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GOLD SEAL **DETECTIVE**

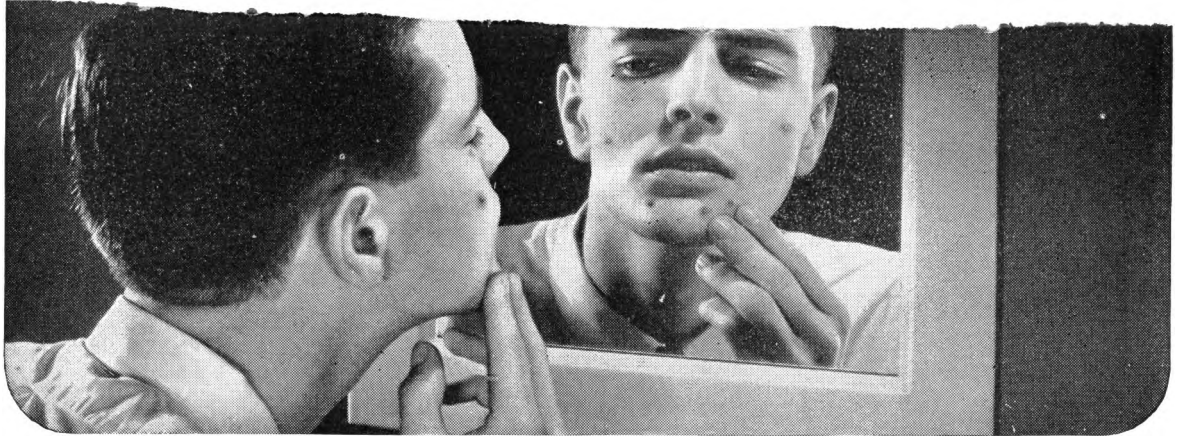
ROUGH-EM-UP RADIGAN

By
**CLARK
AIKEN**

Also
**G-MAN
JUSTICE**



**NIGHTSTICK
NEMESIS**
*"Barney Dall"
Novelette*
By **FREDERICK
C. PAINTON**



**A new crop
of pimples was
always taking
the joy out
of things!**



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WRONG, TED?
YOU LOOK
ALL WASHED
UP!

DON'T I KNOW IT! I
WOULD HAVE TO GET
A FLOCK OF CHIN
BLOSSOMS JUST WHEN
I WANT TO MAKE
A GOOD IMPRESSION
ON SALLY



IF THAT'S ALL-- CHEER UP!
I MEANT TO TELL YOU SIS
SAID TO TRY FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST -- 3 CAKES A
DAY, AND
PIMPLES
VAMOOSÉ

HONESTLY?
THEN IT'S
FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST FOR
ME -- IN A
HURRY



2 WEEKS LATER

HELLO, TED--
WHERE HAVE
YOU BEEN
THESE PAST
TWO WEEKS?

OH, JUST OUT
LOOKING TO
MAKE SURE THERE WERE
NO GIRLS AS PRETTY AS
YOU--AND THERE
AREN'T!



GREAT LADY-KILLER--
NOW THAT HIS FACE IS
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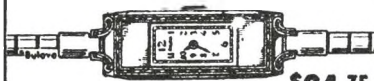
—clears the skin

**by clearing skin irritants
out of the blood**

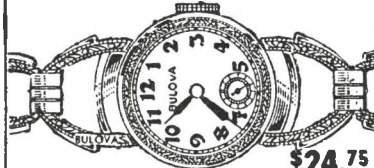
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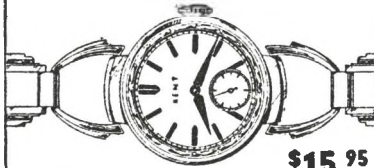
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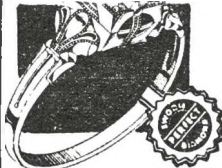
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The juggernaut of justice swings his crime-crushing machine against a vicious murder quartette, following a trail that is marked by red blood and a yellow streak—only to slam his way to a trap and be checkmated by a friend.

THE DEATH PAROLE DAVID M. NORMAN 31
Officer Dan swore that he would get any man who killed Robert Reade, a criminal he had to admire. Yet Reade is killed—during a two-hour period when Dan sat watching the man he is sure must have committed the murder.

The Next Big Issue of GOLD SEAL DETECTIVE 40

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NIGHTSTICK NEMESIS (Novelette) FREDERICK C. PAINTON 60
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WHILE THE HOT SEAT WAITS (Novelette) NORMAN A. DANIELS 90
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Rough-'Em-Up



Rough-'Em-Up Radigan—juggernaut of justice—swung his crime-crushing machine against a vicious murder quartette. Red blood and a yellow streak marked their trail—the red blood of an old watchman—and the yellow streak of a copper who cracked in the face of gunfire. But Chief Radigan slammed his way to a craven-baited trap—to be checkmated by a friend he had trusted.

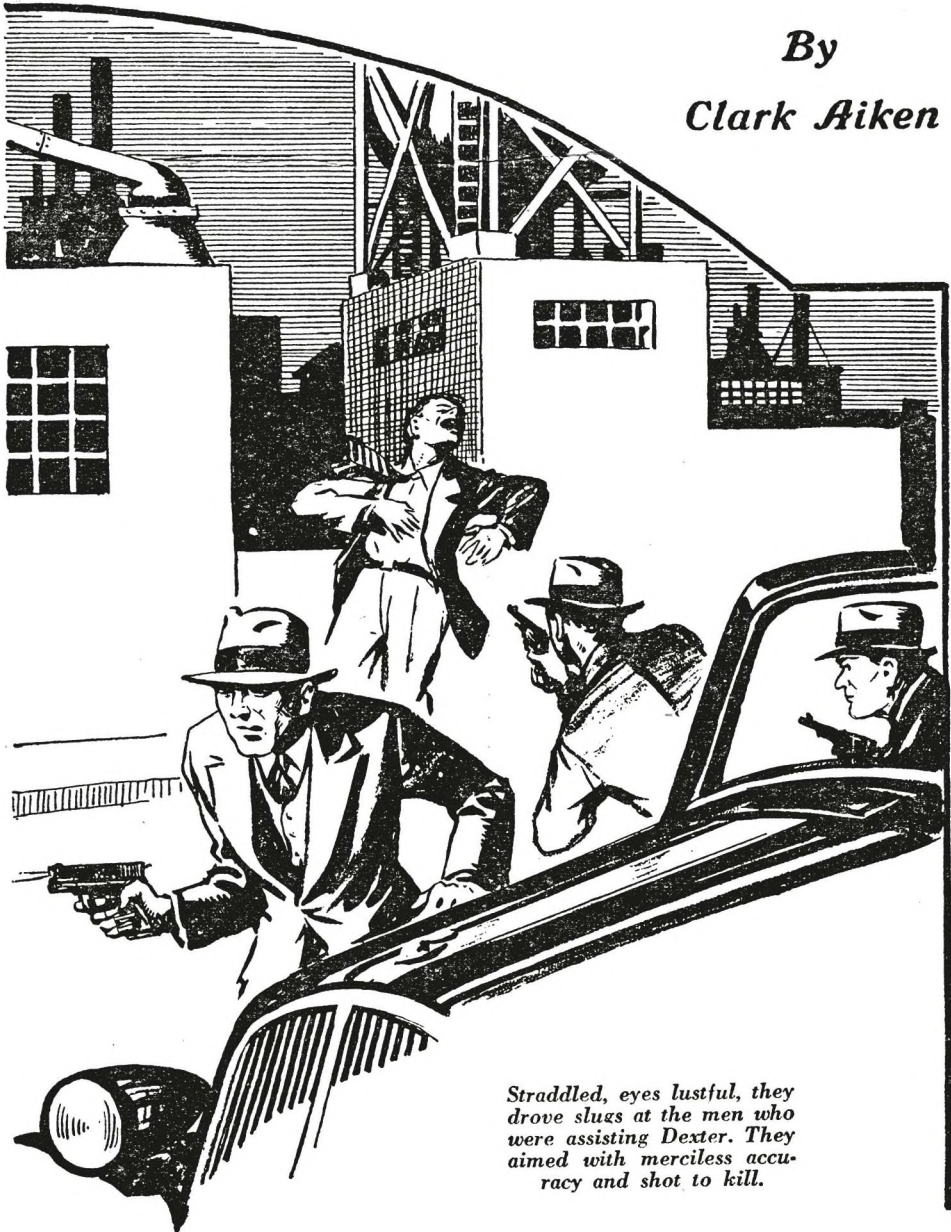
CHAPTER I SUICIDE SECRET

THE Super-power Explosives Plant sprawled like a giant asleep inside the spiked mesh fence that angled for miles along the

cindered river bank. The windows of a low-roofed el shone brightest in the checkered pattern of dim glass, casting a glow across the few cars remaining parked within the barricade. The cars were empty—except one. Four men huddled in the lightless

Radigan

By
Clark Aiken



Straddled, eyes lustful, they drove slugs at the men who were assisting Dexter. They aimed with merciless accuracy and shot to kill.

sedan stationed near the gate. Wordless, eyes sharp with the wariness of jungle stalkers, they watched the entrance of the el. Chabat, whose huge head housed the brains of the jackal pack. Barth, one ear bullet-torn, whose hungry gun always barked first

at the prey. Acer, stifling a racking cough, whose hooked nose gleamed like a vulture's beak. Albano, rubbing the itch of his needle-pricked arm, his snaky lips twisted with evil eagerness. They were gripping automatics. They were killers.

In his little wooden hut near the main gate, Mike Nolan, veteran night watchman, yawning while he waited for the last of the late workers to leave the plant, did not dream that death was lurking in the darkness.

Striding square-shouldered along the gloomy sidewalk outside the spiked fence, nightstick twirling, Second Class Patrolman Barrett had no premonition that within a few minutes his ears would pound with the blasting of murderers' guns.

The four gunmen in the dark sedan were watching the entrance of the chemical laboratory of the plant. They had learned that Arthur Dexter, brilliant young director of the research division of Super-power, was working late tonight with his assistant, Sylvia Lane. Forged passes had admitted them to the lot. Bullets would get them out.

The lab door opened quickly, fanning light. Tensing, the quartet of crooks saw two men come out supporting a third between them. The man in the middle, clad in an acid-stained smock, moved with lagging steps, head lolling, eyes exhaustedly closed. He was Dexter.

A girl—she was also clad in a spotted smock— anxiously hurried ahead. While the other two men, gripping Dexter's arms, guided him to a waiting coupé, Sylvia Lane opened its door. Her voice was a frantic whisper:

"Get him home as fast as you can, Walter. I'll call the doctor right away. It's overwork—I knew it would happen!"

In the black sedan, Chabat snapped: "Give it to 'em!"

Three men slipped from the car—Barth, Acer, Albano. Their leering faces shadowed, they glided toward the coupé like panthers. The gritting of their heels in the cinders turned Sylvia Lane. A plea for help was in her mind—but alarm rounded her blue eyes. Her lips parted to utter a cry of warning—but her voice was stifled by cannonading guns.

Three automatics fusilladed at the same instant. The trio of crooks shot without warning. Straddled, eyes lustful, they drove slugs at the two men who were assisting Dexter—men who had no means, no chance, to protect themselves. They aimed with merciless accuracy and shot to kill.

Walter Lawrence spun back against the car, arms outflung, red gushing from his punctured neck. Frank Pike dove against the open door, shouldered down and sprawled. Arthur Dexter, striving to support himself with the last of his failing strength, stumbled forward into the grit. A scream of terror quavered from Sylvia Lane's throat as she retreated, staring at spurting blood.

She whirled and ran—ran crazily into the darkness, her footfalls a confusing echo against the bleak brick wall of the plant.

"Get her!"

Acer sprang past the car, his gun seeking the fleeing girl, while Barth and Albano leaped to Dexter. Brutally Barth kicked one of the fallen men aside. With a snarl, Albano spilled the other off Dexter. Dexter was staring wildly. Barth and Albano clamped his arms, jerked him to his feet. While he stumbled and dragged between them, they swung him to the black sedan.

They heaved him in. He lay panting, dazed. Albano and Barth spun at the sound of heels rapidly crunching on the ground. Acer, his pin-point eyes glittering, was rushing out of the darkness. A second man, revolver in hand, was loping from the direction of the gate. He was the veteran night watchman, Mike Nolan.

Thundering guns drove hailing slugs into Mike Nolan's chest. He wavered to a bent-kneed stop, dragging up the revolver that was suddenly a tremendous weight in his loosening fist. As he strove desperately to pull the trigger, gasping, his strength pouring from the ragged wounds, a second blasting attack withered him. He spilled face down while a racing

engine made a crescendo roar in the night.

The rocketing echoes of gunfire had brought Patrolman Barrett to a startled stop on the sidewalk. The lightning of killer guns flashed as he sped toward the closed gate. Through the mesh he saw a black juggernaut hurtling. It jounced with a ghastly crunching sound over the prone, still body of a man in overalls. It swerved to the gate as Barrett stopped with one hand groping toward his service gat.

Metal clanged. The links of the gate chain broke into fragments hissing through the dark with the speed of bullets. Barrett's gun jerked up as the sedan slammed out.

It wheeled into the street with tires screeching. White-faced, quaking in every muscle, Barrett stood while the killer's automatics flamed at him. He flung himself down at the fence while the death car whizzed.

The cracking reports in the plant yard had dinned against the windows of the office section. A girl dozing at the switchboard had sprung up to see darts of fire spitting in the gloom below. Stunned, eyes widened, she had watched the black sedan smash out and flee along the dark street. Now, heart racing, she spun back to the board and thrust a plug into its socket.

"Police headquarters!" she wailed. "Police—quick, the police!"

The crime-fighting machine of the city sped into high.

"Signal Thirty! Signal Thirty! Calling cars eleven-fifteen and eleven-twenty! Watch Canal Road for black sedan escaping from Super-power plant. License number unknown. Stop suspected car at all costs. Shoot to kill in case of armed attack. Special orders Chief Radigan!"

Radio lightened the alarm from police headquarters—Signal Thirty, a crime of violence!

Sirens wailed into the night along the road that skirted the explosives works. Prowl cars screamed over black tar, through black night, in

search of a black quarry. From two opposite points they raced toward each other, directed by a swiftly formed plan based on the hope that the escaping killers might be trapped between them.

"Signal Thirty! Calling cars twelve-twenty and ten-forty-two! Watch cross roads off Canal for escaping sedan. Further report confirms car contains desperate killers. Block roads and hold positions. Killers have a captive who must be protected but your instructions are—shoot to kill! Special orders Chief Radigan!"

Far out in the night surrounding the great Super-power plant, sirens howled defiance as singing tires sped grim squad patrolmen to their dangerous posts.

"Signal Ninety! Signal Ninety! All wires being kept open. Rush reports. Special orders Chief Radigan!"

Signal Ninety—words that snapped every man on duty to instant alertness. A demand that any suspicious observation, in any part of the city, be flashed to police headquarters at once. An order that swiftly erected thousands of barricades against the fleeing killers—thousands of watchful eyes.

"Signal One Hundred! Signal One Hundred! All radio cars, patrolmen, detectives on duty assigned to Plan X take preappointed stations at once. Complete coverage imperative. Killers fleeing Super-power plant must be stopped if they attempt to leave city. Watch for heavy black sedan carrying at least four men. If they can't be stopped alive, stop them dead. Special orders Chief Radigan!"

In headquarters building, the very air hummed. Nerves snapped tight. Brains speeded. The attack of an armed invader could not have stripped battleship decks for action more swiftly than the bluecoated, crime-fighting forces of the police clicked to the peak of grim efficiency. Thousands of men scattered in the field, warring against predatory criminals. Captains at their

desks, minds sharp, barking orders. Over them all, supreme in command, issuing edicts that whipped his men like the lash of a blacksnake—"Rough-'em-up" Radigan.

Into an office on the first floor of headquarters, where picked plain-clothesmen were always on duty for emergency service, the crackling voice of Chief Radigan had burst by telephone the instant the alarm had flashed:

"Keegan! Get out to Super-power fast as you can travel. Take Jarvis and Fioretti and Deutsch. Close that lot and search it with a microscope. Keep the reporters away—let 'em yelp! Find out about Barrett, the cop on that post who had the tour tonight. What happened to *him*? Why didn't *he* stop that car? And if you grab anybody, Keegan, you know my standing orders. Rough 'em up!"

Radigan slammed the receiver on its prong and rattled his knuckles on his desk. He was a tough-skinned, hard-headed, merciless driver of men who had fought his way from the ranks to the high command of a crime-busting army. He had the husky physique of a fighter, shoulders built for battle, energy that stormed, a mind that hummed like a dynamo never shut down, eyes that packed a power as telling as the force of his fists.

He was the youngest police chief in the United States. He'd driven his way through the whole works. He burned with a driving impatience to get out into the field and grip this case in his own horny hands.

But he couldn't. Not yet. Keegan and the others were at this moment hitting a murder trail with steaming heels but Radigan had to stay back. He was the chief. A score of captains, thousands of men in the field, were depending on him for orders that must keep the organization mobilized.

To abandon his desk now, to leave some important phase untouched, might mean the collapse of the whole case. It might mean a pack of human

wolves winning out against his men. Radigan couldn't see *that* happen. Not Radigan!

FINGERPRINT experts. Official photographers. The Medical Examiner. Human bloodhounds trained to follow certain special scents—men who specialized in preserving footprints as perishable as spider webs, others who might find damning evidence in a grain of dust. All of them had to be dispatched to the scene with special instructions fitting this particular case, and those orders had to come from Radigan.

But when he'd given them, he went! Another chief might have eased back in his swivel chair and considered his job done. Another chief might have stayed at that desk and let "the boys" handle it. Not Radigan. When he slammed the telephone down, he completed what might have been another chief's work, but to Radigan it was only the start.

Fists clenched, square jaw out-shot, his heels hammering down the stairs and to the car he always drove himself, he sped squarely into the middle of a brutal murder case—because that was Radigan's way.

Patrolmen were guarding the broken gate of the Super-power plant. They stepped back for Radigan and Radigan charged through. Detectives were scanning the grounds with flashlights. They trooped to Radigan and Radigan heard their reports—negligible findings. Other men were stooping over two prone bodies. They swung away and Radigan made his own examination.

His eyes—a mild, kindly blue, strangely out of keeping with the toughness of a man like Radigan—grew grimly narrow as he studied Mike Nolan's bullet-pierced body, crushed by the wheels of a weighty car. His face hardened as he examined the two black holes in the forehead of Walter Lawrence, a man who hadn't had a gun. He straightened with Keegan, the most reliable man in

the plainclothes division, talking in his ear:

"The killers snatched the chief research chemist, Arthur Dexter."

Radigan: "Gleckler, put Dexter's description on the radio. Hartig, beat it over to his home. Get busy!"

"Dexter's laboratory assistant, Sylvia Lane, is missing," Keegan went on. "Maybe they got her too."

Radigan: "Gleckler! Same for the girl's description. Madalen, find out where she lives and nail her boy friend. Move, you ox!"

"Frank Pike—works in the time-keeper's office—saw the whole thing," Keegan continued. "Skull broken—couldn't talk much. He's on his way to the Pasteur Foundation now."

Radigan: "MacPhail, chase that ambulance. Camp with Pike. Keep the reporters off. The minute he can talk, phone me personally at headquarters. Get the lead out of your shoes, Mac!"

"The prowls on Canal Road didn't spot any sedan," Keegan's crisp report resumed. "It evidently got through on one of the side roads before the other squad men could block 'em. By this time they've had a chance to get Dexter under cover."

Radigan: "You're telling me that? Radio a repeat on Signals Ninety and a Hundred. Keep this town tight as a drum. If they slip out, I'll have somebody's scalp. Where's Barrett?"

"Barrett's right here."

Radigan turned blazing, wrathful eyes on the young patrolman. Barrett was standing rod-backed, a smart, stalwart man—but white faced. He stared into the sky above Radigan's head because he couldn't meet the scrutiny of Radigan's damning gaze. They confronted each other silently—the merciless taskmaster who expected every man to do his job in the face of any odds, and the agonized cop who had failed his duty.

Keegan drawled on: "Here's his roscoe, chief. I just took it from him. Clean as a whistle. Not a shot fired. He hasn't said yet what cellar he was hiding in."

Radigan rapped: "Barrett, report back to headquarters at once!"

Keegan winced. Jarvis took a hard swallow of air. Fioretti shuddered. Deutsch's head wagged. They were tough men. They had met desperate crooks in many a slamming fist fight. They had been carted off to hospitals crushed and riddled, and lived to take it again. Tough. But every one of them quailed at the lash of the chief's voice. They'd rather confront a cornered, coke-crazed killer, any one of them, than face Rough-'em-up Radigan on the carpet.

CHAPTER II

HARD TALK

RADIGAN stood straddled, big hands clenched behind his back, thick arms tendoned. His piercing gaze, passing from eye to eye, challenged the plainclothesmen who faced him. They were the best detectives in the division. This was the "war council room" in police headquarters. This was a council of war.

Radigan's words clicked. "We're going killer hunting. The rats we want murdered two men tonight without giving them a ghost of a chance. They fatally wounded a third. Maybe they've got the girl with 'em. They snatched a man who was too sick even to stand up. They've holed in somewhere, but we're going to find 'em. Until we've got those killers, every one of us is a twenty-four-hour cop."

Radigan didn't say "you." He said "we" and "us." Radigan was in on this job.

"You know my orders. You're bound by thirteen hundred rules and regulations, and I'll have the scalp of any man who flaunts 'em—but don't coddle crooks! You're officers of the peace, men of honor and integrity. But violence is the only law those rats know! If they don't get what we mean when we tell 'em to come along easy, we begin speaking the only language they understand—gun talk. When it comes to bullets, there's one cardinal

rule we follow to the letter. On this man's police force, *the cop shoots first!*"

Radigan's eyes whipped every word home.

"We're going out to find Dexter and Sylvia Lane, and it's our job to bring 'em back safe. We're going out to raid a rats' nest of killers, and whether they arrive here dead or alive, we're going to bring 'em back. That's your job and my job, and we're not stopping until we've done it. Now get out of here! Get busy!"

Radigan's blunt jaw squared while the detectives filed from the room, but when he turned to the door his blue eyes were soft. He muttered to himself: "I love those guys."

TWO men were waiting at his desk—men with drawn faces, worried eyes, tight brows. Radigan's gesture folded them into chairs. He glared across the desk and said:

"Those rats are smart. We're doing our damndest to smell 'em out, but so far we've found nothing but herrings. Here's a statement from Frank Pike, just telephoned from the hospital. I dope it out that the crooks behind this job are after something special."

Guy Gaylord, president of the board of directors of Super-power, asked in bewilderment: "What could it be?"

Radigan told him. "What about the automatics and Tommy-guns crooks use? And the tear gas bombs and dynamite? Where do they get 'em? The answer is, dealers in illegal weapons. The rat I'm out to get is some Master at Arms of Crookdom."

Wallis Camp, treasurer of the explosives manufacturing plant, said breathily: "Then they were after the formula for Trinite!"

Radigan demanded: "What's Trinite?"

"The newest explosive developed in our research lab," Gaylord explained. "It's more powerful than any other. The remarkable thing about it is that the direction of its force can be per-

fectly controlled and concentrated. It's such valuable munitions material that we've agreed with the War Department to keep the composition strictly secret and to restrict its sale under federal regulation. In the hands of crooks, it would become a devastating weapon."

Radigan said flatly: "They were after the formula for Trinite. Dexter knew it—and Sylvia Lane?"

"Yes, both of them," Camp revealed. "Dexter developed Trinite. With Miss Lane's help. They both know the formula. They were concluding a series of tests tonight to determine its exact physical properties." Camp's eyes widened in dismay. "Their game is perfectly clear. They intend to force Dexter or Miss Lane to reveal the secret."

Radigan's fist slammed down. "Certainly! Big money in it—selling the stuff to any crook with the price. That means broken banks, stolen millions, more terror spread by racketeer rats, scores of deaths. It's a murder breeder. What happened to Dexter tonight?"

Because Camp and Gaylord were puzzledly silent, the chief read from the report that had been telephoned in: "Collapsed in the lab. Went down all of a sudden while talking with Miss Lane. She called help. Pike and Lawrence were going to take Dexter home. Looked like a nervous breakdown." Radigan glared up. "Filthy trick! Snatching a man in that condition!"

Gaylord suggested: "Overwork. Dexter was going at it too hard, trying to complete the final tests. He was in the lab day and night, with scarcely any sleep, for several weeks back. We tried to get him to take some rest, but he wouldn't. That's serious, Chief Radigan. He needs medical attention—"

Radigan snarled. "Do you think those killers will give it to him? They want what he knows. They'll torture him to get it, sick as he is. Once they learn it, they'll kill him!"

Fury lined Radigan's face and his blunt fingers whitened on the edge of the desk. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, that crooks like this pack have only one life. They can kill again and again—but the law can fry them only once. They deserve cooking a hundred times and I wish to God I could do it with my own hands!"

An explosive sound jerked Gaylord and Camp to their feet—the snapping of the latch as the corridor door flashed open. Keegan, striding in, thrust a small black notebook at Radigan. The chief took it eagerly and flipped leaves bearing cabalistic symbols as Keegan's report crackled:

"Just found it behind a waste barrel in the far corner of the Super-power grounds, chief. Chemical formulas or something. It's got Sylvia Lane's name on it."

Radigan, thrusting the notebook at Gaylord, asked quickly: "Know this? Valuable stuff?"

Gaylord wagged a negative. "Important to her, no doubt, but not to the plant. I often saw her consulting it in the lab. How did it get there behind—"

"They didn't snatch the girl! That must be the answer. Evidently she went out of the lab in a hurry, helping Dexter, probably with this notebook in her pocket. Ran when the shooting started. Hid behind the waste barrel—dropped the book. Crooks didn't have time to hunt for her in the dark. She must have slipped out later." Radigan whipped the book back and thumbed the cam of the dictograph machine on his desk.

Keegan asked blankly: "Where is she? Why hasn't she shown up?"

Radigan rasped into the instrument: "Get Sylvia Lane's home. Find out if they've heard from her. Call everybody who knows her. Special attention to her boy friends. If she's not back yet, flash all radio cars to look for her. Not to be placed under arrest but bring her to headquarters as a material witness." He snapped the cam down, his eyes up and declared:

"We need that girl's testimony to crack this case. Go after it, Keegan!"

Keegan hastened into the adjoining office to supervise the telephonic search for Sylvia Lane. Gaylord and Camp were looking hopelessly baffled when Radigan turned to them.

"We're on the job. We're doing everything we can. I'm a busy man, gentlemen. Good night."

While the two Super-power officials went out, Chief Radigan stood tight-muscled at the desk, big hands flat on it, peering at a police positive lying on the blotter. It was the gun that had been assigned to Second Class Patrolman Barrett. It made Radigan's lips curl. It set the veins in his thick neck to throbbing. Suddenly he strode to the door of the adjoining office and snapped it open.

