have smashed that window from the inside except Peter Kendle! Peter Kendle, was as dead as the proverbial doornail. Dr. Stockbridge had so pronounced. He, Magnus, had felt for the pulse and found none—

Magnus looked out the window, and what he saw sent his logical and unimaginative brain into a whirl. A car was rolling out of the Kendle drive. Fluttering over the sill of the driver's open window was the yellow sleeve of a silk dressing gown!

Magnus would have dived through the window if it hadn't been for the saw-tooth edges of glass still clinging to the frame. He turned, dashed back through the room, upsetting a glassy-eyed Dr. Stockbridge and knocking the wind out of George Paton.

He went through the living room, into the little hall, out the front door. He was conscious of the fact that he was being followed by his own men and also by the late Peter Kendle's guests, but he didn't look behind him. His eyes were set on that fluttering bit of yellow silk which he could see out the window of the car now moving down the street.

He scrambled under the wheel of his official car, made a loop turn that brought him around to follow the Kendle car, now picking up speed as it turned left at the first corner. Magnus spurred, and then, as he dragged off on his speed in order to make the curve, he heard a crash and a shriek of tortured metal.

He rounded the curve, saw the Kendle car cracked up against the side of a concrete garage. More than that, he saw a flash of pale silk on the tall figure of a man disappearing around the end of the garage!

Magnus braked almost in the middle of the street. His heart was leaping around in his thick chest. In his police career, he had chased everything from a small boy who had stolen a bottle of milk to a number one public enemy, but

The Magician-Sleuth



George Chance

IN the last issue of *THE GHOST* George Chance tackled the perplexing problem of the lispng man murders. We are happy now to present his third memoir, *MURDER MAKES A GHOST*, in which his courage, cleverness and skill continue to shine brightly despite his innate modesty.

Seldom has a new magazine been greeted with the enthusiasm that marked the first public reception of *THE GHOST*. This gratifying response was a tribute to George Chance—master of criminology and magic whose exploits are always fascinating.

George Chance, writing about himself, doesn't brag—but he cannot stop us from bragging about him. He cannot stop us from saying that he ranks at the top of his profession—the profession once graced by Harry Houdini, master of the escape technique.

In employing his magical talents in his crime-fighting role as *THE GHOST*, George Chance has perhaps done more in the service of the Law than any other crusader for justice. Small wonder that criminals quake at the prospect of tangling with *THE GHOST*—savant of the science of criminology, remorseless crime-tracker and criminal-catcher. When *THE GHOST* walks, the underworld stirs into deadly life to combat him.

Remember these things when you read this and future memoirs of George Chance. You see, this modest, kindly, humorous magician is a far bigger man than he makes himself out to be. He won't say so himself. That's why we are once again saying it for him.

—THE EDITOR.

this was the first time he had ever chased a corpse. And if Peter Kendle wasn't dead, this Dr. Stockbridge, who was apparently the personal physician of Kendle and Paton and Andros, had fools for patients, and he, Magnus, had insensitive claws for fingers.

Some of Magnus' men were following behind him on the run. He waved them on and gave chase. Behind the concrete block garage was a wilderness of shrubs. Everything there was as still as a church. Magnus got out his flashlight and sprayed its beam around. The yard wasn't as big as he had thought at first and most of the shrubs were too small to conceal a full grown man.

Magnus rounded the house that fronted this miniature forest. Owen Marsh, doubled up close under his shoulders and powerful chest thrown back, was running toward him.

"Hey!" Magnus shouted.

Marsh pulled up. His blue eyes became brilliant in the beam of Magnus' flash. Close behind Marsh was George Paton.

"W-w-was it the murderer?" Paton panted.

"Murderer, hell!" Magnus exploded. "It was the murder—I mean the corpse. It was Kendle, damn it!"

CHAPTER III

I Go Ghosting



NOT all of this came to me over the phone while I listened to Commissioner Standish. I picked up a good deal of it later, in the course of the investigation. But that's the gist of what went on before the Ghost got called out of his underwater coffin.

If it takes a thief to catch a thief, Standish had good reason to believe one

ghost might have a chance to catch another ghost. Was Kendle dead? The question was up in the air. Nevertheless the tentative status of the case was one of murder—Dr. Stockbridge had pronounced Kendle dead, Magnus had found no pulse. Perhaps Dr. Stockbridge had been too drunk, perhaps Magnus would have found the pulse if he had not been interrupted by Wick. Who knew?

I hung up and turned to Glenn Saunders.

Every time I look at Glenn I see a reflection of myself, almost as though I were looking into a mirror. For he is tall, broad-shouldered and lean-waisted. His hair is wavy and red-gold as mine is. He has the same broad forehead and high cheek bones; the same thin nose.

Glenn Saunders is my identical double—the ablest assistant a stage magician can have and certainly the most vital accessory to the Ghost. You see, in Glenn Saunders I have the perfect alibi. Crime strikes. The Ghost is called. I hit the trail in the disguise of the Ghost. Presto—Glenn Saunders steps into the shoes of George Chance, lives the life of Chance, proves to the underworld, if it ever has cause to think so, that its ghastly Nemesis, the Ghost, simply can't be George Chance.

So Glenn Saunders has deliberately shucked his own identity to become my double. And his reward lies in one word—magic. All Saunders asks in return for the service he does me is a complete working knowledge of magic. And he gets it.

George Chance has some reputation in the magical world. My youth in the circus gave me a start in the field. With magic as my ladder, I climbed from an obscure sideshow mentalist and fire-eater up to vaudeville, night club acts, and finally toured the world with my own magic revue.

Finally I established the School of Magic in New York, where many students study the art and buy their gim-

micks from me. The resultant income enables me to give many public performances for benefits without personal profit.

Glenn Saunders looked at me. "Something interesting?"

"Yes. A corpse that got up and walked. You'll have to stand-in for me, Glenn. Standish wants me in a hurry. Don't forget I'm slated for the Milk Fund Benefit tomorrow night. In case I'm not back, you'll have to put on the show."

GLENN took his briar pipe out of his mouth and put it aside on a work bench. This signified clearer than any words that he was stepping into George Chance's identity. He would have to forego the pleasure of pipe smoking until I was through ghosting, for I smoke only cigars and cigarettes.

"Good ghosting, George," he said. "I'll take care of things."

I dressed quickly and left the house under cover of darkness. On East Fifty-fifth Street, a short walk from the home of George Chance, I came to the home of the Ghost.

The place looks its part. In the shadow of towering church steeples is the square brick house once used as a rectory for the church pastor. The place always displays a FOR RENT sign, but any possible inquirers are discouraged by the absurdly high rental price. I own the place and I encourage its reputation for being haunted. In the basement of this apparently unoccupied rectory is the headquarters of the Ghost.

I hurried around the side of the house to the basement stairway, unlocked a door, went down the dim flight, unlocked a second door. The apartment disclosed isn't anything like the gloomy exterior. It's nicely furnished and entirely livable.

It has to be, because if a mystery investigation drags on for any length of time, this basement of the rectory must serve as my home. To continually step

in and out of my own identity would only be adding unnecessary risk to what is dangerous enough business already.

In this rectory basement there is a small room devoted entirely to the Ghost's large wardrobe and collection of makeup materials. Impersonation is one of the best defensive weapons against a world of crime. I got my foundation in it early training in the circus.

Ventriloquism and voice impersonation, which dovetail so nicely with the mastery of disguise, I had picked up from that sideshow artist, Professor Gabby, bless his dummy. All told, I was well equipped to slide from one alias to another.

One of my favorite disguises is the one which I now assumed—that of Dr. Stacey. As Dr. Stacey, I was known to the police as a friend of Commissioner Standish and Medical Examiner Demarest—an unofficial adviser, if you will, to these two experts.

A few deft touches with a lining pencil added signs of approaching age to the corners of my eyes. Metal "plumpers" filled the hollows of my cheeks and assisted in making Dr. Stacey's voice depart sufficiently from the tones of George Chance. A false moustache that was going into gray gave me the dignity of years, as did the grayish powder which I scattered through my hair. Then, for a touch of professional wisdom, I mounted a pair of Oxford glasses on my nose.

I GRAYED my eyebrows and brushed them out, drew them together in a scowl and darkened the resulting wrinkles with black pencil. Then I changed to one of those remarkable black suits worn in my alias of the Ghost but which suited Dr. Stacey well enough. The black suit is well equipped with secret pockets and numerous magical gimmicks which I have found useful in moments of danger.

The small automatic, with which I am none too good a shot, though I am constantly improving under the tutelage of Standish, was held by a clip at the bottom of my coat. My knife, which I handle a good deal better, went into its place in my right sleeve.

I left the rectory, walked to Madison Avenue, hailed a cab and taxied to Hotel Penn.

Ned Standish was standing in front of the hotel waiting. He gripped my hand. His hard, close-set eyes drove into my face. You can almost feel the impact of the man's gaze. The pronounced muscles of his chops lent a thin line to the lips beneath his precisely trimmed square moustache.

"Get moving right away," he said. "I'm parked conveniently where I shouldn't be. Abusing my special privilege, I suppose."

And he hurried me off to his official car in which we were to drive up to the Bronx.

So the Ghost began his figurative walk—a pace that was destined shortly to break into a run.

Inspector Magnus himself came plodding to meet us as we alighted in front of the yellow brick house of Peter Kendle. He has always looked upon Dr. Stacey as an unwanted meddler, but I think tonight even the assistance of Dr. Stacey would have been welcome to him. Magnus looked like an artist's conception of "the baffled police" which certain newspapers like to talk about. His eyes were actually popping.

On the doorstep of the house were several newspaper men, among them this Ronald Wick who was a particular pain in Magnus' beefy neck. Wick snatched at Magnus' sleeve as we passed.

"Give us a break, fats!" he whined through his thin hatchet-blade nose. "What about my camera?"

"Out of the way," Magnus threatened, "or I'll give you a break over your head. When there's any news to give out, you'll all get it at the same time."

Wick grinned maliciously at Magnus.

"You're hanging onto the camera because you think the only time you'll see the run-away corpse again will be on the film!"

Magnus reddened and pushed the commissioner and me into the house.

Magnus had insisted on Kendle's guests remaining for the investigation, though exactly what was being investigated Magnus himself didn't know. You certainly couldn't call it murder if there wasn't any corpse.

WE found Kendle's guests divided into two groups. Dr. Stockbridge, Owen Marsh, and George Paton composed one group. On the other side of the living room Samson Andros and Attorney Calvin Pieper were giving information to one of Magnus' detectives.

Magnus introduced the commissioner and me. George Paton began to high-pressure Standish to be permitted to leave at once, and I got little attention from any of them, which didn't displease. I didn't want attention. From an obscure corner of the room I took in Kendle's guests one at a time. Perhaps I was lurking, as befits a ghost.

I didn't take to George Paton at all. I have never seen a frog smile, but if I ever do, I shall be reminded of Paton. And Dr. Stockbridge did not look like a credit to the profession to which Dr. Stacey was supposed to belong.

Calvin Pieper looked like a guileless cherub. I judged the guilelessness to be a mask.

The bodyguard, Marsh, talked too much and too loudly.

Samson Andros was like a fine example of what a diet of skim milk will do to a man. He was a physical coward, no doubt, but behind those ugly eyes, I would have wagered, was a clever brain.

"Where did the shot come from," Standish asked Magnus.

"That open window."

The answer had come from Owen Marsh, not Magnus. Marsh had taken

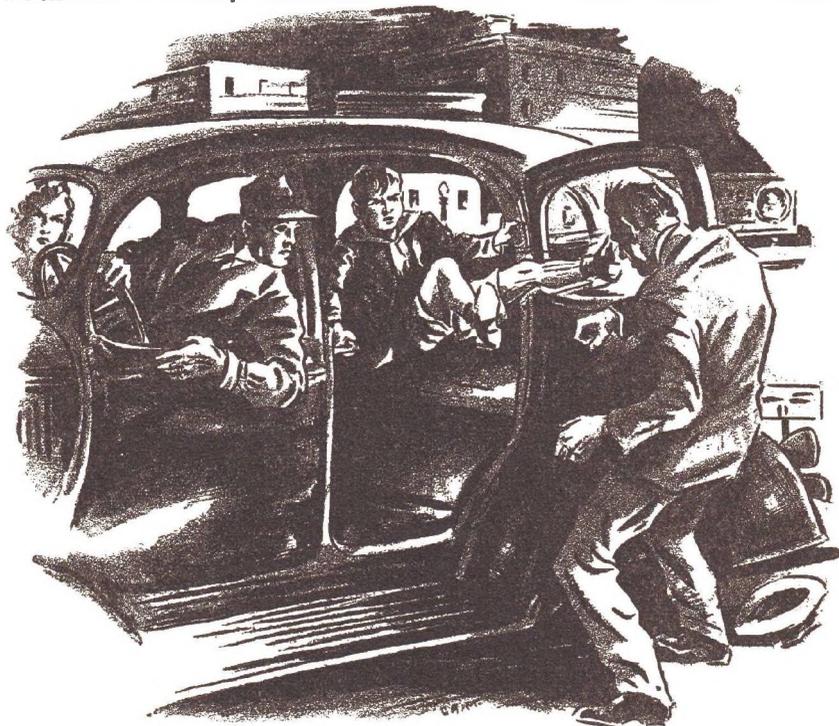
one too many bracers from the whiskey decanter.

I walked to the window. I stood there a moment beside the commissioner. Since no one had seen the flash of gunfire, the shot couldn't have come from close range. But outside the window there was a wall of tall shrubs which would certainly have screened

was pouring himself a drink and put a hand on his arm. He scowled up at me and pouted his full lips. He was a big bruiser. He didn't mix well with alcohol.

"Been working for Kendle long?" I asked.

"Two years. Not much of a job because nothing ever happened until to-



Tim lifted himself, one hand on the robe rail, and kicked out with both feet at the man called Mack (Chap. X)

the window from any marksman across the street—unless that marksman happened to be in a position of sufficient elevation to shoot down and over the top of the shrubs.

I think this was a point that Magnus missed at the time, and he missed it because of the utter confusion into which his mind had been thrown by a happening essentially inconceivable—the flight of a corpse. I didn't blame him.

I stepped back to where Owen Marsh

night. And then I wasn't ready."

"Use a gun well?"

HE pulled a .45 Colt automatic and put the muzzle of it to my nose.

"I didn't kill him, if that's what you think. Smell the gun. Clean. Why would I kill him? I'm out of a job. And I don't know if I could get back on the Coast Guard or not."

"You're drunk," I said.

"I'm getting that way," he said, low-

ering the gun. "I can't carry whiskey. I wouldn't be drinking now, only seeing Kendle get it in the neck, hearing those damned ghost voices—hell, it got under my hide."

Marsh's "hide" seemed pretty thick to me. I walked over to the group Standish was questioning. Calvin Pieper was telling about the ghost voices speaking in some gibberish and then in English. There was one word in the gibberish part that had sounded familiar, though he could not recollect it now and had not been able to think of its meaning when he had heard it.

"More like the name of something or someone," he said. "It may come to me after a while."

"Before he died," Standish said—"if he died—Kendle said something about some jewels. Any jewels in the house?"

"Kendle wore a sparkler on his finger," Marsh said. "That's all I know about."

Standish took me aside into the study.

"It's a lead," he said. "Mighty convenient if this turned out to be a jewel robbery. Give me something simple every time."

He looked at me for information.

"Maybe so, maybe not," I said. "There's as much reason for looking for a man named Jules. Jewels—Jules—phonetically, spoken by a supposedly dying man, they're about the same. I wouldn't be surprised if, lifting the rock off this case, a Jules crawled out."

Magnus unlocked the door of the study and we trooped in. The room contained two large bookcases, a lounge chair, reading lamp, and the studio couch where the body had rested. I went over to the broken window. The glass had been smashed from the inside, all right, but what annoyed me was the fact that the latch was wide open. I studied Magnus through the lenses of my Oxford glasses.

"Well," the inspector asked irritably, "what's eating you, Doc?"

"Just my infernal curiosity again," I

said. "Why would a man, dead or otherwise, smash a window glass to get out of this room when all he had to do was raise the sash? It would have been less dangerous and certainly less noisy."

"He was in a hurry," Magnus said. "His car was outside in the drive."

"You don't believe Kendle was dead, do you, Inspector?"

"I don't know what to believe. If he was dead, someone killed him. If he was dead, he couldn't move. If he was dead, someone took his body away. But I saw him running. Tie that."

"Then he wasn't dead. Isn't that the logical conclusion, Inspector?"

Magnus snorted and left the room. The others followed. I was the last to leave, but no one saw me go, for I went by way of the window through which it was supposed the living corpse of Kendle had gone.

THE house across the street was owned by a Stephan Orestes. I had learned that from scraps of conversation picked up in the Kendle living room. The name had registered on my mind at once. Stephan Orestes was one of the most acute financiers in the city, and quite as necessary to the future of the firm of Paton & Andros as George Paton and Samson Andros themselves. Orestes, in fact, was treasurer of the firm.

The police would undoubtedly eliminate the name of Orestes from their list of suspects, for he had an excellent reputation. But what Magnus and his men had missed was the fact that, because of the shrubbery in front of the Kendle living room, a distant shot passing through the living room window would have had to come from the roof of the Orestes house!

That was the way I figured it, anyway, and to prove my point I intended to get up on the Orestes roof as soon as possible.

The disguise of Dr. Stacey would no longer have been convincing if the

grave, gray doctor were caught climbing up some gutter spout, so I had determined to switch to the most useful of all my disguises. I was about to become that grinning, ghoulish character known throughout the underworld as the Ghost.

CHAPTER IV

I Face the Murder Gun



MAGICIAN develops eyes on the ends of his fingers. In the shadow of Kendle's garage, my fingers saw to it that the identity of Dr. Stacey merged with that of the Ghost. I got rid of the pads

that filled my naturally hollow cheeks, removed glasses and moustache, dusted the gray from hair and eyebrows.

From my makeup kit came a set of celluloid shell teeth that fitted over my own teeth. These shells were the color of old ivory. Brown eye-shadow deepened the pits of my eyes. Ovals of wire inserted in each nostril tilted the tip of my nose and the same eye-shadow darkened the nostrils. Over my entire face I applied a coating of heavy powder that gave me a ghastly pallor.

Such is the makeup of the Ghost. Simple, yes, but there's a bit more to the trick than that. In this makeup with my black crusher hat pulled low, I can pass unnoticed in a crowd, appearing only as a person who has, perhaps, had a bout or two with pneumonia. But when I relax the muscles of my face, let my lips part to show my skull's teeth, permit an unblinking, vacant expression to come into my eyes, the effect is entirely different. By this relaxation I literally "turn on the Ghost." Ask any criminal who has met the Ghost on a dark night. His shudders may flatter me!

In the obscurity found in my black

suit, I passed the group of police and reporters gathered at the front door of the house. I crossed the street. The Orestes house was ugly—a plain square of brick rising three stories to a flat roof. There were awnings at some of the windows, otherwise the addition of a few iron bars would have made a good imitation of a prison out of it.

A car that was caked with dust was standing in front of the house and two men were unloading baggage from the trunk compartment. As I passed, I heard one of them say:

"What goes on at the Kendle place across the street?"

"I don't know," the other said. "But as we came in with Mr. Orestes tonight, I heard a shot. The boss has had the jitters ever since he lit, hasn't he? Funny guy we're working for."

I walked by the house but doubled back as soon as the men had gone inside with the baggage. It was obvious from what I had overheard that the Orestes household had returned to the house at just about the time the shooting of Kendle had occurred. Such being the case, and if I was right about the shot coming from the roof, how the devil had the gunman slipped down from the roof without being noticed?

I prowled back to the Orestes grounds, saw what I had not noticed before. There was a sign in the front yard and I could read the lettering on it:

ROOF REPAIR BY KURTCHNER

I didn't know Mr. Kurtchner, but if he fixed roofs he used ladders. I moved into the shadows, rounded the house, came into the back yard.

THE ladders the roofer had used rested horizontally against the foundation. I checked carefully the impression they had made in the soft earth. There was only one impression for each ladder, which indicated that if the gunman had mounted the Orestes

roof he hadn't had the same brilliant idea that I had of borrowing Kurtchner's ladders.

Not making a noise is a specialty of the Ghost just as it is of George Chance the Magician. No black-stage magician was ever more careful about putting one solid noiselessly against another than I, as I rested the upper end of the ladder against the eaves of the house.

I was behind the ladders, shrubbery at my back, making sure that the bottom of the ladder was well founded, when a slight sound made me glance quickly to the right. A man was leaning up against an old pear tree, lighting a cigarette.

Matchlight gave me a glimpse of the man's face—a dredging-engine jaw, a thick-lipped mouth, a large hooked nose. I was sure he hadn't been watching me put the ladders in position, but if he didn't notice the ladders leaning up against the roof edge he was as blind as a mole. I shrank back into the bushes and held my breath.

He saw the ladders. He tossed his cigarette away, came toward the house at a curious, loping gait. Two feet from the ladders he stopped, looked up toward the roof. I had to eliminate him from the picture—at least temporarily.

With a slight motion that didn't cause so much as a rustle of the branches, I got my gun down into my right palm. The man extended both hands to the side members of the ladder. I reached out fast and hard to rap the man smartly on the side of his head. I stepped out of the shrubs and looked down at him. He was out for a considerable count.

Kneeling beside the man, I opened his coat. A gun-holster harness was strapped to him and there was a small shield on his vest. I didn't dare risk a light, but I explored the engraving on the face of the shield with my thumb. The man was a private detective. Well, I had done him no permanent harm.

It came to me as I started up the ladder that the gunman who had done

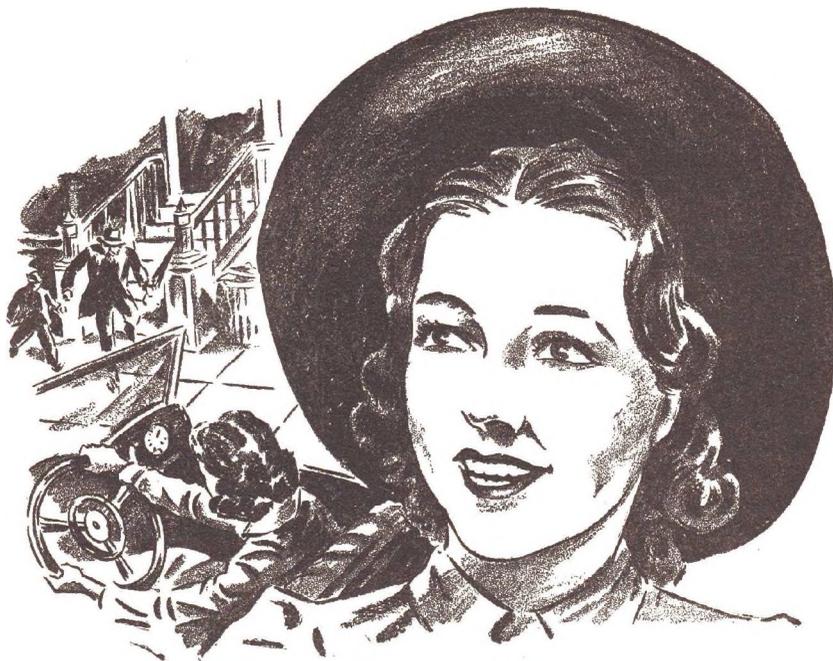
for Kendle may not have got off the roof at all. He hadn't employed the ladders to get up there, I was certain, and except from the interior of the house, there was no other possible means of getting to the roof. Orestes and his staff had returned at about the time of the shooting, and since the gunman must have got to the roof by means of some skylight opening from the interior of the house, the man was probably up on the roof now, trapped there, and waiting for the household to quiet down before attempting to make his escape.

That was not a comfortable thought for me. Another thing that bothered me a little was this staff of musclemen and private dicks assembled on the Orestes grounds. There didn't seem any reason for it. The man I had knocked out at the foot of the ladder had obviously been guarding the grounds and the house.

NO sooner had the top of my head cleared the eaves than I saw how my reasoning had taken the most direct course to the exact truth—I found myself staring into the cold, hollow eye of a long-barreled revolver. Behind the gun was a black, formidable figure that crouched on the edge of the roof.

I was three stories from the ground. Height has seldom meant anything to me, which isn't remarkable considering that my mother was a trapeze performer. But I've got to admit that I gave a wee worry about how far I was going to fall. Not that it matters particularly how far you fall when you're dead. I was simply considering that if I jumped backward to escape the shot, my probable alternative was a broken neck.

My left hand hooked me to the ladder. It was the right hand that now pulled the trick that cheated death and disturbed the gunman considerably. In a special pocket of my coat I keep a supply of certain carefully mixed and cushioned chemicals. My right hand



Merry White

obtained a pinch of this mixture between thumb and second finger. I raised my hand and simply snapped my fingers in the gunman's face.

The result was a small thunder bolt combined with a lightninglike flash. The surprise of it took the gunman back on his heels, and even if he had used his gun, his jolted nerves would have made him a rotten marksman.

Another thing—that brief flash of light had showed me the man's face. It was a wide, flat face with an undershot jaw. His lower teeth were caught on his upper lip. Something had smashed his nose flat. His eyebrows were a distinctive marking because they weren't more than an inch in length—like something a clown might have painted with grease paint. It was a face hard to forget.

You can be sure that when I faced this man on the roof I had "turned on the Ghost" in order to give him that frightening dead-pan stare to add ter-

ror to the surprise of the fingertip explosion.

As soon as the man jumped back on the roof, I scrambled up and rushed him. He crouched, bunched himself into a hard-to-hurt package. He lashed out with his gun when I came within reach, didn't touch me because I dived over him, turned a flip I had learned in the circus, landed on my heels behind him.

He was fast for a man of weight, but still a bit slower in turning than I. I came in close, got hold of his gun wrist. I tried to upset him, but he knew most of the tricks.

Together we wrestled along the roof, not far from the edge. Most of the time he had me on the outside track, a position that's worse in roof-fighting than it is in horse racing. I felt my feet skidding along the freshly pebbled roof toward the edge. Then my right foot locked in the caves-trough and my ankle twisted painfully.

If it hadn't been for that sharp gouge of pain that passed up my leg and into my brain, I don't think the crude, brute-strength tactics of the man would have taken me so easily. But at the same time the pain shocked me, he drove a hammer of a fist in just below my ribs. My sense of balance went haywire.

My right hand still clung to something that later turned out to be the man's gun. I hung onto it as I plunged into space, just as though it offered some support.

Below me I glimpsed the slanting plane of a small roof or perhaps an awning. If it was a roof I was going to plow it up with my face. If it was an awning I would do a midair bounce and eventually land where I wouldn't bounce at all.

I did neither. It was an awning I hit, but the cloth was rotten and split beneath me. My fall was broken a bit and I had time to grasp the steel framework of the awning with my left hand as I went through.

I still had the man's gun in my right. Holding on with my left hand, I dangled there, ready to use the gun if the man came down the ladder, some ten feet from where I hung. But he didn't do that. I don't know why he didn't unless it was that he thought the Ghost had a charmed life and would be waiting for him at the bottom of the ladder.

I heard the man running across the roof, heard the opening of a skylight. I thought for a moment that this bulldog-faced gunman was an inhabitant of the Orestes house, but in another moment my question was answered. He wasn't a member of the household—not unless those in the house were accustomed to indulging in a little gun play before retiring. For inside the house, shots stumbled over each other, mingled in a roar that echoed from room to room.

I put the man's gun into my pocket, gripped the awning support with both hands, and swung to kick the screen of the window out with my heels. I swung

back and forward again, gathered momentum, let go of the support on the forward swing, landed in the room. My twisted ankle made itself felt. I set my teeth and limped forward in the dark.

CHAPTER V

The Frightened Men



IN the upstairs hall I leaned over the carved rail that guarded the stairwell and looked down into the reception hall below. There were two men who wore hats and who had smoking revolvers in their hands. They were taking peeks through the open front door.

A third man who was bald and pretty stout stood in front of a closed door with his hand on the knob. His attitude was much like that of a hunted animal sniffing the air before diving into the shelter of its hole.

"Gave us the slip, Mr. Orestes," said one of the men at the front door. "Did my damndest to wing him, but he was a pretty fast moving target."

The "target," I presumed, was my sparring partner on the roof. He had made a wild dash through the house, escaped Orestes' guards. Perhaps he had the idea that the Ghost was working for Orestes—an idea which had changed any thought he might have had of staying on the roof until he had the opportunity to slip out quietly.

"That isn't the man," the plump Stephan Orestes said. His voice sounded as though it was coming out of the barrel his body so closely resembled. "That isn't the man at all."

"Maybe," said the other man at the door, "he was a stooge for the guy you're looking for."

Orestes shook his head vigorously.

"You don't understand. He would be working alone!"

"But you said you wouldn't know him."

"Enough!" Orestes stamped his foot. "That is not the man. But you are sure he has gone? He isn't prowling around outside the house?"

The two men at the door looked at each other. One of them said they would go out and look around the grounds. Orestes agreed that this would be the thing to do, so the two men went out the front door and left it standing open. Orestes walked on tiptoe to the front part of the hall, leaned out the door and sniffed. I thought again of a fat woodchuck who feared a farmer's gun.

Orestes' barrel-toned voice sounded outside the door:

"Who's with you, Clark?"

The voice of a bodyguard replied: "It's Mr. Andros, sir. He wants to see you on urgent business."

I SAW the doorknob of the room in which I had hidden turning. There was no place of concealment except a Chinese screen of costly wrought-iron work that offered a poor hiding place for even a ghost. But there wasn't any choice. I got behind the screen and depended a lot upon my black suit and the dim light to conceal me.

I raised my right arm to the lower

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THE GHOST

I went to the top of the stair and stole quietly down, my body flattened against the panneling. I was down in the hall, moving across it toward the closed door in front of which Stephan Orestes had stood, when the sound of footsteps outside the front of the house announced the return of Orestes' bodyguards.

I sprang to the door, pushed it open, stepped into a somber, book-lined room that had no apparent window and only one door. If I was to be trapped by Orestes' guards, I couldn't have picked a more convenient place from their point of view. If they discovered me, I was sunk.

part of my face to hide the whiteness of my skin.

Stephan Orestes came into the room. His skin was olive-complexioned and he lacked only a white cap and pinpoint moustache to act as a stand-in for some foreign chef who tasted his own pastries too frequently.

Behind him was that washout little man I had met at the Kendle place a short while ago—Mr. Samson Andros. Holding on to one of Andros' arms with one hand, carelessly swinging his big Colt automatic by its trigger guard with the other hand, was big, blond Owen Marsh.

Stephan Orestes patted his cranium

with a wadded handkerchief. He smiled rather feebly.

"We've had a little shock here. A burglar or something," he said. "Nothing at all, Samson, really. *Nothing at all.*"

Andros and Orestes exchanged glances that were probably significant to them.

Owen Marsh's forehead crimped into a scowl.

"Listen, don't anybody start to deal me in as their bodyguard. I didn't mind seeing you across the street, Mr. Andros, if it makes you feel any safer. But the way I leaked out tonight, not saving Mr. Kendle, I don't think I'm so hot in this racket."

"I have plenty of bodyguards," Orestes said. "Good of you to look out after Samson, though."

Samson Andros moistened colorless lips. "You don't know, then? You don't know that he got Kendle?"

Orestes' pallor resembled yellow jaundice, what with the naturally dark color of his skin.

"Peter?" he gasped. And then repeated dully: "Peter."

And that was all there was to it. That was the beginning and the end of the conversation. Andros turned and left the room. Owen Marsh divided a puzzled stare between the two older men, and then walked out behind Andros. Orestes put his fat self down on the edge of a chair and his fat shoulders drooped dejectedly.

I stepped from behind the screen, took two steps away from it until I came to the edge of a small round table where stood the lamps that dimly illuminated the room. The light played upwards onto my face, adding to my ghastly appearance. I did not know what I was in for. Swiftly and noiselessly I made certain preparations that might help me if defensive measures or a sudden exit proved necessary.

"Stephan Orestes," I then said softly.

Orestes didn't move. He sat there as though examining the buttons on his

vest. I repeated his name and he raised his fat face slowly. His lower jaw sagged.

"Don't be afraid," I said quietly. "I want to help you. What is it you are afraid of? Tell me and I may be able to help you."

ORESTES stood up. His mouth was still open but nothing came out of it. His small dark eyes glanced toward the one door of the room. I thought I knew what was coming.

"Don't call out," I cautioned. "There's nothing to be afraid of. I am the Ghost and I make it my business to help people in danger from some criminal scheme."

As I said this, I completed my preparations for eventualities. I lifted my right hand to the edge of my vest. There was a small black button there where another man might wear a fraternity pin. The button came away with my fingers. Attached to the button was a strong black silk thread which fed out invisibly from a small but powerful spring. The button itself had a sharp needle point in its center, this point being covered with "magnetic" wax.

When I lowered my hand again to my side, it carried the button and pulled out a length of the strong but nearly invisible black thread. I gripped the edge of the table, fastened the needle point of the button to the underside. It was then, fully prepared, that I walked toward Stephan Orestes.

Orestes got behind his chair. He closed his sagging mouth for a moment. The next time he opened it, he called out.

"Help, Clark! He limps!" Orestes pointed a trembling forefinger at me.

I didn't quite get it. I limped. So what? And then the door of the room burst open and the two men I had seen in the hall outside shoved into the room. The guns in their hands swung in my direction, centered their deadly stare on my middle.

I stood there between Orestes and his guards, my hands down at my sides, making no defensive move. There was a lot going on here which I was only beginning to understand. The guards were perhaps a little bit awed by my appearance, for I was giving out with my skull grin in the approved ghostly manner.

Orestes began hopping up and down. "Take him!" he shouted. "Take him out of here and kill him. It's legal. It's all right to kill him. He's a burglar. He tried to murder me, I tell you. He—he *limps*. Ten thousand dollars to the man who kills him!"

I might have told them that the reason I limped was that I had twisted my ankle, but there just wasn't any time to argue. Orestes had talked money and money talks for itself.

The two men started for me at once, and I knew by the look in their eyes that my life hung by a thread. Literally, it hung by a thread, for you will remember that I was attached by that means to the small table across the room.

I slapped myself smartly across the front of the vest, and this released the spring catch. The small table started sliding, apparently of its own accord, across the room, toward me, and toward the vortex of the private war about to be declared in Orestes' library.

THE lamp remained on the table just as long as the length of its extension cord lasted and then it crashed to the floor. It was my hard luck it didn't break. But perhaps it was just as well I pulled the trick in the light. I don't know of anything that could have added more to the general confusion than that table that was trotting across the room at my bidding.

I think Orestes fainted, for I saw him collapse into a chair and stare glassy-eyed at the ceiling. The table got in the way of the big feet of one of the private dicks, tripped him up.

The table moved right into my hands

and I lifted it with a snap that tore the attaching button from the under side. The one man who remained on his feet tried a shot, but by that time I was rushing him with the table held in front of me. One leg caught his gun arm, spoiling his shot. Another leg gouged into his ribs. I drove him hard against the wall. He probably didn't have much wind left with which to carry on.

I went through the door of the library, slammed it, twisted the key in the lock. Then I simply ran out of the



front door, rounded the house, cut through backyards, came out on the next street.

From this adventure on Haight Street, which I figured I had pretty well concluded, I had learned a few things. First of all, if Kendle had been murdered, I would be able to recognize the gunman who had done the job—the man who had been trapped up on the roof of the house across the street by the untimely return of Orestes and his staff of guards.

Second, all appearance to the contrary, Samson Andros believed that Peter Kendle was dead. At least he had told as much to Orestes. Third, both Andros and Orestes were afraid of someone—someone who would be working by himself and who limped.

I reasoned in this manner because Orestes had made no move to have anybody tackle me until he saw that I limped.

After that, nothing would do but what I was to die.

In addition to all that, I had a sneaking suspicion that the limping man was called Jules.

CHAPTER VI

At the Rectory

HAD left word with Glenn Saunders that it might be well if he contacted the Ghost's three able assistants and had them assemble at the rectory. It was midnight when I arrived at the rectory basement. As I un-

locked the door, it occurred to me that it might be said the rectory was haunted with the rattling of bones, for I could hear evidence that Tiny Tim Terry and Merry White were occupied with one of their dice games.

Joe Harper, that artist among chiselers, that parasite from Broadway who had appropriated my guest room for one night and liked it so well he remained for years, would be asleep on the couch or perhaps drinking from the Ghost's little bar.

When I had the door open, I saw that my three friends were occupied exactly as I had anticipated. Joe Harper, in his checked suit with its piped vest, had stretched his lean, wolfish length on the couch. His offensively green felt hat covered his face and the hands on his chest were clasped around a high-ball glass.

Merry White, that honey-hive of dynamite who is one day to become Mrs. George Chance, scrambled up from the floor where she had been rolling dice, danced across the room to stand on tiptoe to be kissed. She is the prettiest little thing, with her silky black hair, her green eyes, and her roguish smile.

"A nice time for you to come in!" she laughed. "You break up the game when I'm four bits up on Tim."

Tiny Tim Terry, my smallest and oldest friend, a circus midget from the old days, strolled over to me with the gravity of a senator and reached up his

baby-sized hand. The enormous cigar, which is as much standard equipment of his face as his button of a nose, tilted and breathed the aroma of Havana. I stooped to shake his hand.

After that he strutted over to where Joe Harper lay, lifted the horrible green hat, was on the point of flicking cigar ashes into Joe's mouth when Joe opened one black-beetle of an eye and stabbed the midget with it.

"Go away, small and loathsome," Joe said. Then he opened both eyes, sat up, took his hat from the midget and placed it back on his head.

"How's ghosting, George?" he asked me.

"Not so good. I need help."

Joe got up from the couch, took a chair. Tiny Tim began to pace the floor, because he's more comfortable on his feet than dangling his legs from a full sized chair. I related the events of the evening as clearly as I could, with Merry picking lint from my lapel, fixing my tie and otherwise annoying me in the most charming manner.

"Now this man I encountered on the Orestes roof," I concluded. "Joe, you ought to be some help there. The man had a pug's face and short black eyebrows like something a clown might paint."

Joe nodded, dangled a fresh cigarette loosely from his lips, lighted it from the butt of another.

"If he's findable, I'll find him," he said.

JOE'S career is as checkered as his suit. While he is attached like a leach to my income, I put up with him good naturedly because he is externally valuable when it comes to placing some underworld character, shadowing a suspect, or contributing information concerning some night-owl who flutters from one Broadway spot to another.

Until he discovered the conveniences of my guest room, Joe Harper had been booking agent, gambler, pitchman, and race track bookie. He's a hard guy,

with a sharp chin that would break a fist, with close-set ears tuned to eaves-dropping, with discerning black eyes that are shutters for a photographic brain. He has the illusion that my money is his money, yet curiously enough he would give me his right arm if I needed it.

"Now," I said, "it's obvious to all of you that Andros and Orestes are afraid of the same man. Somebody who limps. Maybe the man's name is Jules, but that's just my idea. The man on the roof who killed Kendle—or if he didn't kill Kendle, he certainly shot at him—doesn't limp. That's the man Joe is going to concentrate on. But this limper—I think we ought to watch for him near the Orestes place. There's a house for rent on the same block. You, Tim and Merry—"

Tim wilted a little. His cigar drooped.

"More baby stuff! I can see it coming. Oh, I can read you like a book, George Chance. I'm supposed to cut out smoking and be Merry's little boy!"

"Well," I said, "it's certain Merry can't move into that house all by herself. But with a small son as an excuse, it would look okay."

"Snow White and her Seventh Dwarf," Merry giggled. "It's fun, Tim. Make a fuss and I'll spank you!"

"Frail," Tim threatened, "if you hand me any of that baby-talk stuff!"

"Cut it," Joe Harper said. "The pair of you remind me of a couple of chorines fighting over the same sugar papa. I want to get some of this straight. What about Peter Kendle? Was he the guy who drove away from the Kendle house in the Kendle car?"

"With the Kendle bathrobe flying out the window," Merry added. "He wasn't, was he, darling? That was Kendle's murderer, wasn't it?"

"If Kendle was murdered," I said, "then it *wasn't* his murderer. His murderer was marooned on the Orestes roof for at least an hour after the shot was fired. Magnus wouldn't have missed

finding out where the shot was fired from if it hadn't been for the run-away corpse. Magnus is a smart cop, but the dead man taking it on the lam upset his orderly mind. It's a nice hunch from a nice girl, but it doesn't fit the facts."

"Listen, Ghost," Tiny Tim Terry said. "Anybody could have put on Kendle's yellow dressing gown and pulled that getaway. There's something in the crack-up of the Kendle car that looks almost as though it was intended to stand Magnus on his ear."

"Agreed," I said, "but the locked room and the disappearance of Kendle's body considerably complicate that picture."

Joe Harper stood up and stretched, yawning.

"You sound like you have some ideas on the subject, George."

"Ideas, yes, but no facts—and one idea is that it was worked by magic."

CHAPTER VII

Under the Steel Hat



THE next morning I was once again in the disguise of the dignified Dr. Stacey. From a nearby garage I procured a car which carried the Stacey alias on its title card.

Andros was the man I intended to see. I expected to play upon his physical cowardice to get him to tell me exactly what he was afraid of. Stephen Orestes shared that fear, but Orestes was unapproachable, what with his hired army of private detectives surrounding him.

Samson Andros lived in an apartment on Amsterdam Avenue near One Hundred Twenty-second Street. He certainly could have afforded something better for the firm of Paton & Andros had prospered well and the current

stock quotations indicated that it was a booming business.

A glance at the apartment building directly told me that while Samson Andros might be living rather obscurely for a millionaire, he wasn't stinting himself. He apparently leased the entire third floor of the building. The elevator operator told me that his cage couldn't stop at Mr. Andros' floor and that I would have to take a private elevator.

I took the private automatic elevator which stopped and left me out in a small windowless cubical with the gray steel walls and a single door that wouldn't have looked bad on a bank vault. I pressed a signal bell and eventually a small opening appeared in the steel panel and a grim, gray face with alert blue eyes looked out at me.

"Well?" challenged the old man behind the door when he had given me two or three once-overs.

"I want to see Mr. Andros," I said. "You can tell him it's Dr. Stacey, a friend of Police Commissioner Standish."

"Mr. Andros isn't up yet. You can come back later." Gray-face would have slapped his peep-hole and withdrawn from the door if I hadn't stopped him.

"Look here," I said, "I'm sure Mr. Andros is awake. He telephoned my office not more than thirty minutes ago. Having a little trouble with his indigestion and he asked me to have a look at him."

Gray-face considered this. "Well, he could have called you from his sitting room, I guess. And if he don't stop eating out with people who don't know how to cook for him he'll kill his fool self."

The lucky guess that Andros suffered with indigestion, was responsible for my being admitted into his sanctuary.

The steel door took at least two minutes to unlock. After it was open I was surprised to find the rooms beyond spacious and beautifully furnished. My

judgement of Andros abode had been hasty and inaccurate. Here was a small palace and an outlay that had cost a fortune.

THE gray-haired retainer led me from room to room, always unlocking doors with keys that clinked on a ring at his belt. But aside from our whispering footsteps and the metallic sound of the old man's keys, the place was as quiet as a church.

"Are you the only servant?" I asked the old man.

"I am. I been with Mr. Andros for ten years. And I cook for him, too, which is something a mighty few people could do. Yes, sir, a mighty few."

We came to another door of gray steel and here the old man pressed an electric button. Behind the door a chime sounded. Its echoes died, but there were no answering footsteps.

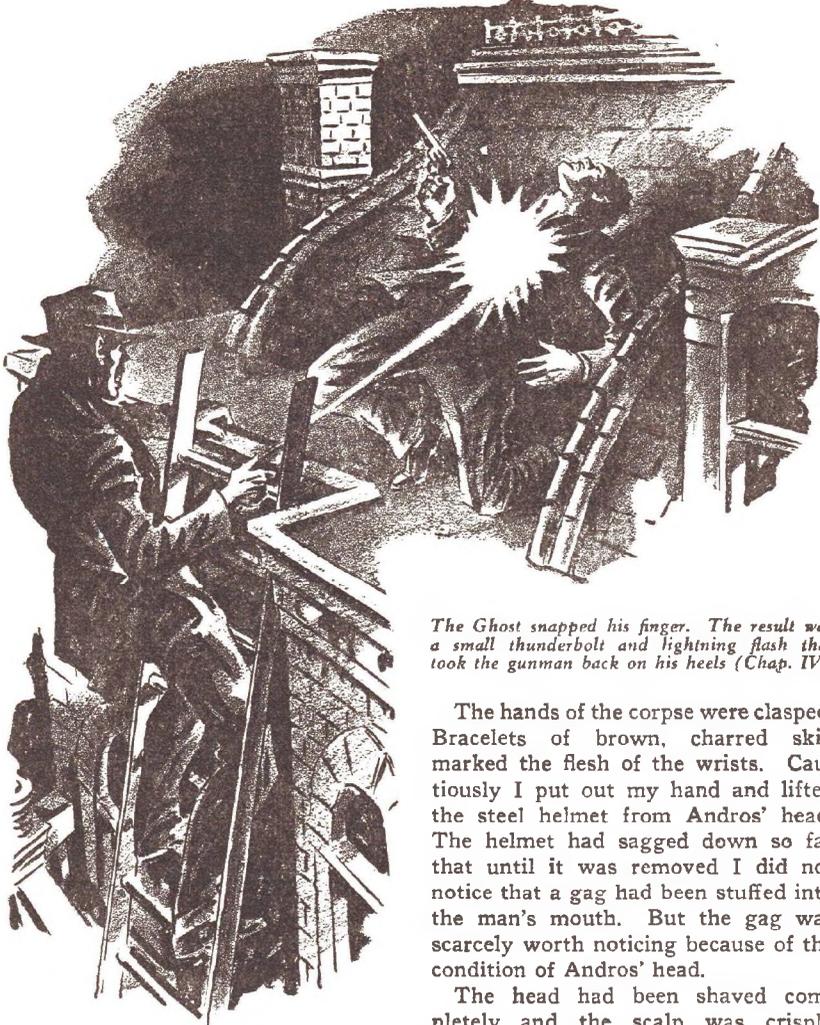
The old man gave me a look with his sharp eyes.

"Maybe he's bad sick," he said. "Maybe that's what it is."

He bent over the keyhole, fumbled with a key, finally swung the door open on a long low room that fronted the street. Steel-framed casement windows were closed, but the morning sun streamed through cleanly washed glass and fell upon the shriveled figure of Samson Andros sitting in a chair in the center of the room.

As I entered the room, a certain nauseating smell came to my nostrils. And as I approached the man in the chair I saw that he wore a hat, which would not have been particularly remarkable had the man in the chair been Joe Harper, for instance. But this was Mr. Samson Andros, who should have known better.

The closer I got to the chair the more that hat fascinated me. My first impression was that it was a flattened brown derby. My second was that it was a woman's hat. My third and only accurate impression was that the hat was an army helmet made of steel and



The Ghost snapped his finger. The result was a small thunderbolt and lightning flash that took the gunman back on his heels (Chap. IV)

with the unmistakable O.D. coloring. "Wh-what's that?" the old servant whispered.

He had noticed the hat.

"Is—is he dead?" Jangling keys betrayed the trembling of the old servant behind me.

I walked around Mr. Andros and his chair. Andros was dead. He had been dead for some time. But how had he died? His left trouser leg was rolled up to expose a bare ankle. Around the ankle was a burned brown band.

The hands of the corpse were clasped. Bracelets of brown, charred skin marked the flesh of the wrists. Cautiously I put out my hand and lifted the steel helmet from Andros' head. The helmet had sagged down so far that until it was removed I did not notice that a gag had been stuffed into the man's mouth. But the gag was scarcely worth noticing because of the condition of Andros' head.

The head had been shaved completely and the scalp was crisply burned.

Now I knew what that sickening smell, noticed on entering the room, was. Only once before in my life had I smelled it, and that had been in the death house at Sing Sing prison, when Commissioner Standish and I had witnessed the electrocution of a criminal convicted of murder.

Samson Andros had been electrocuted!

I repeated that thought out loud. I dragged my eyes from the charred

scalp of the corpse to the inside of the steel hat I held in my hand. The lining had been removed. Steel had rested on Andros' head, acting as the electrode that had introduced the killing current into the man's head. Andros' easy-chair had been turned into an electric chair.

He had been fried, burned like a condemned criminal. There were only two things missing—his executioner and the necessary voltage for the execution. I mean, of course, Andros' murderer wasn't there, nor could the ordinary house current have killed this man in this manner.

A dry sob sounded behind me. Turning, I saw the servant sitting on the edge of the bed, his head bent, tears dripping from the end of his nose.

"Ten years," the old man blubbered. "Ten years I served him and never missed a day. And last night—last night I failed him."

"Oh," I said. "You weren't here last night, eh?"

"I was at my brother's house in Brooklyn. I got a letter yesterday afternoon saying my brother was sick. It said he was too sick to write himself and that a friend was doing it for him. So last night I went out to my brother's place only to find he was all right. It was crooked work, that's what it was. Crooked work, and I should have known it and come right back to Mr. Andros. Now—now—"

The old man buried his face in his hands. I let him cry. I returned the steel hat to the head of the corpse, but as I was stooping over the hairless cranium to do so, I noticed a peculiar mark on the scalp, nearly obliterated by the burning of the flesh.

The mark, as near as I could make it out, was like two straggling letters—two twisted letters "S." There was more to it than that, but I couldn't make it out because the flesh was burned.

Back of Andros' death chair there was half a sheet of newspaper and on it was piled little wads of hair, some of

which was stuck together with dried lather—hair that had been shaved from Andros' head so that contact with the deadly steel hat would be certain.

I stooped over, doubled up the newspaper with its contents, carried it to the window. I picked up one of the pale hairs and examined it closely in the daylight. It was Andros' blond hair, no doubt of that, but near the point where it had been severed by the murderer's razor the hair was darker, almost black.

I made an envelope of a piece of the newspaper and put several of the hairs into it. Then I went to the servant and put a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"That note that sent you to Brooklyn last night," I said. "I want it. Perhaps it was written by Mr. Andros' murderer."

The old man fumbled in the breast pocket of his shirt and pulled out a small slip of paper that had been folded several times. I opened the paper and read the typewritten lines on it:

Your brother is bad sick. He asked me to write this for him and send it to you. You'd better come at once.

I put this into my pocket along with the hairs. Then I phoned Commissioner Standish and told him what "Dr. Stacey" had discovered.

CHAPTER VIII

The Word for Death



DR. ROBERT DEMAREST was sitting beside Standish's desk, his heavy, sleepy-looking eyelids drooping over his slightly protruding eyeballs, when I entered the office that afternoon. There's a good deal about Demarest besides his title of Medical Examiner that reminds

you of the morgue. Gloomy saturnine, cadaverous—all describe Bob Demarest. Yet he is one of the most interesting and brilliant men it has ever my pleasure to know.

Standing in front of the commissioner's desks, talking, was Attorney Calvin Pieper. Back against the wall, floppy hat, sagging top coat and all was the hatchet-faced police reporter. Ronald Wick.

"Well, *Doctor!*" Demarest lent a nasty emphasis to the title as he addressed me. He knew well enough that all that Dr. Stacey knew about medicine was what he had soaked up from associating with the medical examiner himself.

Standish shook hands, reminded me that I had met Calvin Pieper on the night before.

"Mr. Pieper has called something that was in that incomprehensible spirit message that heralded the shooting of Kendle last night," Standish informed me.

Before I had a chance to discover what it was that Pieper had remembered, I felt a tug at my arm and turned to face Ronald Wick. It has been a mystery to me how Wick managed to sink his teeth into his chewing gum with every word he uttered and still articulate fairly well, but somehow he did it.

"Maybe you can answer a few questions," he said.

"He can't, Wick," the commissioner

cut in. "You came here to get your camera. Go down to the Homicide Office and I think Magnus will let you have it. You've got all the dope on the Andros death you're going to get."

"Was there any chance of Andros' death being suicide?" Wick persisted.

Standish pointed at the door. "The answer is no, and if you don't get out I'll apply the toe of my shoe to the seat of your pants!"

Wick left. I turned to Pieper.

"I was just telling the commissioner that I remembered something that was said in that portion of the ghostly warning last night which no one seemed to understand. Perhaps you know that I said I recognized a name that stood out from the rest of the gibberish."

I nodded.

"It was the name of a poem," Pieper said. "It was repeated several times. Remember that poem about death. Goes something like this:

"Remember when thy summons comes
To join the innumerable caravan,
Where each shall take his chambers
In the silent halls of Death. . . ."

"I THINK that's misquoted," Demarest said, "though the thought is there. You mean that joyous, happy graveyard lyric called 'Thanatopsis'."

"That's it," Pieper cried. "Thanatopsis. And the word spoken several times in that part of the message that didn't

[Turn Page]



make sense—it was *'thanatos'*."

"And does this—this *thanatos* make sense?" Standish asked. "Who is he?"

"Death," sighed Demarest. "Thanatos is Greek for Death. I often wondered what I would do with my college Greek. Now I know I was being prepared for the illuminating moment."

No one is so adept at dampening enthusiasm as Robert Demarest. Calvin Pieper was thoroughly dampened. I don't know what he expected Standish to deduce from this information, but he was certainly disappointed that no one volunteered to name the villain of the crime as soon as Pieper had voiced this clue. He left us, looking a little crestfallen.

"Well, Mastermind," Demarest said to me after Pieper had gone, "what do you think of the electrocuted Mr. Andros?"

"As a murder method," I answered somewhat absently, since I was still meditating over the *'thanatos'* business, "I should say it was something new."

"That's where you're wrong," Demarest said. "It's epidemic. Out Jamaica way, a young Negro came across a second corpse wearing a steel hat. This one was in the middle of a field with not so much as a flashlight on his person, and yet he was electrocuted. How do you like that?"

"Not as much as you seem to," I said. "Who was it?"

"You don't know him," Demarest said. "But one of his names is Gimp Taylor. He holds up banks for a living, or did until this mad-hatter turned his life off."

I sat down. Andros. Then a man named Gimp Taylor. What possible association could there be between the two except the manner of their death?

"Crazy, isn't it?" Standish said. "We start with a run-away corpse named Kendle and gradually work up to tin hats and vengeful bolts of lightning from the blue. Have you anything at all, Ghost?"

"I've something for Demmy," I said.

I showed Demarest the hairs and the note I had brought from the Andros apartment.

"The hairs came off Andros' head," I explained. "They look as if they were originally brown or black and had been bleached."

"I'll give them a look," Demarest said. He went out to have a look at the hairs through a microscope.

"Ghost," Standish said, "Kendle can't have been killed, and that's a fact. This Dr. Stockbridge was drunk when he looked at Kendle after Kendle had been shot. It's his vanishing into thin air that has me dizzy. How could it happen?"

"Don't look too hard at me," I said with a smile. "I've vanished a horse from the middle of a lighted stage, but I never did any tricks with a corpse. Let's take stock. What are we doing—tackling three separate and distinct cases at once, or are they all connected? There's the shooting of Kendle, murder or not. There's the electrocution of Samson Andros, definitely murder, though somewhat inexplicable. Then there's the electrocution of this Gimp Taylor. Any connection?"

STANDISH thoughtfully stroked his moustache.

"Gimp Taylor hardly seems to be on the same plane as the other two, yet he was killed by the same method as Andros. And then there's something else. Less than a week ago, Gimp Taylor and mob of stick-up men pulled a vanish that was just as clever as the one Peter Kendle seems to have pulled. Remember the Western National Bank job?"

I nodded. Bank jobs aren't in my line, but I had read about the crime in the paper.

"Gimp Taylor's mob pulled it," Standish said. "We were tipped off. We were tipped off just in time to get onto the tail of the mob as it made its get-away. We were sure we had them. Then what? We closed in on nothing. Gimp and his boys slipped through our

net like so much sea water through a sieve."

Standish leaned across his desk. His close-set eyes bored into my brain. His voice was low and grave.

"This town has got so it is full of leaks. Don't we have the finest police force in the world, yet we have a whole mob like Gimp Taylor's get out from under our noses. And that isn't the first. There's some illegal traffic in this town. Somebody's helping those crooks disappear."

"If," Demarest's voice sounded flatly from the doorway, "if they all turn up eventually as Gimp Taylor did, cooked to a turn in some hot seat, think of the money it will save the taxpayers."

"Not," said Standish, "if the taxpayers have to buy all the headache pills for the police." He sighed, elevated his brows as though his eyes hurt him. "Anything in those hairs, Demmy?"

Demarest looked sourly at me.

"I hate to say you're right, *Doctor Stacey*. These blond hairs of Mr. Andros' were originally dark brown. Mother Nature didn't have a chance after Mother Peroxide went to work."

"I wonder," I mused, as I started to leave the office, "if that Greek word *thanatos* held any meaning for Samson Andros."

"It's Greek to me," said Standish.

"That's just it," I said. "The thread running through this seems to be Grecian. That's why the death of Gimp Taylor seems a false note. '*Thanatos*' is a Greek word, Andros and Orestes are Greek names. It's Greek to me, too, but perhaps in a different sense. So long."

I RETURNED to the Ghost's rectory shortly after an early dinner, expecting to get some word from Joe Harper. As I unlocked the second door of the basement rooms, I could hear the Ghost's telephone ringing insistently. I hurried across the room to scoop up the phone.

"Darling, darling, I've been trying to

get you for ages of minutes!"

It was Merry White and she was excited.

"What's up?" I asked. I think she was still talking but a thunderous roar at her end of the line cut through her sentence.

"The limping man!" I heard next. "Tim and I saw a man who limped prowling around in front of the Orestes place this afternoon. We're on his trail. He's dreadful looking and—"

"Where are you now?" I asked.

She didn't answer.

"Merry, where are you?" I repeated.

"Darling, Jane—"

The connection was cut off by a crash that nearly broke my eardrum. What had happened!

CHAPTER IX

The Limping Man



IN the morning in which the murdered body of Samson Andros was discovered, Tiny Tim Terry somewhat unwillingly took Merry White's hand and permitted himself to be led up into the Bronx where Merry engaged a house at the end of the same block in which the Orestes and Kendle houses are located.

It wasn't a large house, but much too generously proportioned for Tim Terry. The full sized furniture—for it was to be let furnished—contributed to Tim's inferiority complex.

The landlord, who was very anxious to rent the place, thought it the very house for a widow and her little boy. Merry thought so too, and her quick acceptance led the landlord to become exceedingly generous. He patted Tim on the head and said he was a fine little man, finally adding injury to insult by handing Tim a bag of peanut brittle.

Merry contained her laughter only until the landlord was out the door. Then Tim called her a giggling frail and threw the bag of peanut brittle at her.

"I can't eat that stuff, damn it!" he said.

Merry gave him a tantalizing, roguish grin.

"That's what's so funny my fine little man! Peanuts ruin your forty-year-old digestive system and besides that false upper plate of yours—"

"Cut it, frail!" Tim shrieked at her, then broke off short. He was looking out of the window, and he saw the limping man.

THE man was tall and thin. He carried himself like a butler or possibly a clothes prop. His right leg, indeed, seemed made of wood, for it was stiff and he swung it along as if it was a pendulum on a clock.

The man walked by the house. Tim got a look at the man's face. It was as dark as walnut stain, and as wrinkled as a walnut shell. It was a face that pain had carved. It would have frightened children.

Tim forgot his feud with Merry. "The limping man's out there," he said quietly. "I'm trying to keep ducking out to see what he's up to."

Merry shook her head vigorously. "No, Tim. Every time you go out alone you get into trouble. George has warned you time and again not to try to carry too much on your shoulders."

She was looking out of the window now, and she too saw the limping man walking back in front of the Orestes house again.

"Watch him," she said. "I'll see if I can get hold of the Ghost."

She went to the phone, dialed the number of the Ghost's rectory which was written in her mind if not in any phone directory. She got no answer, hung up, went to see what Tim was doing.

Tim had on his hat and was already

going out the front door with a stump of his cigar in his mouth.

"Tim!"

Tim turned around and looked at her coldly.

"Your cigar. Put it out. Hide it." Tim felt a little sheepish.

"I'm slipping," he said. "This is the first time I've forgot about the cigar—"

"Since the last time you forgot," she said, picking up her hat and a light coat. "And the last time you forgot you nearly ended up on one of Dr. Demarest's post-mortem tables."

Together they left the house, Tim holding onto Merry's hand.

The limping man walked on as though he knew where he was going and eventually boarded a west-bound street car.

Merry and Tim got on behind him and Merry nearly disgraced Tim by starting an argument about Tim riding for half-fare.

The limping man got off one street car and transferred to another, eventually alighting at Franz Sigel Park. As Tim got off, still clinging to Merry's hand, he looked back over his shoulder and noticed that three men left the car at the same time. Two of them were tall and well-made, while the third was short and skinny. Tim didn't like their faces.

Their eyes were too steady, like the eyes of skilled poker players. Maybe he was over-working his imagination, but Tim got the idea that here was a trio of very tough babies.

MERRY, apparently, had eyes only for the limping man who was walking along East One Hundred and Fifty-eighth Street and looking neither to right nor left.