"Come in here!"

BARRETT strode white faced to the desk. He stood erect, lips pinched. Radigan's eyes blazed with unconcealed contempt.

"What have you got to say for yourself, Barrett?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"'Sorry'!" The word was an explosion. "Tonight those crooks shot to kill, and they did kill. They didn't hesitate to use their guns. You were there, you were the police. Your job was to stop them. There's your gun, Barrett. Perfectly clean. Still full of bullets. You didn't even pull the trigger. You let a pack of filthy, cowardly killers commit murder and get away with it. And you say you're sorry!"

The whiteness of Barrett's face grew stark.

"My men have got to be *tough*, Barrett. They've got to be *fighters*. You know why. There are half a million armed criminals in this country today, a merciless band bigger than the United States Army. There are twelve thousand crooks dangerous enough to be listed as Public Enemies. Take a walk down the street and one person out of every twenty-five you pass has

a police record. Those are facts. That's why we've got to fight. We uphold the law and abide by the regulations, but we use the crooks' own weapons.

"Guns, Barrett. Guns like the killers used tonight. Guns like the one you had in your hand when they went right past you leaving death behind them." The scathing scorn in Radigan's voice! "And you didn't even pull the trigger!"

"May—may I explain, sir?"

"Explain!" Radigan rasped. White cords drew tight in his neck. "Go back to Mike Nolan and explain to him. You'll find him in the morgue. Go back to Walter Lawrence. He's got a widow and two children you can tell your alibi to. We're going to find those killers and when we do there'll be a fight. Some of my men are going to take it standing up. Explain to them, Barrett—they'll understand they wouldn't have those bullets burning in their guts if you'd done your job!"

Radigan's knuckles rattled the desk. "Can you face 'em, Barrett? How do you feel now, thinking of the men who have to corner those killers because you didn't? We don't fight crooks by explaining! We don't duck for cover when their bullets start coming. *The cops on my force shoot first!*"

Barrett forced out: "I understand, sir—I'm broken." He rushed on as Radigan straightened grimly: "I tried to do it, sir—I tried with all my soul—but I couldn't! I wish—I wish now they'd put a bullet in *my* guts. I'd rather be lying on a slab in the morgue right now, where Mike Nolan is, sir—than take this!" There were stinging tears in Barrett's eyes. "I'd sell my soul, sir, if—if I could be a man like you."

Rough-'em-up Radigan's thick shoulders eased down. The stony hardness of his mouth melted. The contemptuous blaze of his eyes softened to compassion. "If I could be a man like you," Barrett had said. Tough. A merciless driver. A crime-fighting machine. An inhuman bully constantly whipping his men—men he loved.

A man like Radigan, Barrett wanted to be that!

"I'd sell my soul—"

Keegan was in the room. Radigan hadn't seen the door open; hadn't heard Keegan come in. He was looking into the acid tears in Barrett's agonized eyes. He was feeling the torture searing Barrett's heart. Deep inside that stony shell of his, it hurt—but he couldn't let that matter. Barrett was on the carpet for failing police duty. The hardness came back to Radigan's mouth. His face was again a mask of contempt when Keegan began to talk:

"Sylvia Lane hasn't any family, chief. She lives alone in a little one-room apartment. None of her friends has heard from her. She's still missing. Wherever she is, there's only one lead."

Radigan, his eyes still condemning Barrett, answered tightly: "That girl's smart."

"Smart?"

"Sure. When the bullets started flying, she beat it, but not because she was afraid. She knew right away what those killers were after. She realized they wanted her as much as Dexter. She's keeping out of sight now because, if she shows herself, the crooks might make another try to grab her. That girl's got a job—protecting the secret formula—and she's doing it. She's got nerve, and she's smart."

Barrett winced.

Keegan went on: "I figure she'd let somebody know where she is, chief—whoever's closest to her. Her boy friend. I'd bet a lot of money he knows where she is right now."

Radigan: "Bring him in!"

"No need to bring him in, chief," Keegan said tersely. "He's already in. He's right here—the man you're looking at, Barrett."

RADIGAN'S jaw clenched. He came around the desk. His eyes were gimlets boring unspeakable contempt into Barrett. His fists became lumps as Keegan went on:

"I found that out from the girl's landlady. A pretty little romance, chief. The beautiful girl and the handsome cop. Barrett's had the night shift of the Super-power tour quite a while. Sylvia Lane often waited in the lab until he went off duty so he could take her home. But the big, brave policeman didn't take her home tonight."

Radigan rasped at Barrett: "Is that straight?"

"We—we're going to be married, sir," Barrett mumbled.

The veins in Radigan's temples swelled and pounded. "You must have seen her come out of the lab. She screamed. You must have recognized her voice. How did you know those killers hadn't shot her down? How did you know she wasn't in that car? You didn't! The girl you're engaged to marry! And you didn't fire a shot!"

The torment in Barrett held him silent. Radigan's fists trembled with an impulse to drive them into Barrett's white face. Keegan, voice rasping with scorn, went on:

"I happen to know Barrett got a telephone call while he was waiting in the next office, chief. The Phone Sarge says it was a girl's voice, sort of breathless. Maybe it was Sylvia Lane. Maybe we'd better ask Barrett about that."

Radigan snapped: "Where's that girl?"

A rush of words spilled from Barrett's lips. "Give me a chance to explain! You don't know how I have come to feel about guns—how I hate them. Every time I look at one now, my blood turns to ice. Can you understand that? Every time I touch one, just the feel of it paralyzes me. They mean blood—and death. I can't stand it any more!"

Radigan demanded: "Where's Sylvia Lane?"

"Look at my record! It'll tell you how I used to use my gun. It'll show you I'm a murderer—a killer as much as any crook. What does it matter if I'm wearing a police uniform? I've

killed men! Can this badge keep me from having it on my conscience—the blood I've spilled—the lives I've blasted out with a gun? I can see 'em—every time I close my eyes—the men I've shot—dying!"

Radigan rasped: "Where's the girl?"

"You'll find it all in my record! But the pictures aren't there—the pictures I can't forget. Blood spurting out of a man's neck. Another with one eye gone—drilled out by my bullet. Still another with his head broken like it had been hit with a cleaver. I did that. I did it all—with that gun. When Sylvia screamed tonight, I knew I couldn't keep it up. I can't go on killing—killing!"

Barrett's trembling forefinger pointed to the police positive on Radigan's desk.

"It makes me sick to look at it. That gun I had to carry every day. The gun I was supposed to use tonight. I wasn't thinking of killers getting away. They were human beings who could shed blood and die with bullets in them. I was remembering—"

Radigan's big hand trapped Barrett's arms. He shook Barrett until Barrett's teeth clicked. He smashed Barrett back against the wall.

"Where's Sylvia Lane?"

Barrett straightened in agony. "She's hiding—you can't make me tell you where. She saw somebody following her. She knows they're after her. If they find her, they'll torture her." His fists closed. "She's safe now, but she won't be if you try to get her out of there. They'll—"

Radigan's hand, heeling against Barrett's chin, forced the patrolman's head against the wall. "All right—they're after her. She'll be safer here in headquarters than anywhere else! She's a witness. She saw the murders committed. We need her testimony. Without it, we don't stand a chance of convicting this pack of killers. I've got to know where that girl is and get her here!"

Barrett challenged: "What'll you do? You'll signal prowl cars to pick her up, or you'll go there yourself. I tell you, they're trying to find her—they're watching. You'll lead them right to her. What if they use a machine gun to get her away from you? What'll prevent her being hit—killed? Haven't I got enough on my soul already, without that?"

Radigan's fist crashed. The jolt flattened Barrett against the wall. He stretched up, eyes closed, lips working. Red seeped onto them. The glitter in the trickling blood was fragments of tooth enamel. Radigan loathed himself and cursed himself when Barrett eased down—because Barrett was smiling.

"That's not a gun. I can take that. You want to find out where Sylvia is? Hit me again, sir—keep on hitting me—but I won't tell you."

Contempt for himself sawed at Radigan's heart. "You're not striking back because it's insubordination—against the rules. That right, Barrett? What do you care? You're broken already, aren't you? Suppose I hit you again and keep on hitting you—you're not going to talk. Are you, Barrett?"

"No, sir!"

Radigan's chin squared. "I'm going to find out where that girl is! The whole case depends on it, Barrett! You said those crooks are trying to find her. Suppose they get to her before we do? They'll torture her, force her to give up the secret formula, then kill her. Do you want that to happen? Don't you realize we can't waste time getting her statement as an eyewitness? I want that girl safe as much as you do, Barrett! Tell me where she is!"

"No, sir."

Radigan's huge fist raised to smash again—but he held back the blow. He spun with shoulders hunched. His heels hammered out of the office and down the stairs. Barrett stood motionless, face haggard, his tongue creeping across his salty lips, until

Radigan's thumping footfalls came back. When the chief came in, he had a round sphere of glass in his fist.

"Get over there!"

He grabbed Barrett's tunic, spun Barrett out of his office and across the hall. He snapped open the door of a deep, windowless supply closet and thrust Barrett into it. As Barrett drew up dizzily, the glass ball shot from Radigan's hand. It crashed to the floor. White fumes clouded up. Radigan slammed the door, closed the lock, clenched the key in his hot palm.

"When you've had enough of that tear gas, Barrett," he growled through the panels, "when you're ready to tell me where Sylvia Lane is, just let me know."

A hacking cough came out of the closed room. Radigan heard it repeated while his face twisted with pain. He knew how it was torturing Barrett. Gas burning into his throat and lungs. Scalding, uncontrollable tears pouring from his smarting eyes. Each breath an agony. Radigan felt the torment as keenly as though he were locked into that suffocating gas with Barrett; felt it because his job demanded he do this brutal thing to a man he could not blame. But he kept the key in his corded fist.

"I've got to find out where she is!" he promised himself. "I've got to do that. God, why didn't he tell me?"

His heels drove hard as he strode away.

CHAPTER III

DEATH'S ADDRESS

A HOLLOW hum sang into the partitioned space—the exhaust of an automobile muffled by brick walls. It came from below, up an oil-blackened ramp. The walled-in section was on the second level of the service garage. A bolt sealed its door. Black paint blinded the windows. A shadeless bulb glared on the greasy ceiling. Four men were in the room—four for whom thousands of police were searching.

Chabat, huge head topping a frame of skeletal thinness, sat staring. Acer hacked out a dry cough and angrily spat. Barth, fury reddening his bullet-ripped ear, crouched over the cot that stood against the whitewashed bricks. His claw hand clutched the shoulder of the wan-faced man who exhaustedly lay there. Arthur Dexter's eyes were vacant of all expression, even fear.

Barth shook Dexter brutally. "You can't get away with that! You can't sham on me. You're goin' to talk! Start givin' it to us. I said *start!*" His palm cracked across Dexter's face and Dexter shrank with pain, his cheek livid.

"That's just a sample, bud," Acer snarled. "We ain't got warmed up yet. Ever have needles run in under your fingernails? We know lots of nice little tricks. This is another one. You're goin' to like this."

He gripped Dexter's shoe and twisted, bending the ankle back like a hinge. Dexter moaned in agony while Acer leered with sadistic pleasure. Bones crunched in Dexter's ankle before Acer loosened his lean hands and reached for a cigarette. Dexter lay gasping, shaken with a shudder.

Chabat, huge head bowed as though it were too heavy for his scrawny muscles to support, watched and smiled.

Barth took off his coat. "Guess I better get to work," he said. He was rolling his sleeves when Dexter elbowed up. A vague expression of mystification crossed Dexter's bloodless face. Four men turned cold eyes on him as he asked:

"Why are you doing this to me? Where am I? How did I get here?"

ACER sneered and said: "That's part of the act."

"We're askin' the questions," Barth snapped. "You're goin' to do the answerin'. It's about somethin' called Trinite. Ever hear of it before?"

Dexter sighed: "No."

Acer pointed a contemptuous thumb at the man on the bed: "That's good, ain't it?" Barth laughed mockingly: "What's the matter with that mug?"

Chabat's breath came faster as his smile faded. He heaved himself out of the chair, gasping: "Wait a minute." He gripped Dexter's arms, stared into Dexter's hollow eyes.

"What's your name?"

Dexter looked surprised. Surprise quickly mounted to terror. Terror faded to baffled wonderment. Dexter answered in a whisper: "I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know your own name!"

"I—can't—remember."

"Where do you work?"

"I don't know that, either."

"Where do you live?"

"I don't—remember."

"You never heard of anything called Trinite?"

"Not that I recall."

Chabat went back to his chair. His three henchmen had ceased glowering at Dexter and were staring at him. A silent half minute passed while Chabat's eyes glinted. He was their brains. They waited while he thought for them.

"If you boys ever get to thinking you're smarter than I am, just remember this." His dry lips formed a thin smile. "He's not faking. If we turned him loose right now, he couldn't find his way home. We could work on him within an inch of his life and he couldn't tell us. It's called amnesia."

Dexter was listening with pathetic intentness.

"Loss of memory," Chabat went on, his voice a husky whistle. "You heard it on the radio, the way he collapsed in the lab tonight. You saw him being taken to the car, all gone. Working too hard. It's in his mind, what we want to know, but he can't get it out. He can't remember."

Barth blurted: "What the hell are we goin' to do?"

"We're going to treat him nice. He needs lots of sleep and rest, and he's

going to get it. He's got to have somebody to take care of him right. He's going to be handled just like what he is, a million dollar baby."

Acer snapped: "What about the girl? She knows as much as he does. She hasn't gone off the nut, like him."

"Listen, I do the thinking around here. I'm telling you, it's not insanity. It's a temporary condition. In a little while he'll be all right. Soon as he feels better, we'll go to work. Maybe he won't feel so good again afterward, but we've got to wait. Call up a nurse, Barth. We want a nurse to take care of him. The best nurse in town."

Chabat heaved up again. His claw hand pushed Dexter down to the soiled pillow. Again his parchment lips became a mummy smile. "Now, you just take it easy. You're going to come around fine. Don't worry about anything. Better get some sleep. If there's anything you want just ask for it. Anything at all."

He signaled Barth and Acer out and snapped off the glaring light. Following them, he looked back to see Dexter settling exhaustedly. Very gently he closed the door. A sub-machine gun stood in the corner of this adjacent partitioned space, another squalid bedroom. They stood listening to footfalls sounding on the cement floor beyond.

Barth's automatic looked up until a code knock sounded, then lowered its gaze. Acer cautiously slid the bolt. Albano shouldered in, sniffing, rubbing his needed arm. His pin-point eyes gleamed avidly at Chabat. He said with a triumphant cackle:

"I spotted her."

Barth exclaimed: "We need that dame! It might be too long before Dexter's able to talk. Anyway, we've got to use her to check against what Dexter says. We've got to screw out of this town. Ain't that so, Chab?"

Albano rushed on: "You had the right hunch, Chab. It worked out perfect. Like you figured, she took a bus after she slipped out of the Super-

power yard. I kept askin' all the bus drivers, sayin' I was a dick from headquarters. Imagine that? One of 'em told me where she got off. Pinehurst Street. I nosed around—"

"Yes, we want the girl," Chabat interrupted. "We'll go get her. Only we won't use a big black sedan this time. We'll use a little green one."

Barth barked: "I said we've got to screw out of here! Radigan's got this town hot. Just one lead is all he needs. I'm for lettin' Dexter stay in the ice box while we work on the skirt. That'll be faster. We've got to screw out of here before Radigan—"

"Stay with Dexter, Acer," Chabat directed. "Call the nurse and be here when she comes. Once she's in, she stays in. The rest of us have a date with a girl. Before she's through it may turn out to be a *blind* date." His thin body shivered as he chuckled. "You're not worrying about Radigan, are you, Barth?"

"Radigan uses his head."

"So do I. It's good policy to study the strength and weakness of your enemy. Radigan's ours, and we're his. I've done the studying. He's hard as nails on the outside, but tender-hearted as a woman on the inside. He never shows it, but underneath he broods over his men like a mother hen over her chicks."

"When he gets us in front of a gun," Barth said grimly, "he ain't goin' to cry about it."

"There's another thing," Chabat went on with a confident, dry smile. "Give Radigan a lead, and he whips the whole police force into action. He throws out everything he's got. Sometime he might toss it in the wrong direction. That would be a sad mistake for Radigan, wouldn't it? . . . Well, even Radigan can make mistakes. Let's start."

Albano asked breathlessly: "Right now we're goin' after that girl?"

"I said," Chabat cackled, "we've got a date. It's not polite to keep a lady waiting."

RADIGAN sat hunched at his desk. He stared over it, out the door, across the hall, at another door beneath which white fumes wisped. He listened to frantic hammering on the panels—each rap a blow at his heart—and did not move. He heard an agonized voice choke: "Let me out! Oh, God, let me out!" It drilled into his aching brain, but he did not move. He listened and watched that door and hated himself.

He was remembering Barrett's desperate plea: "I'd sell my soul if I could be a man like you." Like *him*? Like Radigan? A merciless bully who was torturing an insubordinate whose only thought was to safeguard the girl he loved?

"I'd kill a man who did that to me," Radigan told himself. "I'd kill him and like it."

A desperate appeal gasped out of the closed room across the hall: "Open the door! I'll take you to where she is—if you'll open the door!"

Radigan jerked up. He moaned "Thank God!" and strode.

Fumes eddied around his feet when he paused at the door. His hand poised with the key as he held himself back. "All right, Barrett. I want to take you out of there, but I've got to know where the girl is."

"I won't tell you that! You can keep me in here till this stuff kills me, but I won't tell you. I'll take you there, you and me alone, because that's safest for Sylvia. I swear I'll take you straight to her. We'll bring her back together."

Radigan growled: "That's a bargain, Barrett."

The key clicked. Radigan swiped the door open. Barrett stood tense on the sill, cheeks gleaming with tears, lips slavering. He stumbled out blindly. He would have spilled down if Radigan had not caught him. The pungency of gas bit into Radigan's lungs as he lifted Barrett. Tears were shining in his eyes as he dragged Barrett into his office—but they were not all brought by the gas.

He slammed the window up. He pushed Barrett into the breeze, stripping off the gas-soaked tunic. He gently sopped Barrett's puffed face with ice water from the cooler. He hovered over the disgraced cop like—like "a mother hen brooding over a chick." Barrett stared up, eyes still streaming tears, shining with grim purpose.

He jerked to his feet and stood swaying. "You're tough and I'm weak. You feel nothing but contempt for me because you're hard and I'm soft. What I told you about guns doesn't mean anything to you, because you would never hesitate to shoot down a crook. 'Shoot first'—that's your creed. You loathe me because I didn't live up to it this time. I don't blame you. I despise myself for it."

Radigan growled, turning away: "I haven't got time to listen to you, Barrett. I'm going out and get that girl."

Barrett gripped his arm. "Being a cop means everything in the world to me, but I'm not a cop any more, I guess. I won't blame you for refusing, but I've got to ask it. I'm begging for another chance."

"Why should I give you another chance?"

"You know what it means—being broken? It's disgrace. Dishonor. I won't be able to face any of my friends on the force—if they're my friends any longer. I won't be able to face Sylvia. I'll lose everything worth living for. All right. I don't expect it. I asked for another chance, that's all."

Radigan's eyebrows beetled. He turned suddenly, scooped the police positive from his desk, thrust it at Barrett. "Take that!" He watched Barrett's hand close on it, cold as the steel it gripped. He about-faced, slammed a closet open, shook one of his tunics from a hook. "Put that on!" He waited, masked in grimness, while Barrett got into it. He stepped close, voice commanding:

"You're getting another chance. You and I are going out to get Sylvia Lane. We're going to bring her in

here. You said something might happen. Maybe it will. If it does, you'll have to use that gun. You've got strict orders, straight from the chief—shoot first and shoot straight. Understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on!"

Radigan led him out. Radigan hunched behind the wheel of his car while Barrett grimly piled in. Radigan's driving was like the man. He listened to Barrett's directions, whipped away from the curb, pressed the accelerator hard, went to his objective by the straightest route, slammed to a stop. He strode past a *For Rent* sign rearing from rank grass, straight to the front of the lightless, dilapidated house.

One foot on the step, he paused. "Easy," he said. He looked along the wall. "Car standing somewhere near here—motor running." Shifting, he searched the gloom of an alley behind a board fence. "Back there. No lights. Might be a necking party. Might not. Watch it, Barrett."

Barrett whispered: "Yes, sir."

"Put yourself between it and the house, but keep out of sight. I'm going in the front door. Got that gun? Where is it? In your holster? It doesn't belong there now! Put it in your fist. Remember orders."

"Yes, sir."

Radigan noted a revulsive twitch of Barrett's shoulders as the gun glittered up, but Barrett held it ready. Radigan watched him go quietly along the walk, pause near the rear gate. Turning back, the chief's eyes narrowed. Radigan crossed the porch, strode straight to the black entrance, gripped the knob.

THE house was silent as a sepulcher, but not empty. In a room flooded with gloom, filled with the mustiness of disuse, two men stood rigid near a door—Barth and Albano. In a far corner, Acer was forcing Sylvia Lane against the wall, one

greasy hand clamped over her mouth. Her eyes went wide with terror as she heard a rattle at the entrance—Radigan coming in.

Albano whispered: "The other one's watching out back."

Barth answered: "Don't make any noise. Don't give Radigan a chance. We'll get the other one in and keep 'em on ice here till we get a chance to screw out of town."

The information gleaned by Albano, the car panting now in the alley, had brought them to this house. They had prowled into it like stalking jackals. They had surprised the fearful girl, blocked her escape, closed their evil hands on her with merciless purpose. Their move to spirit her out of the house had been halted by the appearance of the police car at the front. They had recognized the muscular man leading the way to the door.

Radigan was coming in now. The entrance stood wide before him. He called softly: "Miss Lane!" A shadow movement appeared before him, so vague he could not catch its outlines. He stepped toward it quickly—into a savage attack.

A gun butt swiped at Radigan. He reared back, shot out his left fist, grabbed for the service gat in his hip pocket holster. His knuckles hit his target, but the gun cracked hard at the base of his neck. He stumbled forward. A fist clicked to the side of his jaw. He half spun with the power of the blow; toppled over on gritty bricks. Instantly two men dove on him.

Sharp-nailed fingers circled his neck while other hands fumbled at his pockets. He was crammed into a corner where movement was impossible. The searching fingers dragged a pair of handcuffs from Radigan's left hip pocket. The chill metal encircled Radigan's wrists, clicked tight. He lay panting, brain whirling, while the two men drew up with automatics leveled at him.

"What about the cop in back?"

"He's still there—didn't hear anything."

"Watch him!"

Radigan blinked, seeing Albano in the other corner, pinioning the girl against the wall. The other two men were peering out the back door toward Barrett. A pungent odor filled Radigan's nostrils. He had been flung into a fireplace. A heap of cold, hard-packed ashes was at his back. He strained his fingers toward the revolver he still had, but he knew the weapon was useless to him now.

He couldn't use it while the handcuffs chained his wrists together. If he shouted to warn Barrett, the automatics leveled at him would spit. The crooks, desperate to break away at an alarm, might kill the girl. Radigan wanted her to live to testify against these killers. He kept silent while the two men at the door whispered:

"Maybe headquarters knows they're here. Keeping 'em on ice is no good. They've seen too much." It was Barth, the blood-hungry. "Dead men don't talk."

Acer gasped: "Drill the chief?"

"Drill him! Leave it to me. Not with my gun—they can trace bullets. I'll use his. Where is it?"

Acer blurted an expletive. "I thought you had it! He's still got it!"

Barth's automatic steadied at Radigan as the chief stared. "Get it, Acer. . . . Leave it alone, Chief!"

Radigan was not leaving it alone. A lightning thought urged him to make a quick move behind his back—a move the two killers could not see. He slipped the revolver from its holster. With a push he drove the barrel into the hard-packed ashes. He worked it up and down, cramming the stuff into the muzzle, as Acer glided toward him. He managed to slip the weapon back into the leather before Acer gripped his shoulder and pushed him over.

Acer backed with the police positive. Barth took it, his grin baring stained teeth. With his automatic in his left hand, he put a glove on his

right hand so as to leave no fingerprints and leveled Radigan's gun at Radigan. His orders were a tense whisper:

"Take the girl to the back door. Get set to make a run for it. When I shoot, it's the end of Radigan—then start for the car. Go ahead."

Radigan looked at the gun in Barth's hand. The darkness kept the secret of the ashes packed in the barrel. Albano dragged the girl from the corner, still clamping his hand over her mouth. Acer poised at the back door, ready to snap it open for the rush. Barth kept pointing Radigan's gun at Radigan, grinning.

A whisper: "Chab's still in the car. He's watching that cop. What are you waiting for, Barth?"

Barth said: "Here goes the chief of police."

Radigan howled: "Get that girl, Barrett!"

Barth pulled the trigger. The explosion rocked the room. The gun in Barth's hand burst into jagged pieces while boomeranging fire spat in his face. The packed ashes, obstructing the passage of the bullet, turned the force of the bullet backward. Only the long reach of Barth's arm saved him from taking the charge full in the head. He staggered back, stunned, red streaking from a cut in his face.

"Get that girl, Barrett!"

Radigan heaved up. Acer and Albano were spurting out the back door, dragging the girl with them. As they sprinted toward the back fence, shots cracked. Some of them, Radigan grimly hoped, were Barrett's. He hunched, facing Barth, who was tottering in a daze. He dove with all the power of his legs. Air burst from Barth's lungs. He catapulted back through a door and sprawled.

Radigan planted one foot on the automatic Barth had dropped and reached far around his body, angling a finger into the watch pocket of his trousers. The key of the handcuffs was in there. His pull ripped the cloth. He

got the key. Because window glass was breaking at the rear of the house, he twirled around to the wall. Feverishly he worked the key into the socket of one cuff and twisted it.

The cuff came open. Radigan grabbed up the automatic.

THE back door was open—Barth was gone. The darkness behind the house was rocketing with guns. Radigan dove toward it.

"Barrett!" he bawled. "Barrett!"

An engine was roaring in the alley. A broad shadow was flowing beyond the fence. Gun flame leaped from it before it blurred from sight behind the shed. Shots whistled around Radigan, tore at his cheek, his side, but did not stop him. Radigan crashed through the rear gate. The car vanished in the street beyond with Radigan's slug chasing it.

Two shots cracked beside him. Frozen with wrath, he watched. Barrett was huddling against the shed wall. His face was deathly white. His eyes were closed. He was shaking as if with a convulsion. He was pulling the trigger a third time, gat pointing wild, when Radigan laughed. That harsh, bitter, contemptuous burst opened Barrett's eyes.

"Even a *good* cop," Radigan, snarled, "can't shoot around corners."

Radigan kicked the gate open. Windows were sliding open all around the vacant house. Curious heads were poking out. Men more excitable than prudent were hurrying out their front doors. Radigan trudged to the closest. He thrust aside a chattering woman who was clasping a wailing child in nightclothes, and snatched up a telephone. Radigan's rasp got service.

"Flash prowl cars Pinehurst Street! Small sedan. Same killers in it. Girl with them—Lane. Repeat Signals Ninety and One Hundred!" It was almost verbal shorthand that Radigan shot into the transmitter. "Block through streets this section. Get that on the air!"

He went out steaming with fury. He stamped past the black house to find Barrett still standing in the gloom of the alley. His chin thrust close to Barrett's. His gaze was a sandblast. His voice sawed:

"You thought something might happen, Barrett. You were right. It did. Plenty! The killers we want were in that house. They found Miss Lane, just as you were afraid they would—only not because they trailed us here. Because I had to take time to sweat the address out of you! They had your girl in there. They took her right past you. They've got her now. Do you know *why* they've got her, Barrett? Because you didn't stop 'em!"

Radigan's clenched fists were straining up.

"Take that badge off!" He ripped it away. "Give me that gun!" He snatched it out of Barrett's palsied hands. "Get out of my tunic!" He stepped back as Barrett fumbled with the buttons. "Get me straight, Barrett. I'm blaming myself—for bringing you here instead of a cop. For believing you'd come through. For not wanting to break you as a patrolman and a man. To give you another chance!"

He whipped the tunic out of Barrett's fingers. He brushed his knuckles across his bleeding cheek. The wound in his side was a beating flame, but he scarcely felt it. He felt nothing but a consuming contempt for Barrett.

"You're broken now—clean through!"

He slammed back through the gate. "Another chance!" he repeated bitterly. He tramped past the house. "Another chance!" He slipped behind the wheel and the roar of the engine was the explosion of his own volcanic anger. "Another chance!"

Rough-'em-up Radigan whizzed back to headquarters alone. Back to headquarters with a cut in his cheek, and a slash in his side, and a scar on his soul, because he still had a bigger job to do—a man's job.

CHAPTER IV

SILVER SLAVE

RADIGAN tramped up the stairs at headquarters with two tunics bundled under his arm, stuffing the tails of his red-stained shirt into his trousers. Criss-crossed adhesive strapped gauze across his furrowed cheek. He was belted with bandages that held pads in place over the throbbing wound in his side. Radigan should have been in a hospital bed. Instead, he was headed for his desk.

He had come charging into headquarters a ghastly apparition of a man. Somehow Keegan had induced him to stop long enough in the first aid room to have his injuries dressed. All the while, he had stormed that he was wasting time, time more precious to him than his blood. The police surgeon had managed to press the last strip of tape in place while following him up the stairs. Radigan went into his office with fists clamped.

A sunken-cheeked, carelessly dressed young man heaved out of a chair beside Radigan's desk. He was Martin, police reporter of the *Express*. He said: "Say, I've got some questions the boss wants answered, Chief."

Radigan ignored Martin. He hung one of the tunics in the closet. It was sodden with blood—his own. He began pulling into the other. Barrett had worn it. Barrett's own was lying on the floor beside the open window. Radigan snarled as he kicked it into the corner. Sleeving his arms, grimacing with pain, he peered at the reports lying on his desk.

Martin insisted: "I hear you broke a cop—Barrett, on the Super-power tour—then gave him another chance and he went bad again. Barrett's the kind of cop you were put in here to get rid of. You're the Clean-up Chief, but how're you going to clean up this town by being big brother to clunks like Barrett? The whole case has gone cockeyed as a result of it, and the boss is going to put the heat on you."

Radigan growled: "Get out of here!"

"Yeah! The boss is writing the editorial now. He started the clean-up campaign that put you into office, and he's fighting for it one hundred percent. For you too, Radigan, but not when you let men like Barrett give crooks a break. Why don't you talk? The boss's editorial will raise blisters if you don't—"

"If your righteous boss is as handy with a gun as he is with his pencil, tell him to come here and get on the cops himself!" Radigan blazed. "I'm not spending any time reading editorials. Maybe you'll get some letters from Old Subscriber, saying I'm falling down on the assignment! Maybe they don't like the way I do it, but I'm fighting crooks for 'em. Are you getting out of here, Martin, or am I heaving you into a cell for interfering with police routine?"

Martin got out. Keegan had followed Radigan into the office; was staring in dismay. Radigan growled at him: "All right, all right! What are you waiting for? Let's have it."

"They can't be human, the way they dodge out of sight, Chief. They're magicians or something. They got away from the house on Pinehurst faster than the prowl cars could block the streets. Where the hell they've holed in—"

"What else?"

"No sign of the first sedan they used, the black one. No fingerprints. No tire tracks. No foot marks in that grit. The bullets out of Nolan and Lawrence are no good until we get the guns they were fired through. Pike's description's no help. Looks bad."

Radigan rapped: "Get 'em busy at the house on Pinehurst Street—fingerprints, anything they can find. Comb that alley. They'll find some footprints, mostly in one spot. Pay no attention to 'em. They're Barrett's. How did that chicken-livered dummy ever get on the cops? I need men on this force—*men!*"

"Funny thing, Chief—"

Radigan was thumbing through the reports on his desk. "There's got to be a lead to those crooks. Wherever they're holed in, we've got to smoke 'em out. That's no cinch. They're slick as the devil. Go ahead, Keegan!"

"Funny thing," Keegan repeated. "A little while ago, there was a telephone call. Woman's voice. I was talking to the Phone Sarge, waiting for reports, when it came in. She might have been drunk. You can't tell. She—"

"Come on! What was it?"

"She was screeching for help. Something about having a gun pushed in her face. Then there was a jumble of words about a sick man and a garage. That didn't make sense. All at once the connection broke, and that's all there was. Didn't have a chance to trace it before it was gone. She was either crazy tight or scared out of her skin."

Radigan, peering at a typed sheet, murmured: "Wait a minute."

"That?" Keegan went on. "It just came in, Chief. It'll be handled routine. Probably it's nothing but the usual—"

"Wait a minute," Radigan whispered again.

His sharp eyes threshed facts out of the chaff of the report. Girl found dying on Park Road. Dangerous gunshot wound in chest, another in arm. Wearing nurse's uniform. Name and address unknown. Unable to speak. Being rushed to Pasteur Foundation Hospital.

Radigan rose, gaze glued to the phrase that had started his ready mind buzzing. *Wearing nurse's uniform.*

He snapped to Keegan: "Camp here. I'm going to the Pasteur."

Each step, as he went out, pounded pain through his side. His car was sitting in its usual place, near the steps, with a cleared space around it. His eyes were narrowed in thought as he sent it winding around corners.

Six blocks flickered past. Radigan climbed out at the emergency entrance of the big hospital.

RADIGAN waved aside internes, attendants. His growling questions elicited information that the wounded nurse was in the operating room. Her condition was critical. The interne who trotted beside Radigan swore nobody in the hospital knew the girl. Radigan was approaching the swinging doors when they flapped wide. The pungency of ether and antiseptic came out with the wheeled litter. Radigan stopped it and peered intently at the girl.

"Whoever shot her," the physician at her side said as he stripped off a gauze mask, "tried to kill her."

Irish, Radigan saw at once. Reddish hair, plump face, a firm chin. Her eyes were closed, but they would be blue. She was breathing with slow, painful jerks, and she was unconscious. While nurses stared dismayed protests, Radigan peeled the sheet down. They hadn't wasted any time getting to work on her. They'd taken off her uniform and her shoes, but she was still wearing a slip and stockings. Radigan wasn't looking at a woman's body. He was searching for some clue to this girl's identity.

Radigan demanded the uniform and got it. It was streaked with red and shone with the pressing iron, but there was no laundry mark on it. The shoes were inexpensive and bore the name of a large department store. Bought for cash, probably—almost worthless for identification purposes. Radigan thrust the apparel at a nurse and again lifted the sheet.

A misty, silver glitter at the unconscious girl's ankle caught his sharp eyes. He flipped back the upper part of the sheet, stripped up the lower edge. He gently eased the pink silk above a crimson garter and stripped the gossamer stocking down. It was a pretty ankle and very shapely, but Radigan saw only the slender chain around it, the little oval of metal. **A**

slave anklet. With strong fingers, he broke the chain, examined the anklet.

On it initials were engraved: *K. B.*

Peering at it, Radigan asked: "Is she going to live?"

"She's got a chance."

"I hope the poor kid pulls through," Radigan said softly.

His voice was not so soft when he tackled the nearest telephone. His lashing rasp went through the hospital switchboard faster than many an emergency call. He snapped "Keegan!" then: "Get busy with the telephone. Call every nurses' register in town. Check every girl with initials *K. B.* This one must have been answering a call. Get the address. I'm coming right back."

The slave anklet stayed in Radigan's hand while he weaved his car back to headquarters. He slipped into his reserved parking space and went up the stairs thinking hard. He stopped when he reached the door of his office. Anger surged red to his face. He glared at a man standing there stiffly, uniformed except for a tunic.

Radigan snarled: "Get out of here, Barrett."

Barrett asked in a dry whisper: "Have you found her, sir?"

"Have *we* found her! You had a chance to keep her safe! You had a chance to stop those crooks! She might be here right now, snug as a baby in a crib, if you'd had the guts of a cop. You *had* orders. Remember that? What were they, Barrett?"

Barrett murmured in agony: "Shoot first and shoot straight."

"Right. That's what I told you, Barrett. And I found you shooting with your eyes closed. You didn't remember orders then, did you? Now you're here wanting to know if we've found her. If *we've* found her! No, we haven't, Barrett. Thanks to you!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!"

"Sorry! You said that once before! Don't say it to me! Say it to her—if you ever see her again. Tell her that

—if she can listen. What do you think she'll answer, if she can talk at all? 'Sorry'!" Radigan's voice lowered to an ominous rumble. "Get out of here, Barrett. This is police headquarters. Only cops belong here. Get out before I throw you out!"

Radigan strode past, his wrath streaming hot blood through his whole tight body. Knuckles rapping the desk, he turned to see Keegan in the adjoining room, driving questions into the telephone. Radigan tipped the dictograph cam and barked: "Special orders for the riot squad!" His knuckles rattled again while he waited. Suddenly he strode back to the hall door and snapped out.

Barrett was gone.

RADIGAN went into the next office. He stood in front of the blackboard, straddled, hands clenched behind him, lips lined. He did not speak while the door opened and men filed in. They were a picked squad. Radigan had put them through an intensive course of training; drilled them as mercilessly, mentally and physically, as a dictator might drill his favorite regiment. They were his lieutenants in charge of the riot squad. And this was another council of war.

"We're waiting for the zero hour," he told them flatly as they stood at attention. "Keegan's working on a lead now that I'm sure will give us the information we want. Sometime tonight we're going to spot the killers. Once we've located their hideout, we're going the hit 'em with everything we've got if we have to. We're holding ourselves ready to go into action at any instant, anywhere in this man's town."

Only Radigan's commanding eyes moved as his words rang—flicked from face to face, omitting no man.

"Wherever the hideout is, we'll isolate it. We'll take full equipment and we'll use it, if necessary, to open that place up. If they don't come out easy, we'll drive 'em out of their hole like the rats they are. But we've got to be

careful. They've got Dexter and Sylvia Lane. Dexter's seriously ill. He and the girl must be safeguarded by every possible means. We can't bungle. If we do, it will cost them their lives. If they die because of any mistake on our part, the man responsible is going to get the works. That includes me. Understand?"

They nodded.

"We've got to keep Dexter and the girl safe—but if those rats choose to fight it out, you know my standing orders. Rough 'em up! Dismiss."

Radigan tramped back to his desk. In the next room Keegan was scowling as he pronged the receiver. He looked up to sigh: "No luck yet. How do you connect this case, Chief?"

"Keep at it!" Radigan snapped. "It connects right through. Dexter sick. Maybe too sick to talk. The crooks have to keep under cover, but have to take care of Dexter. Taking no chances on having Dexter pass out without talking, they call a nurse. The nurse gets wise. She sneaks a chance to call headquarters about it. She's caught and choked off. Next she's picked up, dying, on a dark road. Killers' filthy work. What are you waiting for, Keegan? Get busy!"

Keegan got busy. Radigan's heels drummed back and forth across the office. He paused when the door opened. The man who came in was pudgy, short-necked, with one eyelid drooping lower than the other. It gave a sinister appearance to a man who was completely aboveboard and starkly honest. He was the only boss Radigan knew, yet he didn't boss Radigan—Mayor Overton.

"Look here, Chief," the mayor said anxiously. "There's one thing I want you to do as a personal favor. Try to keep yourself from getting killed."

Radigan scowled: "That's not the way I run my department. The purpose of my orders is not to keep my men from getting killed—though God knows I want 'em to stay alive. God knows I love every one of 'em. They've got to die. That goes for me

too. I can't let it matter. My job is exterminating crooks."

Mayor Overton put his hands on Radigan's bulging biceps. His stubby fingers didn't reach halfway around. He said: "Listen. You know why you're chief—because there's no other man equal to the job. Your place is at that desk. This department was ragged and inefficient before I put you there. We need *you* in that chair—not a wreath. Thousands of honest men and women are looking to you for peace and safety, Radigan. You owe it to 'em to stay alive."

Radigan snapped: "You can't chain me down. I'm a cop. I belong out there with the rest of 'em—fighting."

"You belong at the head of this police force, and not in a casket!" Overton retorted anxiously. "There's another thing. You've got to keep yourself a commander. You've got a dignity of office to maintain, and you can't step beneath it. Look at yourself now—shot up! If you—"

"Dignity!" Radigan exploded. "I'm not fighting crooks with dignity! I can't ask my men to do anything I'm not able and willing to do myself. They've got to face coked-up killers, and I face 'em with 'em. If you want a stuffed shirt at that desk, put me back on the gas house post! As long as I'm chief, I'm using a gun and not a push button!"

Overton sighed: "I was right. I certainly picked the right man for the job. I want you to *stay* on it, that's all, Radigan."

"Leave that to me!"

Radigan spun as Keegan loped into the room. Keegan slapped a scratchpad leaf into Radigan's big hand and exclaimed: "We've got it! Her name's Kate Brady! The Reliable Register had a call for a nurse around midnight and she went out on it. Address Eleven-forty Crocker Street. I've checked that up. It's a public garage."

Radigan's gaze gleamed. "That started her scare—going to a place like that! It accounts for the missing cars. Not far from Super-power and

the place on Pinehurst Street." He clicked down the cam of the dictophone. "There you are, Mr. Mayor! I'm not sitting on my tail when a four-alarm like this comes in. I'm going after it!"

Overton shrugged his despair as Radigan snapped into the instrument. "Lasker!" he barked at the captain of the riot squad. "Eleven-forty Crocker. Stay here until I confirm that. Come running when you get the signal!"

His eyes speculated. "Maybe they've switched to another place since gunning the nurse," he thought aloud to Keegan. "That would be a smart thing to do. We're going to make sure about the garage before we shoot the works."

He was charging toward the door when the jangle of the telephone stopped him. He whirled, snatched it up—and froze. A dart of his eyes sent Keegan spinning to the extension instrument on the secretary's desk. He listened, breath stopped, to a husky whisper over the line.

"Listen fast. I'm not talking long enough to give you a chance to trace this call. We've got the girl. You're going to let us strictly alone. The first move you make toward us, she's going to get a bullet in the heart. That's a promise! We've got nothing to lose by it. If you find her dead, you can blame yourself, Radigan."

A click ended the threat. Radigan rattled the hook and blasted at the Telephone Sergeant: "Try to trace that call! Get busy!"

He stood still, fingers rippling on the desk, staring chilled at Keegan. *If you find her dead, you can blame yourself, Radigan. Address, 1140 Crocker—the killers there. If you find her dead—* The telephone zinged.

"Not a chance of tracing that call, Chief."

Radigan strode to the door. He paused stiffly, staring at Mayor Overton, at Keegan. He turned abruptly. His heels slammed again.

"Come on!"

CHAPTER V

RIOT CALL

A HAND gripped Radigan's arm as he stooped to the wheel of his car. When he looked up, his face pinched into a mask of fury. His foot lifted from the starter button and a snarl burst from his throat. He kept his hand on the gear shift knob with an effort, because every muscle in his body strained to send it crashing into the white face of Barrett.

"I don't deserve it, sir. I know what you'll say, but—I'm thinking of Sylvia. If you'll only give me—"

"Don't say that!" Radigan spat the words so violently Barrett recoiled. "Give you another chance—is that it? Another chance! You've had your last!" His voice rang with contempt. "You're thinking of Sylvia! Back at Super-power, over at the house on Pinehurst—why didn't you think of her there? It was something else then, wasn't it? You were afraid of hurting somebody with a gun! Take your yellow hand off me, Barrett!"

It had closed hard, pleadingly, on Radigan's arm. "Let me go along. I don't know where you're going, but it's something to do with Sylvia, isn't it? You've found out where she is. Guns won't stop me this time. I'd rather take a bullet in the heart than face—"

Radigan slammed out. The whole car quaked with the force of the closing door. He straddled, facing Barrett, fists clubbed at his sides. His eyes were a fierce fire. Barrett stood straight, eyes firm, chin squared.

"I'm going with you, sir. It's my job. You can't keep me back now."

"Your job!"

Radigan's fist streaked. Propelled by a consuming fury, it exploded on Barrett's chin. Barrett took it without a lift of his own hands. One step backward, head up, a crimson line trickling down his neck—Barrett stood that way, almost out on his feet, before his knees bent. A sob wrung from his lips as he fell. He writhed

on the black pavement as Radigan charged back at the wheel.

"His job!"

Radigan tramped on the starter. In his anger he forgot the ignition, then turned it. He kicked again, meshed screaming gears. He did not look down into the street as he started away. If he had, he would have seen that Barrett was no longer lying there.

He did not know, as he twisted from the curb, that Barrett, half conscious, was huddling down on the rear bumper, trying with corded hands to keep his position as the pavement blurred beneath him.

Whining tires zigzagged Radigan to his objective. The garage sat at the crossing of Crocker Street and Branch Road, and that was Radigan's mark. He didn't park a block away and steal to the entrance. He didn't roll soundlessly along the curb with lights out and motor off. There was nothing furtive or cautious about the way Radigan went at that place. He whizzed to the broad door, twisted through it, bucked to a stop inside.

He slipped from the wheel, Keegan skirting at his side, peering through a jungle of cars. A small partitioned office sat in the corner, at the foot of the ramp, and opened into the street. A lean, doglike face looked through the filmed glass as Radigan started toward it. Radigan stopped short—staring at Barrett.

Barrett had dropped dizzily off the rear of the police car. Aching muscles had dragged him up. His chin smeared with dry red, his eyes earnest, his breath coming fast, he stood at smart attention. He swayed a little, but he couldn't help that. He asked huskily:

"Orders, sir?"

Radigan kept peering at the partitioned office. His jaw muscles lumped. "If you get in the way, Barrett," he said tightly, "you're going to be worse than broken. You'll get thrown into the cooler for interfering with police work. Do I make myself clear?"

He went past Barrett. Keegan's gun was out when Radigan thrust into the little office. The man with the canine face took slow, retreating steps. Radigan looked sharply around the office. There was a greasy desk, dusty papers, a telephone, little else. Radigan said, "Watch him, Keegan," turned back, and stopped. Barrett was in the doorway.

Radigan's thrust, wedging Barrett aside, was a full-muscled gesture of contempt. Radigan climbed the ramp. Near the peak of the oil-tracked incline, he slowed because the cavernous room above was vibrating with the exhaust of a motor. Easing to the level, Radigan saw the car sitting in a cleared space, both doors on one side open—a maroon sedan. No one was near it. The space in the corner beyond it was partitioned.

Radigan walked past the car. He went to the door of the partition. It was locked. He listened. Not the slightest sound came from inside.

Radigan went back, looking curiously at the sedan. When he turned to go down the ramp he jerked to a stop. There was Barrett. Barrett asked:

"Orders, sir?"

Radigan snarled. He heeled down the incline and stepped into the office. The dog-faced man was still shouldered against the wall. He was staring at Keegan's hands. Keegan was intently making sure his police positive was in tip-top shape.

Radigan took up the telephone, spun the headquarters number on the dial, snapped: "Lasker."

Lasker's voice came through fast. "Listen, Chief! An alarm just came in. A man phoning about a girl screaming in the house next door. Said he saw her run out on the porch, two tough guys after her. They grabbed her and dragged her back. It's on Clinton Street, 'way over the other side of town."

Radigan: "What's the rest?"

"The guy who phoned—Hannon, his name is—gave us a description of the girl that sounds like Sylvia Lane.

Lord, I'm glad you rang in, Chief! I've been hopping up and down, thinking you're off on a bum lead while—"

Radigan: "Go after it! Get your men there fast as they can travel. Circle that house and wait for me unless they make a break. If they ask for it, shoot the works!"

"We're off right now!"

Radigan crashed the receiver down. "I was afraid of that!" He heaved toward the door. "Come on, Keegan—we've got 'em!"

On the sill he stopped. Barrett was standing there, but it wasn't Barrett that stopped Radigan this time.

It was a scream.

IT echoed from above and stopped like a snapped-off radio. A brief, shrill note of terror, then silence. A girl's voice. A swift hand clamped over her mouth could have sliced off the sound like that. It brought a chill to Radigan's blood and turned Barrett's eyes haggardly up the ramp.

Barrett whispered: "That was Sylvia."

Radigan scowled. He reached for the telephone—but his hand poised. On the edge of the desk near it was a round spot—mother-of-pearl—a push-button. Radigan's narrowed eyes traced wires trailing to the ceiling and through. He turned back to see terror in the eyes of the dog-faced man. Ominously slow steps took him into the corner.

"I get it," Radigan snapped at the man. "You keep watch. When anybody looking like a cop or a dick comes around, you push that button. That signals 'em upstairs. They keep quiet. When the coast is clear you signal again—that right? What's the buzz?"

"You're screwy!"

One blow of Radigan's fists caused two sounds. His knuckles clicked to a chin; a head cracked against the brick wall. The canine eyes rolled. Radigan asked softly, "What's the all-clear signal?" Another swift blow—two

more reports. The overalled man moaned through lips seeping blood:

"Three quick."

Radigan gave a rapid triple touch to the button. He didn't hear the buzz. The motor was still humming beyond the top of the ramp. Vaguely voices mingled with it. Radigan signaled Keegan to keep the gun on the man who was drooling red. Barrett was still staring up the incline, white faced, but he hadn't moved. Radigan took slow, gliding steps upward.

The motor of the maroon sedan sang a steady note through the space Radigan crossed. When he paused at the door, he heard a girl's breathless whimper: "Don't—don't! I'll tell you!" There was a wheezing exclamation of triumph, then another voice. Radigan froze as he heard:

"Headquarters? This is Mr. Hannon callin' again. Remember, I called a few minutes ago, and— You better get here in a hurry. From the way the girl's screamin', they're killin' her. Sure you got the address right? Twenty-sixty-eight Clinton Street."

Then the husky whisper: "Radigan will shoot the works. He'll throw so many men over there, we can get through to the other place without any cops paying attention. They'll be standing by for another general alarm in that direction. I told you it pays to know your enemy's weak points."

Radigan's fury pounded. He went past the sedan on a silent run. He sprinted down the ramp and burst into the office. He whirled the dial back and forth and rasped: "Lasker!" The Phone Sergeant's answer stung through Radigan:

"Lasker went beating it out of here with the whole riot squad a couple minutes ago, Chief!"

Radigan: "Flash him by radio! Order him to head back to the first address! The Clinton call's a fake! Signal the prowl cars around Crocker and Branch! Close in on the garage! Rush it!"

Clattering motion spun Radigan from the telephone. The dog-faced

man was battling past Keegan. He had a hand clamped on Keegan's wrist and was scratching Keegan's eyes with greasy nails while the gun waved overhead. His fist tottered Keegan back. He was spinning through the door when he collided with Barrett.

Barrett's knuckles transformed the canine nose into an oozing pulp. An unconscious man slid half under a car and lay still.

Radigan, peering intently at Barrett, said softly: "Not bad."

He charged up the ramp. Keegan, face streaked with red, sprinted at his side. Barrett legged after them—gunless. Heels were gritting on the cement at the second level. Radigan rounded a car to see three men grouped at the side of the maroon sedan. A terrorized girl was huddling inside it. They were thrusting a wan-faced man after her. Sylvia Lane and Dexter.

Radigan slowed, his service gat in his hand. He said:

"The cop shoots first!"

He shot first. His bullet clanged to the open rear door of the sedan. Acer and Albano sprang back, their automatics spurting. Chabat ran behind another car.

Barth had been standing in the doorway of the partitioned space. His gun spat twice as he leaped back. Keegan's weapon blazed at Radigan's side as they charged forward.

Radigan howled at the girl and the man in the maroon sedan: "Get down!"

The narrow space roared with clashing reports. Chabat's automatic spat behind the barricade of an imported roadster. Acer ducked low, arming for Keegan's belt buckle, as he darted toward the head of the ramp. Albano, needle-point eyes gleaming terror, wedged behind an oil barrel. Radigan's bullets started two brown gushers. He whirled near the driver's door of the maroon sedan with an arm spurting red—but he didn't know it.

"Get down!"

He bawled the order again to the horrified girl and the stricken man on the rear seat. He slid behind the wheel, clacking the door shut. The glass in front of his face turned white. He snapped the car into second gear. It leaped toward the wall against which the punctured oil barrel was sitting. Drawn lips baring his teeth, Radigan crushed the front bumper into the drum.

Albano screamed, arms and legs thrusting out grotesquely. As Radigan backed, the crook collapsed like a deflated balloon. He sprawled down, crushed pulp, red trickling from him into the flowing amber. The maroon car retreated while slugs clanged into it from both sides. Radigan twisted, peering back, and moaned. Keegan had gone down.

Keegan was sprawled near the head of the ramp. Radigan glimpsed Barrett leaping for Keegan's gun.

Barrett seized it, straightened, sprinted to the partitioned space. His bullets smashed the glass of the door. He spun aside, temple dripping red, as Barth's gun blazed out. He was straightening, firing again, when Radigan felt a rip of cloth on his shoulder. Radigan twisted to see Chabat crouching at the rear of the roadster, aiming straight for his head.

RADIGAN hurled the sedan at the nose of the roadster. It leaped under the sudden surge of power. The impact smashed two radiators. As water splashed, the roadster drove back into the space where Chabat was crouching. Radigan saw the rear bumper cleave into Chabat like an axe into dry kindling. The wall behind Chabat disintegrated into bricks. The rear wheels of the roadster dropped out through the ragged opening. Half of Chabat thudded into the street.

Radigan slammed back. A mad god of a juggernaut, he whipped his gun toward Acer. Acer's bullets caromed off the ceiling as he straightened. He went on tiptoes, pitched forward.