"I don't want to scare you, frail," Tim whispered to Merry, "but if you should have to powder your nose, you might mirror a backward glance and see if three hard-cooked eggs aren't following us."



Robert Demarest

Merry did as Tim suggested, nodded her head a little.

"They're across the street now," she said. "They've been following us almost as far as we've been following the limping man. I didn't want to scare you, Tim."

"Nuts!" Tim said.

The limping man turned north into Cromwell Street and then left at the next block to walk under the el and to the Anderson Avenue station. There he boarded the downtown el. Tim and Merry did likewise.

"And," Tim whispered, "the unholy three are right on our heels, Merry."

Merry nodded, turned to the man on the seat next to her and asked him if he wouldn't move over so that her little boy could sit down.

The man moved over and Tim got into the seat beside Merry, his cheeks burning.

Tim salvaged his hurt pride by thinking just how perfect this set-up was. No one else could have helped the Ghost

as he could. Merry might be suspected, Joe Harper might be suspected. But Tim—well he had a man's brain and—even a man's body traveling around in the disguise of a child.

Even the Ghost couldn't disguise himself as a child.

THE el dropped swiftly into Lower Manhattan. The limping man sat with his ugly face turned toward the window. At West Fourteenth Street station, the limping man got up into the crowded aisle and alighted with a lot of other passengers. Tim and Merry got off also, and in the crowd Tim lost track of the three tough-looking men entirely.

He was a little disappointed.

The limping man walked into Hudson Street. It was then that Merry used her vanity mirror again.

"Tim, they're right behind us! Those three men. Tim, I've got to get to a phone, quick! Watch Limpy while I telephone!"

CHAPTER X

The Wire Mask

RIGHT off Hudson Street, the limping man turned to the left. Merry was walking six feet ahead of Tim, trying to hurry the little man's steps.

"Hurry, sonny," she kept saying to him. "Mama wants to find a drugstore."

Where the el cut down Greenwich Street, Merry stepped into a drugstore. Tim glanced around the corner, saw the limping man go into the doorway of a narrow brick building that looked like cheap office rent. There was a sign in one of the windows of the building, and Tim became curious about that. Tim kept on up the street, watching the building into which the limping man had disappeared. The street narrowed. It was hardly more than an alley. It was dark, too, and sharp gusts of wind blew in from the Hudson. It was a warm enough afternoon, but Tiny Tim Terry found a shiver racing along his back.

Behind him he saw three tough looking men go into a huddle that lasted only a few seconds. The huddle broke up and one of the men cut across the street while the other two remained on Tim's side of it.

The sign in the window of the building across the street said *Messenger Wanted*. Maybe the limping man was trying to get the job. Or perhaps he was less innocently employed. Anyway, he was in there quite a time and Merry didn't reappear from the drugstore where Tim knew she was trying to get in touch with the Ghost.

Tim kept to the sidewalk across the street from the narrow building. So did two of the tough men. The third tough—the skinny little man, was leaning against the wall of the building

into which the limping man had gone. He was smoking, but he kept his right hand tucked up into the top of his loose-fitting suit coat.

The limping man appeared in the doorway of the dingy office building for only an instant. During that instant, the skinny man pulled his gun and fired. That one shot was like a signal for battle. The two men on Tim's side of the street drew guns and let them talk. From the doorway across the street, nothing could be seen of the limping man except long splinters of gun flame, orange-red in the half-light.

Lame the man might have been, but he was in no way blind. The skinny man ventured too far out from his sheltering wall and took a slug somewhere in the chest. His gun slipped from fingers that rose to claw at the bloody region of the wound. He spilled forward to flop on the pavement. And the limper trained his gun across the street.

Tim Terry's eyes strained from their lids. He had wanted action and adventure, but he had no desire to collect a passing bullet intended for one of the two hoods behind him. He glanced around desperately, saw a coal window curbing that would make a decent enough trench for him, dove for it.

POLICE whistles shrilled above the racket of gunfire. Tim raised his head above his concrete entrenchment, saw the two hoods bearing down on him. One of them was dripping blood from his side. It looked as though all the blood in his face was draining out of his side. The other was whole, moving swiftly, letting go with shots for the doorway across the street and sending a few back over his shoulder toward the police. Tim thought that if Merry White were to step from the drugstore at this moment she would be lucky if she didn't get hit by one of those wild slugs.

It was just when his brain was offering this unselfish thought for Merry

that the gunman who wasn't wounded stooped, seized Tim by the shoulder, pulled him from the depression in front of the coal window.

"Come on, kid!" the gunman said hoarsely. "You'll do to put those coppers' shots wide."

"Mack!" the wounded man groaned. He bounced in close to Tim and the other rodman. "Mack, that's the boss' car back there. We're going the wrong way!"

"He'll pick us up," the other man panted, struggling to keep Tim in hand. "Cops back that way. Head toward the dock."

The bleeding man stumbled, got to rubber legs, lurched along, hanging to his partner's shoulder.

AT the sound of the first shot, Merry White ended her telephone conversation with the Ghost. She had every intention of calling him back as soon as she had made certain that Tim was safe. But knowing the midget's unequaled ability for getting himself into scrapes that he wasn't strong enough to get out of, her first fear was naturally for Tim.

Merry ran out into the street, got there just in time to see Tim jump into that depression in front of the coal window. She was over a block from where the actual shooting was taking place, so it appeared to her that Tim might have fallen to the sidewalk, hit by one of the slugs.

She was on the point of rushing headlong into the danger spot herself when a hand dropped on her shoulder. She turned her head and raised it to look into the strangest face she had ever seen. The face reminded her of Napoleon or rather a portrait of Napoleon. There was something lifeless about it. The eyes seemed painted and stared fixedly down the street. But she had a queer notion that there were eyes behind those painted eyes and that the hidden eyes were looking into hers.

She opened her mouth, would have

cried out. She realized that this was no face at all but a mask that completely covered the face—an artfully made mask, painted on a shaped piece of wire mesh screening which enabled the completely hidden eyes to see unhampered in all directions without being seen by anyone.

For the first time in her life she was too frightened to move or utter a sound. A gun hidden in the pocket of the man's long dark raincoat shoved into her side. A gloved hand motioned to a car that waited at the curb. She obeyed that gesture without question. She slid in under the steering wheel and to the other side of the cushions while the man in the wire mask followed her closely.

Merry saw two police in uniform race by the car, guns drawn from their holsters. She heard the scream of their whistles. The man in the wire mask kicked his car to life, gave it the gun, made a loop turn that carried his front wheels up and over the sidewalk. The car sprang out like a live thing under the spur of the accelerator. The car burned off rubber going around a corner.

Merry felt dizzy. Beside her the man in the wire mask was speaking in a muffled voice:

"You're one of Orestes' hired agents, aren't you?"

"I—I—No, I'm not. Of course, I'm not."

"It wouldn't pay to lie, little lady. No, it wouldn't pay at all."

The man in the mask slammed on his brakes.

"Mack!" his muffled voice rang out.

Merry turned, saw one of the three toughs who had followed her and Tim stagger across the sidewalk to the car. His face was a mask of blood, his eyelids dripped crimson from a scalp wound high up on his forehead. He had Tim with him.

The man called Mack opened the door of the car quickly.

"They got me in the back, boss. The

damned dirty coppers. Rufe got it in the belly. The limping guy musta killed the Runt."

"Can you get in? Who's the kid?"

"Belongs to the jane, boss. Her kid—"

"Kick him in," the boss said. "We've go to step. Put you off at the dump. The boys will take care of you."

Mack put one bloody hand out and grabbed Tim by the back of his coat, lifted him into the car. Tim's face, a crinkled mask of mixed emotions, looked up into Merry's face. Then he pivoted, put one hand on the robe rail and the other on the front edge of the back seat cushion, lifted himself, kicked out with both feet at the man called Mack.

Mack cursed, fell to his knees on the running board, lammed Tim in the face with his fist. Tim fell, lay still.

"You hurt Tim!" Merry cried. She remembered suddenly that she carried the small automatic the Ghost had given her. It was in her pocket book. She tried to get it now, but the eyes of the man in the mask were watching her closely—those eyes you couldn't see, couldn't tell where they were looking. One of his hands closed on her wrist. The crushing strength of his fingers brought tears to her eyes.

"The sack," the man in the wire mask said.

Merry looked up to see a bag of velvet cloth held over her head. She uttered a small scream as the bag dropped and its blackness engulfed her head. The sweetish odor of chloroform assailed her nostrils. She stopped breathing. She'd rather smother, but she wouldn't take any of that stuff into her lungs. God only knew what would happen to her if she did.

Her temples throbbed. Red clouds swirled before her eyes. Lights flashed. She wouldn't. She wouldn't—and then the involuntary nerve centers dictated against her will. She opened her mouth, sobbed the drug into her lungs. Her head spun like a top. Strange, terrifying noises shrilled in her ears. Then

the spinning slowly stopped. The sounds faded. After that there was nothing—no beginning and no end. An infinity of blackness.

CHAPTER XI

Trail of Blood



THE break in the connection that ended my conversation with Merry White staggered me. I wasted a few seconds in the futile effort to re-establish the connection. Finally, I dropped the phone back into its cradle, crowded down my frantic fear. There was only one thing for me to do and that was to use my head, hope, and be patient.

Merry's last word had been "Jane." I had asked her where she was. Jane's house? Who was Jane? Merry had never mentioned anyone by that name to me in all the years we had been on the stage together. And then it snapped to my mind. She had started to say "Jane Street," of course.

And that roar I heard in the phone—could it have been the sound of an elevated train rushing by the place where she had stopped to telephone? The el did cut across Jane Street.

Anyway, that was the morsel of information I had and there was nothing to do but make a supper of it. I left the rectory still wearing the disguise of Dr. Stacey, employed the car which was registered in Stacey's name, drove west to Ninth Avenue and then south along the el.

Police had blocked off Jane Street and over the heads of the crowd of watchers I could see the top of an ambulance. I angled the nose of the car into part of a parking space, got onto the sidewalk. I elbowed my way through the crowd and got to the edge of the street just as the doors of the

ambulance were slammed and the driver gunned his motor.

I dodged past a cop, ran into the street, sprang onto the running board of the ambulance which was already in motion. But a cop took hold of me from behind and dragged me off the ambulance.

"What's the matter with you, Mister?" the cop demanded.

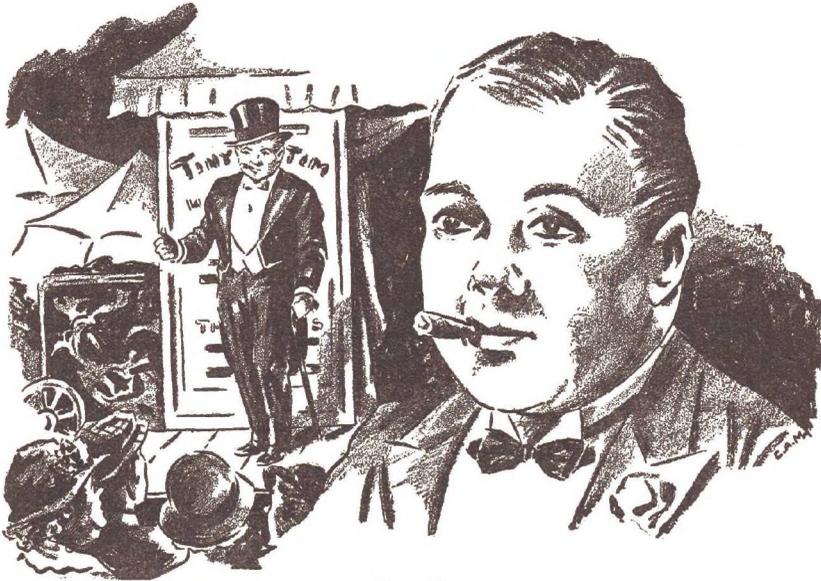
"What's happened?" I asked, looking after the ambulance. "Who's in there?"

to the crowd. My eyes searched from face to face. Strangers all, and again I had to beat back the urge to call out for Merry White.

Then I heard a couple of men talking.

"One of them got away, they say," said the first man.

"Two of them. They were taking a little boy as hostage and the cops had to pull their shots. That's what I heard. But one of the cops said he hit one of the gunmen. And the other was al-



Tiny Tim

"By the looks of you, Mister, I would say it was no friend of yours in that wagon. There was a bit of shooting and a little man who was hopped to the eyes got his everlastings. What business would it be of yours, now?"

"Was there a gun battle here?"

"That there was. I'd have given me right arm to put in a pot-shot at the rats myself. Don't ask me what it was about. But this little one was jit and one of the boys shot another in the get-away, but he's given us the slip, I'm afraid."

I got away from the cop, went back

ready wounded from the gun battle. Step over here and you can see the blood on the sidewalk."

I WAS the one who stepped over to see the blood. And as soon as I saw those dark stains against the gray pavement, I began following the gruesome dotted line that ran away from them.

A block farther along Jane Street toward the river, the bloody trail became even more pronounced. There was no one on the sidewalk now to get in my way and I followed swiftly.

Darkness came swiftly to the narrow street and as I hurried along alone, my head bowed, I realized for the first time that in acting as I had in the disguise of Dr. Stacey I was in danger of exposing my most valuable alias. But when Merry's call to the rectory had been broken through, I had been in no state of mind to act as I otherwise might have done. There was certainly no way of switching to another disguise in the middle of the street.

As I neared the docks, the blood trail came to a sudden end. There was an old brown brick building that might possibly have been used as a warehouse and the blood led to the sill of a broken window of the basement. I crouched low and looked into the darkness of the cellar below. I saw nothing, heard nothing.

I looked up and down the street, saw that I was the only soul in sight. I dropped on my belly on the sidewalk and snaked backwards through the opening.

I dropped about six feet to the basement floor, stood there for a moment listening before I ventured a beam of light from my flash. To my right I heard the sound of labored breathing.

I turned on the flash. Over in one corner of the filthy little basement room huddled the figure of a man. There was blood on the floor, quite a rivulet of blood coming from the middle of the man's shirt front.

"Mack," the man whispered in agony.

I moved quickly across the room to drop beside the wounded gunman. I took my left hand and put it in his grasping fingers. Eyes that had a glassy look about them sought my face which was shadowed by the darkness.

"That you, Mack? I knew you wouldn't desert an old pal, Mack."

"It's not Mack," I said. "I'm a doctor. Maybe I can help you." I knew I couldn't. This man was going fast.

"Too late, Doc., I'm going to croak. Mack said he'd send some of the boys from the Dump for me."

"The Dump," I said. "Where's that?"

The man coughed.

"Sure, everybody knows where the Dump is. Didn't Mack send you here? Mack said he needed a doc hisself. Ain't you the one he sent?"

"Yes. But there was a girl, wasn't there? Wasn't there a girl with you and Mack?"

"I don't know anything about the girl," the dying man worked out. "There was a girl and a little kid following the limping guy, too. Mack grabbed the kid. I don't know anything about the girl."

THE "kid," I knew, must be Tim. "Why were you following the limping man?"

"The boss—he said to. We were to gun the limpy or else. The boss—well, you got to do what the boss says. He's hell—"

The gunman gripped my hand hard. His eyes seemed trying to drill past the beam of my light to find my face.

"You, Doc, you can't help me—any, because I'm going to—to—"

He tried to sit up, clawed weakly at the darkness which must have come over him like a smothering blanket. Then he did what he said he was going to do. He died.

I left him there. My feelings towards him weren't particularly generous, I suppose. There are numerous varieties of rats and one of the most noxious kind, to my notion, is the kind that uses a woman or a defenseless and innocent man as a shield against police bullets—as this man and his companion had evidently used Tim and possibly Merry.

Once back on the street, I lost no time in getting to my car. There was a drugstore on the corner beneath the el tracks and I turned into it. The proprietor asked me what I would have and I asked him if a young girl of Merry's appearance had used his telephone, sometime during the past hour.

"Maybe so, mister. A lot of people come in here to telephone."

In my opinion, it was an odd man who wouldn't have marked Merry White well in his memory, but I suppose there are all sorts of tastes. I asked the man where I could find a place known as the Dump.

He jerked his head in the direction of the river.

"It's on West Street and down about a mile," he told me. "A little eating joint—eat and drink, but mostly drink, I guess. I've never been there."

I returned to my car, drove over to West Street and south, my eyes wide open looking for the Dump.

It was just a door and a window in the wall. The red letters that named the place were partly pealed away from the dirty window pane. I rolled on by and parked. Before I left the car I intended to make certain alterations in my makeup which would protect my alias of Dr. Stacey.

But I had hardly time to raise my fingers to my face before the door of the Dump opened and two men came out. In what light there was from the dirty window, I got a glimpse of a pair of hard-looking faces. The men were coming in my direction and I waited, hoping to pick up a scrap of their conversation.

But as they passed me they were silent. I watched them go up the street a couple of doors and stop in front of a brick front building. I noticed then that the building had a small illuminated sign which read:

Dr. G. A. Ray, Surgeon.

IT occurred to me what the dying gunman had said about his partner being hit by a bullet in the gun fray. I wondered if I was going to be given a break. Even a chance to make my own break would have been welcomed with open arms.

The two toughs knocked at the doctor's door and received no answer. They talked in low tones together for a few seconds and then sat down on the steps,

intending to wait for the return of Dr. Ray, I presumed.

Here was my chance. It was about as thin as a soap chip, but I was beggar enough not to be too choosy about it. If these two mugs didn't know Dr. Ray, I was all set. If they did know, I was probably about to commit suicide.

I resolved to step into the shoes of Dr. Ray, regardless of their size.

CHAPTER XII

Alias, the Doctor



FLATTENED the beetling brows of Dr. Stacey, removed the Oxford glasses, pulled away the false moustache. That left me but little in the way of makeup to conceal the face of George Chance—a few lines of age, gray temples, and artificially fattened cheeks. I intended to depend almost entirely on control of the facial muscles to hide my real identity.

I gave my mouth a one-sided quirk, kept it in that position. I raised my left eyebrow, held the muscle that controlled it taut, giving a quizzical expression to my eyes. Next I reached into the rear compartment of my car and brought out a suitcase. It wasn't anything like a doctor's satchel, but it had certain magical properties that might better serve me where I hoped I was going.

I got out of the car and walked straight toward the door that was marked by Dr. Ray's illuminated sign. As I walked I whistled and took a ring of keys from my pocket.

I walked up the three steps directly between the two toughs, and tried to put the first key that came into my fingers into the lock of the doctor's door.

"Nice evening," I said as I stooped

over the door. "You gentlemen waiting for me? I was detained at the hospital—"

I held my breath. Either my act was going to go over or it was going to flop.

"Doc," one of the men said.

I turned, glad enough to give up fumbling with the lock my key didn't fit.

"Yes?" I said.

"We'd like you to do a little job for a friend of ours. How about it?"

"The man sick?" I asked.

"Well, in a way," said the other man. "It's more like he had an accident."

I tried to look severe. Actually, I could hardly keep from smiling. My act was going over.

"You mean he's been in a fight?"

"Yeah. With guns."

I shook my head.

"Sorry, but I can't touch a case of that kind. Too dangerous. Of course, if I can look the man over in the presence of the police—"

"Don't make it hard, Doc," the first man said. "We don't want to make it that way. How'd you like to make a hundred bucks?"

"Not that way," I said, turning once more to the door.

A gun jabbed into me. It was probably the first time I welcomed that unfriendly gesture.

"Come on off the high horse, Doc. You fix our pal up or we give you the works, see?"

"You do the job," said the other man, "and keep that twisted trap of yours shut and everything is going to be jake. You let out a squawk and the next nap you take is going to be in the morgue."

I CAME down from the steps, a man on either side of me, the man on the left keeping his gun nosed in under my arm, I was "forced" toward the illuminated doorway of the Dump.

The smoke-choked, dim-lit room inside, with its crepe paper festooning, was so narrow that we had to walk

single file between tables and bar. I was sandwiched in between the men so that I couldn't have got away if I had wanted to. We went through a swinging door at the rear, across a dirty little kitchen, out of a back door into a six by ten yard that was the result of an off-set in the building at the rear.

The man in front of me knocked at a door located in the wall of the off-set part of the building. It was opened at once and we filed into a room.

The place looked like a small version of a two-bit flop house. There wasn't enough floor space to have the mattresses spread on the floor, but there were double tiers of bunks on each wall. Two of the bunks were occupied, one of them by Tiny Tim Terry.

Tim was working with rope, his hands tied behind him. A dirty quilt was tossed over his feet. He was alive, thank heaven, and his eyes met mine eagerly as I approached his bunk.

"That isn't the guy," said a red-haired giant of a man who had been in the room when I had entered with my two captors. "That's just the kid. He ought to be asleep by now. We take the best care of him we can, but what he needs is a mamma. You ain't got a mamma, have you, kid?"

Somebody snickered, but it wasn't Tim. I put my suitcase down on Tim's bunk and turned around to the patient on a bunk on the other side of the room.

"He's got lead trouble in his back, Doc," the redhead told me. "I think the slug is squeezing on his spine. He can't use his hands."

"Impinging on a motor nerve," I said professionally.

I looked down into my patient's face. The man's lips were set tight, every muscle of his face wooden. He was one of those guys who could take it. Blood smeared his face from a scalp wound that didn't bother him much, he said. What got him was his back. Was he going to croak, did I think?

"Someday," I said. "Maybe not now."



Commissioner Standish

I turned to the redhead and told him we'd have to get our patient over on his belly so I could slit the coat and shirt up the back and get a look at the wound.

"And there will have to be a clean sheet under him," I said. "We don't want blood poisoning to set in."

"No," said the wounded man. "That's bad, ain't it, Doc?"

"It's hell," I said. "We'll have to give you lockjaw anti-toxin as a precaution anyway."

REDHEAD and the other two men lifted the patient and took the bloody sheet out from under him. I took the sheet from their hands, carried it to the other side of the room and draped it over my suitcase and over Tim. It looked like a thoughtless movement, but it was far from that. The first finger of my right hand touched a concealed catch on the side of the case that allowed a secret flap on the side nearest Tim to drop down.

When I turned around, two of the men were holding the wounded hood

while another put a clean sheet on the bunk with characteristic male awkwardness.

The wounded man was put on the bunk face down. I took out my knife and ripped his coat and shirt up the back, peeled sticky cloth away from the wound.

"There isn't enough light," I told them. "Bring that extension cord over here."

Redhead took the one light bulb from its hook in the ceiling and brought it over to the bunk, trailing the light cord behind him. I still complained about the light, gave my flashlight to one man to hold and told the other to strike matches. Then, with all hands occupied, all backs toward the bunk where Tim Terry lay, I started to probe the wound, or rather the region around it, with my fingers.

The wounded man started to moan. I hated to torture him, even if he was a rat, but the noises he made effectively concealed Tim's movements on the other side of the room. All Tim had to do was roll over onto the flap of my

magical suitcase and I would be ready to pull a vanishing stunt. The midget would have no trouble doubling his supple little body into the inside of the case.

When I thought Tim had had time to accomplish that, I straightened, gravely told the crooks that I would have to operate.

"That means," I said, turning toward the bunk where Tim and my suitcase were, "that I will have to go to my office for instruments and ether."

I crossed the room. I jerked the bloody sheet away from my suitcase and at the same time touched the hidden spring which caused the secret flap to fly back into its original position. I doubled the dirty sheet up and tossed it on the bunk, hoping that it would hide the fact that Tim was no longer there.

"I'll be right with you, Doc," the redhead said, "and don't try any funny business."

I could scarcely conceal a smile. After all, the funny business had been accomplished. I took hold of the handle of the suitcase which contained Tim, turned quickly, started for the door. The redhead was right behind me.

We got just as far as the tavern kitchen, when the two able-bodied crooks left behind discovered that Tim was missing.

CHAPTER XIII

Dead End



S UDDENLY, they burst through the back door of the kitchen and called out to the redhead or perhaps to me to wait a minute. I waited less than a fraction of a second. Something like this was bound to have happened. After all, getting Tim into the suitcase was about as

brazen a stunt as I had ever pulled. It was really remarkable that I had got as far as I had with it.

The suitcase was in my left hand. As soon as the two men broke through the rear door, my right hand went to the lower edge of my coat, my palm slapping against the concealed gimmick that delivered my little automatic smoothly into my hand. I drove my right hand, carrying the gun, hard to the side of the redhead's face as he turned to see what the trouble was. The man dropped as though he had been struck dead on his feet.

I hoped my sudden movement would cause enough surprise so that the draw of the other crooks would be delayed. But they must have had their guns out almost as quickly as I. Considering my doubtful marksmanship, there wasn't much point in trying to shoot it out, especially since a stray bullet would have snuffed out Tim's life if it happened to find its way into the suitcase I was carrying.

"Drop that gun, Doc!" one of the men ordered.

I delayed in obeying just long enough to manipulate a strong loop of transparent gut over the butt of the automatic with my right little finger. This gut loop was attached to what is known to magicians as a wrist reel. It has many handy uses, but I am probably the only person who ever uses it in conjunction with a gun. That done, I dropped the gun to the floor in front of me.

One of the crooks advanced, pushed my gun aside with the toe of his shoe. He thought the gun was beyond my reach, but just as long as the thread connecting the wrist reel and the gut loop had not been broken, the gun was actually as conveniently placed as when it had rested in its usual gimmick.

"Let's see what you've got in that suitcase, Doc," said the man. "I don't know how you worked it, but I got an idea there was some funny business went on under that sheet you threw over the suitcase."

The gunman stooped over the suitcase and tried to open it. He couldn't, simply because the regular clasp at the top was securely locked.

"I'll show you," I said. "You've got to unlock the thing. I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't tried any doublecross."

As I stooped over the case, my left hand made a brief visit to a secret pocket in the tail of my coat. My left hand came away pretty well filled and worked under my right which I used to unlock the suitcase. I opened the case just far enough to put my left hand inside. Through the opening I could see Tiny Tim curled up like a worm in a cocoon. His eyes questioned me. And then I pulled the trick.

I had filled my left hand with what is known as a "production baby" in the magic profession. It has a hollow rubber head molded into the face of a baby doll and a body that consists mostly of a silk dress formed over a spiral spring of wire. Expanded, the baby is full size, but when collapsed it is just a handful. Of course I produced it from the suitcase full sized.

The effect went over big in front of my criminal audience. If the crooks had supposed that Tim was inside there, they now saw me remove a six-months-old baby instead. And I employed ventriloquism to give the collapsible baby a lusty voice, and then handed it to the gunman.

But I have my own ideas as to the baby-out-of-the-hat trick. Beneath the dress of the production doll I always have a piece of magnesium flash-paper and a phosphorus cap for firing the flash-paper. As I thrust the baby into the startled gunman's hands, I fired the phosphorus cap. The baby immediately became a ball of fire. Flames shot up into the gunman's face as the dress caught from the flash-paper.

I closed the suitcase, picked it up. The crook who wasn't occupied with the burning baby showed signs of com-

ing out of his dazed trance. I pressed the catch on my wrist reel and my automatic skated across the floor and jumped up into my hand.

"You're covered," I said. "Don't try anything or I'll kill you where you stand." And I backed swiftly from the room.

One crook had burned fingers and the other seemed to be badly troubled with paralysis, for he stood there with his mouth hanging open and his eyes shuttling around as though searching for the nearest exit.

I ran the length of the tavern, opened the front door and raced to my car. I put the suitcase containing Tim in the front seat beside me, started the car and spurred down the street.

As I left, I heard cries of "fire" coming from the Dump. Evidently the crooks had found the Ghost's baby too hot to handle. I could have had a big laugh out of this if I had been sure that Merry was safe.

When I had driven well out of the neighborhood, I stopped, opened the suitcase, got Tim out and cut his bonds.

"Where's Merry?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said. "She was in the car that took me to that place, up in front riding with somebody called 'the boss'. The man had some sort of a mask over his face."

"And you don't know where she is?"

"No idea," Tim said. "I tried to start a fuss in order to let her make a break for it, but one of those mugs hammered me into the floor of the car."

I drove on in down-hearted silence, hearing only about half of Tim's account of how he and Merry had followed the limping man.

"In the Dump," Tim said, "I got along all right. They thought I was a kid until they noticed tomorrow's beard showing up on my chin. Then they got the idea that both Merry and I were agents for this man named Orestes and they were going to torture me, only you came along in time."

"Was Merry in that tavern at all?" I asked.

Tim shook his head.

I tried to think. Merry kidnapped. I reviewed the case up to that point. Kendle shot, possibly murdered. A crook named Gimp Taylor electrocuted. A millionaire named Samson Andros electrocuted. A crazy mark on Andros' head. Andros and Orestes both afraid of a man who limped. The boss of a crooked outfit after agents who were supposed to be protecting Orestes and also out to get the limping man. Where did any piece of the puzzle fit?

We reached the rectory. Medical Examiner Robert Demarest was lazing in a chair and smoking a pipe. It was like coming home to a nice cheerful raven. Merry was gone, and I did not know where to look for her.

CHAPTER XIV

The Third Hat



PERUSUAL, Tim found solace in one of his cigars. Demarest soberly smoked his pipe. I took nervous puffs on a cigarette. I wheeled on Demarest.

"What have you got?"

"The limping man," he said quietly. "You were right about that 'Jewels-Jules' business. The man's name is Jules Kalkis."

I sank my teeth into the case again—anything new on it might be a lead to its solution and also a lead to Merry.

"Kalkis," I said. "Another Greek name. Orestes, Andros—all Greek. Ditto, the word thanatos. The message that came mysteriously out of the air before Kendle's death—it was incomprehensible merely because it was in Greek. The source of this case goes back to Greece. George Paton, the late Andros' partner—I shouldn't be

surprised if he were Greek too."

"I was coming to that," Demarest said. "Standish has an appointment with Paton tonight."

"They're scared, all of them," I said—"all afraid of this Jules Kalkis."

"Right. According to what Paton has already hinted, he and Andros left Europe to get away from the wrath of some vendetta."

"I think Paton is holding back," I snapped. "I think that's true of Orestes too, and Kendle. I think they're all tied together."

The phone rang. I froze.

"That's either Merry—or news of another murder."

I broke my paralysis, snatched up the phone. Ned Standish was on the other end.

"There's been another steel hat killing," he said.

"Paton," I said.

Standish gasped.

"Paton it is. Found seated in his car in the middle of Empire City Park. He was evidently on his way from the country club where he had dinner. I was to meet him downtown. He had a steel hat for dessert. He fried like a murderer at Sing Sing and no electricity around except the six-volt battery in his car. How did you know?"

I hadn't known, I had merely guessed. I suppose Merry's disappearance had given me a fatalistic outlook on the whole case.

"If Demarest is there, tell him to get on the job," the commissioner said.

"I will. And you put the Department of Missing Persons on the look for Merry. She's gone." I hung up to break the news to Demarest and Tim.