The big room was rocking with the blasting of a gun within the partitioned space. Barth was inside, barring the door with lead. Barrett was crouched at it, trying to shoulder through while splinters flew from holes drilled close above his rounded back. Radigan roared the car at those board walls.

The crashing, smashing, deafening drive sent the sedan half into the closed space. Radigan reversed, tore it out while Barrett whirled to the opening.

Inside, Barth was straddled, his automatic leveled. Radigan couldn't see clearly—his head had hit the cracked windshield. Blinking his vision clear, he could see only Barrett. Barrett wasn't firing now. He was gripping Keegan's gun by the barrel. It was empty.

Radigan spilled from the wheel as Barrett charged in. Barth's automatic spat once, and Barrett winced. Barth's gun flashed again, and Barrett stumbled. Barrett hurled himself at his man, slashing the revolver high. Radigan saw a third shot blasted squarely into Barrett's body. Barrett's blow had all his strength behind it. Radigan saw the gun butt sink into Barth's skull.

Barrett straddled, looking down at Barth. He turned, ducked out through the broken wall. He straightened, looking down at the crimsoned gun. "Yellow rats!" he spat out. Very carefully he slid the service gat into his holster. "Yellow rats!" He was lowering himself to his knees, like a spent runner finding rest, when his eyes closed. He settled softly.

In the street sirens were screaming. Radigan still didn't know his arm was bleeding. He tramped to Barrett. He bent down, tears in his eyes, looking at ghastly wounds. With a tremendous effort he straightened and went past the maroon car, ignoring the girl staring out in a paralysis of horror. When he reached Keegan, two uniformed men bounded into sight on the ramp.

Radigan: "Get an ambulance!" As one patrolman sped back down: "You—I guess you can help mop up."

He stooped to see that Keegan was breathing laboriously, trying to raise on a broken leg. Radigan pushed him down. "Don't you know when to quit?" He looked around, scarcely hearing the approaching wail of another siren. Now Sylvia Lane was kneeling over Barrett. Radigan went past the sedan and snarled at Dexter: "You're all right." He paused, wavering on his heels to say to the girl:

"What're you worrying about? Bullets can't kill a man like him."

HIS arm in a sling, Radigan went down the hospital corridor with Mayor Overton at one side, a nurse at his other. Both of them were talking to him earnestly. He was frowning impatiently. With a final gesture of his one good arm, shortened by a stab of pain that got him in the side, he said:

"There's only one way you can get *me* into one of these rooms. You'll have to use a strait-jacket. I've got a job to do. I can still walk, can't I? You want my men to think I'm a sissy?"

He stepped into Keegan's room, gripped Keegan's hand, saw Keegan grin. "You've got to get well fast," he said. "A chief like me needs cops like you."

Going on, he inquired gently about Kate Brady, and smiled when he heard she was recovering rapidly. "Barrett?" he asked. He went into Barrett's room to see for himself.

Barrett lay immovable, one hand closed snugly on Sylvia Lane's. She rose when Radigan entered, but he gruffly gestured her down. He looked at the chart at the foot of Barrett's bed, pursed his lips, looked happy. He sat on the edge of Barrett's bed. Sylvia Lane was looking at him anxiously.

"Good as new in a little while, Barrett," Radigan said.

"Of course he will be," the girl affirmed. "I—I'm afraid you think I really told them the secret. What I gave them to write down didn't make sense. They were going to take Arthur and me somewhere else until they had a chance to test it. I was only playing for time. . . . Bob's just been talking about where he might find a new job."

Radigan scowled. "Listen. He doesn't need a new job. He's got one. Under the circumstances, there can't be any award for distinguished serv-

ice, but there ought to be. Barrett will go up to first class soon. He's to stay on the Super-power post, though. So he can take you home at night. Okay, Barrett?"

"There's nothing in the world I want more, sir," Barrett whispered. "Thank you, Chief."

Radigan smiled as he walked down the hall with the mayor. "Good man, Barrett," he said. "Good man with a gun, too. He knows how to rough 'em up."

G-MEN DIE TWICE

Gripping Mystery-Action Novelette with Mort Holborn, Department of Justice ace, fighting a sensational Twentieth Century criminal combine.

BY
JAMES
PERLEY
HUGHES



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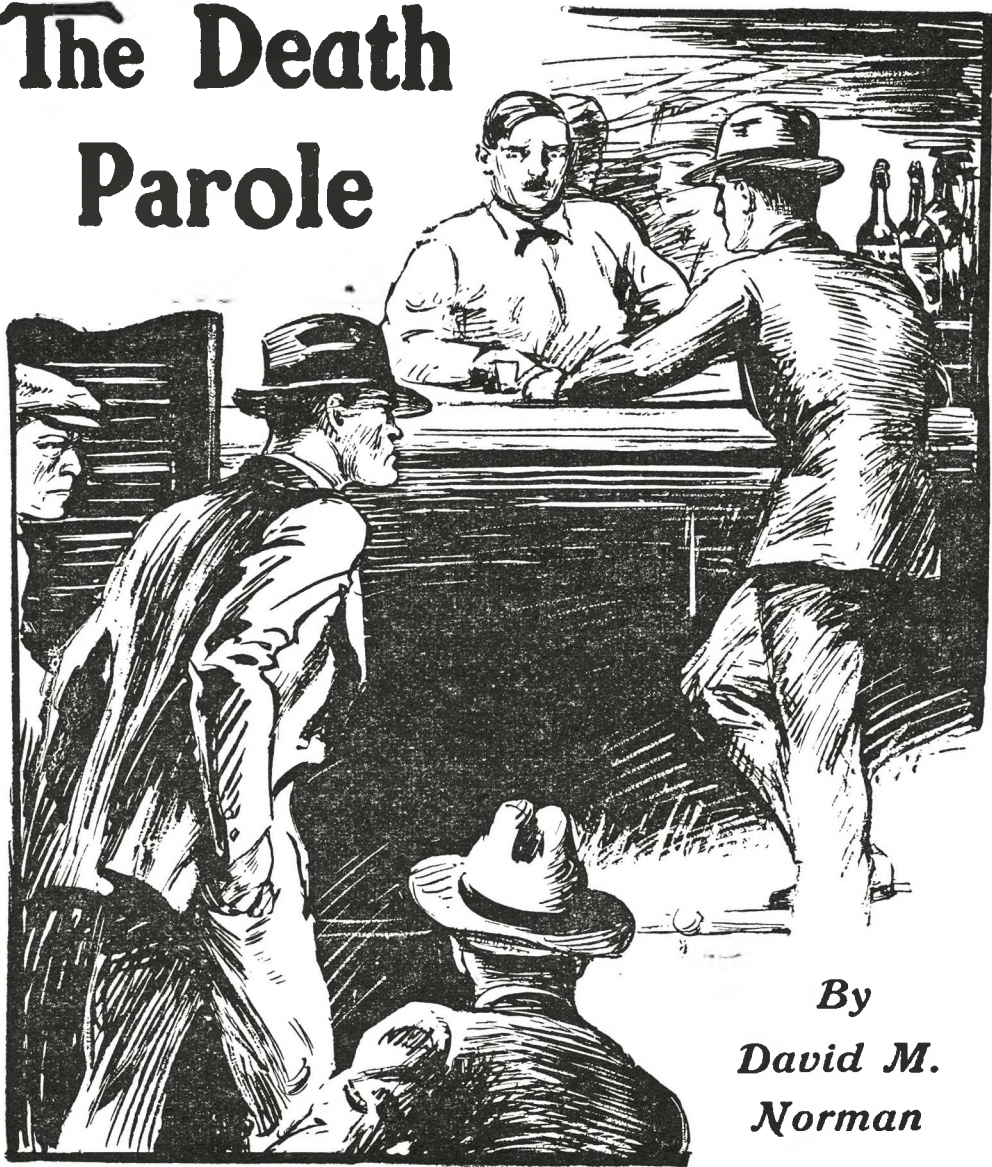


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PROBAK JUNIOR

The Death Parole



By
*David M.
Norman*

Officer Dan had writhed when Balch, the paroled killer, barged out of prison, sneering at the warning: "Balch, if Reade is killed, I will know who did it—and I'll get him!" Yet Reade was later killed—mutilated, then murdered, just as Balch would have done it—but Officer Dan was Balch's alibi for the two hours during which the murder must have happened.

PAROLE OFFICER DAN CLARK jabbed a button on the desk in his prison office. Ordinarily Dan's mild gray eyes were twinkling with the good things of life, but now his brows were drawn down and his jaw clamped like a vise.

"Send in Tony Balch," he ordered the trusty. "He's ready, isn't he?"

"He's been ready for three hours, sir. In fact, he's almost nuts waitin' for you to call him."

"Get him," Dan snapped and to himself he appended a thought: "If

I could keep that rat waiting here ten years, I'd do it."

Tony Balch strode into the room. He was dark, crafty looking and cruelty shone bright in his black eyes. He clamped both hands flat on Dan's desk and glowered in ill concealed hate.

"Tryin' to take it out like this, are you?" he half snarled. "Makin' me wait three hours before you can see me. Listen, Clark, I'm free, get me? I'm sprung and you can't stop me. You tried hard enough, but for once the Parole Board had sense. I—"

"Shut up!" Dan snapped. "You're not free until the main gate closes behind you—and from then on you're only paroled, remember that. You are to report to me twice a month, Balch. The first time you miss, you'll be yanked back here. You're going out of the prison over my protest, but you had money enough to buy that restaurant you say you're going to take over. You hired the best lawyers and you fooled the Board. But you're not fooling me, Balch. I know you for what you are and when you leave here, you'd best take things very easy."

Balch drew his lips back in a snarl. "Some day, mister wise guy, you're going to be sorry for tellin' me this stuff. Sure I'm on parole and I'll obey every letter of it. What kind of a sap do you think I am?"

"And I'll tell you something else," Dan went on as though Balch hadn't spoken. "I'll tell you what I couldn't explain to the Parole Board. Two years ago, Balch, you planned an escape from this prison. You succeeded in getting three machine guns and a quantity of Mills bombs smuggled in here. How, I don't know. You planned to kill anyone who stood in your way and you would have done it.

"Somebody found those guns and bombs. The man who did so never squealed, but he realized the disaster you could create once you were started on your way out. He knew that

dozens of innocent men would die and—he fixed those guns and bombs so that they were useless!"

Balch's eyes were wide in astonishment he couldn't conceal. There was concentrated hate and murder in those black orbs too. His fingers were clenched into hard fists.

"You know who did that, Balch, and so do I. That man wasn't a squealer, although he could have fixed things so that you would never get out of here. He simply wrecked your weapons and let it go at that. You're going out of here with revenge rankling in your soul.

"Listen to this—if you harm Robert Reade, I'll come after you and your next stop will be the chair. Reade didn't sing to the warden, but I know how you feel toward him. He's going straight and—he is to be left alone. Reade told me about that, but I had to promise secrecy. Reade got nothing out of it."

Balch remained silent. Gradually the fire went out of his eyes. He became composed, suave and smiling.

"Okay. If that's all, I'll be on my way."

Dan yanked open a drawer in his desk. He took out a twenty dollar bill and a railroad ticket.

"The State gives you this money to get a start on life. The railway will carry you back to New York. That's all, Balch. Report to me here twice a month."

"Twenty bucks!" Balch sniffed contemptuously and folded the bill. He tucked it in his vest pocket. "Five years I worked for this." He threw the railroad ticket on Dan's desk. "You can keep that. I've got a car waiting outside. Some day, mister, you're going to wish you had kept your mouth shut. You could have earned enough to take care of you for the rest of your life if you'd listened to me."

"The door," Dan said curtly, "opens by turning the knob. Get out!"

Balch laughed, turned on his heel and slammed the door with all the

strength he could muster. Dan sighed, leaned back in his swivel chair and reached for a cigar.

"Parole Boards," he muttered, "can be confounded nuisances sometimes."

IT was a week later that Dan Clark visited the metropolis not many miles from the great gray walls of the prison. He drove his coupe to the address Bob Reade had given him and two minutes after he parked, Dan was tapping at a well worn door panel of a cheap rooming house.

A tall, well knit young man with the pallor of prison still perceptible on his face, opened the door. He stared in astonishment and just the slightest semblance of fear crossed his countenance.

"Mr. Clark!" He stepped back. "I—I—nothing is wrong, is there?"

"Not a thing," Dan grinned, "and forget the formalities, Bob. I'm Dan to you—as I am to any of my friends."

"Thanks—Dan." Bob Reade leaned against the rickety bureau while he motioned Dan into a chair. "I thought for a moment the Parole Board had changed its mind or that I'd pulled a boner or something."

"I'm here to see that you don't, Bob. You got my letter a week ago?"

"About Tony Balch?" Reade shrugged. "Hell, I'm not afraid of that rat—but thanks for the tip anyway. I'm not a squealer, Dan. You know that better than anyone else. I wrecked that armory Balch had because—oh, hell, guards have wives and kids. Balch would have gone to the chair if he went through with his scheme to escape. But I never squealed—except to you, and that was months later."

"Sure, I know. But listen, Bob. I've been in this business a long time, almost too long, it seems, sometimes. I know these rats and I know good guys, like you. Tony Balch is lower than a rat. He's the type of a man who would never face you unless half a dozen of his gorillas had you pinned

to the floor. Watch him! He boasted he'd kill you and he'll try to make good his threat."

Bob Reade frowned. "I didn't know it was as bad as that. But don't worry, Dan. I can take care of myself. It's damned decent of you to come all the way down here to give me the tip off. I won't forget it. I'm beginning to understand why some of the men up there at the prison would give their right arm for you."

Dan brushed aside the thanks with a sweep of his hand. "That wasn't the only reason I came to town. I have to address a bunch of women who think we ought to install bridle paths for some of the boys to go horse-back riding on. Those dames mean well, but they can get your goat.

"Just be careful. I didn't get you by the Parole Board to have somebody kill you. You've the makings of a damned good engineer under that skull of yours."

He shook hands with the younger man, hurried down the narrow, ill-lighted steps and drove quickly to the downtown sections. He was puffing slightly as he dropped into the speaker's chair at the long banquet table. Dan fumbled with his collar, looked around at the two score of sedate women until his eyes fastened on the doorway of the big restaurant.

"You seem startled, Mr. Clark," the hostess at his right whispered. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Do you know that man in the tuxedo standing at the door?" Dan asked.

Mrs. Smithwick looked, swept the faultlessly dressed figure with her lorgnette and nodded. "Yes, indeed. He is Mr. Anthony Balch and he owns this restaurant. In fact, he actually came to us and offered to allow us to use his place at a very low figure."

"He did, huh?" Dan snorted. "I thought that my eyes were deceiving me, Mrs. Smithwick. You see, Tony graduated from my little college just a few days ago. It's rather a

shock to find him working. I knew he bought a restaurant, but I never figured that he was more than filling the requirements for parole. Well, well."

Dan had no further time to comment. He was called upon to speak, but while he had the floor, his eyes followed Tony steadily. The crook smiled coldly when he caught Dan's gaze fastened on him. Only once did Tony leave the banquet hall and that was for five minutes. Dan finished his speech, bowed to the applause and sat down.

He fidgeted nervously as others took the floor. Dan heard nothing of what they said. An undercurrent of apprehension gripped him. Dan wasn't subjected to these hunches very often, but he believed in them. Forty minutes crawled by. Suddenly the doors of the restaurant were thrown wide. Five burly men bustled in. One of them Dan knew for Sergeant Donovan of the Homicide Squad. Donovan's face wasn't pleasant to look upon. Dan tried to get the detective's eye, but Donovan spotted Tony Balch. He signaled his men and they converged on the ex-convict from all sides. Tony saw them coming and stared in astonishment.

"Lift 'em!" Donovan warned brusquely. "Any phony plays and I'll smack you down. Stick out your mitts! You and us are going places."

"But what is this all about?" Tony implored. "I have done nothing. Because I had the ill fortune to spend five years in prison, does that give you cause for this—this action on your part?"

Tony acted well. He seemed a brow-beaten, half frantic man who stood in ardent fear of the police.

"You know what happened," Donovan blurted. "You bumped Robert Reade. You threatened to do it and I always figured you would."

"I—killed Reade?" Tony backed away a step and gasped his horror. "But that cannot be. I have been here—right here, for hours. Last night I was also here. I have witnesses."

"Sure he has," Dan broke in as he stepped close to Donovan. "Hello, Sergeant. I heard you, of course. When was Reade murdered—and where?"

"Within the hour," Donovan replied. "We got your tip about the trouble they had at the pen so I figured Tony did it. It was a knife job and Tony always was hot on the shiv. Reade was left in a car at Town's End."

"But I have been here," Tony protested. "I have witnesses—"

"Shut up!" Dan snapped. "I hate to do it, Tony, but even for a louse like you, I have to back up your alibi. Tony has been right here, Donovan, for the last two hours. He couldn't possibly have left this restaurant and reached Town's End and back without my noticing he'd been away. Come along, Sergeant. Tell me about it."

THEY sat in the big police car outside while Donovan gave the details.

"A passing motorist spotted the body, Dan. It was shoved in the back seat of a stolen car. Whoever bumped the poor guy made him suffer plenty. He sliced him in about a dozen places where it would hurt most, before he jammed the shiv into his heart. Want to see him?"

Dan nodded. "I'll trail you in my own car."

And Donovan was right. Reade's body wasn't a pretty thing to look at. On the first appearance, his murder seemed the handiwork of a maniac. Blood was congealing on the floor of the tonneau and there was even a blob of it up on the roof of the car. Reade had been tied, his arms and legs lashed so that blue marks were left where the ropes had cut deeply. Blood had trickled from the sides of his mouth.

"He was gagged," Dan said. "I wonder why?"

"Because he might have hollered," Donovan retorted drily. "You know,

Dan, you're a good guy and everything, but you ain't no dick. A blind man could have seen that."

Dan grinned. "Perhaps I don't know so much about your work, Donovan, but I do know men. If I hadn't spotted Tony with my own eyes, I'd have sworn he did this. It's just the type of a job he'd perform. I'm going back to town. See you later!"

On the way back, Dan tried to puzzle it out. Tony might have hired someone to do the killing, but that wasn't Tony's method. He was a killer himself, a cowardly, sniveling murderer who would torture to hear his victim scream.

"If he didn't do it himself," Dan reasoned, "he hired somebody Reade was lured out of his room right after I saw him. Maybe there's a clue at his rooming house."

Dan flashed his badge to the woman who owned the place. "Perhaps you know your roomer, Robert Reade, was killed a little while ago," Dan said.

The woman nodded. "I know. They came here and searched his room, the poor lad. But he had nothin'. All the cops did was tear the room around so it will take me all day to fix it up again."

"Did Reade get a phone call—or did someone come after him?" Dan asked her. "I was in his room at seven o'clock. When did he go out?"

"He had a phone call," the woman admitted slowly. "I remember him sayin' he didn't expect any. I heard him say Carthy's Inn, kind of surprised-like and he acted as if maybe he didn't know if he ought to go or not. That's all I know except he was a good lad."

"Thanks," Dan told her.

He had a clue anyway. A meagre one that could hardly work out, but there was rugged determination in Dan's character and he tossed no chances to the winds. Deep within him, he had determined to capture the murderer of Bob Reade. True, Reade had served time, but if anyone had reformed, Reade had. He was an en-

gineer and with the right opportunity, would have made something of himself.

It was this that caused Dan's lips to compress tightly. He had believed in Reade; helped him that he might be of some benefit to the world, only to have him murdered in order that a cruel, sadistical taste for revenge might be appeased. This whole case was none of his business. Even if Tony had paid some professional killer to murder Reade, it was a police job and not a parole officer's.

"But I'll take him myself!" Dan muttered while he drove toward the shabbier sections of the city where Carthy's Inn was located. "If only I can prove it!"

CARTHY'S INN proved to be the disreputable place Dan expected he would find. A quick survey from his car told him he was putting his head into a hornet's nest by entering. From where he sat, he recognized the lounging door guard as a three-timer at the prison and a man whose parole Dan had violently objected to. There would be others of his ilk within, but Dan didn't hesitate a second. If a clue to the murderer of Bob Reade was in that place, he meant to get it if he had to combat every convict who had reason to hate him.

Dan loosened the gun in his shoulder holster, pulled his hat down tight and walked with slow steps toward the entrance. The man at the door straightened up. Dan saw his hand flash behind him. A signal was being given.

"Whaddya want?" the guard queried hoarsely. "There ain't no parole jumpers in here."

"No?" Dan replied easily. "Too bad, you mug. I hoped I might find a dozen of 'em. Get out of the way."

"Nothin' doin'," came the growled challenge. "You can't get in here without a pass."

"So?" Dan grinned. His fist flashed quickly and collided with the guard's jaw. Dan eased the half-conscious

form into the rickety old chair. "You asked to see my pass, mister. How do you like it?"

Dan turned and strode up a flight of steps, opened a narrow door and stepped into a well lighted room. There was a long bar at the further end. Dan walked between the tables without casting so much as a quick glance at the occupants.

"Beer," he ordered and the bartender balked only a second. There was something in Dan's eyes that didn't behoove any good for those who might act contrary to his wishes. A sudden silence settled over the place; a sullen quiet barely broken by the whispers of the men who watched Dan narrowly.

"We oughta plug that guy right now," someone whispered to a companion. "He made me roost four years extra in the can. Said I was no damned good, he did."

"Shh — take it easy," another warned. "I know Dan Clark. He's fast with his fists and faster with a gat. He ain't so bad anyway. Hell, he yanked me outa solitary once when I was sick. He ain't after us. We got off parole long ago."

Dan, trained by long years of prison supervision, heard every word and smiled a little. Suddenly his smile died away. There was a round shouldered, wizen-faced man at his side drinking glass after glass of straight whiskey. He kept his face averted from Dan's gaze. With a quick motion of his hand, he drew a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and threw it on the bar. It was this bill that made Dan breathe a little faster.

Before the bartender could pick it up, Dan's big hand covered it.

"Hello, Snowy," he nodded to the wizen-faced one. "You've been out of prison just a year. I never knew you to work. How come you can throw twenty dollar bills around like this?"

As he spoke, Dan thrust one hand into his own pocket, fingered his own thin roll of bills and extracted a twenty. He was able to do this easily

because he had only one and it formed the core of the roll. With a swift movement, he picked up the bill Snowy had dropped and replaced it with his own note.

"What's the matter, Snowy?" Dan queried. "Lost your hearing? I asked you a question."

"You go to hell," came the quick retort. "You're no dick. You can't pinch me. I was off parole six months ago. Lemme alone."

"Sure, you're all right." Dan stuffed the twenty dollar bill into his coat pocket. "Seen much of your pal, Tony Balch, lately?"

Dan expected some kind of a reaction, but he was hardly prepared for what followed. Snowy, Dan had observed in a glance, was off the needle. He was nervous and deadly as a cobra. When he drew back a step, snarled to reveal yellow, uneven teeth, he did remind Dan of some variety of snake. Snowy's hand darted behind him. When it reappeared, it clutched a gun. But Dan had anticipated this. Before Snowy could bring the gun to bear, Dan leaped for him.

Using both arms, he slammed the little crook hard against the bar and sent his hands whacking upon the bar. Dan fastened a grip on the gun hand; twisted it slowly until Snowy began to whimper.

"Drop that gun, you rat," Dan grated. "Drop it before I break your wrist."

The gun fell to the bar top. With a grin, Dan yanked his prisoner toward him and prepared to search the man. There was a dull crack and the lights winked out. A shot had come from the room behind the bar. Someone had shattered the fuse box with a bullet.

Dan pulled his prisoner floorward. Snowy struggled futilely. He opened his mouth and raised a shout.

"Over here!" he yelled. "In front of the bar."

Dan cracked him smartly on the point of the jaw, picked him up and carried him a dozen feet away. His own gun was in his hand. The crooks

were no longer passive. Those who hated Dan were ready to slay him on sight. The blanket of darkness was more of a safeguard to Dan than an impediment. He knew the way to the front door; knew just how many ex-convicts would be barring his way.

There was a telephone hooked to the wall just behind the bar. If he could reach that! He made certain Snowy was still unconscious, shoved him against the wall and crawled forward. So far only one shot had been fired and that from somewhere behind this barroom. No one would have heard it. Before any inquisitive patrolman might stop in to find out why no lights were on, Dan would be riddled with bullets. He heard a hoarse whisper to his left.

"You guys know this screw," someone said in a rasping voice. "He put all of us on the rack. Now let's fix him—for good. We'll dump his body in the river. You guys that are game, spread out. I'm gonna turn a flashlight loose. When you see the mug, bump him!"

DAN crouched, gun ready for instant action. He guessed the exact location of the phone, sprang forward a half dozen steps and vaulted the bar.

Thick arms closed about him, but before his captor could raise an alarm, Dan jabbed a hard right to the pit of his stomach, doubled him up and cracked a second blow to the face. The arms fell limply away. Dan's exploring hands found the telephone. He lifted the receiver, let it hang by its cord and raised his gun close to the instrument. He dialed the operator and snapped two quick shots that must have almost blown the operator's ear drums out.

The jabbing finger of a flashlight swept the bar. Dan dropped behind it. The light traveled on. He began to perspire. In a second it would reveal Snowy. That would end in but one thing and Dan needed Snowy badly.

He grabbed a bottle from the bar and sent it hurtling to his right. It

crashed against the wall. Instantly the flash swept toward the sound. Dan came around the end of the bar like a halfback, gripping the ball and looking for a clear field. He scattered two men with his powerful shoulders, reached Snowy and lifted him up. There was only one place of safety—behind the bar.

"He's over here," someone yelled and the flashlight swept toward Dan. This beam of white light would become a death ray if it centered on him. Once he was brought into relief, a dozen gangland guns would speak their vicious messages of doom.

He fired once in the direction of the light. It winked out instantly. But the streak of flame from his own gun made him a target. Lead slammed into the wall beside him. Dan made for the protection of the bar again. Someone tried to stop him. Dan snapped a short blow that floored the shadowy hulk of his opponent.

A siren's wail caused a momentary silence. Then feet scurried away. Men raced for every exit, running like rats before a fire. In one minute, Dan and Snowy were alone in the big room.

Flashlights seared the darkness. A terse voice demanded an explanation and a quick release of the gun Dan still gripped. He let it thud to the floor.

"An' keep it there!" the patrolman ordered. "What the divil is goin' on here anyway? It looks like a tornado hit this dump."

"I'm Dan Clark, Parole Officer," Dan stood up. "This man is my prisoner. Someone put out the lights in here. I've got to get away quickly. Will you take charge of this man?"

"Sure I will, but maybe it'll be best if you wait for Donovan. He's on his way right now. We met him outside and he's throwin' a cordon around the place."

Donovan rushed into the barroom. He quickly reached Dan's side, breathless and crimson of face.

"I thought you'd get into trouble, Dan," he panted. "That landlady at

Reade's rooming house told me you'd questioned her. I came as fast as I could. This is a hell of a place for a parole guy to stick his nose into. It's the toughest spot in town."

"You're not telling me much," Dan grinned. "But if we can get Snowy to talk, I bet we've got Balch. Got him cold, Donovan. Help me get Snowy out of here. We've got to work fast now."

Snowy was groggy but able to stand. Dan passed an arm around him and forced him down the steps and across the sidewalk toward the police car. Donovan was just ahead of them.

Crack! A gun spoke, flat and deadly. Snowy's body gave a lurch as his head was whipped backward by the force of the slug. Like a flash, Dan dropped to the pavement, but not quickly enough. The gun cracked again and a bullet ripped into the flesh of his right shoulder, high up.

"Surround that house!" Donovan was shouting orders. "There's a killer in there. Get going!"

He dropped beside Dan. "Are you hit bad?" he asked. "Don't worry, we'll get the guy who shot you."

Dan stood up weakly, holding Donovan's arm for support. He looked down at Snowy.

"There goes our witness," he groaned. "I believe I know how that murder was done, Donovan. Tony Balch killed Reade. Listen—he paid Snowy to lure Reade to this place. Snowy made Reade a prisoner, stuck him in the back of that car and drove him to the alley in back of Tony's restaurant. Tony went out long enough to jab Reade a few times before he finally sent his knife through his heart. Then Snowy drove the body to Town's End and left it there."

"Holy Smoke!" Donovan cried. "You got it, Dan. Sure that's the way he musta done it. But—can you prove it?"

"I think so," Dan replied, "but it must have been Tony hiding in there who killed Snowy and tried to get me. Bet he's on his way back to the restaurant to establish an alibi by this time.

It's too late for the place to be open, but if you found him in a warm bed when you go looking for him, he could swear he was there all the time. Maybe he'll even have a chance to get some of his pals in on it—say he was in a card game or something. I want to borrow this squad car, Donovan. How about it?"

"Sure," Donovan agreed. "And I'll go with you."

"No," Dan said. "Stay here in case your men do smoke him out. This is my job anyway. Bob Reade was a friend of mine. Tony killed him and if I can pin it on him, I'll do so."

"But listen, Dan," Donovan implored. "This ain't your work. Hell, man, it's a cop's job to tackle that rat."

Dan stepped on the starter of the car. "Bob Reade was a friend of mine. He saved many men from death not so long ago. Saved them and kept quiet about it even though he might have profited. Only a real man could do such a thing and Balch is going to pay for killing him. This has become a personal matter now. See you later."

DAN snapped home the siren switch and raced toward the restaurant which Balch owned. He cut the siren as he neared it, swung to the curb a block away and proceeded the remaining distance on foot.

He knew what he was going into. Tony would shoot him on sight, would probably be lurking somewhere in the shadows of the restaurant ready to deliver his deadly greeting.

He skirted the building, hurried down an alley and reached the back door. This was locked, but Dan knew more than one trick.

"What's the use of having some of the best crooks in the country as your friends if you can't learn a little from them," he told himself while he removed a bunch of keys from his pocket. He tried four. A fifth one turned the lock a little. He removed it, used a tiny file on one portion of its design and tried again. This time the

door swung wide. He stepped in quickly, moving with all the agility at his command.

From somewhere in the building, he could hear a voice. It was Tony Balch's and it was crammed with anxiety and desperation. Dan paused only long enough to get the gist of the one-sided phone conversation.

". . . and don't forget the time," Tony warned. "It's two o'clock now. We were together from midnight until now. Got that okay? Swell! I—"

"You might as well hang up," Dan said calmly. "An alibi won't do you much good."

Tony dropped the receiver, turned swiftly and with the same motion whipped a gun from a holster.

Both men fired simultaneously. Dan took the slug in his already wounded shoulder, but he hardly felt the pain. Tony Balch stared down at a hand dripping blood and a gun that had fallen to the floor when Dan's bullet tore it away from his grasp.

"Raise 'em, Tony," Dan warned. "This is the end of all things for you. I warned you strongly enough. Now you're coming back to prison—and the chair!"

"You wouldn't say that if you didn't hold that gat," Tony rasped. "You're like any other kind of cop. If you got a gat, you talk big."

Dan smiled just a little and tossed his gun far into the big room. Instantly Tony's sound hand darted behind his neck and came away with a long, glittering knife that had been secreted there in a scabbard. Foul oaths ripped from his lips and he came forward like a beast descending for the kill.

"So I'm gonna hit the chair, huh?" he snarled. "If I do, you won't be there. You're gonna get the same thing that damned Reade guy got. I'll slit you to pieces."

His knife came down in a flash, but it found only air for its mark. Dan had sidestepped quickly. Only his left arm was good, but there was power behind it and the blow he sent smack-

ing against Tony's head knocked the murderer off his feet.

He scrambled up again, screamed in rage and poised the knife for a throw. Dan saw death staring him full in the face. Tony was an expert at this sort of murder. Dan lunged forward, head down and his sound arm reaching out. The knife whizzed a fraction of an inch over his head. On he went, like a charging bull. Tony's eyes widened in fear. He turned suddenly and began to race for the door.

Dan hurled himself at the man, hit him hard just below the knees and sent him sprawling. With his left fist, he hammered two husky blows to the face. Tony raised his arms, encircled Dan's throat with his fingers and began to squeeze.

Dan smashed one more blow that made Tony groggy. "That's for Bob Reade," Dan said hoarsely. "And this is—for me!"

Tony's head snapped backward. His eyes glazed and his body went limp. Dan pulled handcuffs from under his coat, clamped them in place and got up only to sink weakly into a chair.

Someone ran down the alley outside the door. At the same time a terrific hammering sounded from the front of the restaurant. Donovan hurried in, gun ready for instant action. He saw Tony on the floor, jammed his gun into his pocket again and grinned.

"A mighty nice job, Dan," he commended. "I couldn't do better myself. You got him all right. Now—can you convict him?"

DAN nodded. "I heard him trying to create an alibi for himself and when he figured he had the upper hand, he boasted I'd get what he gave Reade. But we won't need either of those confessions. I've got evidence enough in my pocket right now."

"Evidence?" Donovan scowled. "I don't know anything about that, do I?"

"Tony queered himself. When he left prison last week, I gave him the customary twenty dollars that the state allows. Tony laughed, folded it up and stuck it in his vest pocket. On a hunch, I'd marked that bill. Tonight I saw Snowy pass that bill to the bartender at Carthy's place. Tony paid Snowy off with that bill as part of the money. It would have made a great laugh in the underworld—bumping a man he hated with money given him by the State when he left prison. Tony was always like that—looking for some sardonic feature that would elevate him to the station of a wise guy among his pals."

"But how did you guess that Tony bumped Reade in the alley outside this restaurant?" Donovan wanted to know.

"First, Tony went out of his way to

get the women's club to hold their meeting here at his place tonight. He knew I was to speak and that would provide him with an unshatterable alibi.

"Then too, Snowy drove the body away too fast. It bumped all over the back of the car. There was blood high on the doors, on the roof, the seat—all over. That's why I was certain the body had been driven around a lot—after Reade was driven here to be butchered.

"You can take Tony now, Donovan. I'm going to get my shoulder fixed up. Got to help a man get by the parole board in the morning."

"Okay, Dan," Donovan yanked the half conscious form of Tony upright, "but this is one guy you won't have to worry about. The only parole he'll get is in hell."

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G-Man Justice

A Thrilling Novelette

By Tom Roan



Never had a group of G-men found themselves so much on the spot. Right before their eyes, one of the most daring and ruthless robberies was committed, and one of their own men was gunned to death. Yet they had to stand by without firing a shot.

CHAPTER I

WITHOUT QUARTER

THE drool of midnight rain whispered softly on the tarred roof of the lonely little telegraph shack there on the west side of the tracks. The water spilled down the drains and bubbled with noisy chuckles from the overflowing rain barrels at either end of the building. Lightning flickered far away across the jumble of hills in the west. The little weasel-faced man in the inky shadows tensed, the muzzle of the big, blunt-nosed automatic pistol in his dirty-paw right hand flinching to the right and left. Bitter-blue little eyes

glinted under the long vizard of the old brown cap pulled low on his head. He looked behind him nervously.

"Ginty" McGinty hated lightning. It was so unexpected, so infernally like a flat-footed harness-bull suddenly popping up on a dark corner with a flashlight and a whistle. Just like a damned cop. Nobody could tell when they would flash or strike. He hugged closer to the building as another distant streak cut across the skyline with a whimper-like motion. McGinty's eyes glinted again. There was something about them that had always reminded people of frosty metal.

Inside the shack, telegraph instruments came to life with a sudden chat-

tering. A chair squeaked. McGinty stole forward rapidly to a rear window where a yellow streak of lamp-light was showing beneath a lowered blind. He looked in, automatic ready.

An enormously fat man sat with his back to the window. A broken-backed magazine lay face downward on the instrument board and to the man's right. A ragged brown sweater covered his broad back. He was tapping out something, either to Hell Gate Bend, forty miles to the west, or to Black Gorge, the station forty-five miles to the east.

McGinty frowned and wished he knew Morse. He waited until the operator closed his key. The man sat back, stretching powerful arms toward the ceiling and yawning. He picked up his magazine, propped his slippered feet on the instrument board and started to read. McGinty cursed him whisperingly. Gee, didn't the bloke do nothin' but read?

Well, he would do something else in just a minute. A man could not take chances, not even out here in these desolate Wyoming hills. McGinty lifted his gun. The cold eyes squinted. A lower, left-hand corner of one of the panes in the window was broken. It made a nice hole to shoot through.

The heavy automatic jumped, kicking backward in Ginty McGinty's tightly gripping right hand like something alive. The explosion and the concussion seemed to bulge the building. The operator's head bobbed, forward, then back. His hands dropped, the old magazine's pages rustling as it fell to the floor. The blood made a strange, half-whistly sound. The flames of the oil lamps at either end of the instrument board licked high in their chimneys. One went out. The other steadied and burned on.

Shadows took shape in the shadows behind McGinty. There were four of them, one a massive thing well over six feet tall, red-faced as a beet, pulpy neck all abloated over a low, hard linen collar showing through the turned-up

lapels of a heavy raincoat dripping with water.

THAT was "Harp" Gambler, the boss. Under his raincoat, fastened to his massive shoulders by black leather straps, was a machine-gun. Just behind him loomed a long, lean shadow with a quivering-tipped beak for a nose, high cheekbones and sunken cheeks; a lunger, this "Splinter Sam" Barclay—already five years overdue in the sod if the doctors knew anything about it. Behind him, short, husky and dark were the Carvello brothers, Frank and Chris. All of them carried "typewriters" under their coats. McGinty's was still back in the car parked down the muddy road a mile away and just around the shoulder of a timbered spur of hills. Gambler spoke.

"Get 'im?"

"Sure!" Ginty McGinty looked up with sudden surprise. "Hell, you know I never miss 'em!"

"We've got to work fast." Gambler's voice was brisk. "No time for any horse-play. You're sure there's no houses around here?"

"Sure I'm sure!" McGinty's lips twitched. "Didn't I just ride over the line two days ago? This duck cooks an' sleeps upstairs in a dinky room."

"Did cook up there," corrected Gambler. "He's probably cooking in hell now. Here, Sam." He turned to Barclay. "Take my flashlight and give Goosey the high sign to bring the car on up. Let's get busy on this job. Find a fire axe or something, Ginty, and get after those instruments in there. If our job's on time, she left Black Gorge a little better than thirty minutes ago."

McGinty found the door locked, but he also found an axe hanging above one of the rain barrels. He smashed a hole in a panel of the door leading into the telegraph office. He reached in, turned the bolt of the snap lock, and shoved the door open. With the wary steps of a cat on wet ground, he stepped inside, cursed from one side

of his mouth from a force of habit, and immediately set to work.

The dead operator might have been a bundle of laundry or any other kind of a bundle. Ginty McGinty hardly gave him a second glance. It was not a nice looking mess, anyway. All that blood slopped everywhere—bled like a butchered hog. McGinty simply cursed, and started smashing the instruments.

He thought he knew exactly how to do it.

"Goosey" Jones brought up the car from Splinter Sam Barclay's signaling. He drove it in close against the side of the little shack, and started bringing in "the works"—two riot guns, the extra ammunition and a black bag loaded with high explosive. He was a typical Jonesey, about five feet eight, hatchet faced and "gimlet" eyed. He took one look at the limp body of the operator sprawling back there in the big chair with its padded seat that had green glass insulators screwed on the bottoms of its legs. He took a deep breath, expelled it with a whistling sound, and stepped back against the door jamb.

"Damn!" he whispered. "Couldn't you have taken 'im outside to give 'im the works, Ginty?"

"Whadda you care?" McGinty spoke from the side of his mouth. "A little blood always makes you shaky on your pins."

"Damn that!" Harp Gambler had stepped into the doorway. "Don't start a row, you two. Get that lug under the bench there." He motioned to the body of the operator and nodded toward the now broken and battered instrument board where wrecked instruments were scattered in a pile. "Make things look regular. Set up some of that junk you've smashed, too, Ginty. The hog-head of the Westbound might look through the window and see something that'll make 'im suspicious."

"Listen!" Barclay's long, bean-pole figure had appeared just beyond Gambler. He spoke, and coughed his hacking cough behind his hand. It always

seemed worse when it rained. "I thought I heard 'er blowin'."

"It's her, all right." Gambler had stepped outside. He turned back after a few moments, thrusting his big, shaved-pork face inside the door. "Hurry, Ginty!"

"Yeah?" McGinty snarled. "Say, what am I 'round this dump? The rub-out, the wrecker an' the swamper all hashed into one?"

"Hurry!" rasped Gambler. "Damn it, you won't have half so much shoot-off to your lip in a few minutes from now."

CHAPTER II

KILLERS KILL

FIVE miles up the track from the telegraph shack, the Westbound Limited was whipping the steel, a roaring "cannon ball" train that had pulled out of Black Gorge fifteen minutes late. The rain and occasionally long, low belts of fog had caused the delay. With only rain ahead now and the visibility fairly clear, the engineer was trying to make up the lost time.

Light shone from the ventilator windows under the second roofs of the baggage, the mail and the express cars. It glowed brightly from the three day coaches, but the long line of Pullmans was dark except in the vestibules, and half the lights had been switched off in the parlor section of the observation car where five men and a slender, gray-eyed blonde of twenty-three sat with their club chairs swung around to bring them in a close huddle. The rest of the passengers had gone to bed.

They looked like a hunting party. Even the woman wore whipcord riding breeches and high-laced hiking boots. In the three compartments ahead of them were heavy gun cases of stout brown leather. Packs with shoulder straps sat on the floor. They looked a clean-limbed lot and in the pink of health. Any man would have said that the woman was beautiful, though the timid would have shunned

her had they known that she carried two light but servicable Colt revolvers strapped below each armpit inside the bosom of her tan shirtwaist.

Three of the men were not over twenty-five and as husky as fullbacks. The fourth was long and lean, about forty-five. The fifth could have been sixty. He was about five-feet-eight, ruddy faced and clean shaven, his nose long, thin and tapering. The eastern underworld had a name for him. It was Buzzard Beak. His friends called him Joe Handy. But down in Washington, in the closer circles of the Government, he was known as Old 66, a G-man extraordinary, and a man with nearly forty years of secret service work well done behind him.

That little group huddled together in their chairs, had just finished an excellent rub-out of the Big Dago O'Brien crowd down among those shaggy buildings and Jewish fish stalls of New York's Orchard Street, and had quietly left town without giving the boys of the press the opportunity of smearing their pictures across the front pages of the daily papers. It should have earned them a vacation. New York's push cart peddlers and vegetable truckers, to say nothing of the outraged public at large, would have contributed handsomely, now that Big Dago O'Brien had gone on along the dark and stormy way where all of his kind were doomed to go the minute the government had taken a hand in their game. But Old 66 had had other plans.

Work, he had argued, was something a man followed to keep old age from creeping upon him; something that kept a fellow from getting down on his back with indigestion. Besides, vacations were something G-men knew very little about unless it was a trip to some hospital—if one escaped the morgue. Both hospitals and morgues played their all-too-important rôles in the life of a G-man, whether the case ended in some dark alley or in the marble halls of a gangster king's palace.

Right now Old 66 and the men and the woman were discussing a certain Mr. Rod Wolfgang and his "boys" who were supposedly out on the Pacific Coast tapping over a federal bank or two. A leak had come through of a hide-out somewhere in the high Sierras, and this was the reason for the hunting party get-up.

"Our little Alice Bellew," Old 66 was saying, "will play the part of the bored wife of Steve. You know, one of those I-didn't-much-want-to-come types. She'll stick fairly close to that big hotel high up there in the mountains. They say it's quite a swanky dump. Good music, good drinks and food, and dancing every night. Rod can't keep away from that."

They were going into other details of it when the train, after a series of long, wailing moans of the locomotive's whistle, rapidly slowed down. Steve Clark squared his broad shoulders, and turned his rusty-red head to look out a window. Rain was beating on the glass and running in rivulets down the broad pane. Somewhere up ahead a sleepy porter stirred. A vestibule trap opened with a bang, a door slamming. From far up ahead came the wheezy drone of steam escaping from the halted engine.

Then the shot, then another, and then that unmistakable chatter of a machine-gun. Footsteps raced along the side of the car. A lantern dropped. A trainman cried out something, and fell. Now a wail of cries coming from passengers in their berths, and again that *rat-rat-rat-tat-ing* of the machine-gun.

Hell was to pay without the formality of a notice.

The little group there in the observation car came to their feet with a leap. Steve Clark was already plunging toward his compartment. Old 66 was right behind him. The others were equally as quick, for bullets were now raking the sides of the cars from the firearms of gunmen well forward and on either side of the tracks.

For a half minute, it was impossible to visualize a train robbery. It was just something that was not being done. The startled passengers refused to believe it. A curious fat fellow, a Jewish cloak merchant, hastily dressed, went out to investigate. He fell dead the moment his feet touched the ground.

It was murder and damnation all along the sides of the train. The observation car porter had been killed. The conductor, lantern still in his hand, had been shot down the moment he had stepped from one of the day coaches to learn the reason why the train was stopping at this lonely place. The flagman lay in a bullet-riddled mass at the rear of the observation car.

Little Jim Ford, youngest of the G-men on the train, did the foolish thing. He climbed over the end of the observation platform with a Tommy-gun in his arms. He went down there at the end of the car with three slugs of steel-jacketed lead in his stomach. He had not had a ghost of a chance.

Nor was there any chance for the others. An air hose was cut. The automatic brakes slammed tight on the wheels of all the coaches behind the express car. Steam lines parted. A coupling lever rattled. It seemed but a second before the locomotive was rapidly chugging away with the mail and express cars. In a minute and a half it was gone, the engine coughing sparks of fire and black smoke down the track and leaving human life ruthlessly blotted out behind.

CHAPTER III

DEATH TAPS A KEY

NO one was more surprised than Steve Clark, Alice Bellew, and the rest of the G-men. There had been not an inkling of what was going to happen. Whether the express car or mail cars had carried valuable shipments or mail was not known.

It was all confusion and lament

there with the stalled train now. The batteries under the coaches were automatically taking care of the lights. Hysterical women were screaming. Men bellowed and bawled at each other. Humanity was outraged. Fat old business men and pampered women had had a little touch of what desperate criminals could do, and did do. It was as if they had never thought about it before and that just now they were realizing what the violence of the country's army of professional crooks and gangsters could be like when they let loose on John Citizen.

The G-men had not had a chance. They were sick enough about it. Out there in the rain lay Jim Ford with his boyish face twisted with pain. Jim was dying. There was no hope for him, and there was not a doctor on the train. Alice Bellew had taken his head in her lap. A porter appeared at last with a lantern and an umbrella. He stood over them while Alice Bellew lighted a cigarette and held it to Ford's pain-twisted lips.

Steve Clark and Old 66 had gone on to the telegraph shack. They found the dead operator under the instrument board. The instrument board was in a mess. The big, long-nosed touring car still stood outside. Old 66 and Clark knew that it was a stolen machine. They never failed to be anything else. There was a yawning hole in its gas tank. The tops of the spark plugs had been knocked off with a hammer and its wiring and coils put out of commission. No man would drive it until a mechanic had spent hours of work on it. One of the G-men was detailed to watch it and keep the swarming passengers away from it.

"Stuck," growled Old 66. "Stuck out here miles away from everything and no means of communication. The devils done a good job of that instrument board."

Only one man knew anything about telegraph instruments, and that was Jim Ford. Old 66 and Clark brought him into the shack. They sat the dy-

ing man in the dead operator's chair. A G-man had to carry on as long as there was a spark of life left in him; and there in the chair, knowing that he was dying, Ford tried to work, with Alice Bellew and Clark supporting him as best they could on either side.

"Bad," he muttered with blood seeping down his chin from each corner of his mouth. "Don't know that I can do anything."

He fainted once. It looked like the end, this grim business of a dying man trying to work with clumsy fingers and then suddenly keeling over with a face as bloodless and cold as stone. Alice Bellew and Steve Clark worked over him desperately. They bathed his face and forced a little water in his mouth. Life stirred again. The dining car conductor finally came running through the rain with a bottle of whiskey.

There was no talking in the little shack. The passengers were kept out, but they stood there in the rain just outside the big bay window, watching with amazed eyes. It was grim business. Entirely too grim. Clark helped all he could. The minutes dragged on. Life flickered and glowed in Ford. At times the clumsy hands refused completely to obey him, but at last it was done. An old sounder found in a box of wire and junk had been pressed into service and connected with the torn-out wires. One of the smashed keys had been repaired enough so that it could be used.

The dazed passengers beyond the window saw something then. They saw Death, himself, sitting in there at the splintered instrument board. They heard the clatter of a sounder. Death was carefully clacking out his call.

At times the hand faltered. The sounder sounded furiously from the excited pounding of a key in Hell Gate Bend. A nation was being alarmed from that little shack in the pouring rain. The slow, painful tapping of bloodless fingers was doing its

work. There were tears in Old 66's faded-blue eyes. Alice Bellew hid her sobs behind a handkerchief.

"Carry on." Ford spoke with a gasp from the side of his mouth. "I—am—all—right. Help—is—coming."

A cheer came from the passengers beyond the window. Ford's hand tapped on, faltering, steadying, his face a mask of pain.

"Carry on!" he rasped. "Don't—mind me. There's a—switch engine—on the siding—in Hell Gate. It's coming. The operator there—is getting a—message past me to—Black Gorge."

His hand faltered again, slipping away from the key. It lay there quivering among the splinters. His left hand gripped hard against the pit of his stomach. The sounder chattered wildly. It paused, chattered again, and paused.

"Steady my hand," whispered Ford. "I—am about—through."

Clark gripped his arm, holding it against the tightening strings of muscle. He moved the hand back to the key. The bloodless fingers spread over it. Slowly but surely, Ford tapped out his last message to the operator at Hell Gate Bend. It was simple and straight to the point. It read:

"I am dying now."

CHAPTER IV

KILLERS ALOFT

IT had been very quick, very businesslike. Harp Gambler had never been squeemish when the business of killing a man or two happened to confront him. It was his one main reason for taking Ginty McGinty into his string when almost any other leader would have been afraid of McGinty's shadow. Ginty McGinty had killed too many men. His trigger finger had ever itched. But he suited Harp Gambler. A man needed thugs like Splinter Sam Barclay, that cold, fish-eyed human skeleton, and McGinty. All a man had to do was to give them their

orders. In a pinch or a fight, they needed none. They knew what to do.

Barclay sat on the fireman's seat there in the cap of the chugging locomotive now, his gun on his lap, the dead-fish eyes on the fireman, a short, dark headed fellow. McGinty stood beside the engineer, a big fellow of sixty. McGinty's automatic muzzle was caressing the engineer's ribs. McGinty liked to caress a man's ribs with an automatic's muzzle.

Gambler and Goosey Jones stood with their backs to the tender. The Carvello brothers were back there atop it, watching the express and mail cars.

The engine and the cars had been switched into a siding six miles west of the little telegraph shack. From the siding it had been switched to a rusty track leading back in the low hills to northward. Deserted mine buildings loomed ahead, the roofs of the houses broken, the skeleton framework of a high tipple showing.

"This track's dangerous." The engineer spoke from the side of his mouth. "I'll bet there hasn't been an engine over it in five years. It's liable to go out from under us at any minute."

"Yeah?" McGinty grinned, sliding the muzzle of his automatic up and down the man's side. "Well, you just keep chuggin' on. We ain't goin' fast enough to hurt much even if the track does go out from under us."

"A lot you know about railroading, I guess," grunted the engineer. "You don't know what sometimes happens when an engine—especially one as large and heavy as this—turns over."

"Maybe I'll ask you sometime," sneered McGinty. "Until I do, keep your damned trap shut."

The engine chugged on until it was almost under the tipple. The engineer brought it to a halt with a hissing of air and a chattering of brake shoes.

"Cut your glim," ordered McGinty. "You're comin' with us. So's your fireman."

The headlight was switched off. The gang moved down the sides of the train with Jones carrying the high explosives. It was Gambler who banged on the door of the mail car.

"Open up!" he ordered. "We've brought along stuff to blow you to hell if you don't."

"Come on, funny face!" That was McGinty yelling to the expressman and banging on the door with a gun butt. "Don't keep us waitin'. If you do, we'll blow your guts loose when we do get to you!"

The mail clerks hesitated. It was dark inside the mail cars now. Gambler cursed them. He was preparing a charge of dynamite when the door rattled.

"Lights on in there!" barked Gambler. "No funny stuff. Lights on, I tell you! Give 'em a round, Chris." He spoke from the side of his mouth to Chris Carvello. "Through the window up there to let 'em know how we're fixed."

Chris fired a ten-round burst through the window, the glass flying above his head. It was the end of all resistance. The mail clerks and the expressman, though armed with six-shooters, knew that they did not have a chance. Only a fool would have tried to fight.

Lights came on in the cars. Doors were slid open slowly. Men stood in the light with their hands lifted above their heads. Gambler climbed into the forward mail car warily while Goosey Jones and Chris Carvello covered the men there in the doorway.

"Where's your registered stuff?" demanded Gambler. "No monkey dust, now. We mean business, if you haven't found that out already. Where is it?"

"Over there." A tall, thin-faced clerk wet his dry lips with a lashlike movement of his tongue and pointed to a forward corner of the car. "I—I guess you fellows know where such mail is usually kept."

"You're damned right we know," croaked Jones, climbing into the car.

"Just be nice an' don't get your bellies gouged full of holes. You'd look like hell in a coffin with your wife an' kids bawlin' their eyes out around you."