The medical examiner got lazily to his feet.

"When you get a look at Paton's body," I said, "watch out for tattoo marks in the scalp. If you find anything, let me know."

Demarest left then. I paced the floor, thinking. Midnight came, and with it Joe Harper.

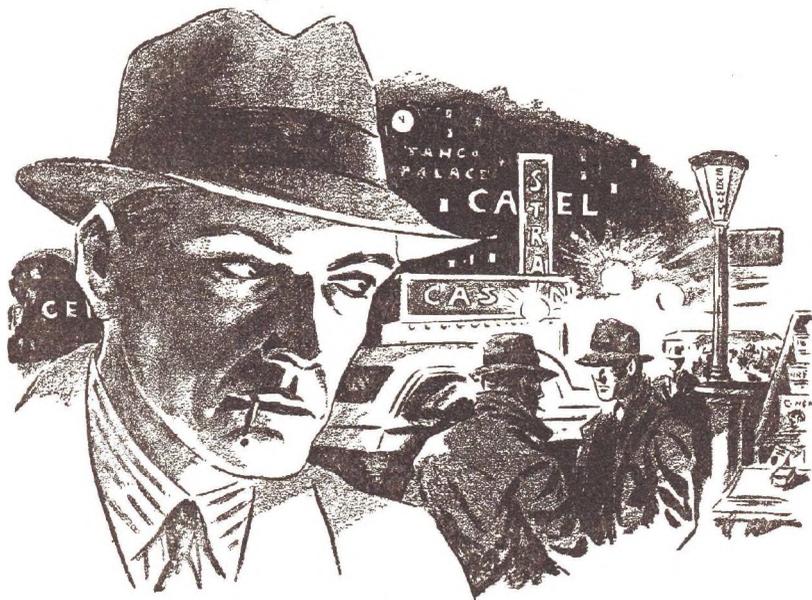
He looked unperturbed. His loose lips dangled a cigarette. His beetle-black eyes were expressionless. He sensed that something had gone wrong.

He didn't say anything until he had bridged the space between a chair and a cocktail table with his lank legs. Then he pushed his green hat on the back of his head and looked from Tim to me.

"There's the cheery, homey atmos-

"What's that got to do with it?"

"George," Joe said, "the only reason I ask is Kendle dead is that before I can play my bit straight I got to get the cast of characters in order. I don't want to call a certain guy Kendle's murderer if Kendle hasn't been murdered. It doesn't matter, I guess. Only if Kendle was murdered, I know who did the job. At least I found the guy with



Joe Harper

phere of the morgue around here," he said. "Where's the babe?"

I gave him the story as briefly as possible.

When I had finished, he just sat there, letting cigarette ash snow down on his vest and flicking it off with the tips of his fingers.

I was edgy, but I kept my mouth shut, just sat there watching Joe's black eyes. He doesn't speak at a time like this unless his thoughts are pretty neatly arranged.

"Is Peter Kendle dead?" he asked finally.

That wasn't what I was waiting for.

the nutty eyebrows and the mashed in pan."

"Who?" Tim and I asked together.

"A man named Hank Roscoe. He's a sidekick of Gimp Taylor. They're both headliners in the bank stickup business."

"Gimp Taylor!" Tim piped. "Why, that's the guy who was electrocuted!"

"Then we've got something!" I said. "Something that's logical. If Taylor and this Roscoe were partners and Roscoe wanted to kill Kendle, Kendle could easily be the man who killed Gimp Taylor and consequently, since the same method was used, Andros and Paton.

Motive? Fear—at least as far as Taylor and Roscoe are concerned. Kendle killed them before they got him.”

I know I was going too fast, jumping at conclusions, but I had been groping in the dark for so long that I grasped at the faintest light.

“Maybe Paton, Andros and Kendle were all in the same crooked racket,” Tim suggested. “And Kendle wanted to get rid of Paton and Andros and also the crooks, Gimp Taylor and Roscoe.”

“Of course,” Joe said, “we’re forgetting that Kendle is supposed to have said something about a guy named Jules when he is supposed to have kicked off. And we’re overlooking the fact that we don’t know that Gimp Taylor wanted to kill anybody, and that Mr. Paton and Mr. Andros were both nice people. But who am I to sling old eggs at anybody’s dress-rehearsal.”

I stepped into my dressing room and changed at once to the Ghost disguise.

“You’re to stick here by the phone, Tim,” I called to the midget. “Don’t miss a single call. Joe and I will tackle this Hank Roscoe and if he’s got a tongue in his head he’ll talk.”

CHAPTER XV

Killer’s Hideout



HERE’S the place,” Joe Harper whispered to me. “The one with the light on the third floor.”

We were moving along Avenue D in the car when Joe pointed out the building to me. There were six others like it in the block, but you can’t fool Joe Harper’s bump of locality as long as he keeps in Manhattan.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Positive. I followed him to the place, double-checked by asking ques-

tions. This is Hank Roscoe’s hangout. I hung around outside and pretty soon some of his pals dropped by for him in a jalopy. But he lives here, and if we get in and find he’s not at home, maybe he’s got some good whiskey in his closet.”

I parked the car a little way north of the place where Hank Roscoe was supposed to live. Then Joe and I walked back, pushed open the narrow door that revealed the usual hall and unswept staircase.

“Second floor,” Joe whispered. “Take it easy. Roscoe is plenty hot with a gun, I hear.”

“You’re not bad yourself,” I said as we started up the stairs. It was a reassuring sound to hear—Joe loosening his gun in his shoulder holster. For myself, I got comfort out of the chill handle of my little knife where it rested against my wrist.

In the hall upstairs, Joe gave a brown-painted door a look that told me we had reached our destination. I didn’t knock. I took a look through an empty keyhole, saw darkness beyond, tried the knob, found the door unlocked. I pushed the door open, stepped into darkness.

Before he followed me, Joe took a necessary precaution. He slipped a triangle of handkerchief over the lower part of his face. The reason for this is fairly obvious. Joe Harper is known to be a friend of Magician George Chance. Therefore it wouldn’t be wise for him to run the risk of being recognized in the company of the Ghost. Somebody might get the idea that George Chance and the Ghost were one.

Because I knew that Joe would take this precaution before entering, I wasn’t surprised by his delay. As it turned out, Joe’s waiting a moment in the hall while he put on his handkerchief mask was the luckiest break I could have got. I hadn’t taken more than two steps into the unlighted room before somebody put a gun into my back.

"Keep your hands down, Hank," a hoarse voice warned. "You'll get a slug in your spine if you try to draw."

I kept my hands down. My knife had worked down to the heel of my hand anyway, and I trusted it above any other weapon.

"Now turn around, Hank," the hoarse voice said.

So I was Hank, was I? I suppose in the total darkness I looked as much like Hank as I did like anybody. I turned slowly, but the muzzle of that gun never lost contact with my body.

"Doublecross the boss, will you? Didn't like the deal he handed you, huh? You'd try to knock him off, would you," the hoarse voice taunted. "Well, how you gonna like this deal, Hank, when it hits you right in the belly."

PART of the regular Ghost attire is a rather large tie pin which contains a minute electric bulb attached by wires to a single flashlight cell carried in the pocket. By drawing back my head and expanding my chest to the fullest, this tiny light is put in position to throw a cold, greenish ray upwards, highlighting my face in the most ghostly manner. I turned on the tiny light and at the same time gave out with the Ghost's ghastly grin.

"Haven't you made some mistake?" I inquired in the Ghost's graveyard voice.

"The—the Ghost!" The man with the gun faded back from me. Joe Harper, coming through the door, dropped a sap on his head, caught the man in his arms, shoved him into the room and closed the door.

"That was okay," I said to Joe as I hunted for the light cord.

"That was perfect," Joe corrected. "If we had practiced it, we couldn't have done better."

I found a dangling light cord and pulled it. A sickly bulb revealed a shabby bedroom, an unmade bed, a man's clothes scattered about.

The man Joe had tapped on the head was thin and tall. His skin was as dark as an Indian's. He had a thick mat of black hair which hadn't been quite thick enough to protect him against the blow Joe had given him.

"You heard what he said about Hank doublecrossing the boss?" I asked Joe. "It would seem that Kendle is the boss and that Hank shot Kendle but didn't kill him."

"What was the matter with Dr. Stockbridge then?" Joe asked. "He said Kendle was dead."

"Two explanations for that. Either Stockbridge was so drunk he didn't know what he was doing or Stockbridge and Kendle are in cahoots. If so, I've got a pretty good notion what Kendle's racket is. Did I tell you what Standish said about there being a lot of illegal

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traffic in New York—a lot of wanted men slipping through the cop dragnet?”

“You haven’t told me, but I’ve known it for a while,” Joe said. “You figure Kendle, being in the trucking business, would have a chance to work out a pretty good system for smuggling the crooks to safety zones. What’s the Stockbridge angle?”

“Plastic surgery,” I said. “Stockbridge used to be the best in the game. He could fix up the faces of the criminals so they wouldn’t be recognized.”

“Why should Hank Roscoe want to gun Kendle?” Joe asked. “Unless Kendle gave him a raw deal.”

“That’s probably it,” I said. “If Kendle is running this crooked transport system, he’d be in a good way to bleed a criminal dry, wouldn’t he? Some of them would be inclined to strike back.”

I began looking around the room, picking over Hank Roscoe’s clothes. Joe Harper, at the same time, was searching the pockets of the man he had knocked out. His prolonged “Ah!” told me he had found spoils in the form of folding money, how much I didn’t know and didn’t ask.

UNDERNEATH a pair of pants half way under the bed, I found a pair of shoes. That was what I was looking for. You’ll remember that the Orestes roof had been newly repaired. Tar and small pebbles clung to the instep of the oxfords Hank Roscoe had worn. There was no doubt now but that Roscoe was the gunman who had shot at Peter Kendle. I showed the shoes to Joe.

“That’s okay,” he said. “But if Roscoe was the man who gunned Kendle, why did Kendle in his death act speak the name Jules?”

“Maybe,” I said, “he was deliberately tossing Andros and Paton a red herring. You’re forgetting we think Kendle is the man behind the steel hat killings. We’re basing that upon the fact that Gimp Taylor, who was Roscoe’s partner, winked out the steel hat way. If that’s so, then Kendle must have been

the killer of Andros and Paton, because the method, so unusual, would hardly occur to two minds at once.

“The motive for killing Paton and Andros is obscure, that’s certain, but if Kendle pulled it he certainly wouldn’t have missed the point of making a fall guy out of this Jules Kalkis whom Andros and Paton were afraid of anyway. Or maybe Kendle actually *did* think it was Jules.”

Suddenly we heard footsteps on the stairs of the tenement. I reached out and snatched the pull cord that turned out the light. No need for words to Joe. He would understand that if the man on the stair was Hank Roscoe we were going to grab him for the cops. For he had tried to kill Kendle and the law would want him for attempted murder, even if Kendle did turn out to be an arch-criminal.

Joe and I stood on either side of the door in the darkness. Footsteps stopped outside the door.

“Indian,” a voice whispered. “Indian, we’re wasting time. The boss got Roscoe. Slipped a tin hat on his head. There’s a car waiting outside for us now.”

This wasn’t Hank Roscoe. Roscoe had had the misfortune to meet the murderer who dealt in steel millinery. Outside the door was the sidekick of the man who had been waiting to gun Roscoe and had had the bad fortune to run into the Ghost instead.

“Okay,” I said hoarsely, my voice matching that of the man called Indian who was sleeping the sleep of the unjust on the floor of the room. “Wait till I get the door open.”

I reached across the door and twisted the knob, allowed the door to swing toward me.

“Come in,” I invited.

The man came in. He didn’t have a chance. I took him by the throat, let him feel the point of my knife in his ribs. He couldn’t have uttered a sound even if the knife hadn’t terrified him into silence.

"Bop him," I said to Joe.

Joe lifted the man's hat and laid the sap with loving care. I dragged the limp figure into the room. Joe closed the door, turned on the light.

THIS time our spider web had netted a tall, tow-headed man, slightly heavier than myself. He wore a dark blue suit and a bright red tie. He had a thick, outstanding upper lip, an out-thrust lower jaw, one ear that was lopped forward while its mate was set close to the head.

"George," Joe Harper said.

I looked up, met his discerning black eyes.

"Something going on in that skull of yours, George."

"I was just thinking how I'd look with one lop ear," I told him. "And the boss has a car outside waiting for me."

"We'll bore from within, huh?"

"I will," I corrected.

"I said something else, George. You can fix me up to look like the other guy. I'm built a lot more like him than you are like the blond guy. And I've known guys like this all by life. Besides, there's no percentage in just one of us turning up. The boss will be expecting both Indian and the blond guy. How's this for an imitation of the Indian's lingo?"

Joe dropped his voice an octave, made it husky. It wasn't good, but then it wasn't bad.

I took out my pocket makeup kit.

"You get into Indian's clothes," I said. "I'll have to stick to my black suit because of the equipment in the pockets and the special gimmicks attached to it. But maybe no one will see the difference between the black suit and the blue one the blond man is wearing."

Joe removed his hat regretfully.

"That's the only part of it I don't like. Why couldn't Indian have worn a hat?"

I told Joe his scalp needed a little fresh air anyway once in a while. I was

anxious to get the makeup work done and get started. Somehow I felt that this new adventure was going to bring us mighty close to Merry White. Either that or we were going to wind up behind the eight ball.

CHAPTER XVI

The Masked Man



WHILE Joe and I were getting ready to make an attempt to meet the master criminal face to face, Merry White, much against her will, had accomplished just what Joe and I were trying to do. At least, she came out of her drugged sleep to find herself staring into the maddening, immobile face that was painted on the criminal's wire mask.

Merry was on a davenport in a small, nicely-furnished living room. It was the typical apartment house living room—the typical lamps on the typical occasional tables, the two lounge chairs, the davenport with its coffee table.

The masked man wore a wide brimmed hat and a long raincoat. His hands were covered with black fabric gloves. He was standing at the foot of the davenport, his painted eyes looking over her. She sat up quickly, put both feet on the floor, tugged her skirt down over her knees.

"No reason to be scared," the masked man's muffled voice spoke to her. "It all works down to this. You tell me where Stephan Orestes is hiding and I'll strike an excellent bargain with you."

"Where's Tim?" Merry asked. "If you've hurt him, I'll—I'll—"

The masked man laughed.

"You're much too small and much too nice to do anything very terrible. So don't threaten. If Tim is that little boy who developed chin whiskers, I am

afraid he's given me the slip. He was in charge of some servants of mine who were a little clumsy about handling the matter. But I find it pleasant to take charge of you personally. Now, our bargain."

"I don't know anything about Mr. Orestes," Merry said. "You're crazy. Just plain crazy."

"You and the midget must have been working for Orestes," the masked man said. "Otherwise, why would you have followed the limping man? Orestes would like to kill the limping man because he is afraid of him."

"Why were you following the limping man?" Merry demanded. "Anyway, your men were."

"Oh," said the man in the wire mask carelessly, "the limping man is desperately in need of money. He's been thinking I'll give him some."

"Hush money!" Merry said. "He knows who you are."

"He *thinks* he knows," the masked man said. "No one really knows. I have no worry on that score. Some even think I'm dead."

"He's Peter Kendle!" Merry's mind pounded. But she kept the knowledge to herself.

"I'm a patient man," the masked man said. "I can wait for your information. Until you decide to talk, you won't get anything to eat or drink. And if you were to step out of the window, you might sprain your pretty ankle. It's twelve stories to the street."

The masked man crossed to the door, opened it, went out. Merry listened miserably to the snick of the lock. She let her eyes travel from the door around the room. Near a door which presumably led into a bed room, she saw a telephone. She got up, ran to phone and picked it up. The phone was dead.

SHE went to the window and looked down into the street. If she smashed the window and screamed—

A sharp metallic scraping noise made her twist around to face the door.

Someone was working on the lock. Not the masked man. Perhaps the Ghost or Joe—

She ran toward the door, stopped half way across the room. Both hands went up to her throat. She could almost feel her flesh grow cold with terror. For the door swung open, and, standing there, was the lean, towering figure of the limping man, his dark face an ugly contortion, a mask of pain and rage.

The limping man stepped into the room. There was a gun in his hand. His ill-fitting suit sagged away from his left breast, revealing a dirty white shirt that had been darkened with slowly seeping blood.

In spite of his limp, he moved swiftly. His left hand seized her wrist. His gun drove into her side.

"You do lak I say," he whispered. "You don' get killed, maybe. He don' try to kill me now. I got his girl."

The limping man dragged Merry toward the door.

"No, you don't understand!" she pleaded. "I'm not his girl. Not the masked man's girl. He's keeping me a prisoner. I don't like him at all. Not any more than you do."

"I lak his money. Maybe you lak it, too, huh? You his girl. You better move fast."

And the limping man gouged her painfully with the gun.

With the limping man close beside her, they entered an automatic elevator that dropped them swiftly down to the street floor. At the door of the apartment building, the limping man made Merry stop. He looked out the glass door and a slow grin spread across his ugly mouth. A car was pulling away from the front of the apartment building. Behind its wheel Merry thought she recognized the man in the wire mask.

"Quick!"

The limping man urged her through the door, hurried her toward a dilapidated touring car, made her get into the front seat with him. The motor started

with a roar. The clutch banged in, nearly snapping Merry's neck off, and the old wreck rolled down the street following the man in the wire mask.

The apartment where she had been held prisoner, Merry knew, was somewhere in the Bronx. The man in the wire mask was speeding south now and the limping man's wreck followed at a safe distance.

Somewhere on Jackson Avenue, the man in the wire mask slowed his car. A neon sign to the left glowed on a gray-painted brick building that was a garage. The man in the wire mask turned into the garage drive.

The limping man braked his car across from the garage.

"Now," he said, "we wait. Pretty soon, maybe, he come out again, eh?"

CHAPTER XVII

Traffic in Crooks



COMPLETED in short order was the "art work" I had done on Joe Harper and myself. I simply couldn't get Joe's hair to look like the black mat on the skull of the man called Indian, nor would all the pale pomade in my kit make my hair quite as pale as that of the blond hood. But in spite of that we were pretty good jobs, both of us.

We tied the two unconscious crooks up tightly and left the room of the late Hank Roscoe. I say "late" because the blond man I was impersonating had announced that Hank Roscoe had been fitted with one of the boss' deadly steel hats.

Down in the street, we found that there were several cars beside the one we had used parked in front of the building. One of these was undoubtedly waiting for us, but which one was a question. In three of the cars there

were one or more men.

We walked along the row of cars and then back. Near the end of the line, a squat man with a big paunch and an enormous checkered cap pulled over his eyes, opened the door of a car and said: "Youse guys stupid or something? What the hell, Dillon what the hell. You find some whiskey up in the ex-Mr. Roscoe's joint?"

I opened the back door of the car for Joe. I got in front with the fat man.

"You walked right by me once, Dillon," the fat man said as he started the car.

"We was mourning the passing of Hank Roscoe," Joe Harper said in his version of Indian's voice.

"Okay, okay," grumbled the fat man. "The boss got a job for you, Indian. You guys shouldn't keep him waiting."

So the boss had a job for Indian. I hoped fervently that the job was something that Joe Harper was capable of doing. Otherwise, our act was bound to flop in the worst way.

It seems odd that Joe and I must have actually passed the car in which Merry White was held prisoner by Jules Kalkis, the limping man, and yet not known it at the time. I suppose Joe and I were too intent on our destination to notice the occupants of the cars parked along the street. It is doubtful if we would have had a chance to recognize Merry—not at the rate at which our car was driven. Certainly Merry couldn't have recognized us in our impersonations of Indian and Dillon.

Our car turned into the wide-open door of the Jackson Avenue garage, hit a spiral ramp in second gear, climbed to the third floor where it was steered between stored cars to what looked like a steel partition at one end. The fat man at the wheel blinked his lights three times and a well concealed door in the partition rolled upwards. We shot through into a portion of the storage garage in which there was an odd assortment of cars.

I glimpsed a station wagon, an am-

bulance, a small bus with the sign "CHARTERED" on it, a variety of light trucks, a moving van, and a gleaming new hearse.

ALL this told me that my idea about the criminal boss being engaged in the transportation of wanted men couldn't be far wrong. This selection of cars and trucks hidden in this remote section of the garage would have made ideal transports for the lads who found the law at their heels. Further, I believed that the garage was a part of the Kendle Trucking and Transport Company!

A corner of the vast room had been blocked off with opaque glass partitions, evidently to serve as an office. It was toward this that the fat man hurried us. He pushed open a door marked "PRIVATE" and Joe and I found ourselves in the presence of one of the greatest criminal geniuses I have ever known—the man in the wire mask.

He wore a wide brim hat, a shapeless old rain coat that concealed anything that was distinctive about his tall figure. His mask of wire mesh was a work of art. How the appearance of the countenance of Napoleon had been captured with paint and brush on that screening, I do not know. It must have been the work of some talented but obscure artist.

The man in the wire mask held a telephone in his hand. A little behind him, sitting at a desk, was Dr. Stockbridge, also at a phone. Stockbridge's eyes were as shifty as ever. His nose was just as red. There were unhealthy splotches of color on his cheeks, but he wasn't drunk.

Stockbridge was speaking over the phone:

"Lefty, this is a pal, see. This is a straight tip. Some damned stooly sung to the cops about where you're hanging out. You've got to lam."

Stockbridge hung up without waiting for a reply. And then I witnessed a most interesting scene—the most

unique I have ever come across in any racket. Here Stockbridge was evidently tipping off some crook that the police were on his trail. And at almost the same time and in the same mysterious manner the man in the wire mask called police headquarters and quietly informed the police where this same Lefty could be found.

The man in the wire mask hung up as soon as he had given his tip-off. He turned to Stockbridge.

"Doc, have the radio man get on the police wave and report to me exactly what goes on in the chase after Lefty McKay. Put a man in a milk truck, have him go over to Lefty's hideout and be ready to pick Lefty up if the going gets tough. Lefty's to be got here some-way—brought here in the milk truck or driven to us for help by the cops. He's carrying a hundred thousand dollars in swag from that bank job, and I'm going after seventy-five percent of it."

"Seventy-five percent!" Stockbridge gasped. "You're squeezing too hard, chief. You'll kill the racket."

"It ought to be worth that much to Lefty," the man in the mask said. "He shot down one of the guards. For him its the bargain we make or the chair. And if he doesn't like it—" The boss shrugged.

"If he don't like it," the fat man who had driven Joe and I to the garage concluded, "you take all the swag and leave Lefty under a tin hat. That sure is one swell new wrinkle, Boss. Shoulda used it long ago. It sure makes em come across."

STOCKBRIDGE shook his head as he started for the door.

"You're killing the racket, Boss."

"Shut up!" the man in the wire mask said. "You're killing yourself, Doc."

Stockbridge hurried from the room.

I understood how the racket was being worked. Cops and robbers were pitted one against the other until things got so tough for the crooks they had to come to Wire-Mask for help. Then

Wire-Mask got most of their swag.

Why, the system must have employed a net-work of stool pigeons, tapped in on the police radio calls, and yet kept in close touch with the under-world grapevine.

But a racket like that, as played by the man in the wire mask, couldn't last. No wonder people wanted Kendle dead, if Kendle it was. Perhaps only fear of the man and his deadly steel hats now kept his system in order. Stockbridge, who must have been a handy accessory with his knowledge of plastic surgery, was entirely right. Wire-Mask was killing his racket. The whole elaborate structure would crumble beneath him. Or perhaps Joe Harper and I could put a sudden end to it all before that time came.

Only the fact that Merry White was in this man's power prevented me from risking an attempt to take the man in the wire mask then and there. Fool-hardy move that would have been! He must have had scores of men working for him—criminals who had sought safety with him for a price, only to find themselves slaves of his power.

"Sit down, Indian, Dillon, Fats," Wire-Mask said. "As you know, I've taken care of Roscoe. He'll take no more pot-shots at me. There remains only one to attend to Stephan Orestes."

I watched the gloved hands of the master crook clench slowly. And then, with a display of sudden energy, he sprang to his desk and pushed a button on a call box. A light glowed. The muffled voice behind the mask ordered: "Send Hauff in here."

Wire-Mask turned on Joe Harper. Hidden eyes examined Joe critically. Was our trickery about to be discovered? Joe Harper, ordinarily as cool a man as any I've known, moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"I'll have a job for you, Indian," Wire-Mask said. "Just as soon as we're through with certain other details."

"Okay," Joe said.

And my heart picked up double

speed. Because if Joe's imitation of Indian's voice had been passable when we had started this adventure it certainly wasn't now. Now it sounded a whole lot more like Joe Harper's voice than Indian's!

But the man in the wire mask had his attention drawn to the door at that moment. A man I presumed to be Hauff entered.

HAUFF appeared to be one of those peculiar combinations of beef and brains infrequently encountered. While he had the figure of a giant ape, remarkable intelligence gleamed in his eyes.

Wire-Mask said to Hauff: "Anything on Orestes?"

"The works," said Hauff. "The whole works. I got one of them private dicks Orestes stacks up around him. I offered him the five hunert bucks you gave me for the bribe and he came across."

"Good!" Wire-Mask leaned across his desk and rubbed his gloved hands. "Give out with it."

"Orestes is holed in at the Majestic Hotel on West Forty-second Street. Tomorrow night, midnight, he goes to his yacht anchored at pier sixty-four. And he skips the country."

"Does he now," Wire-Mask said.

He opened a map of New York on his desk. I stood up, apparently to pull an ash tray over toward my chair, but actually to get a look at the map. The map was covered with a network of red lines.

"That's bad," Wire-Mask said. "Only one possible place— However, we'll make it." He raised his head. "Hauff."

"Yeah, chief?"

"The dick who squealed for a price— you slit his throat, huh?"

"I strangled him, chief," Hauff said proudly. "Wit' me bare mits. You gotta do that when a guy squawks. I figure he'd squawk to somebody about the dope I'd bought from him if I didn't."

"And you didn't leave five hundred

dollars with the corpse, did you?"

Hauff squirmed in his chair.

"Boss, the guy was dead. Hell, he couldn't use the dough, could he?"

"But you could, huh?"

"Sure." Hauff grinned.

The man in the wire mask tapped the top of his desk.

"Count it out, Hauff."

"The dough? Listen, I croaked the guy for you. I got the information, didn't I? How about my cut?"

The man in the wire mask came around the desk fast. His black gloved right fist connected sharply with the chin of Hauff. Hauff was a big man, heavy. But he went over backwards in his chair and got up shaking.

"Hand over that money," Wire-Mask said. "I need every damned bill I can get my hands on. Every damned bill!"

Hauff handed over the money. But if his hands paid the master in money, his eyes paid him in hate.

Stockbridge was right. Wire-Mask was killing the racket.

"And now, Indian," Wire-Mask said when Hauff had left the office, "about that little job—"

THE high-pitched whine of a motor car transmission, the roar of a powerful motor, the noise of the steel plate door rolling up, cut through Wire-Mask's words. A black car rolled to the very door of the office. I saw Wire-Mask's right hand jerk up to his shoulder and poise for a gun draw.

A man got out of the black car, burst through the office door. He was carrying a plump leather bag. He was a good-looking man in a Satanic sort of way—good-looking, but hard from the toes of his polished black shoes to the lumps of green jade he used for eyes.

"Well, Lefty McKay, what brings you here at this hour?" Wire-Mask asked. But there wasn't a doubt in my mind but what he knew. Hadn't he personally tipped off the cops as to Bank Bandit McKay's hiding place?

"The cops, damn 'em. I cleared out

just in time. You gotta get me to the Coast. You gotta fix my face, see? I killed a guy. Some damn fool guard at the bank had the guts to pull a gun on me. I had to knock him off. It's the chair if I'm caught. You got to move me."

Wire-Mask rubbed his hands.

"That's what I'm here for, Lefty, my boy. And the price for the complete service, like the undertakers say, is just seventy-five grand!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Death Penalty



YOU'RE very funny," Lefty said. "Seventy-five grand. That's a joke."

"Oh, don't get me wrong," the man in the wire mask said. "I'm not joking. That's my price. Seventy-five grand for your life—that's really not so high, unless you're awfully damn modest about your worth."

It took Lefty McKay just a little time to grasp the fact that Wire-Mask was absolutely serious. And then the color started to creep into his face. I saw his hand make two false starts up toward his shoulder holster.

"Why, you dirty damned robber! I won't pay it. I haven't got it. If I did have it, I still wouldn't pay it."

"You've got it, all right," Wire-Mask said. "Right in that bag. I could take all of it if I wasn't a square-shooter."

The man in the wire mask coolly touched a button on his inter-office communication telephone. I heard Dr. Stockbridge answer.

"Prepare to give Lefty McKay a new face, Doc," the man in the wire mask ordered. "We'll move him with the bandages on his face and in the ambulance. We can even get him a police escort out of town if he wants it."

"I said nothing doing," Lefty said. "Not for any seventy-five grand."

"If you don't act nice, we can move you in a hearse instead of the ambulance," the master criminal said. He came around his desk and took Lefty's bag out of Lefty's hand. There wasn't anything McKay could do about it because the fat man who had driven Joe and me to the garage had a gun in Lefty's back.

Wire-Mask sat down, coolly opened the bag, counted out greenbacks which he transferred from the bag into a brief case.

"That's my cut, Lefty," he said. "And we'll have you out on the Coast with a new face and twenty-five grand in your pocket in about forty-eight hours."

Lefty's body trembled with violent rage.

"You can't do this to me," he said hoarsely. "Take most of my dough like that. Damn it, I'll get you for this!"

"You're wrong," the man in the wire mask said. "I have done it to you, and you won't get me for anything."

And then Dr. Stockbridge came in with two gunmen, and Lefty was taken out of the room.

The criminal chief went to a long steel cabinet which he opened. From it he took a canvas bag and a sub-machine gun. He tossed the canvas bag to the floor at Joe Harper's feet. The contents of the bag gave out a metallic clatter. The man in the wire

mask nursed the machine gun in the crook of his arm.

"I've had the misfortune to lose the combination to my safe, Indian. Since you're the best safe man in the city, you open it for me."

JOE HARPER gulped. He knew as well as I did that his last attempt to impersonate Indian's voice had been a washout. Furthermore, although Joe had lived by many different professions, he had never cracked a safe.

Joe looked at the man in the wire mask and shook his head.

"No?" Wire-Mask asked. "No what, Indian. Are you going to open my safe for me or aren't you?"

"Sure," Joe croaked. "I'll do it."

The man in the wire mask gestured toward a steel door built into the wall.

"Get busy, Indian. That's your own kit of tools on the floor."