The car was robbed in three minutes. Gambler climbed down from the doorway with five stout packages in a mail sack. Chris Carvello was still watching the engineer and the fireman.

It took a little longer with the second mail car. Gambler did not seem to know what he was hunting now.

"The registry was all carried in the forward car," a clerk told him. "We haven't a thing worth taking."

Ginty McGinty, aided by Barclay and the second Carvello, were going through the express car. The expressman had twice been knocked down. He had opened the strong box. Only three small packages were in it. McGinty was cursing.

"You've got somethin' else stowed away," he was rasping. "Dig it up or we'll blow hell out of you, funny face."

"I—I'll swear there's nothing more than what you see." The expressman, a short, bottle-bellied man of forty-five, looked like he was about to weep. He stood there with his hands up, a slow stream of blood finding its way down his face. "Honest! I—I swear it, fellows."

"I'm a good mind to plug you just for the hell of it!" McGinty had stepped close, ramming the muzzle of his gun in the man's stomach. "Just to see you fold up an' die!"

"You—you can," whimpered the expressman. "God, man, I haven't resisted you! I've told you the truth, too. I'll swear I have! Don't—don't shoot me."

"Let up on 'im, Ginty," Splinter Sam's voice growled. "You know we didn't expect to find much in here, anyhow."

"Scram!" That was Gambler's voice outside. "We've got the main works. Let's travel."

"Okay." McGinty dropped out of the express car door. Barclay was

right behind him. "I'd get a kick out of pokin' lead in that expressman's damned belly. I still think he's lyin'."

"You've had enough kick out of things for one job," sneered Gambler. "You ducks beat it." He waved his gun toward the engineer and the fireman. "Hit the can and scram."

They ducked back in the shadows of the old buildings. In two minutes, with all aboard it glad enough to get away from there as quickly as possible, the engine was backing off down the rusty track.

"You sure you got everything?" whispered Frank Carvello to Gambler.

"Sure!" Gambler grinned from ear to ear. "Five nice little packages of currency. The banks figure they're damned smart these days in using the mails."

They were gone then, making their way toward a high benchland in the rain and just east of the old buildings. Ten minutes later a big, tri-motored plane was roaring up there on the benchland. A woman with an enormous bosom was at the controls. The benchland was almost as level as a pool table. The plane shot down it in the wind and rain. It rose like a giant bird, climbing steadily in the drooling sky.

CHAPTER V

HUNCHES

THE crowd at the telegraph shack heard the plane go over, its three motors droning through the cloud-tossed heavens. It must have passed no higher than two thousand feet above the ground. It was heading east—east as straight as an arrow. Fast.

Of course, no one there on the ground knew that the plane had played its part in the robbery—at least, not a word was said about it. The engine, the mail and the express cars came back at last. There was almost a wreck when the engine and

a caboose came rushing up the track from Hell Gate Bend. Armed men piled out of the cab of the engine and the caboose. A telegraph operator had come along. He immediately took charge of the instruments.

"It was the same plane, all right," the passenger train engineer was soon telling Old 66, Clark and Alice Bellew. "I was taking it easy on that old track when I heard it rise from that big flat above us. I stuck my head out the cab window. I saw it for just a second against one of the lighter patches of sky."

A freight engine, hauling two box cars loaded with armed men, arrived a short time later from Black Gorge. Two special agents, a deputy sheriff, a town marshal, and a reporter from Black Gorge's *Weekly Journal* were among the lot.

It was the usual howl. Two fat women knew all about it. Fat women were usually the hysterical. Old 66 scowled and wondered how and why. Hell, if he knew anything about it, they were trying their damndest to get under their bunks after the first gun was fired. And it was the same for that little knot-headed, banjo-bellied man who kept trying to get into the telegraph office.

The *Weekly Journal* reporter wrote his story with an old portable typewriter balanced crankily on the west end of the splintered instrument board while the operator from Hell Gate Bend connected up a sounder and a key he had brought along with him. The reporter turned out to be the type-setter, printer, printer's devil, advertising manager, circulation manager, publisher, owner, and society editor of the *Weekly Journal*. It was as Old 66 expected. The fellow prepared his story. The operator shot it "home" to the nation over the press wire.

At last the train pulled out. With it went the bodies of the dead and two of Old 66's G-men with their orders whispered in their ears.

Old 66, Steve Clark and Alice Bel-

lew remained with the telegraph operator. Finally they had the office to themselves.

With a telegraph operator to work for him, Old 66 turned the little shack into a nerve center of the nation. He coded message after message and sent it merrily on its way. The hardest was to try to tell them in Washington what in the hell he was doing on a train that was held up with a clean getaway and having four of the best men and one of the best women in the service right there with him.

Daylight came. A red sun peeped now and then through the clouds and the rain. Messages finally started coming through to Old 66. He learned that a bank a hundred and fifty miles east of him had had exactly a hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars in the mails of the robbed train. That was news. But the one message that puckered Old 66's brow read, when decoded:

IMPOSSIBLE HARP GAMBLER
GANG POSITIVELY KNOWN TO
BE IN SOUTH AMERICA.

"Yeah, and so am I," growled Old 66 as Alice Bellew and Steve Clark peered over his shoulder. "They once had the same opinion about a gent called Big Dago O'Brien. It just didn't turn out like that."

"What," asked Clark a few minutes later when they were outside and away from the operator, "do you think of that eastbound plane going over us so low and handsomely?"

"Scrumptious!" For the first time since the robbery, Old 66 grinned. "They went to a lot of trouble to let us know they were eastbound. Even came down a few thousand feet just to make sure we would hear the motors. But you noticed, don't you, that none of the Black Gorge bunch mention having heard it? Harp was always a smart boy. I'd say he's gone west—just as straight west as he showed us he was going east. If you haven't forgotten, he was once mighty close to a certain Mr. Rod Wolfgang."

"And some," nodded Alice Bellew, "have said that they were related."

"Honey," Old 66 clamped a fatherly hand on her shoulder, "you brighten a little every day you live. A job to kill two birds with one stone, was one that was never hard for me to take."

"And Washington," grinned Clark, "will soon be reading our titles clear and otherwise giving us hell for our stupidity."

"Oh, sure!" Old 66 scratched his chin. "But that's to be expected, my boy; that's to be expected. Nevertheless, we're going to play our hunches. Hunches take a man about as far in this game as anything else. You young squirts got any idea who was flying that plane?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Alice Bellew. "Milk-wagon Annie!"

"Brighter every day you live," nodded Old 66. "One of the best flyers this country ever saw, even if she hasn't crossed an ocean or flown any good will tours."

"Hey!" yelled the operator, poking his head out the door of the shack behind them. "Another message for you. It's not in code this time. It says that plane was stolen late yesterday afternoon from a private hangar up in Montana."

"Well," yelled Old 66, "tell 'em I didn't take it!"

CHAPTER VI

A GOOD-LOOKING WOMAN—AND A DRUNK

IF he even thought of going to the abandoned mine where the final episode of the robbery had taken place, no sign of it ever showed in Old 66's face. That was a job for a young, high-headed gentleman in a ten-gallon hat and cowboy boots who had just been elected as sheriff of Hell Gate Bend. With the fellow were thirteen special deputy sheriffs just sworn in for the big manhunt, and a half dozen special agents of the railroad company.

There was nothing of interest at the old mine. Old 66 knew that. Steve Clark knew it, and so did Alice Bellew. This trio was certain that the job simply belonged to one Harp Gambler. Old 66 would have sworn it. Hell, Harp could not have made it any plainer had he signed his name to it. It was a Harp Gambler job and only a Harp Gambler job. The wrecking of that car there beside the telegraph shack was Harp's own particular way of doing this and that to a car he wanted put out of commission.

They could believe what they wanted to in Washington about that South America stuff. Harp had probably been down there all right, but Harp and his little playmates were back and once more on the job after nearly three years of silence.

When the late afternoon passenger train came through from Black Gorge, Old 66 helped Steve and Alice load their luggage that they had taken from the compartments aboard the Westbound Limited. It looked like he and Steve and Alice had taken their "run-out" powders, leaving everything tossed willy-nilly in the laps of the local authorities—and especially the gentleman in the ten-gallon hat. Strangely enough, the whole government of the United States seemed to take a run out. At least the long shanked, pipe nosed man from the *Weekly Journal* lamented that that was a fact and carried a long editorial about it the following Saturday afternoon.

Nearly a week passed before a certain Mr. and Mrs. Crandall Jepsey of Los Angeles arrived, with quite a flutter on the part of the Mrs. Jepsey, at the Little Casino, a rustic hotel on a high, blunt-nosed ridge of the Sierras with a view of lofty mountains in the background and a desert below stretching away to the east.

Mr. Crandall Jepsey looked fairly healthy, but his shoulders were badly stooped, his mouth had a habit of hanging open, flycatcher-fashion,

and his eyes appeared to glimmer weakly behind the lenses of his thick, horn-rimmed glasses. It somehow became known that he had made considerable money in prunes. Not long afterwards it was evident that he had a habit of drinking far more than was good for him.

But Mrs. Crandall Jepsey—she had the hard, firm step that any man with a pinch of fire in his craw would have liked. She was slender to a degree, but it was just to the right degree. Her eyes were big and gray. Her blonde hair had an inviting shade. It was true that she did wear a little too much rouge. It was true, also, that she had a temper.

They were no more than upstairs in the Little Casino when she quarreled with Mr. Jepsey about the rooms. She wanted rooms on the first floor where one could sleep late in the mornings. She said something about being a trifle afraid of fire. Mr. Jepsey said something about Hell, and ordered a few drinks. He went a little further and mentioned something about them living on the top floor of a ten story apartment house in Los Angeles, and pointed out that she had never been afraid of fire before.

It all took place in front of a patient bellhop. He was there pouring the drinks and dropping in the ice when Mrs. Jepsey said something about Hell, that she did not give a toot about his old hunting trip; that she had come to the Little Casino for a good time—and was going to have it. Mr. Jepsey mentioned one or two more little matter-of-fact somethings about Hell, and right away started in to get drunk.

Mrs. Jepsey called up the manager, a gross, big-bellied, walrus-mustached Greek. He found Mr. Jepsey running nervous fingers through his unruly shock of rusty-red hair and staring dazedly at the floor with a glass in one hand and a half empty bottle in the other. Mr. Trantiphilopolis had a way with drunks and women—if the latter were pretty. He

rubbed his paunch affectionately, patted it, and patted the pretty shoulder of Mrs. Jepsey. He had given her a room exactly where she wanted it, and Mr. Jepsey was left to sulk and drink the rest of the afternoon through in his room.

Mr. Jepsey hunted mornings and afternoons, and drank himself peacefully drunk every night. It was the third night of his stay at the Little Casino that he fell through a table and had to be carried upstairs to bed.

Mrs. Jepsey wore her bright hunting togs around the hotel, just as other women wore bright and snappy things, and danced to her palpitating little heart's content every night. She really became the life of every party, while Mr. Crandall Jepsey became more and more of a drunken ass and a bore, a good spender but a man everybody did their best to ignore. Nobody cared much about the price of prunes, especially when some slobbering drunk tried to talk about them.

It was one Saturday night and the Jepses' tenth day at the Little Casino when Milk-wagon Annie, big bust and all, appeared on the dance floor garbed in an English riding habit. With her was a distinguished gentleman in black Russian boots, a well-fitting dark suit with the latest cut in riding breeches, and a high, white stock at his throat. Somebody whispered that his name was Alexis Kirshenef; that he had been there before. By the cut of his fine black beard, he looked like one of the Czar's noblemen.

The chic, bright eyed, wide awake little Mrs. Jepsey was dancing with the powerful looking gentleman at midnight when all the lights had been lowered to a wee, puny glimmer and the orchestra softly played that tantalizing waltz called Hold Me Tight In The Moonlight, Honey.

Mr. Jepsey sat hunched in a corner with a drink-smearred table in front of him. For just about a second the Mr. Jepsey whiskey jitters faded

from his eyes. He became the cold, level-eyed Steve Clark, the G-man, again. A hunch, backed by further information and a tip—plus the long, tedious play-acting wait at the Little Casino—was bringing results.

He glanced at another corner, and saw Tom Craig, another G-man. A vision of Jim Ford dying at a splintered instrument board flashed in front of him. He rocked his head to one side, and thickly ordered another drink when a flat-footed waiter came along.

He was dancing with Mr. Alexis Kirshenef's lady friend an hour later and drunkenly trying to tell her that he wanted to buy her a diamond the size of the Rock of Gibraltar.

CHAPTER VII

PICK-OFF

IT was one-thirty when they went up to Mr. Jepsey's room. Milk-wagon Annie was a little drunk. Mrs. Jepsey seemed a little drunk, too, and leaned against Mr. Kirshenef a trifle more than was good for him as they mounted the stairs. The party, they all agreed thickly, was just getting started.

Mr. Jepsey mentioned something about the fact that it might get a little wild before morning. They had been in the room and busy with their drinking for about thirty minutes when somebody passed down the hall and fell against the door. They heard the man say something in a thick, drunken voice, about the sea being a trifle rough. Everybody in the room laughed.

It was just about thirty seconds later that Mr. Jepsey started shambling across the room with a highball in each hand. The blur left his eyes when he was a yard away from Mr. Kirshenef. The drunken Mr. Jepsey that had been in the room a second before completely vanished. Steve Clark was again Steve Clark, the G-man!

He spoke one sharp, warning whisper from the side of his mouth:

"Now, Alice."

The highballs flew out of his hands to land on the bed. His right fist curved, the weight of his body behind it. It shot upward, a driving maul of a thing that caught "Mr. Alexis Kirshenef" flat on the point of the chin. The blow lifted him, curved him backward. He landed in the middle of the bed with his heels in the air.

Instantly, the Mrs. Jepsey vanished. Alice Bellew took her place. She was upon Milk-wagon Annie with a leap, her eyes glittering, a heavy automatic pistol in her hand. Her left hand slapped hard on Milk-wagon Annie's forehead. It flung the big-bosomed woman's head back. At the instant, the muzzle of her automatic buried itself in Milk-wagon Annie's throat.

"Don't squawk," whispered Alice, fiercely. Then she laughed. It was a nice laugh, one full of merriment. In a little louder tone, she said: "I wonder what happened to the man who thought the sea was rough."

As if the man answered for himself, the door opened.

Tom Craig whisked into the room. He closed the door quickly. He closed the transom. He came forward, grinning.

"Take the woman!" hissed Steve Clark from the bed. "I've got this."

A tiger could not have done it any quicker. It was Mr. Rod Wolfgang there on the bed under Clark. He looked like hell. His mouth had been smashed all over his face. Blood poured from it and his nose. He had made a desperate attempt to fight, but the unexpected cyclone that had struck him had been too much for him. For the second, he was like a pickled mackerel, limp, his mouth open, eyes rolled upward in their sockets. Clark whipped him over on his belly.

Clark laughed to drown the metallic chatter of the handcuffs. He slipped a big handkerchief out of his

pocket, one with something like a small rubber ball tied in the middle of it. He thrust the knot in the prisoner's mouth, whipped the ends of the handkerchief behind the man's neck and ears, and tied it snugly in place.

Milk-wagon Annie might have yelped had she had a chance, but the sudden careening back of her head and that automatic's muzzle jammed in her throat had completely robbed her of even a whisper. And then Tom Craig was upon her. Again a handkerchief came into play. Both Craig and Alice Bellew laughed this time to drown the sharp, almost musical chatter of a pair of Peerless handcuffs.

A blazing-eyed tigress glared at Alice, Craig and Clark when Milk-wagon Annie's head was allowed to rock forward. Craig had already felt of her bosom. The usual heavy automatic pistol was there, riding well down toward her stomach. Craig let it remain.

What Craig was interested in was the fat roll of currency that Alice took from the woman's bosom beside the automatic. Craig snapped a rubber band from around it. He scanned the larger bills closely. Five of them were thousand-dollar bills, the rest mostly five-hundreds. Ten thousand in all. Fortunately there were some bankers with brains enough to take serial numbers of large shipments; and one could always depend on Milk-wagon Annie being one of the first to get her share of the loot. Here was proof now—at least proof that Annie had played her part in the West-bound Limited robbery; and Annie was a woman who would talk to keep out of a hot seat!

The G-men laughed merrily. Alice cackled and said something about another drink. Clark said something about the party coming along fine, and he said it in Mr. Jepsey's whiskey-thick voice.

It was at that moment that the transom was thrust rudely down again by a hairy-backed *paw* of a hand.

A MAN stood on a short stepladder taken from a linen closet down the hall. A big Colt automatic was in his right hand. He spoke whisperingly, his voice thick with tension.

"Havin' a hell of a lot of fun, ain't you? You fools might have knowed that the boss would have somebody 'round to back 'im a little. I recognized your pardner Craig. It was me that bumped against your door a little while ago. The boss didn't answer back, and then I knew that something was up; and then I see Craig dart in. Start gettin' the handcuffs off. If either one of you even bat an eye I'll blow you all to hell."

The muzzle of the automatic flinched, covering Clark, Alice Bellew, and Craig. Murder gleamed in the burly man's black eyes, and Craig recognized that face. It belonged to Blacky Winters, one of the most desperate killers of Rod Wolfgang's band.

"You heard me!" he hissed. "I'm starting shootin'. I—er—"

His voice died with a squeak. He stiffened, eyes widening. A voice below him spoke, in a guarded tone.

"Go ahead and shoot, Blacky." Old 66 had appeared like a shadow out there in the hall and under Winters. "I'll blow you to Kingdom Come and back again."

A trapped animal, Winters eased back, his face sickly yellow with rage. He disappeared from the transom. Clark whirled, crossing the room. He opened the door.

Old 66 ushered the snarling Winters into the room on the muzzle of a Tommy-gun. "Been watching the place for almost an hour," the G-man explained. "I moved my camp up closer this afternoon, you see."

Had Mr. Trantiphilopolis seen him, he would have promptly ordered him out of the hotel, just as Old 66 had been ordered away from the kitchen door early in the morning while trying to buy a can of coffee from the cook. For he was not the Old 66 men in Washington knew. He was much

older. A mass of tobacco-stained gray beard covered his face. He was filthy dirty, and when he had appeared at the kitchen door to arouse the unbridled ire of Mr. Trantiphilopolis, he had been badly stooped, just another old prospector wandering about in the hills with a big burro, a ragged tent, and the usual assortment of a gold hunter's camp equipment. A grin broadened on his face now.

"Take his gun," he ordered as Clark closed the door. "I just didn't want to bother with it."

While Craig and Clark took charge of Winters, Old 66 moved on to Rod Wolfgang and Milk-wagon Annie. He bent over them, speaking in a low voice.

"So help me, Moses, Annie," he chuckled, "I'm so glad to see you I could kiss you." He turned then to Wolfgang as Milk-wagon Annie glowered and tried to pull away from him. "And little old Roddie, in person! Boy, how you'd like to cuss if you had that gag out of your mouth.

"You should have seen the job our little Annie made of a stolen plane, Roddie. I suppose you had a car waiting for them on that big flat west of Reno where she landed to let her pals down to earth. The trouble with Annie is, she grows tired of things a little too soon now and then. She took her bus back in the air, and tried to drop it into a lake while she came down in a parachute.

"Came very near doing it, Annie. It hit the water, all right, but it kept on going to land against a pile of rocks at the head of the lake. Bad break for you. And the car came on. It must have picked you up in just a couple of hours after your take-off from the benchland. Get anything on them?" He glanced at Clark.

"Plenty from Annie," Clark told him. "Tom's got it."

"Proof?"

"Positive! Ten thousand in currency, the most of it Westbound Limited stuff!"

Clark hastily told him of every-

thing that had happened then. Old 66 listened intently, and nodded.

"Good," he chuckled. "The hole-up—one of them, anyway—won't be more than five miles from here. I was back in the hills almost straight west of here yesterday. Somebody dropped a bullet close to me just as a little warning that prospectors are not wanted in certain sections."

"The horses Annie and Rod rode here will take us to the place." Alice Bellew was speaking in a low tone.

"Best bet in the world, yes," agreed Old 66. "And didn't I say we'd get our line on Rod and Annie up here in this swanky whiskey pot? I could almost kiss Blacky over there."

Blacky Winters, disarmed and gagged now, stood against the wall. His black eyes glowered. Milk-wagon Annie looked at him. It was as if they were trying to talk to each other with their eyes.

"Tom will stay here," Old 66 was going on in a hushed tone, a few moments later. "After we're gone an hour, Tom, you can call Sheriff Newt Kelly in Carson City on the telephone. Tell him to get himself a quiet little bunch and come here. No newspaper men, tell 'im. We are making fast work, but you never can tell when you'll strike a snag. Blacky, here, must have ridden a horse of some sort. I'll leave that horse and ride that confounded jackass I bought from the drunken old prospector when I took over his outfit. We'll get some action right away quick. Let's get going."

But there were a few plans to be made, a few loopholes to cover. Clark, playing drunken Mr. Jepsey again, staggered back downstairs to see if any undue excitement had been caused among the guests. He came back shortly, staggering down the hall with a bottle of whiskey in his hand. Behind him thundered a fox trot down on the dance floor.

"Everything's as smooth as silk," he told Old 66. "Nobody has tumbled to a thing."

"Good enough," grinned the G-man. "I'll go out now and get that fool jackass of mine and join you in ten minutes in the bushes back of the hotel. Be careful when you go to get those horses. You know little Roddie and the milk-wagon baby. They're hell for their tricks."

Clark and Alice Bellew gave him a few minutes. They left the room, then, armed and ready for business. They slipped hurriedly out into the hall. They went down the servants' stairway to the dark rear porch, eased out into the dense shrubbery, and stood there listening. They heard Old 66's big burro snort somewhere up there in the darkness above them.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ALARM

GINTY McGINTY saw them come out the back door. He was up there in the bushes, waiting for Blacky Winters to come back. Now hell was to pay sure enough. Blacky gone, and Blacky evidently had been made a prisoner there in that hotel and was not coming back.

McGinty thought the whole place was swarming with G-men. He stood back in the darkness when Old 66 appeared with his burro. A heavy automatic eased out of McGinty's bosom, right hand gripping it, his thumb feeling for the safety. He lifted the gun, took deliberate aim. His forefinger started to squeeze the trigger, but something halted it. Hell, he couldn't risk it! A shot would spoil everything. McGinty eased closer to the big tree behind which he was hiding. He stood there holding his breath.

He saw Clark, Alice Bellew and Old 66 ride away, vanishing like shadows in the darkness of the forest. With a Tommy-gun he could have blown them to pieces, but a man had to use his head now. One glance had told him that those fool horses Annie and Rod had ridden were going

to take Clark and Alice Bellew straight to the hide-out. Things *had* to hum now. The rest of the gang could not be left to their lot back there in those high, dark hills.

McGinty stole out of his place of hiding. He slipped quickly to the place where he and Blacky had left their horses in the denser underbrush and trees a hundred and fifty yards beyond the place where Annie's and Rod's horses had stood. Leaving Blacky's horse, McGinty mounted, dug his heels into the ribs of his old bay, and turned rapidly away from the scene.

Keeping well to the left of the G-men and the woman, McGinty hurried the bay along, urging him into a gallop now and then by beating the old horse down across the rump with his automatic. A mile went by, two, three, four. At times the forest closed about him like a black coffin. The bay kept wanting to swing to the right and hit the old trail, but McGinty kept him headed in the general direction of a deep, forest-walled valley far back in the hills. Dawn cracked the eastern heavens before McGinty came in sight of the valley and saw a deep blue lake shimmering in the distance and two miles below the high shoulder of a great, hog-backed ridge.

At the upper end of the lake stood an old hunting lodge with a moss covered roof. Beyond it, backed into the timber, stood several little out-buildings.

Here was the hide-out, an ideal spot for any gang to drop out of sight of the world under the guise of a hunting party. All would have been well, McGinty told himself bitterly, if Rod had had sense enough to stay put for a while. But buzzing off to some dance and a frolic was like Rod Wolfgang. Money burned holes in his pockets, especially if there was a place anywhere in reach in which one could find good looking women hanging around.

It was a wonder that Harp Gambler had not gone with the fool. Would have, damn 'im, if a job had not been so new behind him. Harp always laid low for a couple of months after a job. It was that Annie. Always wanting to go, always looking to pick up a man somewhere.

Rapidly, McGinty galloped down the hill. Two giant Great Danes and a pair of Russian wolfhounds saw him coming, and started a vicious baying and yelping as they shot out from under a corner of the porch and stood straining at their chains until Harp Gambler appeared on the porch to silence them with a volley of oaths. A few minutes later, McGinty was galloping up, bouncing all over his saddle. He pulled his bay to a halt, and slid from the saddle stiffly. He was blurting out his story then as others of Wolfgang's and Gambler's men appeared in an excited huddle on the porch.

"Rod didn't know Clark an' that damned dame," McGinty was telling them. "Me an' Blacky spotted 'em through the window while the dance was in full swing. Maybe Rod an' Annie had had a little too much to drink. Anyway, I couldn't go in. Blacky couldn't go in. We were tryin' to hoodwink a waiter from the kitchen door to carry Rod a note when they all got up and went upstairs. The waiter got suspicious. The lug was about to call the Greek who owns the dump. To make a long story short, Blacky finally went in the dump from the back way. I waited in the bushes. Then that Old 66 popped up from somewhere, and went in behind Blacky. Later, Old 66 came out, then Clark and that Bellew dame came out. They were carrying Tommy-guns or something just as strong under their coats. Clark and the dame took Rod's and Annie's horses. Old 66 is riding a burro. They'll be here before we know it."

"Three of 'em?" Harp Gambler had gone forward, catching him by the shoulder. "Just *three*?"

"Sure, but three of a kind like that can play hell—"

"Shut up!" snapped Gambler. "I'll bet you just got scared of your own shadow. You can't even tell your yarn straight. But if that three are on their way here, this is one time we'll wipe out a lot of old scores. I've never forgot that Big Dago O'Brien, back in Orchard Street in New York, was my best friend. If they come here, I'll stick until I've wiped them from the face of the earth!"

"Get this horse out of sight. Get the dogs out of the way, Splinter. You can handle them. We've got to get ready for some damned straight shooting in a mighty short while."

Things moved with the precision of fine watch work. Years before they had operated together. Only the constant hammering and battering of the government's ace-men had broken them, splitting them and killing off their members until, at last, they were but two little rag-tags of what had once been two of the largest and most desperate gangs in the history of the country. But it was like old days now, old days and preparing for the coming of the cops in some stuffy alley where the talk of guns would settle it all. They made ready rapidly, each man knowing just what was to be expected of him.

In ten minutes, a vast silence settled over the buildings there at the end of the lake. Birds chirped in the big willows down at the edge of the water. It was as it should have been, so quiet and so peaceful. Even the little wind that had come up just before dawn had stopped blowing.