Joe lighted a cigarette with hands that trembled. He picked up the bag of tools and swaggered over to the safe. My pulse ticked more rapidly. Joe had nerve enough to bluff through almost any situation, but here was a place where bluffing wasn't going to do him much good. If I had been called on to open the safe I could at least have made a pretty good stab at it. I know something about the structure of the lock, though this appeared to be an exceptionally strong safe. But Joe didn't seem to know where to start. There

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College Humor

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was something strange here. Even if Wire-Mask had lost the combination, didn't he remember it? Or was he just testing out a suspicion, and playing with Joe as a cat plays with a mouse?

Bewilderedly, Joe's eyes wandered over the outlay of tools—punches, lead hammers, electric drill, wrecking bar, ripper. He finally selected an electric drill, put the point of it against the door of the safe, started the motor, and drilled a hole. The drill went through eventually and Joe tried the safe handle. Nothing happened. The thing was as strong as ever.

Joe picked up a lead mallet and beat on the handle until the lead was out of shape and finally the handle broke off.

"Having a little trouble, Indian?" the man in the wire mask asked. "I was afraid you would."

"You've got to use soup on a job like this," Joe said. His voice was still cool and steady, but it had slipped a long way from Indian's husky tones.

"No, you don't have to use soup," the chief said. "Indian wouldn't have to, anyway."

He stepped up to Joe and wiped a finger along the side of Joe's cheek. Joe sprang back, stared at the smear of dark brown grease paint that showed on the master criminal's finger. The nose of the tommy gun in the chief's hand came up.

"What kind of a rat are you?" the man in the wire mask asked Joe. "A while ago, when you spoke, I didn't think it was Indian speaking. An impostor, huh? A dirty cop spy, huh? Did you ever wonder how you'd look with your head shaved and a steel hat hanging down over your ears?"

"Boss," I said.

The hidden eyes were on me. I could feel them meet my gaze.

"Boss, do you know who this guy is? Do you know who he must be, if he can impersonate Indian that well?"

"Who, Dillon?"

"Why," I said, "he's a guy I've got an old score to settle with. I'd like to

handle him personally. He must be the Ghost!"

My idea, of course, was simply to keep my own nose clean, get the job of executing Joe, and then ease Joe out of the mess he was in as quickly as possible.

"Sorry to deprive you of the pleasure, Dillon, but I always attend to such matters personally and alone. Fats, let's have handcuffs for the Ghost."

And then I let my knife drop into my right hand. If I could kill this confessed murderer who employed the steel hats as his murder weapon, I was taking the short way to justice, saving money for the state, saving Joe Harper also.

I don't suppose I ever threw a knife more swiftly nor more accurately. Don Avigne of the circus, who had been my teacher, would have been proud of the job. Before either the criminal chief or his fat henchman knew what was going on, that knife was winging with the speed of light straight toward the heart of the man in the wire mask!

But even as the knife struck, stuck into the chest of the master criminal, the man in the wire mask brought his sub-machine gun up to the level of my belly.

CHAPTER XIX

Steel Hats for Two



AGAINST the wall, the muzzle of the machine gun drove me. Joe Harper lunged at Wire-Mask from the other side, came up hard against the man called Fats. Joe had his gun out and he could see it was going to be death for him or Fats, so he let his gun speak.

Fats went down on his knees and then collapsed all the way. Wire-Mask swung his Tommy gun and I fully ex-

pected to hear its deadly chatter. Joe thought this was the finish too, and if he was going to go out he was determined to take Wire-Mask along with him. I could see that in the set of Joe's jaw and the glint in his eyes. And I knew that if this was the show-down, the play could end only one way—something like Hamlet. Everybody was going to go over into the Great Guess except the man behind that sub-gun. Because Wire-Mask was almost invulnerable.

You see, he carried my knife in his chest, and yet his coat front didn't show a sign of blood nor did his movements indicate that he felt any pain. This just wasn't the time for a show-down. This was the place to be meek and hope to heaven that the earth you inherited by being meek didn't happen to be six feet below the sod.

"Drop your gun!" I cracked at Joe as the threatening sweep of the criminal's machine gun covered both of us.

And Joe dropped his gun. He stood there, looking at me, wondering, hoping that I saw out of this. I thought I did. When the man in the wire mask said that he attended to his tin hat killings personally and alone, I thought then that our chance to grab him might be well pushed into the future a little way.

Henchmen of the man in the wire mask poured into the room, brought by the sound of Joe's shot. Wire-Mask issued crisp orders. Joe and I were handcuffed. The wounded and probably dying fat man was taken from the room. Wire-Mask pulled my knife from his chest and put it down on the top of his desk.

"I've always worried a little bit about some sudden attempt to end my career," he said. "And so I take the trouble to spend most of my life behind a bullet proof vest. I think as soon as I've found someone to open my safe, we'll try a pair of steel hats on you two and go for a nice long ride."

At the points of guns, Joe and I were

taken from the office, and stood up against a wall like spies before a firing squad, except that our wait for eternity was to be longer. A truck that bore the name of a poultry concern was driven up in front of us, and I guessed that this was to be our conveyance to the spot of our execution.

Soon I heard someone in the chief's office working on the safe. He was doing what Joe should have done—hammering off the dial and punching out the lock. Ten minutes later, the chief came out of his office carrying two bulging bags which he put into the front seat of the truck.

JOE and I were forced into the back of the truck. It was a dark and dirty place to ride in, for it had evidently been used to carry live poultry. The slightest movement inside sent dirty feathers up from the floor or snowing down from the walls.

Handcuffs snapped around our ankles linked us to chains attached to the floor of the truck. The criminal chief's henchmen left the truck and closed the door after them.

"This is a hell of a note," Joe muttered.

"It's better than the two of us getting shot to pieces by that Tommy gun in Wire-Mask's office. That's the way it would have ended if we'd tried anything there."

The motor of the truck started. I was thankful for the noise. Joe and I could talk without running the risk of the man in the wire mask overhearing us. The driver of the truck had to be the man in the wire mask. He wouldn't have trusted anybody with those money bags.

"What's the idea of this opening of the safe?" Joe asked. "At first I thought it was just a tryout to see if I was the guy I was cracked up to be."

"What do you think?" I asked him. "Do you figure a man as crazy after money as this criminal, would forget the combination to his safe?"

"I don't figure that way at all. But he's Kendle, isn't he?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't think so. Not anymore. I don't know who he is. But we'll find out, Joe. Don't worry. We'll find out."

The truck was spiraling down the ramp at a cautious pace. We didn't know which direction we were going, but our destination was death.

"Listen," Joe said, "you can get out of these cuffs easy enough, can't you?"

"Perhaps," I said. "They seem to be regular Bean Pattern bracelets. Watch."

I raised my hands above my head, brought both wrists down with all my strength to a point just above my right knee. There, strapped to my leg beneath the trouser leg, I wore a lead plate. All escape artists who permit any kind of cuff to be put on them, wear a plate of this type. A blow to the plate is very much like a blow from a sledge hammer. It breaks the pins of the cuffs. The big disadvantage to this method in a stage trick is that there isn't such a lot of mystery about it—the cuffs are obviously forced open by a blow.

However, I didn't care particularly to mystify the man in the wire mask. The main object was to get rid of the cuffs.

"Yes," I said to Joe, "I can get out of the cuffs all right." And I dropped the broken handcuffs from my wrists.

"What about me?" Joe asked. "I like a hat all right, but I'm not nuts about one made of steel. I don't happen to have any lead plate strapped to my leg, either."

I REACHED into my vest pocket and brought out what is known among handcuff kings as a "Bean feke." I always carry several types of fekes to open various types of cuffs. This particular device consisted of a flat strip of steel, beautifully made and hardened—a product of the George Chance Magic Shop, as a matter of fact. The plate was the exact width of the

opening in the lock of the Bean handcuff. I don't mean the keyhole, but that portion of the lock which receives the toothed jaw of the handcuff.

This steel plate was slotted in the middle to form a fork. With this feke in my hand, I bent over the cuffs that anchored me to the floor. The bumping of the truck made the job difficult, but finally I got the forked end of the plate into the small opening just above the point where the saw-tooth half of the cuff enters the lock. Once in place, the fork wedged down the lock so that a good strong pull brought the jaws apart.

No ordinary strip of steel will do the trick. It must be specially made and perfect.

"Remember," I said to Joe as I went to work with the feke to remove his manacles, "we put these back on. Not lock them, of course, but just have them on so that the killer will get the idea we're still at his mercy. I want to see how he works those electrocutions."

"Sounds like famous last words to me," Joe said. "If you think I'm going to sit here and fry in a steel hat just so you can deduce how it was done—"

"Nuts!" I cut in. "Does going to your own funeral always affect you this way?"

Joe laughed harshly. "This is the first time I've ever gone to my own funeral."

I knew why he was cracking wise. I never knew a brave man yet who wouldn't pull a joke or take time for an ironical laugh when he was about to face some crucial test. And with or without handcuffs, there was no denying we were still in a jam. If Wire-Mask brought his Tommy gun into the truck, neither agility nor magic could save us. As to the steel hat death, we didn't know but what that was something that struck with the swiftness of lightning. We didn't know what we were up against.

Back on the floor of the truck, Joe and I tried to arrange our manacles so

we would have the appearance of helplessness. Neither of us had anything in the way of conventional weapons, for Wire-Mask's mob had searched us carefully. The few magical tricks that were left to me which had gone undetected weren't going to be an awful lot of help against a machine gun—if the killer had his gun tucked under his arm when he came into the truck to finish us off.

NO wonder," Joe said, "that the crooked boys have been giving the cops the horse laugh these days, with a transportation system like Kendle's working for them."

"Working them—not working for them," I said. "This smart killer is chucking out of that racket, don't you see? He's played the game too tough, squeezed the wanted men too hard, taken most of their loot. He must have almost as many enemies in the underworld as the Ghost. Like any other business—I mean legitimate business—you've got to give value received or you can't stay in business."

"Yeah," Joe said, "that's what I used to tell 'em when I was pitching lifetime guaranteed fountain pens for two bits!" He snickered. "Ghost, those weren't such bad pens for two bits, were they?"

"Are your past sins troubling you now that you're approaching the supposed end of your existence?" I asked him.

Joe laughed. "I'd trade my chances for a harp for a cigarette right now. My conscience is clear."

And then we sensed a slowing up of the truck. Worn brake bands squealed against polished drums. Joe asked if this was as far as we went. I didn't say anything. I was trying to map out a program of action.

"Listen, Joe," I said, "if he comes in here with that Tommy gun, we lie perfectly still. He'll try and put steel hats on us probably. We'll let him. Then when he gets near to me, I'll grab the

barrel of the Tommy gun and try to get it pointed at something that isn't flesh and blood. If you get a crack at the guy, let him have it at the back of the head."

"A rabbit punch," Joe said. "The back of his neck seems to be about the only place that isn't protected."

I heard gravel scuff beneath the wheels of the truck. It came to a stop and the floor beneath us slanted to the



right. It seemed we had pulled over to the shoulder of the road. The motor of the truck was left idling.

Footsteps. My heart drummed faster. The electrical death which had baffled the police and puzzled me no less than them, was about to be demonstrated to us. And on us.

The rear door of the truck opened. I rolled my eyes as far to the right as possible, saw the figure of the man in the wire mask outlined against the dim night glow. As I had feared, he had his gun nestled under his arm.

"The Tommy," Joe whispered.

In his right hand, the man carried two war helmets and what appeared to be a coil of wire. He stepped into the truck body, stood there a moment, brushed his hand over his wire mesh mask, and sneezed violently.

He came over to where we were, dropped a helmet on my head. There wasn't any lining in the steel hat, so naturally it dropped down over my eyes. I shook my head a little, rolled the hat back so I could see. Joe had a hat on his head. In the light of a small flash, the masked man was uncoiling wire. The end of the wire had a clip

on it. This, I suppose, would be attached to the steel hats.

THEN, very suddenly in fact, Joe and I got a stay of execution. Headlights from a car beamed through the open back door of the chicken truck. The man in the mask sneezed again, cursed, moved to the door of the truck and looked out. Too late he pulled the door toward him to shut out the light. Too late, because in that flash of direct illumination, I saw clearly the gun he was nursing. And it wasn't a sub-machine gun!

Right then I didn't know what it was. On the muzzle of the thing was a large cylinder about five inches in diameter. It was fitted to the muzzle like a silencer. But if it was a silencer, it was of a type utterly foreign to me. Somehow, I connected that gun with the electrical deaths.

I leaped to my feet, shook the handcuffs from my wrists, put both hands up to grasp the brim of my steel hat. What irony if it was a steel hat that knocked the killer out! But as I sprang at the man in the wire mask, the car, the headlights of which had been boring steadily down on the chicken truck, rammed into the rear of the truck!

I glimpsed the masked man as he pitched sideways through the back door of the truck, but the glimpse I got was short because the jolt had me going down on my face. When I hit the floor, my forehead hit the helmet that was in my hands. It wasn't enough to knock me out, but I was groggy as I got to my feet and staggered to the door of the truck.

Joe Harper must have had better luck. He was out of the truck. I saw him try a necktie tackle on a man who was getting out of the car that had hit us. And as I got out of the truck, looking for the man in the wire mask, I saw a girl get out of the car behind us. And suddenly I forgot all about the man in the wire mask.

The girl was Merry White.

CHAPTER XX

Picture of a Corpse



MERRY was running across the concrete highway as fast as slender legs could carry her and I was after her. Had there been enough light to see, she wouldn't have recognized me in the disguise of the mobster Dillon. She passed the center stripe of the road and I was about three yards behind her. But by the time she reached the other side I could reach out and grasp her shoulder. "Merry!" And as I called her by name, my voice became once more the voice of George Chance.

Merry turned. Her lips were parted. Her greenish eyes glinted in the light from the truck.

"Darling! Darling, it's really you?" She threw herself into my arms.

And that would have made a very nice fade-out. It very nearly was all of that—a sort of permanent fade-out. For at that moment a machine gun began to talk to us from the truck.

I keeled over to the right, hitting the ground and pulling Merry beneath me. Bullets sprayed about us, dug gravel and earth from the shoulder as we rolled together toward the ditch at the side of the shoulder. Somehow, our bodies found the top of that embankment at the same time the man in the mask found our range. We tumbled down into the ditch to listen one breathless moment to the whine of bullets passing over our heads. And then I remembered Joe Harper.

As I climbed toward the top of the embankment, the machine gun stopped firing and the truck motor speeded up. Merry seized my coat from behind.

"Darling, you'll get yourself killed!" she sobbed.

I looked over the top of the embank-

ment. The truck was rolling down the road—rolling rather crazily, for the masked man at the wheel was trying to steer and operate his Tommy gun at the same time.

There was a fine volley of slugs before the truck was out of range. Then I climbed to the road with Merry after me and looked after the ironically winking headlights.

Merry and I started over toward the battered wreck of a car that had bumped into the chicken truck. Merry was saying:

"We don't want to go back there, dear. It's the limping man. I've been with him most of the evening. He's silly in the head, and besides he can't speak English and I don't like him at all."

"I don't think he'll bother you," I said. For from what I could see in the one light that remained functioning on the car, that was Joe Harper sitting on top of the limping man at the side of the car. The limping man wasn't doing anything about it. In fact, Joe was smoking that cigarette he would have traded paradise to get.

"That," said Joe drily as Merry and I approached, "was no machine gun. That was my grandma's egg beater she brought over on the Mayflower."

“JOE HARPER!” Merry gasped. "You look like an Indian."

Joe grinned wearily.

"I don't seem to be able to sound like one," he said. "What's this I'm sitting on? I'm too damned tired of all this racket to bother to look."

"You're sitting on Mr. Jules Kalkis or I've missed a guess," I told him. "But Joe, do you realize Wire-Mask has just slipped through our fingers?"

"Hush, Ghost! Don't ever mention it. We actually had the guy when this jalopy crashed into us. What was that the guy used if it wasn't a machine gun? You distinctly told me it wasn't a machine gun. Was that just a psychological effect to pull up the pants of

my courage or something?"

"The gun he had when he came into the back of the truck to kill us was no machine gun. His machine gun was parked in the front seat. Merry, what the devil was Kalkis doing, following the masked man around?"

"He wanted hush money for something," Merry said. "He thought he knew who the masked man was, but the masked man said nobody knew who he was."

"I think he's right," I said. "Because Joe and I have been figuring he was Kendle. Now, I've decided he isn't Kendle. Kendle would have known the combination to his own safe."

"But who am I?" Merry asked. "The masked man thought Tim and I were agents of Orestes. The limping man thought I was the masked man's girl friend. The limping man was carrying me around as a hostage so that the boss killer wouldn't shoot at him or something. It's awful, because I don't want to be anybody but Merry White."

"Unless," she added a little wistfully, pressing close to me, "it would be Mrs. George Ghost Chance."

"Nice night for love stuff," Joe said, "but this is too far from the bright lights for me. If this jalopy wasn't wrecked, I'd like to drive down to Times Square and see life again."

I looked at the dark horizon, illuminated by the distant lights of Manhattan. Against the gray sky, I saw two structures like radio towers standing alone in the field at the side of the road. Heavy wire cables made parallel lines against the sky. It's an odd thing, but that look at the sky marked the beginning of the end of the case, and the solution to the death-mystery of the iron hats.

The limping man's jalopy was about as unconscious as its owner, we discovered. Joe, it seems, had lit into the limping man with both fists, and Mr. Jules Kalkis, if that was the man's name, had taken much the worst of it.

There was only one explanation for

the masked killer's sudden dash away from the scene that was to have been marked by another of his steel hat killings. He thought that the car that had followed him—the car of the limping man—was filled with cops. And above all things, the masked man wanted to get away with that money which he had taken from Kendle's safe and from Lefty McKay, one of the bandits his racket had swindled.

AS for Joe, Merry and me, we walked nearly a mile to the nearest house, got the inhabitants out of bed at three in the morning, telephoned Commissioner Standish. We suggested that he send cops to raid Kendle's garage on Jackson Avenue at once. And perhaps he would put an end to the leak in the police dragnet.

Then we took our captive, Jules Kalkis, who was beginning to show signs of consciousness, rented a car, drove into town, and straight to police headquarters where Ned Standish awaited us.

We couldn't get anything out of Kalkis, no matter how we questioned him. He kept repeating in his broken English that he was a poor man who didn't mean any harm but that he had to have money and he wished people would stop shooting at him.

And when we'd ask him who was shooting at him, he would simply say: "Novpaklos!"

Standish's hard, close-set eyes met mine. He stroked his carefully trimmed moustache.

"What does he mean?"

"It's Greek to me," Merry said.

"I think you're right, Merry," I said. "I think it's Greek to everybody, including a Greek. Standish, you'd better get a Greek interpreter somewhere. Maybe Kalkis can make himself understood. In the meantime, I'd like to see that photo that Ronald Wick took the night Peter Kendle was shot. Have you got it?"

Standish nodded, smiled a little.

"Magnus says it's the only evidence there is to show that he wasn't lying about Kendle turning up as a corpse. But it doesn't prove that Kendle was really dead. It's just a photo of Kendle's legs sticking out over the edge of the couch, with John Magnus stealing most of the show."

Standish opened a drawer of his desk and took out a photo print. As Standish said, it was excellent of Inspector John Magnus. But all you see of the supposed corpse of Kendle was the edge of his silk dressing gown, his trousered legs from the knees down. And Kendle's shoes. That was the important thing. The photo showed the bottom of Kendle's shoes. Something on the heels had reflected light and caused a little blur on the film.

I pointed to the blur and asked Standish what it was.

"Something metallic."

"Looks like he wore taps for dance," Merry said, bending over the photo.

"Heel plates," I said. "And why would a man of Kendle's means care about whether or not his shoes ran down at the heels?"

"Maybe he was Scotch," Standish said.

"On the contrary," I said, "I think he was Greek. Ned, that picture is the picture of a corpse. Kendle is dead."

CHAPTER XXI

Murderer's Magic



JOE HARPER drove

Merry White to her apartment. After that he was to turn in at the rectory and wait until he heard from me. I spent those gray hours of the early morning in Standish's office, hav-

ing once more put on the disguise that associated me with the alias of Dr. Stacey.

The first thing I wanted from the police records was a map of New York put out by the electrical utilities, showing all the high voltage lines in the city. After I had looked at it for some time, I began placing "X" marks on the map where the various steel hat killings had taken place.

"You see, Ned," I explained, "Andros got his in his apartment. See, there's a high-tension line on the map which must go right back of the building. And Paton died in Empire City Park, not far from the high-line that is needed for that street car line right there." And I indicated the spot on the map.

Standish added another penciled "X" to the map.

"That," he said, "is where we found Gimp Taylor's body over in Jamaica."

"And there," and I made another mark, "is where Joe and I were to have gotten our everlasting. The killer uses those high-lines to electrocute his victims."

"But the lines aren't accessible!" Standish objected. "He can't just plug into a hundred thousand volts."

"He does, though," I insisted. "But what I'm getting at is that this map enables us to tell where he will attempt to kill Stephan Orestes. Orestes is next on his list. Orestes is staying over here"—again referring to the map—"in the Hotel Majestic. Tonight, he is to sneak over to his yacht and skip the country because he's got the idea that this Jules Kalkis is out to kill him. Of course it's really Wire-Mask who will try to kill him."

"We'd better put men in Orestes' hotel to guard him," Standish said.

"Not if you want to catch Wire-Mask. You see, to get to the dock where his yacht is, Orestes will go across this way." I marked on the map. "And there's only one high tension line above the pavement between the hotel and the dock. That's where Wire-Mask will strike. And that's where we grab Wire-Mask."

"If the raid at the garage hasn't grabbed him already."

I shook my head.

"The garage raid won't grab Wire-Mask. He chucked the racket tonight, looted the safe, squeezed his last dollar from this runaway bandit Lefty McKay. You see, when crooks like this Hank Roscoe started shooting at Kendle, that was evidence that this hot-crook transportation racket had gone to the dogs.

"Kendle pushed his racket too hard. He had the crooks at his mercy and he milked them dry. You can fool some of the crooks all of the time and all of the crooks some of the time, but you can't fool—"

STANDISH interrupted.

"Never mind. I'm getting dizzy. Kendle operated the racket, you say. But Kendle's dead, you say. Now which is it? Is he dead?"

"Dead," I said. "The crooks he'd milked dry as the price for helping them escape from town, came back to square things. One of them, Hank Roscoe, killed him."

Ned Standish took his head in both his hands, rocked his head back and forth, looked as though he'd like to throw his head at me.

"But, damn it! You've told me that the head of the mob killed Hank Roscoe. We *know* he killed Hank Roscoe because we found Hank's body with a steel hat on his head, electrocuted. You said the motive behind the killing of Hank was to square accounts for Hank's shooting at Kendle. Did Kendle kill Roscoe?"

"Kendle is dead," I said. "Was dead when Roscoe died. So Kendle didn't kill Roscoe. Kendle never killed anybody by the steel hat method. But, don't you see, Hank Roscoe *thought* he'd failed to kill Kendle, just like everybody did. So Hank Roscoe and Gimp Taylor were both out to kill Kendle to settle the score. So the man in the wire mask, the real villain, had to

kill Roscoe and Gimp Taylor in order to keep them from killing him, since they thought he was Kendle. He had to beat them to the draw.

"It wasn't to square anything with anybody for the killing of Kendle. Wire-Mask killed Hank and Gimp Taylor because he was afraid they would kill him as they had already killed Kendle."

Standish grinned at me.

"I thought I was about to go nuts," he said, "but now I'm proud to say I've got it. Where's Kendle's body, incidentally?"

The phone on the commissioner's desk rang. He answered, listened for a minute or more. Then hung up slowly.

"The boys raided Kendle's garage, took over the whole place, netted a bunch of wanted men, caught Dr. Stockbridge. And Stockbridge squealed. Stockbridge named the criminal boss, the guy in the wire mask. And who do you think Stockbridge said it was?"

I looked at Standish.

"Peter Kendle," I said. "Stockbridge named Peter Kendle as the man in the wire mask, Stockbridge's boss, the steel hat murderer, and the head of the crook-transportation racket. Am I right?"

NED STANDISH gripped the edge of the desk.

"Right, damn it!"

He sank down into his chair, looking at me fixedly.

"But Kendle's dead," he said quietly. "Let me say it over slowly. Peter Kendle is dead."

And then a slow smile spread across his rugged face.

"All right. Kendle *is* dead. He's dead because you're always right. But nobody knew he was dead. Stockbridge didn't know he was dead. Whoever was wearing that wire mask was just pretending to be Kendle. Kendle must have worn the mask when he was busy

with his crook-transportation racket. And after Kendle died, the devil we're now chasing simply put on Kendle's wire mask and carried on, fooling all the crooks, fooling even you, fooling Stockbridge."

"Exactly," I said. "Because the man we're after was using the Kendle organization for his own purposes, making it hand over its last piece of change before it went to pieces. If it had ever got out that he wasn't Kendle, there would have been revolt. The crooks would have killed him, looted the safe which contained profits of the organization—profits which the man we're hunting wanted to use for his own gains."

"Now," Standish said, "you've got to show me how Kendle's body broke out of that locked room the night Kendle was murdered. You've got to show me Kendle's body. After that, I'll rest easier."

"That was worked by magic," I said. "The murderer can use magic as well as the detective—if he knows how. Let's go up into the Bronx and go over the Kendle house carefully."

Standish turned to the phone, called the number of the Kendle house.

"Owen Marsh, Kendle's one-time bodyguard, is living there until he can find a new connection," Standish explained to me. "I'll have him arrange to have the place open."

After he had spoken to Marsh, he hung up, reached for his hat.

"Marsh will be there all morning, so we're set. Let's go."

"By the way, Ned, did Demmy note anything that looked like tattooing on the head of the corpse of George Paton?"

"I was going to mention it. There was some sort of a mark, but the scalp was so badly burned no one could make it out. Demarest even took samples of the skin and examined them beneath the microscope."

"Probably a mark similar to the one on Andros' head," I said.

FOR the rest of the drive, I remained silent, trying to put my mental notes in order. After all, I had to show Standish exactly how the trick of the runaway corpse of Peter Kendle had been worked. And while I thought that the criminal had employed a stunt commonly used in magic—particularly those stage tricks of transposition popular some years back—I had to consider every possible angle carefully.

Owen Marsh, the big blond young man who looked like all-American foot-

him die, didn't I? But then, your Inspector Magnus says he saw him running around the house. Which is it?"

Standish turned to me. "All right. Where do we begin?"

I walked over to the window which had targeted Peter Kendle for Hank Roscoe on the roof of the Orestes house the night of the shooting. I got down on my knees.

"All he needs is a spy glass and a checkered hat," Marsh snickered.

I paid no attention to the big blond

*The Ghost Tackles the Grim
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IN

**THE CASE OF
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ball material, opened the door of the Kendle house for us.

"Hello, Mr. Commissioner," he said. "And hello to you, Doctor What's-Your-Name."

"Stacey," I supplied. "The name is Stacey."

"Marsh, we're still arguing about whether your employer, Mr. Kendle, is dead or not," Standish said. "Dr. Stacey thinks he can settle it."

"Oh, Mr. Kendle's dead," Marsh said, leading us to the living room. "I saw

man. A lamp extension cord ran along the edge of the rug and near the window. In several spots, the insulation was badly wore. In one place, the metal of the wire showed through and the wire was blackened, burned looking. Directly beneath the wire, there was a black mark on the flooring, as though it too had been burned.

I stood up, looked around the room. There was a large radio console at one side of the fireplace. I went over to it, pulled it out from the wall, thrust my

hand behind and felt the tubes. The tubes were cold. I turned on the switch on the front panel.

"The dial doesn't light up, Doctor," Standish said.

"The dial lamp has been busted for a long time," Marsh said. "If you're thinking that that's where the ghost voice came from, you're off on the wrong track, Doc. That radio hasn't worked at all for six months."

Just the same I examined the aerial connections on the set with the greatest care. There were no extra wires anywhere—nothing that could excite suspicion.

"Where's the basement stair?" I asked Marsh.

"This way. I ought to know. I fell down 'em the other night. Can't seem to leave whiskey alone, so I thought the best thing to do was get rid of Mr. Kendle's entire stock as soon as possible." He laughed. "I'm okay now that I got all the stuff drunk up."

DOWN in the basement, I considered the hot-air heating plant. Galvanizing had been recently chipped from the outside of the bonnet at the point where it joined the cylindrical shell.

"If you gentlemen will give me a hand, we'll lift that bonnet off."

"Sure," Marsh agreed. "But this furnace hasn't been in use for a couple of months."

"Maybe not for heating purposes," I said. "Naturally not, with this summer weather we've been having."

Well, when we got the bonnet off, we found the "ghost voice" that had warned of coming death! It was simply a cheap portable phonograph with a record in place. A magnetic trigger arrangement, crudely made, had been used to start and stop the machine. Wires from the magnetic trigger led out of the furnace and up through the living room floor.

We played the record over, heard again that mysterious voice that had

heralded death. And of course the voice would have passed up the warm air ducts to every room in the house with the furnace bonnet in place.

We went upstairs again. Beneath the living room rug near the window where Kendle had been standing at the time of death, we found a pushbutton like that used on doorbells set in the floor. It was this button that had started and stopped the phonograph in the furnace below.

Owen Marsh sat down in a chair. He passed a hand over his particularly dull-looking face. His bright blue eyes sought mine and questioned.

"Look here, Doc, that looks as though Peter Kendle was working the ghost voice. It looks as though he was announcing his own death."

"It looks that way," I said. "But it isn't logical, is it? Kendle *did* operate the ghost voice. And Kendle shorted the electrical circuit, putting out the lights. He did that by stepping on that piece of bare wire with metal heel plates that were on his shoes. Yes, he did all that—but he didn't expect to die."

"I don't get it," Standish said.

"Kendle," I said, "stood here at the window that night, turned on the warning voice he had prepared ahead of time, cut out the lights. No because he expected to die, but because he expected to commit murder!"

CHAPTER XXII

How the Dead Man Walked



STANDISH and Owen Marsh stared at me in silence for a minute. Finally the latter asked:

"Who did Kendle expect to murder?"

I shook my head.

"I don't know. Someone in the room at the time. He expected to kill that person in the dark. That's why he shorted

the lights. And he expected the blame to fall on Jules Kalkis, the Greek. That was the reason part of the warning message transcribed on the record was in Greek. Kalkis was presumably carrying out the vengeance scheme of some Old World vendetta. Hence, Kalkis was the perfect fall guy for Kendle's plot. Just for a guess, I'd say that Kendle intended to kill George Paton. But that's just a guess. Nothing much to back it with."

"You mean," Standish said, "that Kendle plotted murder, but instead was himself murdered—murdered by Hank Roscoe, who was waiting on the roof of the house which stands across the street?"

"That's it," I said. "That's it exactly. We know that Roscoe had plenty of motive for killing Kendle to square accounts for the raw deal Kendle had given him. But Kendle, as he lay dying on the couch in the next room, didn't know it was Roscoe. He thought that Jules Kalkis was his murderer. That's why he pronounced the name 'Jules' before he died. And that means that Kendle, as well as some of the others, was an object of Jules Kalkis' vendetta."

I went into the library where the dying Kendle had been stretched out on the couch and from which, presumably, he had broken out after Magnus had locked the door on the corpse.

"Now," I explained to Standish, "if Kendle was dead when Magnus saw him, then someone besides Kendle must have been in this room when Magnus locked the door."

"But where?" Standish looked around the small room. There was no apparent hiding place for anything. None of the articles of furniture could have concealed anyone. But there were the bookshelves.

I began looking at the books, pulling some of them from the shelves, sounding the walls behind them. The bookshelf on the inner wall seemed the most likely place. As I looked over the book

titles, I came across a copy of the Bible resting in the middle of the third shelf and surrounded by recently published books of fiction.

Now, while the Bible is the all-time best-seller, it seemed to me to be the book in the entire collection which a stranger entering the room would be the least apt to remove from the shelf. I took hold of the Bible, pulled it out a little way from the shelf, saw that a round hole had been cut through the center of the cover and the pages beneath.

I hooked my finger into the hole and pulled. The Bible was simply a handle! The book shelf rolled smoothly out of its recess.

STANDISH got the first look behind the shelf.

"There's a safe back here. An old wall safe, the door standing part way open. Nothing in the safe."

Owen Marsh and I both tried to get to the opening the moving shelf had revealed. Both of us couldn't squeeze through the opening at once. And at that moment Standish came from behind the shelf.

"Blood on the floor back there," he said. "Pretty well dried. But nothing else. With that shelf rolled back, there wouldn't be room for anybody very fat, that's sure."

"Kendle wasn't fat," I said. "And at some time the body of Kendle was stored behind that shelf of books. Here's the way the run-away corpse stunt was worked. The corpse of Kendle was on the couch. Behind that shelf of books the murderer we are now hunting was hiding. *Not* Kendle's murderer, understand. We've already put the Kendle killing on Hank Roscoe.

"All right. Magnus, annoyed by Ronald Wick, the newspaper reporter, left Kendle's corpse in this room and locked the door, which kept Wick out, and also kept whoever was hiding behind that bookcase, in.

"The man behind the bookcase comes

out after the door is locked. He removes Kendle's dressing gown. He puts the corpse of Kendle behind the bookcase, pushes the bookcase as far back into the wall as possible. He puts on Kendle's dressing gown which was pale yellow silk and readily distinguished at night.

"You'll remember that he broke the glass of this room instead of lifting the latch and sneaking out quietly. He did that to attract the attention of the police—to *prove*, in other words, that in spite of what Dr. Stockbridge had said, Kendle was still alive.

"The Kendle car was outside. The man who was wearing Kendle's dressing gown got in it, started it, but allowed Magnus in a police car to follow. The man in the dressing gown cracked the car up on purpose, jumped out of the car. Magnus saw him running away, swore it was Kendle.

"Then the killer had only to dispose of the yellow bathrobe, and the 'run-away corpse of Kendle' had vanished."

"Say, that's good!" Marsh said. "What a stunt! But why go to all that trouble?"

"You've explained that, Stacey," Standish said to me. "You see, Marsh, your employer, Kendle, was running some illegal traffic. He was helping hot criminals get out of town for a price. Stockbridge was in the business with him. Our villain, the man who hid Kendle's body, was going to step into Kendle's shoes at this crook-transportation business—something he could logically do, since Kendle wore a mask over his face while he conducted his crooked business."

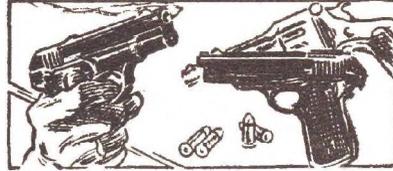
I NODDED.

"But our villain had to prove to Stockbridge that Kendle was still alive. Otherwise, the impersonation of Kendle wouldn't have held much water and Stockbridge would have got high-handed and taken over the profits of the concern for himself."

"It was Doc Stockbridge who said

Kendle was dead, though," Marsh objected.

"But Stockbridge was drunk at the time," I said. "The act the villain put on wearing Kendle's robe convinced Magnus that Kendle was alive. Magnus convinced Stockbridge, who wasn't sure of himself that night anyway. That



enabled the villain to step right into Kendle's shoes and carry on the racket."

"But," Standish said, "where's Kendle's body?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. And it matters, I suppose. We might search the house."

"If there's a corpse in this house I'd know it, wouldn't I?" Marsh asked. He laughed coarsely. "If I didn't know it, my nose would."

Nevertheless, we searched the house from basement to attic. And we didn't find any corpse. It was while the three of us were washing some of the dirt of the coal cellar off our hands that Owen Marsh got an idea.

"Say, how about the rain water reservoir on the roof?"

Standish looked sharply at me.

"How do we get up there?" I asked.

"Through a skylight in the roof. The tank's between those two big gables up there. I know because I had to clean the thing out for Kendle last spring."

We followed Marsh up the attic steps for the second time. A step-ladder was put beneath a skylight. Marsh went up first, Standish next, and I followed. The reservoir was about ten feet long with ends that were four feet square. The three of us hurried along the tiles and bunched around the tank. A blind man could have told something was dead in there. And a ray of sunlight that slanted into the

water showed us plainly the body of a man.

"Kendle, by damn!" Standish said. "Get a hook, Marsh."

"And a pair of shears," I added, as Marsh hurried back to the skylight opening.

"Ghost," Standish whispered to me, "have you any idea who's behind the wire mask? Any idea at all?"

"Just a faint notion," I said. "But wait until tonight. We'll catch him in the act then."

"It's got to be tonight," Standish said. "This case is driving me crazy. Why did you ask Marsh to bring a pair of shears?"

"I want to cut away some of the hair from the head of the corpse," I said. "I'm looking for a tattoo mark."

WHEN MARSH came back through the skylight with a long pruning hook in his hand. There was a pair of shears in his pocket and he handed them to me as he carried the hook to the tank. Several times he tried to catch the garments of the body in the tank before he succeeded in bringing it to the surface. And then Standish and I grasped clammy hands and dragged the corpse of Peter Kendle from the tank.

We stretched the corpse out on the sun-baked slates in the "v" notch between the gables. With the shears I performed the unpleasant task of cutting away the water-soaked black hair from the white scalp.

In the center of the dead man's white scalp was a curious design, tattooed in brown ink—two hands around which twined a pair of snakes.

It was undoubtedly the same design that I had seen on the shaved head of Samson Andros, for either one of the snakes could have been mistaken for the letter "S".

"This," Standish said, "is a job for Inspector Magnus. Or rather the same job he had before. He's much better at a murder case when he has a corpse to deal with."

CHAPTER XXIII

Novpaklos

ATTER, Ned Standish and I had some lunch served in the commissioner's office at Police Headquarters. A small, pleasant man named Jack Galema ate with us. Galema was the interpreter I had asked for. He was a Holland-American, and like many Dutchmen he had a particular talent for foreign languages. He was very good at Greek.

In half an hour with Jules Kalkis, the limping man, Galema had learned more than the third degree method could have possibly brought to light.

"This Jules Kalkis," Galema told us, "is rather a pitiful person, really. He hasn't been in this country very long. He hasn't been fortunate in finding work.

"Kalkis came to New York in order to look up a Greek family he had known in the old country. There were four brothers—Peter, Stephan, Samson, and Georges Novpaklos. It seems, according to what Kalkis told me, that the Kalkis family and the Novpaklos family were traditional enemies. But Kalkis thought to bury the hatchet, as you say, especially inasmuch as the four Novpaklos brothers were rich and might help Kalkis get started in this country."

"Excuse me," I interrupted. "Ned, that explains the tattoo marks. Peter Kendle was Peter Novpaklos. George Paton was Georges Novpaklos. Samson Andros was Samson Novpaklos. And Stephan Orestes ought to be Stephen Novpaklos. Four brothers, all under assumed names. Samson (Andros) Novpaklos even tried to conceal his dark complexion by dyes and bleaches. Obviously, the four brothers were afraid of the Kalkis family follow-

ing them here. Perhaps there was a basis to this originally, but as far as Jules Kalkis was concerned, there was no cause for fear.

"The fear was brought up again, no doubt, by Peter (Kendle) Novpaklos, because he intended to kill his other brothers, covering himself by the old vendetta idea and putting the blame on Jules Kalkis, who, he must have learned, had actually come to the U. S."

"Perhaps so, gentlemen," the smiling Jack Galema said. "You know much more about this than I do. But this Peter Novpaklos was only half brother to the other three. Kalkis told me that much.

"Kalkis' crime as confessed to me is simply this: He tried to seek out these four brothers and make friends with them. He found Stephan Novpaklos—the one you call Orestes—definitely hostile toward him, couldn't get near him because Orestes thought he was trying to carry on the vendetta. And Peter, the half-brother, Kalkis discovered to be engaged in some sort of criminal venture.

"In desperation, Kalkis approached Peter and tried to blackmail him. After that, Kalkis was continually hounded by gunmen who tried to kill him. Last night he was determined to strike back at this Peter. And I think you know the rest."

I NODDED. "Only he wasn't striking back at Peter. He was striking back at our Mr. X who stepped into Peter (Kendle) Novpaklos' shoes the night Peter died.

"Standish, I think we've got a motive for Kendle—I'll stick to Kendle because my tongue is having trouble with the Greek name for him—a motive for Kendle wanting to kill his brothers. Or rather his half-brothers. Kendle thought to inherit the stock they owned in the Paton and Andros company, which is one of the most up-and-going firms in the business.

"You see, Kendle's own crooked

racket was going to pieces under him. His identity had leaked out and certain criminals he had swindled were after him. He had to get out of the racket before someone killed him. So he planned to get rid of his half-brothers, put the blame on Jules Kalkis, and retire to enjoy the revenue he would obtain from the Paton and Andros stock."

"That cleans that up," Standish said, satisfied. "Thanks a lot to you, Mr. Galema."

When Galema had left, Standish and I laid plans for the capture of the man in the wire mask. A squad of picked men were to be placed in and around the buildings on the spot where Wire-Mask would have to murder Stephan Orestes, if he intended to employ his steel-hat method again. In addition, a police car was to be at the Majestic Hotel to follow Orestes as he went to the pier where his yacht awaited him.

Satisfied with our plans, Standish squeaked back in his swivel chair and folded his hands on his vest.

"And you and I will be there, Stacey," he said. "Just in case anything goes haywire."

"I'll be there," I said, "but I'm no guarantee against things going haywire."

I left Headquarters Building and telephoned Joe Harper at the rectory.

"Joe, I'd like you to find a broker or somebody who knows plenty about stocks. I want you to get me all the dope you can on Paton and Andros stock. I notice that after hitting an all-time high, it's dropping fast. Find out who's buying the stuff. And I'll get in touch with you later."

That done, I went around to Merry White's apartment. The darling insisted on being brought up to date on developments in the case.

"You know who 'done' it, darlin'?" she asked, eyes snapping.

"I've just a hunch. Maybe a few little clues point to one man, but there's nothing that would make a court case."

"You're going to be awfully sur-

prised," she said. "Because this time I know who 'done' it. And I'm going to be stubborn and master-mindish like you are and not tell until it's all over."

"You're not even going to tell me?"

"Should say not! You run along and get your own ideas. But give me a kiss first."

I HAD never known Merry to act quite like that before—I mean about holding back her hunches. Her asking to be kissed has been going on for a long time. Maybe she did have some evidence which I didn't have. Or perhaps she had noticed something which had escaped my notice.

At any rate, Standish and I were expecting to catch the criminal red-handed that night. Obviously, I couldn't go into action in the disguise of Dr. Stacey, so I returned to the rectory. I stepped into another alias by putting on a flat putty nose and a bushy red toupee. Some changes in general build were achieved by padding the shoulders, and I became Detective-Sergeant Hammill. A regulation police badge gave me official capacity.

Then I taxied down to Police Headquarters to meet the commissioner.

According to my deductions, the man in the wire mask would strike at Orestes somewhere on Eleventh Avenue between Twenty-third and Twenty-fifth Streets. From ten o'clock on, Ned Standish and I patrolled those two blocks in the commissioner's car, never out of touch, by means of radio, with the squad of men who waited at the Majestic Hotel for Stephan Orestes to put in his appearance.

At exactly eleven-thirty, the word came to our radio that the Orestes car had left the hotel. Orestes wasn't alone, apparently, because the police saw four men in the car—his armed guard of private detectives, no doubt.

"Right on schedule," Ned Standish said to me. "He'll just about make it here at midnight."

Standish pulled the car over to the

curb and waited, motor running. It was nerve-cracking business. There were twenty cops in those two blocks, concealed in doorways, in narrow spaces between buildings, or walking the streets in plain clothes. There was almost no traffic in the street, no sign of anything that could be treated with suspicion. And yet right here, a few minutes from now, we expected to beat murder to the draw.

"Orestes car nearing Eleventh Avenue," the voice from the radio whispered suddenly.

Standish's hands gripped the wheel. His foot jazzed the throttle nervously. Our eyes strained up and down the street. A hundred feet in front of us, a plainclothes cop took a look at his watch. Standish and I weren't the only ones keyed to high pitch.

"By damn, we've got to get him tonight," Standish whispered. "Got to do it."

Then I looked through the rear window and saw a long-nosed black sedan turned into the Eleventh Avenue. It was the Orestes car.

I touched Standish's arm. He looked back, his close-set eyes grim. He shifted into low gear but kept his clutch out.

"Wait," I said. "Your cops are right behind Orestes. No use making a parade out of this. We've got to watch for Wire-Mask."

THE Orestes car moved on toward the next corner. When it was within a hundred feet of the intersection, I saw the nose of a light delivery truck sticking out from Twenty-third Street. The truck seemed to be stopping to give the Orestes car right-of-way.

"Watch that truck!" I cautioned. "That's it. That's how they'll work it!"

Hardly were the words out of my mouth before the truck spurred into the intersection, swerved, struck the Orestes car alongside. Fenders locked. The

back door of the truck burst open and six men with Tommy guns tumbled out—the remnant of the criminal army of the man in the wire mask.

Police whistles shrilled warning blasts. Men pelted from hiding places and along the street. A couple of tear gas bombs arced from windows above the street, burst in white clouds above the armed mobsters.

There was a stuttering volley from only one of the crimester's guns, as the cops closed in from all sides. I saw a single cop fall flat on his face in the middle of the street, knocked down by one of the machine gun slugs. And then one of his companions eliminated the machine gunner who went down with his Tommy still sputtering like a firework piece gone haywire.

Standish spurred his car from the curb. By the time we drew abreast of the truck, everything was under control. The crimesters stood with their guns at their feet and their hands held high. The four men were piling from the Orestes car.

Standish and I got out and hurried to the Orestes sedan.

"Where's Mr. Orestes?" Standish demanded, looking from one to the other of the private detectives.

"He isn't here, Mr. Commissioner," one of the dicks said, as he recognized Standish. "Carl Bricker, one of our cops, was murdered yesterday. We found his body, and Mr. Orestes said the chances were that somebody had figured out his plans. So he sent us out to his yacht tonight. It was a sort of a trap, see?"

"Where's Orestes?" Standish repeated.

"Oh, he went alone, back to his home in the Bronx," the man said.

Standish looked at me. His eyes were worried. Because if Orestes hadn't showed up, neither had the man in the wire mask, for there was no sign of the master criminal among the six crimesters who had got out of the truck.

"Do you suppose—" Standish began.

But I didn't let him finish. A gray coupe was rolling slowly out of Twenty-third Street. It paused an instant, and then cut the corner so sharply that its rear wheel bounced over the curb.

I grasped Standish's arm, jerked him toward his car. For in the brief instant that the coupe had stopped at the intersection, I saw the unmistakable painted mask of the killer.

GETTING back to Standish's car, I was two jumps ahead of the commissioner. I got in under the wheel for the simple reason that if this was to be a gun-battle with the killer in the coupe, Standish had it all over me handling a gun.

The coupe was rolling south. So, in another instant, were we. Standish had his gun out—that same fine Police-Positive he had handled so well long before he became police commissioner. We were not yet within range of the racing coupe, but we were biting off the separating distance in giant strides as I kicked the accelerator to the floor.

At Thirteenth Street, the coupe cut across and jogged into Washington Street, continuing south until it met Canal Street.

"Good Lord!" Standish gasped. "Is he heading for Police Headquarters?"

I gave the motor all it would take and Standish leaned out of the car, tried four shots at the whirling tires of the coupe ahead. The coupe had still more speed under its hood. It pulled away like a shot.

Howard Square flashed by. The coupe looped around the block and into Mulberry Street. It headed north, picking up top speed. Suddenly, its stop lights glowed red. The man in the wire mask socked on his brakes so hard that the rear of the coupe seemed to rise up off its rear axel. I knew suddenly that this was intended for a showdown, for the killer knew well by now that he couldn't shake us.

My foot went to the brake pedal.

CHAPTER XXIV

Defeat

NOTHING but the protecting shield of bullet proof glass in the commissioner's windshield kept Standish and me from annihilation. A machine gun in the hands of the killer mouthed flaming death through the rear window of the coupe. Slugs slapped the glass in front of my eyes. Glass spider-webbed. Visibility was zero.

I set the brakes tight. Standish was thrown forward in his seat. My ribs felt the pressure of the steering wheel. The clatter of the machine gun stopped.

Standish leaned far out, emptied his gun. When the roar of shot died, he yelled at me:

"Damn it, he's running for it! Step on the gas!"

I stepped. The motor roared. I let the clutch slap in. I couldn't see where I was going, but we were on our way—or so I thought. The car gave a lurch forward, the motor choked, died. Standish gave me a look that cursed. He leaned out the window.

"The coupe's turning to the right. Step on it, Ghost!"

I was stepping on the starter. The motor ground away, caught, choked and died. I tried again, and this time there was no turn-over at all.

I knocked open the door, got out into the street, ran to the front of the car. Water was pouring out of the radiator. The whole front end of the car reaked with the smell of gasoline. Standish joined me.

"What's the matter?"

"We're out of it," I said bitterly. "His machine gun slugs have wrecked the carburetor."

Standish cursed like a sailor. He stood in the middle of the street and

waved his arms. I don't know what he was waving at, there wasn't a car in sight. That was why the killer had prolonged the chase. He had kept going until he reached a deserted street. Then he had stopped, grabbed his machine gun, tried to finish us, and certainly put our car out of the race.

"Ghost, haven't you got an ace up your sleeve?" Standish pleaded.

I said I had, but it wouldn't do any good to play it in the middle of Mulberry Street.

"Then we're licked, damn it!"

Standish spotted an all night drugstore up in the next block and we hurried toward it. In the drugstore, he went at once to a phone booth and called Police Headquarters to have a car sent out at once. Then he consulted the phone book and dialed again.

He let the phone ring for over a minute before hanging up.

"You called Orestes' house?" I asked.

He nodded. "And nobody's there. Or else the man in the wire mask has caught up with him."

"Not," I said, "unless the killer can sprout wings and fly. Only angels can do that, and the man we're after isn't exactly that."

"Just the same, I'm going out to the Bronx as soon as that car gets here."

THAT'S what we did—drove out to Haight Street and to Stephan Orestes' ugly fortress of a house. After ten minutes of knocking and bell pushing, a window above us opened and Stephan Orestes put a shot gun and his bald head out of the window.

"Open the door!" Standish snapped. "It's Commissioner Standish and Detective-Sergeant Hammill from Police Headquarters."

"What do you want?" Orestes asked.

"We don't want to smash our way in here, but that's what we'll do if you don't come down and let us in."

Stephan Orestes appeared at the door a moment later, wearing pajamas and a bathrobe. He still nursed his

shot gun under his arm.

"Where were you forty minutes ago when I called this house?" Standish demanded as we stepped into the hall.

"Upstairs," Orestes said promptly. "I was asleep. I am a very hard sleeper."

"Good!" Standish said. "Because some fussy people have had a little trouble sleeping in a jail cell, and that's where you can finish your nap."

Orestes protested. He hadn't done anything, he said.

"You stay around here, you won't be doing anything until Gabriel blows his horn!" Standish said. "They're after you still."

"Jules Kalkis?"

"Not Jules Kalkis," I said. "By the way, Mr. Orestes, how does it happen you don't have a tattoo mark on your head like the rest of the Novpaklos brothers?"

Orestes blinked at me. "Novpaklos—how did you know?"

"Never mind," Standish said. "Answer the sergeant's question."

"Why," Orestes said, "I had it removed. I'm bald, you see? I couldn't have a thing like that showing on top of my head."

"I suppose not," Standish said. "Tell me, if Jules Kalkis doesn't happen to be the man who wants to kill you, are there any other possibilities?"

"Why—why, no," Orestes gasped. "I—I haven't any enemies."

"Uhm," Standish grunted. Then he told Orestes to go get his clothes on.

When the millionaire treasurer of Paton and Andros Company had gone upstairs after his clothes, Standish whispered to me.

"What do you think?"

"What do you?" I countered.

"That man"—and he pointed upstairs—"is Wire-Mask. Look, if Kendle had a motive, as you say, for killing his half-brothers in order to get hold of the Paton and Andros stock, what about Orestes?"

"You think so?"

"Why didn't he answer the phone when I called him a while ago? He simply wasn't here, that's why!"

"And all this stuff about trying to kill Orestes was just a basket of red herring thrown in our faces, huh? Well, it's been done before."

"You can bet it's been done before!" Standish said warmly. "But how are we going to prove it?"

"Tomorrow night," I said, "you bring Orestes to the Kendle house across the street and I'll see if the Ghost can make some proof."

WITH Orestes in charge of the police, I returned to the Ghost's rectory where I found Joe Harper taking a nap on the couch. I wakened him, asked him if he had found anything about Paton and Andros stock.

"Sure," Joe said. "I found a guy who knows all about it, and he was sick-looking as though he had played angel to a flop show on Broadway. Paton and Andros stock hit the basement today. It's because of the deaths of Mr. Paton and Mr. Andros, see? People think without their guiding lights the company is headed for the rocks."

"But is it?"

"No. It's just one of those things. It'll pick up in a few days, because somebody is buying in the stock as fast as the frightened investors get rid of it."

"Who's buying it?"

Joe shrugged. "That's a mystery. It's a new name in Wall Street, and probably a phoney one. The guy who's buying is completely covered. But when it's all over he's going to be the big gun of Paton and Andros, so far as the profit is concerned. He'll probably wait for a rise and dump his stock, or else he'll just sit back and reap the company profits. The death of Paton and Andros in person isn't going to injure the future of the Paton and Andros Company, see?"

"Okay," I said. "Now the first thing tomorrow, we've got to find the address

of that apartment where Wire-Mask held Merry prisoner. If Merry can't give it to us, this Greek Jules Kalkis ought to be able to."

"I've got my candidate for the position of killer all figured out," Joe said. "It's the angel-faced lawyer, Mr. Calvin Pieper. Nobody would know the ins and outs of the Paton and Andros Company any better than he. He was legal pilot for the firm."

"We'll see tomorrow night," I said. "But when we know the address of that apartment where Merry was held, you've got to pull a burglary. You'll be looking for steel hats and a gun with a fat cylinder on its barrel."

"That," Joe said, "will certainly be ducky. Suppose the killer comes in and tries one of his hats on me?"

"He won't," I said. "Besides, you're to duck in and out again as fast as you can."

CHAPTER XXV

Flowers for the Killer



NEXT morning, Inspector Magnus was sent by Standish over to the Peter Kendle house. He was admitted by Owen Marsh, Kendle's one-time body-guard. Magnus had been instructed to make all arrangements for the experiment that was to be made that night. He got permission from Stephan Orestes, the potential heir to the Kendle house, to use the Kendle living room.

While Magnus was carrying out these instructions, Joe Harper filled his part of the job excellently, returning to the rectory at dusk with the loot he had taken from the apartment which the killer had used as a prison for Merry White. I don't know whether Joe found some cigarette money lying around or

not. Anyway, he was happy about the whole thing. He had found a canvas sack which contained several old army helmets, the curious gun with the fat cylinder on the barrel, a coil of wire and a large switch.

Shortly after Joe's return, Commissioner Standish arrived escorting Merry White. Tim Terry was on hand, too, bringing sandwiches from a nearby delicatessen.

None of us had appetites. The masked killer had played ring-around-the-rosey with all of us, and we were all eager to see if the card the Ghost had up his sleeve was going to be an ace or a two-spot.

"Merry, my love," I said as we concluded our meal, "Standish has picked Stephan Orestes for the murderer. Joe Harper believes that Calvin Pieper is the guilty party. Would you care to give us your solution?"

"I think, my darlin'," she said, turning on the heat of her potent eyes, "that you are a very smart man. But I am wonderful, too. And I think that the killer is this Owen Marsh."

"Marsh?" I said, though I had heard perfectly.

"Uh huh." Merry nodded her head. "Why in the world pick him, you ask?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Standish said. "Marsh had nothing to gain from any of this. He's not hooked up with this Novpaklos family in any way."

"What's your reason?" I asked Merry.

She giggled. "I'm terribly scientific. You see, when George Chance—remember him?—was touring the world with his magical review, and I was with him to sort of steal the show with my feminine allure—I am alluring, aren't I, Ghost, darlin'—"

"Very," I said.

"Well, when we were on tour, there was a man named Owen Swift who was quite a stage-door Johnny. In fact, he followed the show all over the country trying to make dates with me. He was

about fifty years old and had false teeth, and I didn't like him. Ever since then I don't like people named Owen anything!"

"Brilliant, frail!" Tiny Tim piped.

I laughed. "We'll very shortly see who is right—if anybody." And Standish and I left the rectory after I had once more put on my Ghost disguise.

IN the living room of the Kendle house, Inspector Magnus had gathered certain people who were to witness one of the Ghost's magical tricks—a trick which I hoped would point the finger unmistakably at the killer.

Jules Kalkis, the lame Greek was there, casting many a glance of doubt at his old enemy, Stephan Orestes. Beside Orestes was seated Kendle's former bodyguard, Owen Marsh. Marsh lolled in his chair, but kept his intelligent blue eyes constantly on the prowl about the room.

Next to Marsh, Magnus had placed Ronald Wick, the crack reporter of the *Tribune*. Wick, wearing his floppy hat and sagging topcoat, sat there with his sharp chin in his hand, smoked endless cigarettes, and made slighting remarks about Inspector Magnus to Attorney Calvin Pieper on his right.

Pieper's cherubic face was screwed up into knots of consternation.

"I don't see how any of this can concern me," he said. "Simply to bring me here because I happened to be here the night of Kendle's death, seems a bit thick to me."

Commissioner Standish did not explain that Pieper was Joe Harper's candidate for the position of murderer.

I was in the Kendle dining room. I had entered the house from the back door and was waiting for my entry signal.

"Gentlemen," Standish began, "I have asked you to come here tonight in order that you may meet the Ghost—that mysterious man who has so frequently assisted the police in unmasking dangerous criminals. I am happy to

state that none of you here objected in the least to coming at my request. Perhaps none of you has a guilty conscience. Yet it is my belief that one of you is the guilty party.

"I want to warn you that escape from this house is impossible. The place is surrounded by my men. They will shoot anyone trying to escape. So with that word of caution, I want you to meet the mystery-maker who unravels other people's mysteries—the Ghost."

"Nice ballyhoo!" Ronald Wick said.

But he uttered his last word in darkness. For as Standish concluded his little introduction, the lights were turned out by one of the police officers at the central switch box of the house.

The little audience of suspects saw two luminous hands at opposite sides of the room. The hands that glowed in the darkness moved slowly towards each other until they met and clasped. Lights came on again, and I was revealed in the center of the room, my hands clasped, even as the luminous hands had been seen to clasp in the darkness.

THIS is one of my favorite spectacular openings and I have no intention of revealing how the trick is performed. Tonight it served only to put my audience just a little bit on the edge of their chairs.

"First of all," I said in my best graveyard voice, "I want to inform you that we have provided definitely that Peter Kendle intended to murder his three half brothers—those men whom we know as Stephan Orestes, Samson Andros, and George Paton."

"Peter!" gasped Stephan Orestes. "Peter was going to kill us?"

"Exactly," I said. "And he hoped to place the blame on Jules Kalkis, who I have reason to believe has every desire to bury the hatchet and end the war that existed between his family and yours.

"The night that Kendle had set to begin his murder march, Kendle him-

self was killed by a man known as Hank Roscoe, who had, we know, plenty of motives for killing Kendle.

"No sooner was Kendle dead than another man, the killer who is in this room tonight, stepped into Kendle's shoes with the intent of carrying on the identical plan that had been Kendle's, namely: to murder George Paton, Samson Andros, and Stephan Orestes. And for the identical motive—to obtain control of the wealthy Paton and Andros Company.

"But while Kendle would have got control of the company by inheriting the stock from his half-brothers, the new murderer, whom I shall call X, intended to purchase stock in the company at an extremely low figure. To do this, he had to have money.

"Mr. X knew the ins and outs of Kendle's life, knew the criminal racket in which Kendle had engaged. And though that racket was turning against Kendle, breaking dangerously beneath him, Mr. X took over where Kendle left off, to squeeze every last cent from that racket before it smashed completely. Then, too, he knew that Kendle had a large amount of cash in his office safe, and this we know was something that Mr. X needed if he was to buy in Paton and Andros stock.

"In order to control Kendle's racket, Mr. X had to give the impression that Kendle was still alive. We know exactly how he did that, fooling the police, fooling even Kendle's associate in the racket, Dr. Stockbridge.

"That done, Mr. X set about forcing the Paton and Andros stock down to a low figure. To do that, he intended to kill the guiding lights of the concern, thus making stockholders lose confidence and dump their stock on the market. Paton, Andros and Orestes were those guiding lights, but the firm bore the names of Paton and Andros, so they were the most important in the killer's scheme.

"Kendle, I believe, had made arrangements for Andros' servant to be absent

on the night Andros was to be murdered. He had done this by sending a message which took the servant over into Brooklyn for the night.

"Mr. X, knowing of this arrangement that Kendle had made, used this fact in the murder of Andros.

"Now the method of murder seems inexplicable at first, when you stop to realize that the victims were electrocuted where no high voltage seemed available. But let me show you something."

I went to the other side of the room and picked up the canvas bag which Joe Harper had stolen for me from the murderer's apartment that morning. I took out the steel hats, the switch, and the gun.