CHAPTER IX

GUNS TALK IT OUT

STRUNG out, keeping well away from each other, Old 66, Steve Clark and Alice Bellew entered the valley. Old 66 was to southward. Steve Clark had gone on ahead, twenty minutes in advance of Alice Bellew.

She was coming in from the east now, watching her chances, keeping behind the shelter of low trees and rocks as much as possible.

The place looked anything but dangerous. A thin streak of blue smoke was rising from the kitchen flue. A woman came out of the house with a pail on her arm. She wore a big, loose house dress and something on her head that looked like a faded sunbonnet. She went to a bowl-shaped group of small boulders at the edge of the lake, dipped the pail downward, and returned slowly to the house, going inside.

Alice Bellew was at her appointed place first. She reined her horse in behind a little weather-beaten shack, the back of which was overrun with poison oak and low oak bushes. It was here that she left the horse, making her way cautiously around the corner of the shack, keeping clear of the poison oak until she was out of danger from it. There at the corner of the shack she halted behind a large, moss-grown stump. Her Tommy-gun was ready. She looked past the main house, and saw Old 66.

Old 66 had left his big burro somewhere down there in the forest. Coming forward afoot, keeping low by walking doubled almost to his knees, he dropped down and out of sight behind a group of boulders scarcely seventy yards from the main house.

With the lake guarding it to southward, the house was well covered now; and now Steve Clark appeared. He swept forward swiftly on his horse, reaching the corner of the house. With a leap, Tommy-gun ready, he was out of his saddle. Darting on he reached the open kitchen door, and whisked himself quickly inside.

It was at that very moment that the woman in the loose house dress appeared again. She walked off the end of the porch with her pail, going toward the lake again. But she was going a little hurriedly now. Suddenly she stumbled, almost fell, the long,

loose dress flying up. Alice Bellew saw that it was a trick then. The "woman" in the dress was not a woman at all. When that dress flew up, Alice Bellew saw the legs of a pair of black trousers and the big, long-soled shoes of a man.

AND then, rising from their places of ambush all around, eight men in the outbuildings and the forest, started shooting. Old 66 flinched back in the rocks as if he had been shot at the first volley. A hail of bullets from a Tommy-gun thudded into the stump right in front of Alice Bellew, the flying bark and splinters appearing to knock her down.

It was hell in the mountains now. Alice Bellew was down, her gun beneath her. She rolled over, scrambling to the broken-down doorway of the shack, dragging her gun along with her. Flat on her stomach in a minute there inside the shack, unmindful of the tangle of briars on the dirt floor, she was in position to fire.

The "woman" at the lake had thrown down her pail, and had turned to run, screaming lustily. In a moment "she" was behind protecting boulders, had dropped, snatched up a machine-gun, and was entering the fight. Alice Bellew's gun chattered, its vicious *rat-rat-tat-tat* joining the reverberating ring of firing filling the little valley.

But it looked like a most hopeless thing. Somewhere in the trees and rocks to the right of the little shack, another machine-gun opened up. Alice Bellew saw splinters flying from the side of the kitchen door. Again she realized that crookdom had played another one of its tricks.

The gunman up there in the rocks and trees was shooting into the kitchen and into a cast-iron stove with a rousing fire burning in it in the corner. One did not need a second guess to know what steel-jacketed bullets would do to a thin, cast-iron stove. Steel-jacketed bullets, coming in a rain from the muzzle of a machine-

gun, would simply shatter the stove like chalk.

Soon smoke was boiling from the kitchen door. With fire scattered into a large pile of old newspapers and rich pine kindling beside the stove, flames were spreading over the entire kitchen. Black smoke rolled out the back door like oily black barrels, and that meant that the kitchen had been kerosened.

It was a nice plant, one that could have hardly failed to bring the best of results. Steve Clark appeared at one of the windows, shooting, but a flame swept around the house like ignited powder. More oil! Plenty of oil! It was as if the entire house had been soaked with it; and now the flames were mounting in the still air, a licking, roaring tongue of red lolling skyward like a fearsome tongue.

Inside the house, Steve Clark was being driven back from window to window. Every door was a blazing inferno. The smell of gasoline mingled with the kerosene. The front porch burst into flame as suddenly—and with almost the same sound—as a cork popping from a bottle. Fire was running across the floors, licking in every direction.

Something exploded in the kitchen. It was a ten-gallon can of gasoline sitting on a shelf above the stove and punctured by a bullet from that expert marksman's gun up there in the rocks and trees. In a minute it would all be over.

A licking flame, jerking up in front of Clark, burned his eyebrows away, blinding him for the moment. He staggered back, his lungs filled with smoke and the deadly-sickening taste of oil heated into scalding steam. Clark dropped, went down to his knee, and again turned toward a blazing window where the panes were already cracking and falling from the heat.

And outside it was hell. Alice Bellew had lifted the "woman" from behind the rocks; had literally turned her around with a ten-round burst of shots. The "woman" staggered for-

ward, a machine-gun clutched in arms, breast high. "She" stumbled, fell, rolled over, and lay still, the dress now wound upward waist high and showing a man's hips, legs and feet. Afterwards that bundled-up thing there on the ground was going to be known as the last of Ginty McGinty with four bullets piercing the money belt in which he carried his share of the Westbound Limited loot.

It was Steve Clark, shooting through a blazing window, who killed Harp Gambler a few seconds later. Choking with the heat and the fumes of oil, Clark was about to make a flying leap through the flames when he saw Gambler from a back room. Gambler was darting from tree to tree out there behind Old 66, getting in close to make sure of his job. Forgetting escape, Clark steadied, took quick, careful aim, and squeezed the trigger of his Tommy-gun. Gambler rocked back, his gun exploding in the air, his hands flying up, a dead man by the time he struck the ground.

Now Alice Bellew and Old 66 were trying to pave the way for the finish of the fight. Alice had crawled out of the shack, rounding it and working herself along flat on her stomach through the dense brush and vines. She reached a place above the spot where she had left the horse, and opened fire on three men hiding there in a row behind a long thick log covered with creepers and bushes.

No quarter in this business! Criminals never gave it. G-men were never fools enough to offer it. Alice Bellew started shooting, and Goosey Jones was the first to suddenly rear to his feet, hands pawing the air clownishly. He went down then, sprawling like a dead lizard across the log while his companions whirled like snarling animals in a trap. The next burst killed Pig-eye the Greek; one of Rod Wolf-gang's killers was next. A man-mountain of a thing as yellow skinned as a Chinaman, he was whipping his gun around and down on Alice Bellew when a burst of bullets filled his belly.

He dropped his gun, curved backward, and spoiled the aim of the cold, fish-eyed Splinter Sam Barclay just behind him; and then Barclay was going down, a rat caught and killed in his own trap.

NOW Clark was coming out of the house at last. He came like a burning bush with an armful of old blankets wrapped around him and every blanket afire somewhere. Once he struck the open, a wild baying of dogs lifted. Two Great Danes and a pair of Russian wolfhounds shot out of the timber, streaking forward like mad.

Alice Bellew and Clark were at work on the hounds now, shooting rapidly but carefully as Clark flung the burning blankets from him. He seemed to forget everything but the forest in front of him and came on through a hail of bullets. He went down there in the edge of the bushes with his right leg broken below the knee by a bullet and a Great Dane plunging atop of him.

Clark lifted the dog from him with an automatic pistol that had somehow come into his left hand. There was a wild burst of shots against the dog's belly, and the dog flung back, back broken, his big fangs biting at himself now.

Alice Bellew went forward. Down there in the rocks she joined Clark, and found him cursing with not only a broken leg but two bullet-burns across the shoulders, a deep, gouging

flesh-wound in the left thigh, and another that had cracked a rib.

"It's all right!" he told Alice Bellew, gaspingly. "It's a mop-up, if we can stick it out."

But there were still men to account for. Old 66, twice creased by bullets, was shooting at one of the outbuildings. The door of it finally flew open. A man staggered out, trying to surrender. A man just behind him cursed him wildly and shot him down; and then, through that open door, three of Old 66's bullets killed the second man.

Two others were to account for, though neither Clark, Alice Bellew nor Old 66 knew exactly how many more were left to fight until two dirty handkerchiefs tied to a stick were thrust out the door of a shack that had suddenly drawn the cross-fire of the G-men and the woman. In a second after the firing halted, two men came out of the shack with their hands up. The Carvello brothers! They who had once taken a G-man and a woman for a "ride" could not "take it" like the rest of the gang. They came out yelling, all their old accent coming back to them.

"No shoota! No shoota!"

Silence now except for the crackling of the flames from the burning house.

The Carvello brothers came on to Clark and Alice Bellew. In a few minutes, Old 66 limped out of his place of hiding. He made his way warily to Clark and Alice Bellew, but there was no need of the wariness now.

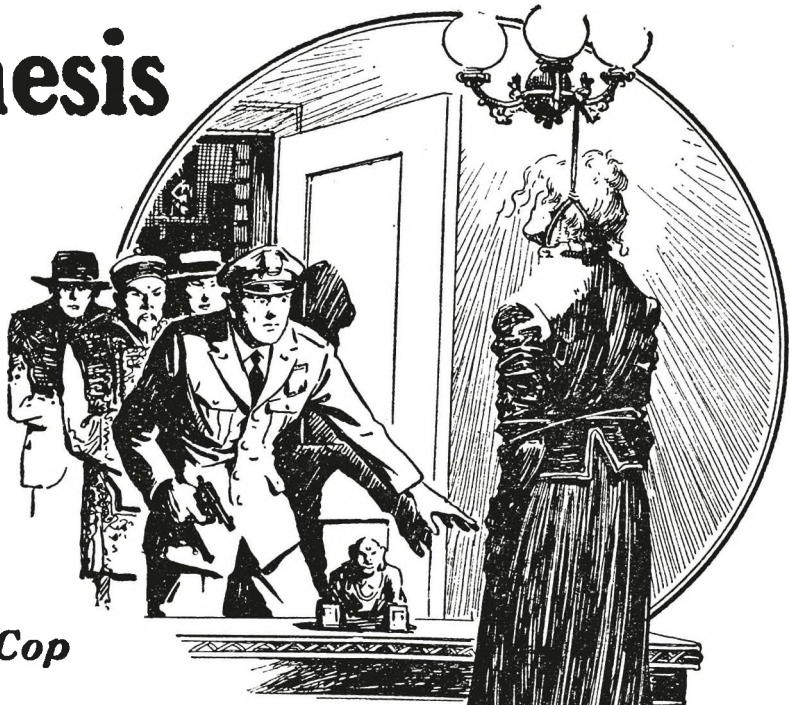
It was over.



Nightstick Nemesis

By
Frederick
C.
Painton

Thrilling
Novelette
of the
Fighting Cop



The newsheets dubbed Patrolman Barney Dall the "Killing Cop." The crooks themselves called him the "Murder Bull." That wasn't anything to what the Commissioner called him after Barney went gun-hunting for the killers of Chinatown Nell Parr. But Barney wasn't there to hear—for he was heading into a suicide snare that a murder trio had built for him with bullets.

CHAPTER I

WHITE AND YELLOW

PATROLMAN BARNEY DALL stood at the corner of Mott and Pell Streets and stared with gray, alert eyes at the colorful Chinatown scene before him. He liked this beat much better than his old post in the Bronx, and he felt grateful to Sergeant McLacey for bringing about his transfer when the sergeant had been shifted.

"You're poison to Lieutenant Allen, Barney," McLacey had said, "and

he'll get you if I leave you behind. So you for Chinatown. But for crysake, use your head because—"

"What do you mean, use my head?" protested Barney. "That's all I have been doing. Studying every night. I bet you I could pass the examinations for detective second grade right now."

"Sure, I know," said McLacey scornfully, "you're so bright you dazzle my eyes. But it won't do you any good if you get kicked out of the Department. Don't break so many regulations. And do you know what the newspaper boys call you now?"

"Sure," said Barney, "the Killing Cop."

"Right. And the crooks call you the Murder Bull, and they'll kill you if they can."

Barney Dall's gray eyes thinned into an opaque hard stare. "Let them try, the rats!"

"Sure. But after all, the state hires a guy at Sing Sing to officially bump them."

Barney Dall laughed mirthlessly. "Yeah? That's what you think." He pulled out a folded newspaper from under his tunic and pointed to a black headline which read:

**GENTLEMAN PAUL MORDER FREED
ON MURDER CHARGE**

"Read it," urged Dall, "Go on, read it and then tell me the guy that wires the hot seat will ever get a chance at Paul Morder. You know and I know that Morder killed Pat Flannigan, one of the best cops on the force. A guy I went to police school with. And what happens? The judge dismisses the charge for lack of evidence."

McLacey bit his lip. "Well, that's the law," he said reluctantly.

"Right," nodded Dall. "Well, if I run into Paul Morder, he'll take a slug through the head. He'll join Iron Hat Schultz in the morgue—and the judges don't dismiss charges against stiff."

"All right, you black-headed Mick," cried McLacey, who hated to be worsted in an argument, "but remember this! They's plenty of guys in the Department who'd like to see you out. And I'm telling you they'll get you the next break you make."

Barney's eyes smoldered but he shut up.

Thinking about McLacey's warning, Barney walked slowly along Mott Street, telling himself they'd never get him. Moreover, now that he needed the extra money to marry Jennie Muller, he'd get promotion too.

He stared at the curious objects for sale. Shark's fin soup; lee chee nuts. Bird's nest soup! He wondered what

that would taste like. Many Chinese passed him. The young men, smartly dressed in the latest Broadway styles, walked briskly, alertly. The old men passed him slowly, shuffling along in padded felt slippers, hands in sleeves, black felt hats pulled down over braided, wound queues. Barney took a deep breath. He liked it here; a touch of Oriental romance about all this.

He reached Canal Street and turned and strolled leisurely back on the other side of the street so as to reach his call box on the hour. Halfway there he was startled by a loud, rending crash as if a barrel of glass had rolled down a set of cellar steps. The sound came from Pell Street.

He heard an excited yammer of voices; felt that electric tension that grips the air when the unusual has happened. He broke into a run and reached the corner in a few paces, tugging at his holstered gun. Upon reaching the corner, however, he thrust the police regulation .38 back, and reduced his speed to a brisk walk.

Two automobiles, one new, expensive, low and powerful, and the other short, antique and practically without paint, were locked radiator to radiator. As Dall approached, a loud voice of violent anger bellowed.

"You dirty, lousy Chink!" cried a man. "Why the hell don't you look where you're going?"

The big thick-set speaker swung a right hook that caught a slight, fragile Chinese youth under the ear and knocked him sprawling ten feet away. The Chinese should have been knocked out. But as Dall came hustling up, the youth got to his feet. His Mongol eyes were slitted with fury, his face a pale saffron. He rushed at the bigger man with gallant courage, striking with his small pale hands.

The bigger man snarled in satisfaction. "No insurance, no nothing, damn you, I'll take it out of your hide!"

He was prepared to strike such a blow as might have terribly hurt the Chinese youth. But Dall arrived just then. He grabbed the arm, whirled the

man and with a push sent him teetering into the gutter. He put out a left hand, palm flat, to stop the charge of the youthful Chinese.

"Hold it somewhere else and charge admission," he said curtly.

A CROWD had gathered as if by magic, mostly Chinese, old and young, and bobbed-haired women among them, too. They hemmed the three in now. At sight of Barney Dall's shield and uniform, the Chinese youth had stepped back, hands dropping passively at his sides.

The bigger man, burly and overbearing, snarled, "You lay another hand on me, flatfoot, and I'll see your shield is lifted."

Dall sighed wearily and got out his notebook. Automatically he wrote the time—four-fifty-six. "I suppose your sister married the Commissioner," he murmured. "All right, what's it all about?"

The big man said his name was Nick Poullos and he was driving through to Canal, taking a short cut, and the Chinese louse had veered and hit him head-on. And who was going to pay for the damage?

Dall turned his eyes to the passive Chinese.

"I am Yung Lee," the youth said quietly. "I did not veer, nor run into him. I was going along the street. He came swiftly—faster than he should—and turned and ran into me."

"You're a lousy liar!" cried Nick Poullos.

A murmur in Chinese went up, and Yung Lee quieted it with words in his native tongue.

Barney Dall looked at the two cars. They were about in the center of the narrow street. The battered old car, a twenty-nine Ford, had left skid-marks where it tried to stop. The other car had left skid-marks but not so long.

Out of the slant-eyed assembly, an old Chinese stepped. "I am Yung Kee," he said courteously, "father of this unworthy youth. I saw what happened. And my miserable son has

spoken the truth. The other veered into him."

"Ah, you Chinks!" said Poullos. "You always stick together. Don't you believe him, officer. Us white people have to stand together. It happened the way I said."

There was a hissing intake of breath. Barney Dall suddenly felt slant eyes burning into him. In that second, it struck him that he was on trial with these Chinese. They feared and distrusted him and the white law. He ignored the sensation and examined the tracks, walked around the cars. Finally, after finishing his notes, he pulled out a summons pad.

"You're to blame, Poullos, and I'm slating you for reckless driving," he said. "You left marks where you veered. Trying to crowd that lad off the road, looks like."

"Why, you crummy—" Poullos yelled, enraged. "By God, I'll fight this and take your badge!"

"Cut it," said Barney, "or I'll take you in myself."

He made out the summons and handed it to Poullos who took it reluctantly. Then Dall shooed at the crowd with his hands. "Go on, get back to your laundry," he called.

Poullos went to his car muttering. The bumper had saved him from much damage and the car drove away.

Dall said to Yung Lee, "Get a garage to tow that heap away. And get it fixed good, because that bird's insurance company is going to pay the bill."

Yung Lee bowed. "This miserable person is grateful to you, officer," he said, "for I—"

Whatever he intended to say was never finished, for a little Chinese youth of no more than ten or so came hurtling down the street, screaming in Chinese. As he saw Barney Dall, he changed to English.

"Big man all blood and no move in hallway," he cried. "He be three-eyed man now."

Again Barney sensed that electric tension. This time one of tragedy. He

thrust a way through the crowd that still clotted close. He seized the youth. "Where?" he jerked.

The boy began to weep in frightened fashion. But Yung Lee spoke sharply to him, and the boy turned and led the way up Pell Street. Barney Dall hurried after him. The child turned into a faded old brick, three-story building and thumped and clattered up the stairway. Barney pulled his flashlight, for even in daylight these stairs were murky. On the third landing, the child pointed and muttered excitedly in Chinese.

The radiance of Barney's flashlight picked out the grisly sight well enough. A Chinese in black silk trousers, with padded felt slippers on his feet, lay curled up on his side as if asleep. Between his eyes was a round blue hole with a single drop of blood hanging redly there. His eyes looked tranquilly at the wall.

But he was quite dead—had been dead from the second that hole had been made by a pistol bullet.

Underneath his right hand was a sharp curved knife whose steel blade had no smear on its gleaming surface. Automatically Dall glanced at his watch—five-two. They'd be wondering about his five o'clock call.

He stared down at the Chinese. Then he became aware of men behind him. The first was the youth, Yung Lee.

"Know him?" asked Barney.

Those who say a Chinese does not feel emotion are wrong. Yung's face was wild with excitement, sorrow and amazement. Only with an effort did he catch himself. He arranged his features.

"The unfortunate is known to me, officer. He is Kei Ming. A brother in my tong."

"What would he be doing here like this?"

Yung Lee shrugged. "Where man wanders lies in the lap of the gods, mister."

Dall got out his notebook and made a careful description of what he saw.

Aside from the appearance of the murdered Chinese, this was little enough. Beyond the dead man, perhaps five yards or so, was a door. The only door on this landing.

"Who lives there?" asked Barney.

The little Chinese answered excitedly, "The old one—the snatcher of pennies. Missus Parr."

Barney Dall lifted his head in startled fashion. Mrs. Parr? That would be the famous—or infamous—Chinatown Nell Parr whom he had heard about. She was a real character in Chinatown. He had seen her once or twice. An old woman of seventy, dehydrated and bent with age. Years ago, before she became a legend, she had been a Broadway beauty whose pictures in tights had adorned many a saloon. When Nigger Mike Salter had run a place here, she had sung in it. She had gone on opium, married a Chinese, Chen Chei Mock, and after he had died, had gone on living in Chinatown. The Chinese regarded her affectionately, and she was never molested. It was said she had a million dollars hidden in her wretched rooms.

Dall ceased writing. Chinatown Nell Parr might tell him about this murder. She should have heard the shot.

He rapped sharply on the door.

There came no answer.

"Mrs. Parr!" he called. "Open up. Police business."

His knuckles played a sharp, impatient tattoo. Finally, receiving no reply, he turned the knob and the door opened under his pressure. He took two steps forward and shrank back.

"Good God!" he muttered.

It seemed to him then that Chinatown Nell Parr was leaping through the air at him like a witch astride a broom. He got hold of his jangled nerves and stared again.

This time he saw the truth. This was an old house and the out-moded gas chandelier that hung from the center of the high-ceilinged room had

merely been remodeled to hold electric lights.

Instead of Chinatown Nell Parr flying at him, she was merely dangling from the chandelier by the neck, from a strong horsehair cord. The wind from the opened window was swinging her lifeless body to and fro like the pendulum on a clock.

Her eyes were open; her mouth was open. On her face was an expression of deadly terror. Barney Dall stepped into the room and her tiny feet, swinging slackly, kicked him in the leg.

CHAPTER II

IN WRONG AGAIN

THE manual of police procedure is very specific as to what a patrolman must do when handling a crime of violence such as murder. Unless he is a witness of the crime or hot on the trail of the murderer, he must make strict notes and notify the Homicide Department with the minimum of delay.

Patrolman Barney Dall wasted twenty more minutes. This can be charged to the fact that he believed in using his head. Instead of running out to leave clues and fingerprints to be ruined by pressing Chinese, he proceeded to look for them himself.

He knew the motive was robbery. The room had been stripped to bits in a frantic, desperate search. Furthermore, she had been tortured. Not only was her skin burned between the toes and the fingers, but pricks near her eyes showed where needles had been used. Finally, she had been hoisted by the horsehair rope so that her toes barely touched to keep her from strangulation.

Either she had not told and had been killed in fury; or she had told and then had been murdered on the theory that a dead woman tells no tales.

Barney found two items which might be clues. The first was a strand of hair about two feet long. The sec-

ond was a chip of amber-colored stone that looked like part of a ring setting.

When the Homicide Squad car arrived at twenty minutes to six, Dall turned over the bit of semi-precious stone but forgot the hair.

Detective First Grade Manhard was in charge. He read over Dall's notes and a heavy scowl made his thick-chinned face lower.

"How come a half hour lost there?" he demanded. "Damn it, we could have closed in this area to pinch any known criminals."

Dall said, "I was alone and I had to stay here and send a kid to have the call phoned in."

"Damn lot of time lost," grumbled Manhard. "Okay. Get back on your beat."

Dall went out, knowing that Manhard would make a report of the delay and that a black mark would be placed against him. He didn't care; his imagination had been caught by the bizarre quality of the crime. Its Chinese background, the glamour around the history of Chinatown Nell Parr, the peculiar mystery of it. Over and over again as he patrolled, he asked himself why was the Chinese shot dead outside the door? Here was a murder mystery like you read in books.

But he had to forget that when he reported at the precinct house at the end of his duty tour. Sergeant McLacey was there, frowning savagely at him. Deputy Inspector Hanrahan was also there, anger glinting in his deep-set eyes. In his hand he held a summons.

"Did you issue this to Nick Poullos?" Inspector Hanrahan demanded.

"Sure," rejoined Dall, and proceeded to tell about the accident.

Hanrahan only half heard him out. "Why you poor idiot!" he cut in. "How the hell you ever got on the cops is beyond me. In the first place, why give a summons to Nick Poullos who has more friends in the administration than some people have hair? Second,

why support a Chink's word against Poulios?"

"Because the Chinese was right," cut in Dall quietly.

"Right, my eye!" yelled Hanrahan. "You dim-wit! Haven't you seen through this yet? The Chinks had their eye on lifting Chinatown Nell Parr's roll. That Chinese, Yung Lee, deliberately ran into Nick Poulios to distract your attention while the murder and robbery were going on or a getaway was being made."

Dall hadn't thought of this, but he had the sense to keep quiet. He was in wrong and a false word now might cause him to lose his shield for good.

Hanrahan tore the summons into tiny bits and hurled the fragments into the air disgustedly.

"As soon as we've sweated a confession out of the young Chink, we'll break this case," he said, "and I'll have to report that a policeman supposedly of intelligence connived with the Chink to supply an alibi."

This was the first that Dall knew young Yung Lee had been arrested for murder. Possibly the youth was guilty, Dall did not know. But one fact stuck out prominently.

"Why was the Chinese shot outside Nell Parr's door?" he asked.

"Shot by Yung Lee to save a divvy," snapped Hanrahan. "Anyway, you're suspended temporarily. I hope I can fix this for you because you're a friend of McLacey's, but I doubt if I can. You handled the thing like a sap."

Whereupon the inspector stormed out, and left Dall to McLacey.

"Ah, God!" muttered the sergeant. "Your mother must have dropped you on your skull when you was a kid. I can fix that delay in reporting, but why give a ticket to Poulios?"

"Because he veered into the Chinese," said Dall.

"What if he did? He's a friend of the big pols. Well, I'll do what I can."

DALL had a thoughtful supper, aware of an inward resentment at the red tape that threatened his

promotion just when he wanted promotion most. Chewing on a toothpick, he went north on the subway to the Bronx and into Two Hundred Twenty-Fourth Street. He liked to talk things over with Jennie.

She sat by the window, knitting something which he feared would be a winter scarf for himself. He sat down heavily and told her what had happened. Usually quiet and soft, she flamed instantly with resentment at the treatment given Barney.

"How dare they?" she blazed. "You did just as you should."

"Sure," said Barney. "But I'm not supposed to use my head. I'm supposed to follow regulations."

She was fearful. "Will they—will they discharge you?" she asked.

Barney shrugged. "If that young Chink is guilty they probably will. Somebody has to take the blame."

He reached into his pocket for a cigarette and pulling out the paper package found shoved inside it the coiled strand of hair which he had picked up from the floor near where Chinatown Nell Parr's feet had dangled. At the time, he had thought it merely a strand of her gray locks pulled out in the torture process.

But as he took it from the cigarette package he saw that it had a golden glint.

"Oh, boy," he muttered, "I forgot to turn this in."

At her questioning look, he explained where he had found the hair. She unrolled it, stretched it between her fingers and examined it. Suddenly she gave an excited little cry. With a quick motion, she wet her fingers and slid them along the strand of hair. Barney watched her, and watching saw that the tiny bit of saliva remaining on her fingers was now colored a sort of orange.

"Barney," she cried, "this is a dyed hair. A quick dye. One that will wash out instantly. This hair belonged to a brunette. Look at the hair root."