"The victims," I explained, "were handcuffed at ankles and wrists. Their heads were shaved and an unlined military helmet placed on their heads. For a ground, the killer used any radiator that happened to be handy, or even the frame work of a car. The ground connection was made to the handcuffs, while a second wire was attached to the steel hat and from there to this large high-voltage switch. You will notice that a wire leads from the switch to this peculiar gun."

I held up the gun and called attention to the fat cylinder on the barrel of it.

"This cylinder contains a free-running spool of wire. The wire is attached to the missile which is thrust into the muzzle of the gun, like this." I suited the action to the words and dropped a steel plug into the barrel of the gun.

"Now to get current for electrocuting his victims, the killer simply fired the gun toward the nearest high-tension electrical wire. The steel plug carried wire from the free-running spool up and over the high-tension line, establishing the circuit. In each murder case, death took place near one of these high-tension lines or near a street car trolley—somewhere where the current was available, though not obviously so.

"Having shot the gun, completing his circuit, the killer simply pulled the switch and his victim died. In the case of the murder of Andros, the killer simply had to fire his gun out of the window. Since the gun operates by compressed air, there was very little noise. The heavily insulated stock made the act perfectly safe for the killer.

"That," I said, "disposes of method, motive, and opportunity. Now, while you are thinking this over and while the murderer is considering whether he will confess or attempt to escape the police who are in and around this house, I am going to entertain you a little with one of the mysteries of the East.

"While the trick is being performed, you might consider the fact that there is only one person in the room who would be acquainted with a gun of the type used by the killer—this compressed air weapon which enabled him to throw a wire over high-tension lines."

The silence within the room had a thunderous quality. My own pulse was hammering at my temples as I prepared to pull the trick on which my entire burden of proof rested. I *knew* who the killer was, but I knew that unless something happened to jolt him out of the perfect nerve control he possessed, there wasn't a chance of catching him.

I RAISED my right hand, flicked my fingers. Three dead black handkerchiefs blossomed from the concealed tube held in my palm. Immediately, I tied the handkerchiefs together with a single knot, gave them a shake, and they became a single large black silk handkerchief.

That portion of the trick was simple enough. One of the smaller handkerchiefs contained the large handkerchief rolled up. A pocket in the large handkerchief simply swallowed the three small ones when, by a deft movement, I jerked the large one inside out.

I spread the large black cloth over

one arm and immediately produced from beneath it a flower pot in which was "planted" a small bush about a foot in diameter and covered with bright red blossoms.

The branches were compressible, covered with silk, and the flowers were even more compressible feather flowers, made of the finest feathers artfully colored.

The audience gasped. I approached them with the blooming bush.

"Would you care to smell the flowers and satisfy yourself that they are real?" I asked.

And whether they cared to or not I thrust the blooming bush of feather flowers into their faces, one at a time. The reason for this move? When Joe Harper and I had been doomed to wear the killer's steel hats, the killer had driven us to the spot of our planned execution in a truck that had been used to haul chickens. Remember that when the killer entered the back of the truck where Joe and I were confined, the killer had started to sneeze?

Since the killer had not previously shown any signs of a cold, had not sneezed any other time while Joe and I had been with him, there was only one conclusion to come to: The killer was allergic to feathers. I was counting on that peculiar physical trait of the killer to reveal him to us now—reveal him without the mask.

The bush of feather flowers passed from Kalkis to Orestes and from Orestes to Calvin Pieper, from Pieper to Owen Marsh. And then it happened. Owen Marsh began to sneeze violently!

Tears streamed into Marsh's blue eyes. He jerked out his handkerchief. He blew his nose. He sneezed again. And I mercifully withdrew the feathers.

"You see, gentlemen," I said, "Mr. Marsh, before becoming Kendle's body-guard and intimate, was on the Coast Guard, where guns such as March used for murder are used to saves lives—to throw life-lines to drowning persons. That and the allergy for feathers which

Marsh and the murderer have in common—”

I GOT no farther. Marsh tried the hard way out. He had no gun, since all had been searched before entering the room. He made a dive for the living room door. John Magnus warned him to halt. Magnus fired low at his legs. Marsh got through the door, stumbled, fell flat on his face. Three cops landed on top of him at once.

And it was over. In all the confusion which followed the apprehension of the killer, the Ghost melted away from the Kendle house to return to his rectory.

I walked through the basement door of the rectory where Joe and Tim and Merry awaited me.

“Merry,” I said, “are you sure you were only playing a hunch about Owen Marsh being the killer?”

“You mean he really *is* the killer?” she gasped. And when I nodded, a look of complete dejection came over her small pretty face.

“Darn it! I’ll never guess again! I—I was just kidding. I didn’t suspect him at all. I’ve never seen him. And besides, I wanted you to have all the glory.”

“There’s glory enough for all,” I said. “And other chances yet to come, when the Ghost walks again. Right now, I’d like to trade places with George Chance, the lucky stiff. He at least gets a chance to sleep once in a while. So let’s all take a rest until the next case comes along.”

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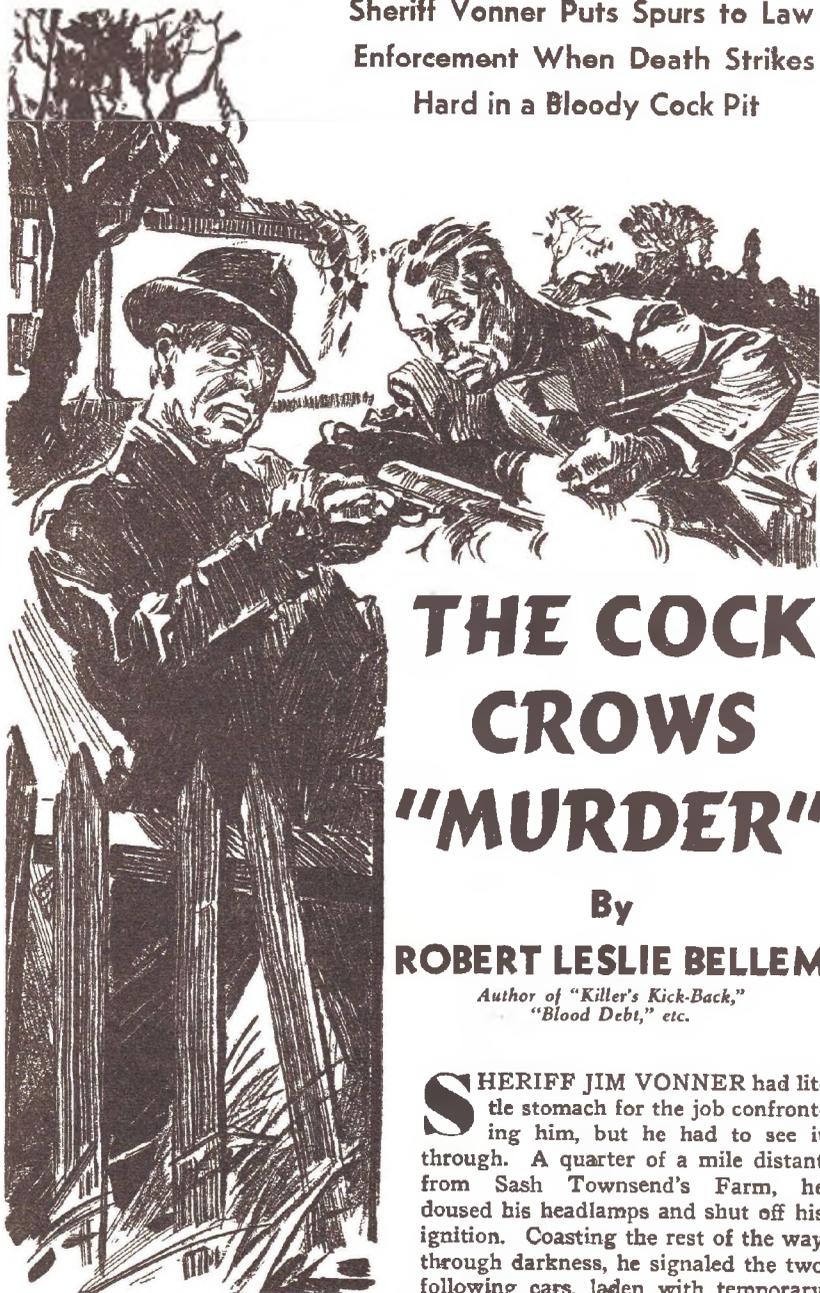
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THE COCK CROWS "MURDER"

By

ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

*Author of "Killer's Kick-Back,"
"Blood Debt," etc.*

SHERIFF JIM VONNER had little stomach for the job confronting him, but he had to see it through. A quarter of a mile distant from Sash Townsend's Farm, he doused his headlamps and shut off his ignition. Coasting the rest of the way through darkness, he signaled the two following cars, laden with temporary deputies, to do likewise.

The excited noises issuing from the

*The sheriff launched himself just as a gun
bellowed spiteful flame*

big gray Townsend barn effectively covered the lesser sounds of the three-car motorcade's arrival in the farmyard. Sheriff Jim braked to a stop and turned to Brod Townsend, the sullen and glowering man beside him.

"You still want to go on with this, Brod?"

"I'm certain." Brod's voice was unpleasantly nasal. "Otherwise, why do you think I swore out the complaint?"

"But Sash is your brother."

"He's a lawbreaker!"

In the gloom, Brod's lips seemed a thin, horny slit, like the mouth of a snapping-turtle.

The sheriff sighed heavily from the depths of his vast girth. There was scarcely a man in the county he couldn't call friend, and beyond doubt the yelling crowd in Sash Townsend's barn would include plenty of Jim Vonner's pinochle cronies and fishing companions.

It was one thing to apprehend thieves and murderers, but to arrest his intimates merely because they patronized a sport frowned upon by the statutes was something else again. Even more personal was Sheriff Jim's reluctance to take the younger Townsend brother into custody.

"I don't like it, Brod," he said. "Strikes me you're packing a grudge because Evelyn got engaged to Sash instead of you."

"Let's leave Evelyn's name out of it. You're the sheriff, even if you are her father. There wasn't anything in your oath of office that said you couldn't arrest your future son-in-law, far as I can remember." Chuckling maliciously, Brod peered into the tonneau at Ed Fabring, local justice of the peace. "Hope you brought your law book along, Ed."

Fabring was shrunken and wizened, with a face like a dried windfall apple, liver-blotched and wrinkled.

"I'm ready to set up court and assess fines right in the barn," he answered.

"Fines, hell! Jail terms is what they deserve."

"You wouldn't tell me my business, would you, Brod?" the J. P. inquired tartly.

BROD muttered a surly apology. Sheriff Jim, hearing it, smiled to himself. It wasn't often that Brod Townsend apologized to anybody, but this time he was dealing with a man who held the mortgage on his acres. That made quite a difference.

From the two other cars, seven deputies, indiscriminately rounded up and sworn in at the village, piled out. Jim Vonner unwedged his corpulence from behind his steering wheel and led his forces into the lantern-lighted barn.

His sortie possessed the virtue of complete surprise. Of the twenty-five or thirty yelling men grouped about the improvised cockpit, not a single one noticed the sheriff's advent. Their concerted attention was riveted upon the battle taking place in the center of the circular space where two gamecocks, one a ruby-eyed Carolina Blue and the other a symmetrically streamlined Whitehackle, were locked in death-combat.

Their natural spurs augmented by attached steel gaffs, like tapered needles, the cocks shuffled each other in a blur of bloody motion. Suddenly, faster than the eye could follow, the Whitehackle shifted, fluttered high into the air and came down with his gaffs flashing in the yellow light. Sharp metal penetrated the Carolina Blue's brain, and the fight was finished. The Blue squawked once and subsided into a quivering heap of ruffled feathers. The Whitehackle crowed raucous triumph over his kill.

"Sorry, boys," Sheriff Jim said, "but you're all under arrest."

Pit-fowl handlers, referee and startled audience went abruptly silent. They were too surprised for confusion, as every eye turned toward Jim Vonner and his intruders. The sheriff made a wry grimace of discomfort under this hostile scrutiny. From somewhere in the crowd, an angry voice said:

"How come, Jim? This ain't like you!"

It was Harley Eblen who spoke, Harley Eblen, the sheriff's partner on many a fishing and hunting expedition. He was big and blond and ordinarily easy-going. But truculent now, his blue eyes blazed with unconcealed ire.

Sheriff Jim shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Don't blame me, Harley. Cocking mains are against the law. Squire Fabring, here, made out the warrant."

"Fabring, eh?" Eblen took a threatening step toward the little J. P. "Why, you runty, sawed-off . . ."

Sheriff Jim interposed his bulk.

"No need to get hot-headed, Harley. It won't do any good." He looked around. "Where's Sash Townsend?"

"He went out to get . . ." somebody started. so say, but another voice, anonymous within the crowd, shouted a warning.

"Shut up! Don't tell 'em anything!"

And Harley Eblen, taking this up, grinned sourly. "Sash ain't been here at all," he interjected. "He don't know anything about our little party."

That was a lie, of course. They were covering up for Sash, since he would be the most culpable of the group, having supplied his barn as a place for the cocking main. Sheriff Jim's full lips twitched in appreciation of this quick loyalty. No matter what else happened now, Sash was out of it. And a man hates to be put to the embarrassment of arresting his own daughter's future husband.

ED FABRING cleared his throat.

"Reckon I might as well open court here and now. Somebody get me a box or something for a desk."

"I will," Harley Eblen volunteered, somewhat surprisingly. There was a partitioned-off room at the back of the barn, and Harley opened the rough door and stepped into the gloom beyond. Chicken-sounds filtered from behind the board paneling, then there was a silence that lasted too long.

"Maybe he skipped," Brod Townsend muttered nasally. "It'd be just like him."

"Skipped?" Ed Fabring said. "He'd better not! I'll fine him for contempt!"

He scuttled to the door and went into the rear room. Squawkings and wing-flutterings sounded again, and Fabring's voice yowled:

"Here, now! Stop that! Damnation! You, Harry Eblen, where are you?" Overturned lumber clattered.

"Trouble in there!" Brod Townsend grunted. He leaped to the door, and shadows swallowed him. Suddenly he was shouting: "Everybody come in here quick! Bring a light! My God—"

Sheriff Jim hoisted his poundage onto a bench, reached for a dangling kerosene lantern and wrenched it down. Moving deceptively fast for all his overweight, he gained the rear room and plunged in.

He almost stumbled over Ed Fabring, writhing on the floor. Blood was spurting from the little J. P.'s wizened throat, where jugular vein and carotid artery had been slashed open. He was still alive, but no power on earth could keep him that way, Jim Vonner ruefully realized. Blinking, twisting, clawing spasmodically at his gashed gullet, Fabring seemed to be trying to say something, but the words wouldn't come.

Vonner felt a little sick. He looked for Harley Eblen but couldn't see him. An open doorway gave access to the outer darkness, mute testimony to Eblen's flight from the barn. Far back in a corner of the room, beyond the strength of the light, Brod Townsend was scrambling around among flimsy wooden crates containing penned game-cocks, cursing them bitterly.

At last he came forward, his lacerated hands clenched about a profanely squawking Shawneck fighter.

"Look!" he parried, holding the fowl aloft before the men who crowded and milled into the room.

On the floor, Ed Fabring stiffened convulsively, a wet rattling noise in his

throat, then the breath reluctantly oozed out of him in a final gurgling expiration and he was still.

"Dead," Sheriff Jim announced morosely. He looked up at Brod Townsend. "What's that you've got?"

"A man-killer!" Brod answered. "Caught him over behind the crates. Don't know how he got loose, but . . ."

The sheriff's nostrils fluttered as he drew a deep breath. "Man-killer?" he said. "Mean to say that rooster cut Ed Fabring's throat?"

"Must have. That was what we heard when Ed started yelling. Look at these spurs."

The Shawneck was heeled with twin slasher gaffs, each blade at least two-and-a-half inches long. Flat and murderously honed to the sharpness of surgical scalpels, the bright steel was still sticky with blood. Somebody whispered audibly.

"That's one of Sash's birds! Meanest cock in the county, too. Soon fly at you as look at you. Reminds me of a case I read about, down in Florida. Shawneck cock killed his handler, clean as a whistle!"

SHERIFF JIM was silent a moment, digesting this, adding it to what he knew. First, he considered Sash Townsend's absence, then Harley Eblen's flight, then the death of Ed Fabring at the spurs of a cock belonging to Sash. The picture wasn't a pretty one, and parts of it seemed somehow out of focus.

Very cautiously, while Brod held the fowl, Sheriff Jim untied the wax cords that held the slasher gaffs in place. He wrapped the red-stained blades in a handkerchief and thrust them into the pocket of his short jacket.

"Pen that chicken up, Brod," he ordered. "The rest of you boys can go on home. There won't be any fines laid tonight."

"Can we take our gamecocks?"

"I guess so."

"And you ain't arrestin' us, after all?"

"Not for chicken fighting when I've got a murder on my hands," the sheriff answered slowly.

"Murder!" Brod Townsend's voice twanged shrilly upward. "How can you call it murder? You're not accusing Sash of gaffing that rooster and turning him loose to kill, are you? That's crazy. How could Sash know Squire Fabring'd be the one who'd come in here and get it?"

Jim Vonner wagged his head from side to side, heavily, in negation. It was funny, he thought, how blood always turned out to be thicker than water when the time came. Brod had been anxious enough to see his brother arrested for running an illegal cocking main, but when it came down to a murder charge he was swift to leap to Sash's defense.

"I didn't accuse Sash," the sheriff answered evenly. "Speaking of him, though, I think we'd better see if we can find him."

He turned to a deputy. "You run down to the village and make arrangements for Doc Blayne and the undertaker to come out here right away. The rest of you boys better leave, too."

Slowly, one by unwilling one, the gathering melted off. Sheriff Jim found a blanket in one of the horse stalls and used it to cover Ed Fabring's corpse. Then, with Brod Townsend at his heels, he left the barn and went over to the neat little farmhouse by the road.

There were no lights in any of the windows. The sheriff knocked on the door, eliciting no response.

"Sash! Sash Townsend! Come out here!" he called.

Again there was no answer.

He tried the door and found it unlocked, but a search of the house revealed no trace of Sash Townsend.

"Queer," Sheriff Jim mused. "He ought to be somewhere around. Unless those boys were telling the truth that Sash didn't know anything about the main here tonight."

"It might be," Brod said.

"And yet *somebody* tied those slash-

ers on that Shawneck and turned him loose in the little room."

"How about Harley Eblen?" Brod muttered. "He went in to get a box for a desk, remember. And then he ran away."

"We'll go see Harley," the sheriff agreed. "Maybe we'll find him home."

They did find Harley Eblen home, over near the next section line. He greeted his visitors warily.

"If you're thinking you can confiscate my gamecocks . . ."

"I figured that's what happened," Sheriff Jim smiled. "You had some valuable roosters crate-penned in the back room of Sash's barn and you didn't want 'em taken away from you, so you grabbed the first handy excuse to go in there and save 'em. You carried the crates out the back door while we thought you were looking for a box, loaded em on your wagon and drove on home."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Anyhow, you can't prove I had any cocks in that barn. Not now you can't."

THE sheriff pursed his lips. "I'm not trying to prove anything like that, Harley. I got more important matters on my mind. I'm looking for the man responsible for Ed Fabring's death."

"Fabring's death!"

"No use pretending you don't know about it!" Brod Townsend said bitterly. "You tried to take a poke at the squire when we first busted in on your party. You were sore at him. You could have tied those spurs on that rooster and turned him loose, knowing Ed would come in looking for you."

Harley Eblen blinked his bewilderment.

"What rooster you talking about? I don't get it."

Sheriff Jim explained tersely.

"A Shawneck cut Ed's throat with slasher gaffs, Harley. Know anything about it?"

Eblen wasn't angry, now. He was disturbed.

"Slashers? No, I don't know a thing. You got to believe me, Jim!"

"Well, then, what about Sash Townsend? Can you tell me where he went?"

"You mean Sash is missin'!"

"I can't seem to find him."

"But—but he just went out to the house to get some beer for the boys, a little before you showed up."

"So he was taking part in the main."

Eblen reddened. "Guess I shouldn't have said that. But hell, Jim, Sash wouldn't have no reason to want to kill Ed Fabring! Besides, maybe the whole thing was an accident. That cock might have got loose some way, and . . ."

"You might be right," the sheriff sighed. "I don't know. But there don't seem much more I can do about it until I find Sash and ask him. Come along, Brod. I'll drive you home."

Later, alone, Jim Vonner returned to Sash Townsend's place and saw that Fabring's body had been removed to the village mortuary. Nobody had seen Sash Townsend. He seemed to have vanished into thin air. Going home, the sheriff pondered this, trying to establish a reason for Sash having run away. The more he thought about it, the more it seemed that there could be only one plausible answer. And the answer troubled him, largely because he was in no position to prove it.

He found Evelyn, his daughter waiting up for him when he reached his house. She seemed distraught, and her eyes were reddened as if she might recently have been crying.

"Something wrong, honey?" he asked gently.

Lips tremulous, fingers plucking nervously at her dress, she turned around and faced him.

"What happened at Sash's place? Why should he have to run away and hide?"

"So he's been here," Sheriff Jim said, his inflection a statement of fact rather than a query.

Evelyn sucked in her breath, swiftly.

"I didn't say he'd been here."

"You didn't have to, honey. But how else would you have known anything happened out to his farm unless he came here and told you? How else would you know he'd run away?"

"Th-that still doesn't answer my question, Daddy. I want to know what trouble Sash is in. Please tell me."

Her moist eyes implored him as well as her voice.

He debated his reply, realizing finally that sooner or later she'd learn the truth anyhow.

"There was a murder," he said. "Squire Fabring was killed."

"And—and you think Sash did it? Oh-h-h, Daddy!"

HE took her into his arms, soothingly, and his own heart was disturbed. He knew how much the girl thought of Sash Townsend, knew how poignant her grief must be at the idea of her sweetheart being involved in a killing. But somehow, when he tried to give tongue to some comforting word, he found himself inarticulate.

"There, there, honey. Don't cry. You mustn't cry," was all he could say. She pushed herself free of him.

"I'm going to Sash. He needs me!" she cried.

"I wish you wouldn't, Evelyn. It's late. And maybe I need you, too."

"You!" Her lips curled bitterly. "You think Sash is a murderer—just like all the others do."

Her scorn hurt him, her contempt stung him to the quick. His mouth twisted in a wry smile.

"I wish you'd trust me, honey. I want you to be happy. You know that," he murmured.

"Then clear Sash of this horrible charge! Prove you want me to be happy!"

"I'll try. It may take time, though. You see, baby, there are certain things I'm not sure of, yet. A lot depends on Sash himself. You wouldn't be willing to take me to him, would you?"

"So that you can arrest him? No!"

"Then promise me one thing. Prom-

ise me you won't see him yourself until I say it's all right."

She stared at him, dubiously.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"I can't explain, honey. I'm just asking you to trust me."

At last, his daughter smiled wanly.

"All right, Daddy. I'll do what you ask."

"Thanks, baby." He patted her cheek. "Now run along to bed. It's late."

Long after she had gone upstairs, he remained in the living room, pacing the floor, examining those slasher gaffs that had brought death to Ed Fabring. It was dawn, before he finally took a nap on the couch, a nap roiled by unpleasant dreams. The fragrant redolence of coffee awakened him, and he saw that it was morning. Evelyn was in the kitchen, preparing breakfast. She seemed less fearful, less upset, now that daylight had come.

The meal finished, Sheriff Jim arose to answer the ringing of the telephone. It was Doc Blayne, down in the village, informing him that the coroner's inquest over Ed Fabring's body would be held that afternoon.

"I'll be on hand," the sheriff said gravely. "And I'll have some things to say."

When the time came, though, he found difficulty in wording his testimony before the jury. For one thing, every other witness—and they included the men who had attended the cocking main at Sash Townsend's barn as well as the special deputies Sheriff Jim had taken with him on the raid—stoutly maintained that Fabring's death must have been an accident. Harley Eblen was loudest in this assertion, which was natural enough when one considered how Harley might have had an opportunity to attach those gaffs to the Shawneck's spurs.

"The way I see it," Harley said from the witness chair, "that cock was bein' readied for a match, and somehow or other he got loose. Then, when the squire went into that room, the bird

flew at him. Shawlnecks are vicious that way. It's happened before."

LUMBERING ponderously to the stand and being sworn, the sheriff contradicted all that had been said.

"We're dealing with a plain case of murder, and that's the only verdict should be brought in. Murder at the hands of a person or persons unknown."

Doc Blayne peered at him over the tops of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Mind telling us how you arrive at that conclusion, Jim?"

"I'd sooner not, but I will if you make me."

"I think I'd better insist, Jim."

The sheriff looked out over the faces that thronged the little hearing room, witnesses and the merely curious who packed the place from wall to wall.

"There was an eye witness," he said at last.

"Eye witness to what? To the tying of those gaffs on the Shawlneck?"

"Something like that."

"Who saw it?"

"Sash Townsend."

"How do you know that, Jim?"

"Sash was at my place last night. He talked with my girl."

"You mean he told her he saw . . ."

"No," Sheriff Jim interrupted quickly. "He didn't tell her what he saw. But he'll tell me when I find him."

"You know where to look for him?"

"I think Evelyn knows where he is. She'll lead me to him when the time comes. Maybe tonight."

The coroner excused Jim Vonner, then, and he drove his car home. At once he started packing a bag, unostentatiously slipping a revolver into it before Evelyn saw what he was doing. It was dusk when he came downstairs, carrying the suitcase. His daughter widened her eyes.

"You're going somewhere, Daddy?"

"For a day or two. Business. I won't have time for supper, honey. Sorry." He hesitated.

"About that promise you made me," he added.

"You mean—about seeing Sash?"

He nodded. "You can take it back, now. Something tells me this trip I'm making will clear him. You might tell him so if you want to."

"Oh, Daddy!"

Her arms went around his thick neck, gratefully. Her lips sweetly brushed his cheek.

He went out to the car, then, and drove away. But he journeyed only as far as Harley Eblen's farm, reaching it with the coming of darkness.

"Got a job for you, Harley," he said to the big, yellow-haired man.

"What is it, Jim?"

"Can't tell you. Just come along."

The sheriff opened his bag and took out his revolver, jamming it into his pocket as Harley Eblen's eyes widened. Then the two men set forth across Harley's plowed fields, heading back in the direction of Sheriff Jim's house.

It was a thirty minute walk. Nearing there, the sheriff pointed to a bobbing lantern yellowly pin-pointing the darkness ahead as someone set out from the house, moving toward the bottom lands along Carp Creek.

"Evelyn," Sheriff Jim whispered succinctly. "Hurry. Don't let her know she's being followed."

At a tangent whose angle would intersect with the girl's course, Jim Vonner and Harley Eblen stole forward. The sheriff felt sure of himself now, and his heart pounded with a curious admixture of sensations — incipient triumph tinged with something he realized was fear. He cast a narrow glance at the man beside him.

"You got a gun, Harley?"

"No."

"Here's hoping you won't need one. Come on, now. Remember that old spring house down by the creek? Sort of set against the bank, partly a cave, like?"

"Yes."

"That's the place. Hurry. But no noise."

THEIR feet silent in the soft, rich loam, they reached the stream bank just as Evelyn, swinging her lantern, neared the abandoned spring house. Her voice called softly through the night, velvet against velvet.

"Sash. Sash, darling."

A man came out of the spring house. At the same moment, a shadow stirred in the alders to Sheriff Jim's left. The sheriff saw the glint of metal, launched his bulk at the shadow and the metallic glint just as a gun bellowed spiteful flame.

It was like a sledgehammer blow hitting him in the ribs, pounding the breath out of his lungs, searing his flesh like the sting of a red-hot hornet. But the bullet couldn't stop him. He smashed into his quarry before a second shot could be fired.

"Got you, Brod Townsend!" he panted. "I figured you'd follow my girl here and try to kill your brother because he knew too much. That's why I said as much as I did, back at the inquest. You were there, and you got scared. Looks like my trap worked."

White, snarling, helpless under the sheriff's smothering weight, Brod Townsend squallered nasal curses.

"Let me up! I'll kill the lot of you! Damn you!"

"You're through killing," Sheriff Jim said.

He cast a quick glance at his daughter in Sash Townsend's arms, over by the spring house, and at Harley Eblen standing nearby, open-mouthed with wonderment.

"You can't prove I killed Ed Fabring!" Brod wheezed.

"That's almost a confession in itself, Brod. Not that I need it, now. By trying to shoot Sash, you've given your game away. Almost from the start, I figured you were the murderer, but I couldn't prove it without some kind of a showdown. This is it."

"You're crazy!"

"Not quite, Brod. You see, I happen to know Squire Fabring had a mortgage on your farm and was going to

foreclose. That gave you a motive for murdering him. Once he was dead, his estate would be tied up in court for quite a time. Long enough to give you a chance to get some money together, maybe, and satisfy the mortgage."

"That's a lie!"

Undisturbed, the sheriff rumbled on.

"You brought that charge against Sash and forced me to raid his cocking main, knowing Fabring would go along. You figured you'd get a chance to kill him some time or other during the commotion, and you had your murder method all planned. You had a pair of slasher gaffs, and you intended to sneak up behind him and cut his throat on both sides, holding the gaffs in your hands.

"Then you'd tie the gaffs to a gamecock and claim the whole thing was accidental. It worked out just that way, too."

"I never . . ."

"But you went wrong because you didn't know much about cock-fighting, Brod. It so happens that in the United States, slasher gaffs are never used. Americans heel their birds with steel spurs, round from socket to point, like needles. Slashers are sort of like little knives, and the only places you find 'em are in Mexico and Cuba and South America.

"You must have sent to Mexico for your pair, most likely. We can check that later. Main thing is, I smelled a rat as soon as I saw those slashers on the Shawlneck. In fact, using a pair of 'em was another bad mistake you made.

"Slashers are never used in pairs. A gamecock'd cut his own legs off if he was heeled with two of the things. They just tie one onto his left spur when they're used at all. I been around enough mains to know that much."

BROD TOWNSEND'S eyes began to hold fear.

He mumbled something nobody could understand.

"Seeing these things," Sheriff Jim

went on, "I knew just how you killed Fabring. You followed him into the little room, took him from behind, and then went over into a dark corner and tied the gaffs to that Shawneck while yelling for the rest of us to come in. But I couldn't prove it."

"You still can't." Brod Townsend sneered at the sheriff.

"Wrong, Brod. When Sash ran away, I knew he had a good reason. What was that reason, I asked myself? And the answer was plain. He must've looked into that back room, through the doorway, just as you were cutting Fabring's throat with your slashers. Sash is your brother, and he'd sooner leave the county than testify you into the noose, I reckon. That way, he's a lot different from you.

"I'll admit you pretended to come to his defense when I hinted he might be the guilty one, but that was just to cover your own tracks. When the time came, and you thought Sash had the goods on you, you came here to shut

his mouth with a bullet, just as I thought you would."

Sheriff Jim looked up at the younger Townsend. "Now that you see what Brod would've done to you, I reckon you won't hesitate to tell what you saw, eh, Sash?"

Sash didn't have to answer.

"HELL with all of you!" Brod said. "I'll take a plea and maybe they'll let me off with life."

"Good idea," Sheriff Jim Vonner said, his voice queerly weak.

His wounded side was hurting him, now that the first shock had worn off. He was bleeding pretty badly, too. He could feel it. He beckoned to Harley Eblen.

"Better take over from here on out, Harley," he said.

Then he smiled at his daughter and Sash Townsend. They made a nice-looking couple, all right. He hoped he'd get out of the hospital in time to attend the wedding.

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LAMAR**

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**There's No Time Out for
Death When His Father's
Slayers Threaten Pro-
Footballer Shane's Life!**

THE pilot set his plane down neatly, considering the shortcomings of Centerfield's unused airport, and taxied up to the flimsy hangar. I got out, paid him his sixty bucks, then headed toward the highway with my suitcase. He was in the air again, on his way back to Detroit, before I had gone thirty steps.

Nobody was in sight from the field, but when I stepped around a corner of the padlocked hangar, a chunky guy was waiting beside a gray sedan. He was a wide-shouldered, dark, with eyes whose color matched the outside of oyster shells, dirty oyster shells.

"You Mark Shane?" he asked.

"Yes. Did Ruth Borden send you to pick me up?"

"Naw. Nobody said anything about picking you up. I'm here to send you back."

"Yes?"



The men from the sales office had found him

"Yeah!" the plug-ugly snarled.

"Suppose I've got different ideas?"

The dark guy turned his hands out, lifted his shoulders in a weak shrug.

"I got to tell you if you're smart you'll let this drop right where it stands. Then if . . ."

He put his hands in his pockets.

". . . then what?" I prompted.

"This—"

The mug wanted the overhand right to be a surprise, but it wasn't. I blocked the blow with my palm. His brass knucks almost drove the bones out of the back of my hand, but my fingers closed on his fist, held on. Then I clipped him a short right in the belly and tagged an uppercut on his chin. He sagged in the middle.

While he was still groggy, I stripped off his knucks and frisked him for a rod. He wasn't heeled. I dumped him very neatly in the sand, sat down on the running board of the sedan to wait.

When the glaze left his muddy eyes, I shook the knucks under his nose.

"How'd you like a dose of your own medicine?"

He didn't answer.

"I've got to tell *you*," I said, "that if you're smart you'll start talking before I get impatient."

A curious sneer twisted the man's slack mouth. It seemed half fright, half something else. Now that I looked at him carefully, he bore the smart boy stamp of the city gangster. He was out of place here in Centerfield. He put his arms behind him, stiffened, ready to get on his feet. I stood up, swinging the knucks suggestively. He relaxed.

"First," I said, "I don't remember you. So you can tell me who you are."

"I don't know nothing."

"What's your name?"

"Aw—"

HE cringed from under my blow, as I had intended he should, but he got the idea.

"Tony Legler."

"Okay. Now, Tony, who sent you

to try and scare me off? How'd you know I was flying home?"

I already knew the answer to my last question. In a town the size of Centerfield, nothing is a secret once it hits the telegraph office. And five minutes after I received her message telling me what had happened to my father, I had wired Ruth Borden that I was on my way, flying.

Ruth Borden was—had been, rather—my father's secretary, and I guess I made the telegram strong when I promised her what I'd do to whoever was responsible.

"Go to hell," Legler muttered. "I'm not ratting."

"You'll probably do worse than rat—before I'm done," I told him. "Who's behind you?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Legler's voice was surly. He started swelling with cockiness. The effect of the uppercut was wearing off.

"I'm going to know!"

Moving briskly, I hopped on Legler's ankles, pinning his feet flat to the ground, and got a firm hold in his greasy hair with my left hand. The guy found himself in a tough spot. He could neither rise nor recline.

No part of my body, except my left arm, was within his reach. And merely by shifting my weight slightly on his ankle bones I was in a position to make him holler "uncle" without actually hurting him badly.

He clawed futilely at my fingers in his hair. I tapped his knuckles with the duster and yanked his wool experimentally. He made a face and his clutching hand dropped as if it had been burned. Then I ground my heel against his ankle—not hard.

Sweat popped out on his upper lip. He gritted his teeth, pawed the ground like a wrestler slapping a mat. Finally, he moaned. I let up.

"I'm not fooling, Legler."

And I wasn't fooling. You don't feel like taking things easy when your father's been murdered, shot in the back without warning, without a

chance. I knew I couldn't maul Legler as mercilessly as I thought he deserved. It simply wasn't in me. But, just the same, he was going to tell me all he could—somehow.

"Talk!" I demanded.

The mug couldn't believe he was so utterly helpless. He squirmed and twisted, trying to find an out. I let him squirm, for there wasn't an out—unless you knew a trick the Buffaloes' trainer had thrown in when he taught me the hold. Legler wasn't familiar with the trick, or he'd have used it already. The best he could do was writhe and curse bitterly.

When he was satisfied he couldn't get out from under I turned the pressure on again. Legler groaned and his wind left him in a gust.

"Sam Glinn," he gasped. "He slipped me a double sawbuck to chase you outta town. That's *all* I know."

All right, Sam Glinn. I remembered him. He had run a poolroom and bowling alley down on Cedar Street when I left Centerfield. Probably he did yet.

There was more discussion between Tony Legler and me, but I learned nothing more. The guy simply didn't have any other information. He was as much in the dark about my father's death as I was.

"Sammy'll fix you for this," Tony Legler promised, when I turned him loose. "He'll get you good!"

"If I don't get him first."

I didn't feel nearly as confident as I sounded.

Legler was dusting sand out of his pants and cursing me as I drove off in his sedan.

CENTERFIELD hadn't changed much in four years. Not that I could tell, at least. It looked nearly the same place I had left when I dropped chemistry at State U and went off to play pro football with the Buffaloes at seventy-five hundred bucks a year.

There were three blocks of business

districts along a single thoroughfare. Short side streets were quiet and shady, almost sleepy. Two chemical plants, my father's modest one and another, were all of Centerfield's industry. The smokestack on the larger chemical works still towered over the town. I could smell a bitter odor from huge retorts in both factories. It was a stench I had known most of my life and, strangely enough, once used to it you didn't mind it at all.

A few people strolled along the clean sidewalks, passing in and out of stores, moving slowly, as if life were easy, as if they didn't have to hurry. I wondered if one of them had murdered my father—which one might try to kill me.

I tightened up inside.

In the first space I found empty on Main Street, I parked the gray sedan and got out, not expecting to be recognized by anybody. But, before I had walked half a block, people were greeting me as though I had never been away.

I shook hands, saw faces, old ones, middle-aged ones, young ones. All with pity in their eyes, all with regard for my father coloring their voices.

"Howdy, Mark . . . Mornin', Mr. Shane . . . Hello, Mark . . . Too bad about Dr. Shane . . . He was a fine man . . . A mighty fine man . . . We're going to miss him . . ."

They were kindly and courteous. They had liked and respected their Dr. Shane, and they welcomed his son. But I didn't feel like talking. I got away from each as quickly as I could and went on toward home.

At Main and Cedar Streets a large puffy paw was thrust toward me and I heard a rumbling voice whose professionally mellow tones oozed false cordiality.

"Mark Shane! Welcome, boy! Welcome!"

I took the hand, glanced up at the owner of the voice. He was a ponderous and pompous man, about fifty-five, with an overstuffed stomach and an enormous lower lip that drooped like

an extra chin above the three he had.

His name, I recalled, was Jessup P. Rankin. He was president, manager, chief stockholder, what have you, of the Rankin Chemical Works, the plant with the tall smokestack.

"Hello. Thanks," I said.

"Mark, son," Rankin boomed, "I am indeed glad to see you." He patted my shoulder heavily. "Indeed glad. Your father's tragic passing leaves us bereaved. He was my friend—my very dear friend."

There was more of the same, much more. I didn't listen. The man was a liar by the clock. My father had hated hypocrisy and pretense. He had been simple and honest, and wise. He would not have been taken in by a big wad of phoniness like Jessup P. Rankin. Moreover, Rankin had hated my father as a competitor. So they had never been friends.

I simply stood until the ton of wind-bag blew himself empty, then went on my way.

Our house—my house now—was a shabby old two-story frame dwelling. The small plant, with my father's office in the corner nearest the house, stood beside it. I stopped before the sign on the office door:

DAVID SHANE

Pharmaceutical Chemist

I thought, "He wanted my name on it too, but I figured there was more money in football." I shrugged and turned up the brick pathway that led to the house. Regret, now, wouldn't mean much.

Ruth Borden, her eyes red, opened the door for me. She had filled out, grown up, and no matter how you felt, you'd notice she was more than pretty. Her shining chestnut hair curled softly away from a firm-boned, pleasant face, beautiful from any angle. And the bow in her lovely lips was natural, not painted on.

It was a treat to hug her, friendly-like, and see her smile.

"Mark," Ruth said. "Mark!"

"Hi, Midget."

I USED the childhood nickname deliberately, reaching for cheerfulness I didn't have. But it worked. We didn't bog down and go soft. We talked, inconsequentially.

In a little while I took my bag up to my room, then wandered through the comfortable old house with Ruth. Not talking, just looking. My father had lived alone here while I was gone, with Ruth Borden running in and out almost like a daughter. His mark was on every room. I kept his office for last, but finally I went across the yard to that. Ruth Borden followed.

"We left things exactly as they were last night—when we found him," she explained, as I turned the knob.

"What time did it happen?"

"About five yesterday afternoon, Dr. Dixon estimated. I went downtown, and when I got back he was—he was—"

"Murdered!" I said.

"Yes. I did some shopping and went to the library. I was gone almost three hours. If I hadn't taken so long . . ."

". . . you probably would have been killed too," I commented. "Don't torture yourself, Midget."

The men from the sales office had found him here, in his office, just before Ruth returned.

The office was small, as my father had been, but it was also in keeping with his personality. It seemed large. Bookcases covered one wall. On another were shelves and cabinets of bottles, jars, graduated measures and the like. A neat workbench held racks of test tubes, Bunsen burners and small retorts. An ancient glass-topped oak desk stood solidly in the middle of the floor, a black-leather upholstered chair behind it.

For a moment, I almost expected a peppery little man, whose eyes were brightly blue and whose sandy hair was very thin, to look up and chuckle.

But the chair was empty—he was

through chuckling, for all time.

Ruth Borden's lower lip trembled.

"The undertaker," she said. "Mr. Rankin came, said it would be best to . . . I didn't know you'd get home so quickly, Mark. So I let them attend to—to arrangements."

I nodded. "I understand. It's all right."

Papers were strewn on the linoleum, projecting from open ransacked drawers. A graduated measure, with the dregs of a precipitation test in the bottom, rested on one end of the desk, and a blue bottle, unstoppered, bearing my father's label was at the other. The space between was taken up by a large aerial survey map of Centerfield under the glass. It was a large photo of Centerfield from the air.

At first, I didn't notice the gummy brown stain on the glass. Then, because light happened to strike the glass exactly right to reflect in my eyes, I looked and saw the stain.

Something in my face must have made Ruth Borden uneasy, for she spoke breathlessly.

"What is it, Mark?"

I drew her beside me.

"Nothing. Just the stain of my father's blood above the map," I said, gulping. "Here's our house, the railroad station, Rankin's plant—except for the smokestack—the blood covers the smokestack."

Ruth Borden's gray eyes filled. "I'm sorry," she said. "It should have been removed before you came. But I don't think it meant anything—I mean, I don't think he could have bled there purposely."

"No," I said. "No, it simply happened."

I searched the office then, carefully, for a lead of some kind, anything. But, so far as I could judge, there was nothing important.

The papers lying loose were merely invoices from supply houses, business letters, drug promotional literature and other such documents. None appeared to contain significant information.

The blue bottle, according to its label, contained an elixir of a drug with an unpronounceable name, a product of my father's laboratories. But, except that it was uncorked and partly empty, there was nothing unusual about the bottle.

AND Ruth Borden could tell me little. Someone—probably an acquaintance, since a stranger hardly could have come into the office and gotten behind him undetected—had shot my father in the back while he sat at his desk. The bullet was of extremely heavy caliber, for death—as Ruth described the coroner's findings—had been instantaneous and ugly. No one could hazard a guess as to the motive. I couldn't, either.

So the lead on Sam Glinn forced from Tony Legler was the only real clue I had.

Sam Glinn would have to keep, though, for a while. The funeral would be held at two o'clock, now that I had arrived. That came first, then I could attend to Glinn—I hoped.

"I'll try to fix some kind of lunch," Ruth Borden said, smiling slightly, looking at me for encouragement.

"Thanks, Midget," I said, and then I ate food I couldn't taste. I wasn't hungry.

Waiting was hell.

I found last night's paper, still folded, went out on the front porch and tried to read. It wasn't much use, however. War news crammed the paper and then, I saw a headline:

TWO DIE OF MYSTERY POISONING

This had happened in nearby Rockford, I learned by skimming through the story, and the coroner suspected a new drug of my father's was the cause of death. There was to be an investigation.

I put it aside and just thought, until it was time to go to the funeral. I couldn't imagine my father letting a drug leave his laboratories until it was

fully tested. There must be some mistake that would show up at the autopsy. I felt sure of that.

My father looked shrunken in death, even smaller than I remembered him. His fine fingers, the nails closely trimmed, seemed oddly frail. There were flowers and decorously sad faces and tiptoeing back and forth and words, words.

Watching the faces, I tried to guess which could belong to the person I wanted to find. But I never was good at guessing. Nobody seemed to fit the bill, none looked like a murderer, and I saw no one who looked as if he worked for Sam Glinn.

Many of the words came from the air-gut Jessup P. Rankin. In a graveside eulogy, he repeated, grandiloquently, the mendacious theme he had practiced on me this morning—his shining friendship with Dr. David Shane.

It was six o'clock before I could get away. Ruth Borden, in black, seemed surprised when I gently released her hand from my arm.

"I've got to leave you now, Ruth."

"But I thought you'd want me to sort of—well—stay around tonight, Mark. You'll be all alone in the house and—" She faltered, smiled tremulously.

I tried to grin reassuringly.

"I do. First, though, I've got to go downtown. You run along home. I'll be there soon."

Ruth didn't understand, yet she nodded. "I'll be waiting."

"Good girl!"

I turned toward Cedar Street, my skin tingling. Sam Glinn would expect me, be ready for me. He probably had been ready all afternoon. It wasn't until I thought of this that I realized sending Ruth home to wait for me was not a smart move. Maybe I wouldn't be there soon. Maybe I wouldn't return at all.

Just the same, I had to play the hand.

Sam Glinn had added a bar to his poolroom while I was away. The bar was where I found him, wary. Several men lounged casually against the ma-

hogany, apparently deep in the usual barroom arguments.

Glinn was no bargain any way you looked at him. He was a stocky, rubbery-skinned, gaudily dressed guy with blunt teeth and thick glasses.

"Hello, Shane," he said, his eyelids unmoving, when I stopped in front of him.

"I guess you know why I'm here," I said.

Sam Glinn canted his head to one side. His lips quirked in what might have been a smile.

"Maybe. Legler told me how you turned him inside out."

"Well?"

"Listen, son. Lay off the muscle. You may be hot as hell in the Buffalo backfield, but this ain't football."

"I'm still saying well!" I told him.

"Now, Mark," Glinn said smoothly. "I don't like rough stuff. I wouldn't want to see you get killed. Let's have a drink."

He waved a hand at the barman.

I DIDN'T want to drink the mug's liquor. I shook my head.

"You'll have to do better than that, Glinn."

"How much better?"

I felt rather than saw Glinn's men closing in. Those within range of my vision were darbies. One had a nose like a tomato—in shape, not color. Another had tiny, monkeylike ears, set tight against his undersized head. The rest were behind me. I watched Glinn.

"I want whoever's responsible for my father's murder. That's how much better."

Glinn stopped trying to appear friendly, curled his lip.

"What you'll get, tough-pants, is outta town. And you won't come back!"

My stomach crawled. I wished I hadn't tried to go so fast alone. It was too late to be back down, though.

"Sorry. I'm here to stay," I stated.

Then the mob hit me in a bunch, four or five of them.

I hooked my fingers into Glinn's thick neck, hung on grimly. His eyes bugged until they almost touched the lenses of his glasses before his pals finally pulled me down. But they did dump me. I tumbled to the floor, felt a toe sink into my belly, another bounce off my head.

Then I didn't feel anything.

Blood was running down my cheek from a scalp cut when I came out of the daze.

Opening my eyelids only a crack, I peeped cautiously around.

I was lying on the floor of Glinn's office. At least I suppose it was meant to be an office. There was a desk and a phone, several chairs and lots of dirty ash-trays. The room sank of spilled beer and stale tobacco.

Sam Glinn, Tony Legler and the small-eared mug loafed in three of the chairs, talking, paying no attention to me. I've been hearing their voices a long time.

The foul ball with the little ears had the floor. I lay still and listened, my head throbbing.

"... maybe five centuries ain't enough for this job. Look, Sammy. We not only have to bounce this punk outta Centerfield, but we're taking a chance on getting hooked for a murder rap, on a killing we didn't pull. It ain't worth the risk, I'm thinking."

"Back up, dimwit," Glinn said harshly. "We ain't horsing Shane outta town just for five hundred bucks. That'll only be a starter—once we get rid of him."

"How you mean?" Legler asked.

Glinn laughed shortly. I knew from the tone of it that he was very pleased with himself for some reason.

"I got information about a guy that's in heavy dough, see? It's enough to sink him. So he'll pay to keep us quiet—and he'll keep on paying."

Legler's dark pan split in a grin.

"I see. I see. Poor little wise guy. He gets hisself cooled. And we collect on the deal. Sam, you got a brain!"

The other hoodlum rubbed his

hands, croaking gleefully.

"Swell! Let's get started with the punk, so we can start collecting."

Their heads came together over the desk in plans which concerned me, but I wasn't listening. I was thinking.

Sam Glinn hadn't been responsible for my father's murder, after all. I'd stuck my neck in a trap to no purpose. The person I wanted was somewhere else. Glinn and his bruisers were simply the cover-up, a smoke screen, for that person.

The more I thought the madder I got. So I figured it was time to stop thinking and do something, while I could still have the advantage of surprise.

When I came up off the floor there was a chair in my hands. And their noggins, huddled together, were a pretty target.

Legler and his microcephalic buddy faded under the first swing of the chair. They were unconscious, seeing bright sparks, before they stopped sagging. Sam Glinn did a little better, or perhaps his head was simply harder.

His fuzz-covered paw darted under his coat, reappeared squeezing the butt of an automatic. I bonked him again with the chair, stepped in, twisted the gun from his fingers.

GLINN was dizzy, weaving on his feet, but not out. I poked his occipital bone with the gun muzzle.

"Listen closely, Glinn. You and I are walking out of this joint. You're going first. I'll be right behind with your rod."

Glinn cursed. I prodded him and he marched.

The office door opened into the bar-room, as I thought it would. The place was almost empty now. Only a drunk, drooping over a table in a corner, and the bartender were in sight. The hands of a wall clock pointed to 8:07.

The bartender eyed us as we passed through, but said nothing. I held my breath, trying to look everywhere at

once and to hear what I couldn't see.

Cedar Street was dark after the bright lights inside. For a moment after we reached the sidewalk I was nearly blind because of the change.

So I didn't actually see it happen.

A heavy gun barked thrice somewhere off in the darkness and Sam Glinn melted from in front of me. Then I heard a car roaring away. Glinn's shoulders jerked against my legs as he died. It all happened in less time than my sight needed for readjustment.

Somebody had spoiled my package of information before I even had a chance to squeeze a single word from him. I was certainly behind the eight ball today. Stopping only long enough to be sure Glinn was past talking, I left him for others to worry over.

A light burned in my father's empty office when I got home, but the house was dark. I went through the rooms, calling Ruth, looking for other lights. There were none. Ruth didn't answer. I returned to the office.

The blue bottle was now on the map, a note tucked underneath. The note, hastily written in Ruth's hand, read:

We got the dame, punk. If you don't drop whatever you're trying and scram—she's dead.

That settled all questions. I might be good enough to rate a position on the Buffaloes, one of the country's best pro elevens. I might even be good enough to beat Sam Glinn's outfit. But I wasn't good enough to outsmart and outfight two mobs at the same time. Not when failure might cost Ruth Borden's life and not do my dead father one damn bit of good.

The odds and the risk were too heavy. I turned to find my suitcase.

Then something about the note struck me as peculiar. The wording was too tough. Even a movie gangster wouldn't dictate such hard-boiled phrases.

I paused, looked at the bottle, *really* looked at it, I mean. Its position on the glass top—on the map—was inten-

tional, meant to tell me something.

And, suddenly, I got the message. . . .

Rankin's plant was a long, low, many-windowed brick building. An ell, jutting off at right angles from the main structure, housed offices and a pharmaceutical laboratory. Windows there were yellow with light, so I went inside.

Jessup P. Rankin, smooth, smiling, was the only person visible in the large office. He bulged over a swivel chair. An unfastened brief case, its mouth toward him, lay on the desk. He held a sheaf of papers, apparently very busy.

"Evening, Mark. I'm just catching up on a little late work. Want to see me?"

"I don't know," I said uncertainly.

Concern, real or assumed, deepened Rankin's voice.

"What is it, son? You're pale."

"Ruth Borden has been kidnapped—by the man who murdered Dad," I said.

"No!"

"Yes. A note threatened her death if I don't stop trying to uncover the murderer."

"That places you in a difficult position," Rankin rumbled. "A very difficult position."

"Especially since I've learned he hired thugs to scare me off, after I've seen him kill one to keep him from talking to me."

RANKIN raised his bushy brows, shook his huge head regretfully.

"Then, my boy, I'm afraid you haven't much choice. Evidently you're up against a desperate man. Therefore, I think I'd advise you to . . ."

I interrupted him. "Ruth left a sort of code message telling me where to find her."

I have never seen a big man move so fast.

Watching Rankin's hands closely, I half expected him to reach for a gun in his pocket. But he fooled me. His heavy caliber pistol was in the briefcase. He had it out and centered on my

belly-button before I fully realized I was finally face to face with the killer.

My luck was still bad. I had overlooked the briefcase entirely.

"I was afraid I'd have to deal with you eventually, Mark," Rankin said.

His lips were now thin blue-gray lines across his teeth.

"I should have suspected you, Rankin, the moment you started blowing so loud about friendship," I said.

Rankin, his eyes hard as granite, stepping as if he walked on hot coals, came around his desk and frisked Glinn's rod from my coat. Then, keeping me carefully covered, he flipped a band of adhesive tape around my wrists with his left hand.

I didn't resist. He had the drop.

When my arms were bound to his satisfaction, Rankin moved back a pace.

"You're no wiser than your father, Mark. Each of you had to know beyond a doubt I was the man before you'd call in the police."

"You always were envious of Dad because his firm turned out finer products than yours," I said.

"So?"

"So," I told him, "some people are dead or dying. Others will die unless they're warned. You must have been extremely jealous of Dad to go to such lengths to discredit his concern."

Rankin lifted his pistol slightly.

"You talk too damn much, Shane," he snapped. "Business is business."

"It can also be murder—your way."

Rankin gave me marching orders then with his gun muzzle. He wagged toward a door with a frosted glass panel. I went into the laboratory, Rankin about three feet behind.

By myself I could never have found Ruth Borden. She was concealed in a cramped mop closet at the rear of the paraphernalia-filled lab, bound securely. Her eyes were wide, frightened, but she was not panicky.

Each of us tried to smile confidence for the other.

Rankin, his weapon always ready, re-

(Continued on page 108)



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(Continued from page 107)

leased Ruth's ankles. Then, grim, not wasting words, he herded the two of us ahead of him, into the main plant.

Only dim night lights were burning there. Long waist-high vats for the manufacture of commercial acids chopped the floor space into narrow aisles. A sharp acid tang stung our nostrils. Rankin was taking no chances, this time, of leaving a body around for someone to check on. "I'm sorry I got you into this, Ruth," I said.

"Maybe you'll get me out, you mean."

Rankin's laugh was short, nasty.

"Like hell!" he said. "Move."

He forced us to walk down an aisle to a vat lower than the rest. It was brim-full of an oily liquid. "This is as far as you go," Rankin said.

Large carboys, in their wooden cases, were ranged at one end of the tank. Ruth Borden sank to one. I sat beside her.

"Perhaps you're not so eager to settle the matter now," Rankin gloated.

I started to get to my feet, but Ruth Borden nudged me sharply with her elbow. Her voice was cool.

"Mark, at least you might tell me what this is all about."

I couldn't see her face in the dimness, yet I knew exactly how it looked, exactly what she expected me to do. As long as we could stave off Rankin's bullets, there was some small hope.

"What's the use?" I said dejectedly, staring down at the acid vat.

Rankin's fat features were only a pale blob, indistinct, but I caught his grin out of the corner of my eye. He was acting just as I wanted him to.

"You do know?" Ruth's words were edged with uneasiness. She was not certain, I understood.

I pressed my shoulder against hers.

"No, but I've guessed. I read a newspaper item this afternoon, and I saw the remains of a test in Dad's office—"

"Go on, tell her what you've guessed," Rankin jeered. The big hunk

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of lard was actually enjoying himself. "She can't hurt anybody, no matter what she knows."

It was hard to sit still and let him crow, but he was beyond reach. He had a gun. I was tied.

"Dad put out a new drug," I said, "which has recently gotten lots of publicity. It's in a liquefied form. Other pharmaceutical chemists had succeeded in marketing the drug only in solid form. My father found a solvent. But Rankin, greedy as he is"—Rankin snorted but didn't interrupt—"couldn't bear the thought of another firm, especially one which had always done better than his, beating him. Somehow, by bribing some employees, he substituted a poisonous drug in the wares of Dad's concern. People who used the drug would die. And, because the counterfeit drug bore Dad's trademark, his products would be discredited and government men would arrest him. Rankin would have a clear field for his own products then.

"But my father learned of the substi-

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tution, analyzed the poisonous drug, and traced it to Rankin. He intended to make his discovery public, call back the few bottles already sold. So Rankin killed him, and destroyed any evidence he may have collected.

"Then, when I bobbed up, Rankin had to get rid of me some way. You see, he realized the same things which had led my father to suspect him would lead me to suspect him sooner or later."

I wasn't sure of even half I had said. Still, most of it seemed to strike Rankin in a tender spot. My guesses were at least close to the mark. He stopped being patient, took a step toward us. That was what I wanted.

"Now he's going to kill you and me," I said, "and find out how good his com-
 (Concluded on page 110)

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(Concluded from page 109)

mercial acid is. He's a louse all the way through!"

"He is!" Ruth Borden said.

Rankin snarled, came closer.

"There's one point you left out!"

"I'm all ears," I said.

Rankin bent slightly. "Nobody else will ever hear your story," he greeted.

His pistol came up. So did my foot, but first it swept through the acid vat. The corrosive liquid splashed into Rankin's doughy face, like a kid splattered in a swimming hole. Rankin, though, bellowed louder than any water-soaked kid. He was in pain.

Rankin's gun spat until it was empty. But I had knocked Ruth to the floor behind the carboys, sprawled beside her myself. And Rankin was firing blindly. I lay quiet until I was certain his weapon no longer held ammunition, hating to think what the acid was doing to my foot.

Then we led Rankin back to his laboratory, found an emolient for his face and my foot, and called the police. I told them first to broadcast a warning to all distributors and possible consumers of the poison drug, then come after their prisoner.

"I suppose," Ruth Borden remarked tentatively, while we waited, "now that it's all over you'll be going back to football."

I looked at her bright hair, her handsome gray eyes. I grinned.

"No," I said, "I'm through with football. I'll have to get my degree and pick up Dad's business, so you'll have a job."

Smiling, Ruth pretended doubt. "Are you sure I'll be satisfactory?"

"You bet," I told her. "Not to mention other important qualifications, you're smart, very smart."

Ruth sobered, looked puzzled.

"You proved it," I said, "when you used the bottle to build a smokestack for Rankin's factory on the map, so I'd know where to find you."

We didn't mind when the cops came in, grinning broadly at what they saw.

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CALLING THE GHOST

A DEPARTMENT FOR READERS

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In short, we want you to know and like all the characters who move through George Chance's memoirs, as we do. To us they are not mere shadowy, fictional figures, but real human beings.

We think that those of you who have followed the career of the Ghost from the first are beginning to feel the same way about it. One evidence of that is the splendid reception you have given the magazine right from the start. We have every reason to believe that more
(Continued on page 112)

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(Continued from page 111)
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The Next Memoir

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Here is a case which tries the Ghost's mettle to the utmost. All his magical talents and criminological powers are enlisted in its solution. The fidelity of his aides is tested in the crucible of the dangers he runs.

Be on hand to shiver when the corpse laughs, and to thrill when the Ghost gets going on the trail of a murder that is no laughing matter—THE CASE OF THE LAUGHING CORPSE!

Our Mailbag

And now for a few letters from readers. Here's a kind one from a chap who doesn't forget that our magazine, in addition to the Ghost novels, also runs short stories of special merit.

Dear Editor:

I have just finished PAYOFF IN LEAD and GUNS DON'T LIE, the last two stories in the first issue of THE GHOST. Although the main story was of course CALLING THE GHOST, I want to express my pleasure in reading these two short ones also.

Is George Chance a real name? You state him as being the author of the Ghost stories. Is the author taking the name of George Chance after the story or did he name the hero George Chance after himself?

How often is this magazine coming out? I hope often. The first issue was a peach. Keep it up.

Viva la Ghost,
JIM RINGO,
1140 Lawn Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

We know that Jim's question is in the minds of many of our readers. But the main question, don't you think, is not the identity of the author of the Ghost novels—what is really important is the pleasure you get in reading them, regardless of who it is that writes them! And thanks, Jim, for your comment on the short stories.

Dear Editor:

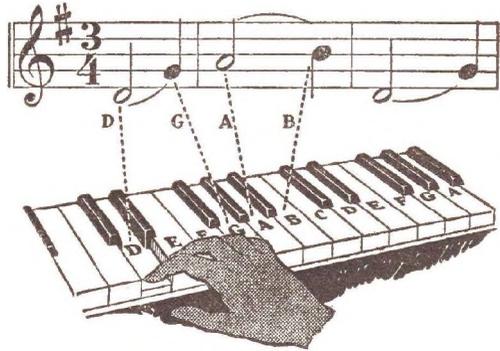
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