Barney did and was impressed. He leaned back heavily. The hair was a

vital clue. If he turned it in now, he'd be further charged with incompetence. He swore softly to himself. Jennie, aware of his perturbation, leaned over and patted his cheek. "You'll lick them," she said. Dall nodded, thinking hard.

Maybe the Chinese thieves did do this murder; torture conformed with their methods.

But why then was this hair on the floor? It might be that some woman who dyed her hair had come to see Nell Parr and it had shaken off. But Nell Parr was a recluse. She never had callers. But how could he find the owner of that dyed hair? Following this through, his mind reverted to the murdered Chinese in the hallway outside. Hanrahan's version of this didn't click with Dall.

"By the Lord!" he muttered, jumping to his feet, "if I could find out why that Chinese was bumped off, I'd know what to do." He put on his hat.

"I was going to make you a cup of tea," said Jennie.

"Save it," he said, kissing her cheek. "I've got lots to do."

She followed him to the door. "Show them, Barney," she cried, her eyes glowing, "that you're the best cop in New York."

He went to Canal Street by subway. He read a five-star final account of the murder, and was startled to learn that Nell Parr had nearly two hundred thousand dollars in cash in her rooms—all stolen. The police had arrived at this figure because the money had apparently been fastened in packages of a thousand dollars with paper and pin, with the amounts written on the paper band in Nell Parr's writing. There was said to be jewels, too, but no verification of this.

The information didn't help Barney Dall any. The bills doubtless had not been marked, or their numbers taken. The money could be spent with impunity.

He walked slowly along Mott Street and inquired of a Chinese curio dealer

where Yung Kee, father of the arrested Chinese youth, lived. Finding it in Pell Street, he turned up that winding short street. Night Chinatown was different.

In the day he had found it drab, ugly, cruelly without any beauty under the harsh sunlight. By night, however, with neon lights going, and with Chinese (a nocturnal people) flooding the streets in quaint costumes, it was colorful, romantic, filled with the smells and scents of the East.

He turned into an ugly, squat brick building and finding the door open, pushed on it. Yung Kee was a tea merchant and, like most Chinese, had his office in his home.

A single bulb droplight glowed saffronly as Dall came up the hallway. As he reached the end where a door was lettered both in English and Chinese, this light suddenly went out. A stairway was to the right. Barney Dall had no gun. Instantly, suspecting a trick, he lunged to the right.

Quick as he was, it was too late. A solid body thudded down upon his shoulders as if dropping from a height, and the weight, as well as the unexpectedness of the attack, bore him to the floor. Savage fists pounded at him; feet thudded in his ribs; a cursing fetid breath fanned against his face.

CHAPTER III

THE LADY LEADS

FOR a brief space the ferocity and fierce surprise of the onslaught bore Barney Dall down and only a miracle kept him from being knocked senseless. That and the darkness. He nuzzled his head into his assailant, took two fierce blows to the windpipe that made him cough, summoned his energies and suddenly reacted.

This is a neat trick and a swell one if you can do it. The assailant, carried on by his own onslaught, getting no resistance and relaxing his own protection, is often caught off guard. This was when Barney exploded.

His head shot upward, trying to strike the chin of the unknown. His feet lashed out and the knees came up, striking for the groin. His fists whipped hard and sunk solidly into human flesh. Holding Barney Dall then was akin to holding an armful of buzzing rattlesnakes.

Silently, he swarmed over his antagonist, risking knife and bullet. Thudding fists, groans and husked breaths filled the silence of the hallway. The grind of bones on flesh. A thumb hooked into Dall's eye and a blinding flash succeeded it, but he wriggled back to butt headforemost before his eye was thumbed from its socket.

In that moment he visualized his assailant, his location. Fists going like pistons he crashed in. A right hook slid off the man's shoulder. In a flash Barney threw his arm around the man, brought the body toward him with such force that they both grunted as they struck chest to chest. Up came Dall's knee.

A sickening groan told it had found its mark.

"Yah!" howled the man, the first loud sound of the fight.

A second later a low whistle echoed through the house. Barney Dall crowded in, locked his arms around his man.

"Stay a while," he panted.

For a second the assailant relaxed. Barney started to drag him toward the wall where he expected to find a light switch. But human muscle can hold a tight grip just so long. Experienced wrestlers know when to lie docile until that fractional relaxation for a renewal of the grip. The assailant felt Barney relax as Barney kicked out his foot to locate the wall. In a flash the man twisted like a snake, a violent blow caromed off Dall's jaw, hard enough to upset his balance. Before he could recover, the antagonist had squirmed out of his grip and the sharp rattle of racing feet bespoke retreat. Dall turned, shaking his head, and raced in pursuit.

He reached the door in time to see a hand snake out of a dark car without lights and drag a taller man inside. The car roared into low gear, whined up the street toward Mott and vanished on two wheels around the corner.

Barney stood for a second, assembling his wits, straightening his rumpled clothes. Pursuit was useless. He didn't even have the number.

Why had he been attacked? Why had the antagonist run at the sound of a whistle? He shrugged and then his eyes thinned.

"Yung Kee ought to have some answers," he told himself, and reentered the hallway.

With a match he found the switch that was on a brief landing where the stairs led up. He saw that anyone could hide here and jump anyone approaching. The man, then, had been waiting for him. Or had he? Perhaps he had been waiting for someone else.

He rapped at Yung Kee's door. A second or so later came the rattle of unleashed chains and the door opened. The old Chinese, wearing black gabardine and a black skullcap with the red button of the mandarin class, stared blankly and then bowed in sudden recognition.

"Ah," said the old man, "the benefactor of my son. Please to enter my miserable lodgings."

He led the way to a small room heavy with teakwood furniture, hung with brocades, and smelling of frankincense. The old man squatted before a taboret whereon reposed tea things of gorgeous jade. All this he did with a stately dignity that impressed Barney.

"Some of the worthless tea, perhaps?" he inquired.

Barney Dall did not learn until later the formidable etiquette that surrounds a Chinese. Impatiently he waved his hand.

"I'm here for information, Yung Kee," he rejoined. "To get your kid and myself out of a jam."

An expression of pain swept the old yellowed face and quickly vanished. Even to this kindly white barbarian, he must not show how much he loved his only son. Besides, he would take his own vengeance.

"The police coming to an old man is a paradox worthy of Confucius," he murmured, impassively.

Dall shook his head.

"Then what's the extra tea cup, half full, sitting there for?"

Yung Kee's look at the extra cup was expressionless; his shoulders rose and fell. "I cannot tell you."

Dall set his lips grimly.

"Listen," he said, "I'm trying to help. Your kid, Yung Lee, is liable to burn for murder. I've got ideas about that killing. I think you know who the woman was who called today on Chinatown Nell Parr. I want you to tell me who she is."

A SILENCE fell on that room, a silence that shut out all noise and brought to the nostrils the smells and color of the Far East. The old man removed his hands from his sleeves, clapped the palms, and when a yellow servitor came he gave some orders in clipped consonants. The servitor departed.

"Mister Dall," said Yung Kee quietly, "for many years the Chinese living here have outwardly conformed to American rule. But we think differently in here"—he tapped his narrow forehead—"and it has been found necessary to use our own methods of reward and punishment. In this case, we will use our own methods."

Barney Dall weighed this.

"Which means I'm right, and your son didn't kill Nell Parr."

"No. Nell Parr was married to a tong brother of mine. Years ago, before the sickness afflicted her mind, she was kind to my people. A Chinese remembers a friend even in adversity. She was sacred to the Chinese. No one would harm her."

Barney Dall sat up straight. "And that means, then," he said, "that the

Chinese who was killed was her bodyguard—a man assigned by your tong to protect her."

Yung Kee's eyes narrowed in approbation. "You are clever, Mister Dall."

Now, swiftly, Barney Dall prodded the old man with questions. But to his amazement he got no further enlightenment. Every question was parried or denied or met with silence. Slowly his anger at this stubbornness grew.

"Listen, you can't save your son unless you talk."

Yung Kee leaned forward. "Your American justice has many worn cogs. The gears slip. I have told you that Nell Parr was protected by my tong. We could not save her from death. But we can see to it that her murderer is punished."

"And your son?"

"We will save him if we can. If not, then I shall see that he is revenged."

Barney Dall understood then. The Chinese is a stubborn man where his vengeance is concerned. The killer of Nell Parr and her Chinese bodyguard should pay according to Chinese custom, and despite Yung Kee's apparent friendliness to him, Barney Dall was just a white interloper. One to be distrusted. Barney Dall felt the anger of frustration. Despite his sympathy he rose stubbornly.

"You've got to tell who she is."

Yung Kee shook his head. "We go over ground already seen."

Barney came close. Yung Kee rose. As he did so, a small oblong of white was to be seen hanging loosely in his voluminous sleeve. A piece of paper.

Before the old man could make a move, Barney Dall grabbed him and seized the paper. "You make it necessary," he said.

Yung Kee snarled and grabbed for it, but Barney snatched it beyond reach. Opening it, he saw it was a piece of rice paper with Chinese writing on it.

"What's it say?" he demanded.

Yung Kee shrugged. "I will not tell."

"Okay," shrugged Barney, "we have Chinese interpreters at headquarters." He saw he had struck home and followed his advantage. "Come on, Yung Kee, give me that lead. I need it to save myself from a trial that will cost me my shield."

Yung Kee's eyelids snapped wide.

"Save you from a trial?"

"Sure." Barney told him how matters stood and seeing sympathy, delicately hinted his trial was caused by his protection of Yung Kee's son. The old man listened quietly.

Then he held out his hand. "Debts are made to be paid. I will help you. Give me the paper."

Dall did so.

The old man said, "There is a girl—Christie Carle, she is called, and she is to be found at a night club, the Paroquet. That should be enough for you."

"It is, thanks." Barney turned. The old man's voice held him.

"Mr. Dall, I think you are a good man. But I warn you not to stand in the way of destiny. You will not be permitted to interfere with what is to happen. I have yielded foolishly here, but I cannot yield further."

"That is a threat?" asked Barney Dall.

Gently the old man shook his head. "The superior man never threatens a friend. We will not hurt you, but we will not let you interfere with our effort to save my son."

Outside in the cool air Barney Dall wiped his brow and felt he had returned from a long journey to a place where camel bells and rickshaw cries had echoed in his ears. He was under no illusions. Friendly or not, the opposition of Yung Kee and his vengeance was a dangerous obstacle. He took the subway uptown.

The Paroquet was on Fifty-First Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, a holdover of the old prohibition days, trying to make a go of it now by dispensing poor liquor at high

prices and giving a risqué cheap show. Low smoke-filled room; rose lights; men and women huddled close over liquor and the whole smelling of cheap scent.

Barney Dall did not fail to see the sudden gleam in the head waiter's eyes as the man piloted him to a seat. A waiter learns to spot a policeman. Barney sat down and ordered a Tom Collins.

Dall's Tom Collins came and he sipped at it, his keen eyes searching the room. A strange sort of tenseness was in the air. He saw the head waiter talking to a man. The man's back was turned; the man walked away with his back still turned. When the waiter went by a moment or so later, Barney said, "Know a doll around here named Christie Carle?"

"Never heard of her," said the waiter.

Barney sat until the cheap music started. Girls were around, professional hostesses they were called, and he got up with the idea of dancing with one and learning something. As he did so a dapper, slim dark man in perfectly fitting dinner jacket approached him, smiling. Even smiling, the face was sinister.

"Hi-yuh, officer," he said familiarly. "Enjoying yourself? Can I get you anything? I'm Paul Morder!"

"Yes, I know," said Barney warily.

"Everything's on the house. I've got a piece of this." Paul Morder gestured. "Sit down and have something good."

Barney Dall sat down. "I'm looking for Christie Carle."

"You pick 'em swell," chuckled Gentleman Paul Morder. "What it takes she's got in clusters." He gestured to a waiter who nearly fell down hurrying. "Bring Miss Carle here. Officer Dall likes her."

The girl came, tall, voluptuous in the Mae West style, eyes pretty but calculating, aware of her charms, flaunting them. Gentleman Paul made the introduction. Barney regarded her with interested eyes.

"I'll leave you two to enjoy yourselves," Morder said. "Get everything good because it's on the house."

THE girl's hair was dark and Barney noticed one thing, it was straight and seemingly damp whereas for her make-up her hair should have been curly. With a purpose in mind, Dall played the part of sucker; he told her he was crazy about her. He drank the champagne and stared into her mascaraed eyes, let his fingers tighten on hers. Finally he said as if in disgust, "We can't talk here. Let's go places. Take a ride."

"We could go to my apartment," she said. "You're pretty nice, big boy."

Barney pretended a drunkenness. "You ain't seen nothing yet."

He got her cloak and hat and helped her into a taxicab. She snuggled up to him and began talking about the horrors of night club life, and how she'd like to get away from it all and have a chicken farm in Jersey somewhere. Barney Dall held her hand, kissed her several times and, as he told himself, acted like a fool. He didn't ask where they were going nor did she say.

Yet after fifteen minutes of this, they pulled up before a pretentious apartment house on West Side Avenue. She got out and said, "Come on up, honey, and see how a poor working girl lives."

Barney staggered out. "You're marvelous," he muttered.

They went up in a self-operated electric elevator. There was no one in sight. On the sixth floor she led the way to an end apartment and fumbled with a key.

"Oh, dear," she muttered, "I'm so darned nervous. Honey, unlock this, will you?"

Barney took the key and did some fumbling himself. He had a sense of premonition, of peril. Yet as he unlocked the door and swung it half way open and peered inside without entering, he saw nothing.

"After you, darling," he waved a hand.

She went in, saying, "I hope you like my little nest."

Barney followed, pretending to stagger, and thus got a look around. He saw nothing. The door closed and with a smile at him she threw the inside lock on it. She came to him, patted his cheek, kissed him.

"Sit down, honey," she cooed. "I'll go get something comfortable on."

"Swell joint," he said, sitting down. "But I'll get you a better one."

She went into the next room, closed the door. Barney, listening acutely, did not hear a click. He lit a cigarette and waited. Two minutes. Five. Ten!

"Christie," he called. There was no reply.

Alive now to danger, he leaped to his feet. He went to the door through which she had passed. It was locked. It was a steel door. He shrugged. Why had she done this? Obviously there was another exit to the corridor from that room in there. But what was the idea?

"Stalling for time, maybe," he said. "But why?"

He went to the door through which he had entered the apartment. Cautiously he threw the lock she had put on the door.

Behind him came a solid roar of sound. Something banged on his head and, hiccoughing like a man who has laughed too much, he staggered, whirled half way and pitched forward on his face.

CHAPTER IV

COUNTERMOVE

GENTLEMAN PAUL MORDER stood graciously bidding a couple of rich playboys good night. But his eyes with drooping lids anxiously watched the doorway and a slight breath of relief escaped him as he saw the full, lovely figure of Christie Carle enter. She did not remove her hat or cloak but came directly to him.

Silently he led her to his little private office, sound-proofed.

"Well?" he turned and tension showed in his set features.

"He's dead."

Paul Morder's eyes gleamed. "Good! Are you covered up?"

"Sure," she nodded. "I left him and went to Ham Maxner's. He'll alibi for me. When I left him, I went to the apartment and set the guy's watch back, allowing about ten minutes, and busted it."

"Good! Ham alibis you—and I'm alibied here." Morder smiled. "By God, that automatic gun wired to the lock is a honey. Where'd it get him?"

"Right through the head. His face was all bloody."

She lit a cigarette, moved restlessly. "I still don't see why we had to chance bumping off a cop."

"You're not smart, that's why." Morder, with a smoker's instinct to smoke when someone else did, lit one. "The guy was willing to swear that Poullos's car veered into the Chink's. Ordinarily any other cop would have lied for Poullos. That was serious but could be fixed. But tonight the goof sees that Yung Kee, and then he comes here looking for you. Does he smell a rat? Sure, he does. And we've got to shut him down."

"It was dangerous just the same," she said.

"Why? What can anybody prove?"

"We've got to get rid of the body."

"Why? That's not your apartment and Loretta's in Los Angeles."

Christie frowned. "We ought to supply a motive for his killing."

Morder frowned. "Nuts! We can take him out and dump him in the Bronx if you want."

"All right," she said, "that'll be okay. And frankly, I'd like to be on that boat for Europe. I ain't afraid of the cops, but them Chinks sure give me the creeps."

"They won't do a thing," encouraged Paul. "It was a bad break that that Chink was watching the old

woman. But how could we know she had protection?"

Paul Morder got his hat and coat and stick. "The police haven't got a clue to us now," he boasted, "and what the Chinese suspect, they'll keep to themselves. They don't run to the cops."

"No, but they're liable to run to us—with guns or knives. I'm scared of Chinks."

The two went out to Paul Morder's bullet-proof sedan and were driven uptown. They went to Hamilton Maxner's. Maxner was a rich playboy who sampled morphine and sin and was drunk most of the time, and drunk or sober was madly in love with Christie Carle. Here Paul Morder left Christie and went down to a corner drug store and made a telephone call.

Fifteen minutes later Nick Poullos joined him. An uneasy, worried Poullos. He gasped and turned pale as Morder told him the details.

"Geez!" he muttered. "We're in up to our necks."

"That's the way it is," said Morder. "We've got to keep going—or burn. Come on."

They walked toward the apartment house where Christie Carle had lured Barney Dall.

"Where's the dough hid?" asked Poullos.

"Where you can't find it," snapped Morder. "We'll divvy when this stiff is disposed of."

Poullos was still uneasy. "Listen, I don't like it."

"What have they got?" growled Morder. "I'm alibied; so are you and Christie. I'm the one cop-killer," he grinned, "who beat a rap."

POU LIOS said no more. They reached the apartment house and cautiously investigated. Apparently no one had heard the shot; there were no changes, and when Morder pulled open the door, he found the body of Barney Dall lying just as it had been.

They wiped down the blood, got one of Dall's arms over each of their

shoulders. Dragging him between them like a stupidly drunken man, they took him down to the parked car. None saw this either. They stacked him in the rear seat and Poullos sat down beside him while Paul Morder started the car and took it smoothly away from the curb.

They rode easily along. Poullos was still fretful. "When do we split the wad?" he demanded.

Morder growled irritably. "Oh, tonight, if you like, after we get rid of this set-up."

"Where?"

"What difference does it make?"

"This," snapped Poullos, leaning forward. "You and Christie are lamming. I've got to stay. How do I know you won't take the wad and leave me in the bag?"

"You don't know," laughed Morder. "That's your risk." Poullos cursed. Morder said, "Aw, keep your shirt on. I was only kidding. We'll go to Christie's place and split there."

"You've got it with you, then?"

"No, you sap! Shut up now."

Poullos relaxed, but from his demeanor it was to be seen that he placed no faith in Paul Morder. As he leaned back, one of Barney Dall's limp hands fell against his leg. The idea of a corpse touching him was distasteful. Gingerly he picked up the hand to put it between the dead man's outstretched limp legs.

"Holy God!" he suddenly ejaculated. "He's warm!"

"Warm?" repeated Morder. "Hell, you're crazy. He's colder than a mackerel—he's been dead going on two hours."

Poullos shivered, shrank from the corpse.

"I tell you he's warm," he chattered.

Paul Morder cursed. His foot hit the brake. His hand streaked inside his pocket. "Grab him, you fool," he muttered, "if he's warm—"

Barney Dall was quicker than either of them. A sweeping blow that had everything he owned behind it connected with Nick Poullos's jaw.

You could hear the Greek's teeth click when they slammed together.

Barney Dall leaned forward, poked his finger into Paul Morder's back. "Keep heading straight for Broadway, Morder," he said softly.

But he forgot the rear view mirror. In it, revealed in the reflected light from the dash lamp, Morder saw it was only a finger. But he did not turn with his gun. Instead, with a movement that Barney could not intercept, he opened the door, slid out of the car, dropped to the pavement.

The car by now was going very slowly. As Morder's feet hit the pavement, the gun streaked from his pocket and it was spitting lancing flames before he had taken a step. Dall fell to the bottom of the car. Slugs tore through the opening. Ripped through the upholstery of the car. Slammed above and below him. Hit the seat back within an inch of his nose. And then the car, running loosely, with the wheel cramped by Morder's swift departure, wheeled angularly into the curbing. They took the curb and smote an electric light pole with a crash that knocked Dall into the front seat. He snaked over and out the door, with the swift pad of feet racing behind him.

"Kill him, Poullos," he heard Morder's urgent voice, "it's him or us now."

But Poullos did not answer and Dall, seizing the chance to run, made the most of it. Morder fired at him. One slug bounced bluely off the sidewalk. Then he rounded a corner into a driveway, ducked through another alley and so threw off Morder's murderous pursuit. He ran clear to Amsterdam Avenue and went into an all-night restaurant where the man stared at his rumpled, bruised condition doubtfully, but started an order of ham and eggs and three cups of coffee. Here Barney Dall pulled himself together to think. It was really the first time he had a chance.

Frowning, he reviewed the incidents since the gunshot had roared be-

hind him and the bullet had ripped across his scalp just above the left ear. He had lain a long time unconscious. When he had regained consciousness, he had discovered the clever electric mechanism whereby, when he opened the door, a gun, trained on it, had been electrically fired. This had been the tip-off.

As soon as he saw it, he knew that any charge of assault or attempted murder would fall through. It was his word against Christie Carle's, or Paul Morder for that matter; and in a court of law their word was as good as his. From this he reasoned one fact; the two crooks would not let him lie there. A murder is simple until the time comes to dispose of the body. So he waited there, human bait, to see what would happen.

It had been going good, too, until Poullos had discovered he was warm.

What to do now? He ate his ham and eggs and drank the coffee. It made him feel better.

"If I pull a pinch or make a charge," he reasoned, "all three of them would be sprung. I know they killed Chinatown Nell Parr, but a jury wouldn't. I know Morder and Christie tried to kill me but I can't prove that either!"

Suddenly he smothered an exclamation and put down the scalding coffee.

"The money!" Involuntarily the exclamation broke from his lips and the cook gave him a suspicious look. Of course! That was it. And as sure as God made little apples, Christie Carle had it in her room. He remembered the conversation. Hastily, he flung down a half dollar and departed. But at the curb he stopped. Where was her place? Where would they split the loot?

A sudden feeling of exhausted discouragement gripped him. His head ached abominably; he was utterly spent. A plan of action occurred to him, but there was nothing more he could do tonight. Tomorrow would be as well.

"The hell!" he muttered. "I'm going to bed!"

CHAPTER V

A NEW ATTACK

SERGEANT McLACEY heard Barney Dall out to the last word. He leaned back in his chair, pushed up his uniform cap and scratched the damp red curls on his forehead.

"By the living devil!" he muttered. "I don't know whether you've been dreaming—Are you leveling with me, Barney Dall?"

"You know it's the truth," rejoined Barney steadily.

The two were sitting in the precinct house at noon. Barney, because of his suspension, had no duty tour, and he had unburdened his heart of the whole business.

"I suppose it is," sighed McLacey. "You have your faults, but one of them ain't lying. But God Almighty, do you realize what you've told me? That Poullos is behind Gentleman Paul Morder, and that's why that crook's been getting away with murder?"

Dall did not reply; he was waiting for McLacey's verdict. He got it at once.

"Lad, it's no dice. You can't charge Poullos or Christie or Morder and make it stick. Even a dimwit lawyer could get them off. You've got to have proof and—Wait a minute."

He reached for a telephone. "Find Christie Carle, Nick Poullos and Paul Morder. No pinch. Tail them." He turned back to Barney. "Besides their alibis," he resumed, "there are three of them against you—and your Chinese can't or won't say anything."

"The Chinese kid still in jail?" Barney asked.

"Sure, and likely to burn unless you break this case."

"I've got one idea that might work," said Barney Dall and enlarged upon it.

McLacey heard him out and shook his head. "That money is in general bills. How could you identify it as Nell Parr's?"

"Give me a chance," said Barney Dall.

McLacey argued. Barney talked back. An hour passed. Then the telephone rang. McLacey listened, swore and jerked down his cap.

"Morder's scrambled. Not around his regular haunts. Christie Carle's disappeared, too. We're checking up on Poullos." He frowned. "Dammit, I don't like your idea, but if—"

The telephone rang again. "Maybe that's on him," broke off McLacey.

He said, "Hello," listened, and then nodded to Barney. "For you."

It was Mrs. Muller. She said angrily, "What did you want Jennie for down there?"

Barney Dall sat bolt upright. "Me, want Jennie?"

"Yes. She just left. I told her—"

What she told Jennie, Barney never heard. A roaring grew in his ears until it deafened him. He heard his voice say, "But I never sent for Jennie, Mrs. Muller—I—"

He closed his eyes for a second, opened them. Somehow he got a grip on himself. "Who came for her? What did he look like? What sort of a car?"

He got his answers, but they were of no help. The driver of the car whom Mrs. Muller had not seen, had sent up for Jennie by a boy playing in the street. The car had driven off. She didn't know cars; no, she hadn't seen the license number. He seemed suddenly old, gaunt, as he hung up.

"They've got Jen," he said wearily. "They're hitting at me through her."

"I know," said McLacey gently. "But they've overstepped. I can get help for you on the strength of this."

"They'll get in touch with me—call off my dogs or else—" said Dall. He jumped to his feet, nervously paced the floor.

"Mac, locate Poullos for me. That's all I ask. I'll make him talk or—"

"Sure, kid. Sure!"

But Poullos had disappeared. Barney went to his boarding house, hoping for a message. But there was none. On a hunch and a desire to be doing

something, he went to Yung Kee's. By now it was growing dusk, and the neon lights began to glow, and the dark, weird Chinese who seemed to sleep by day, came out of their holes like phantoms from another world.

Once again Barney Dall entered the hall of Yung Kee. This time a tall, powerful man, obviously a Manchurian, looking awkward and gawky in occidental clothing, stood barring Yung Kee's door.

"I wish to see Yung Kee," Barney said.

The immense man with the bullet-shaped yellow face shook his head.

"Him not in—sorree!"

Barney Dall pushed on the door. The man thrust him away. Impassively, "Velly sorry, big mlasters not in there. Go."

Barney Dall heard faint voices. His eyes thinned. Suddenly he slugged the Chinese and not on the jaw. His fist sank to the wrist in the man's stomach. Taken unawares, the Chinese gasped out his breath, groaned and staggered back. Dall shoved on the door, literally crashed in.

He stopped at the sight before him.

Yung Kee sat as he had before. Beside him was a small dark Chinese. Facing these two, terror-stricken, sobbing convulsively, was Christie Carle.

She turned swiftly as she heard Barney enter. Seeing him she quickly ran to him. "Don't let them hurt me," she screamed. "It wasn't me, I tell you. It was him—it was Morder. Damn him! Get me out of here, for God's sake."

NEITHER of the Yungs made any movement to intercept or interfere. At sight of her, Barney Dall's heart leaped. He could use her, or through her, use these Chinese to save Jen. He made her no reply and walked to Yung Kee.

"I've come for help," he said.

"The superior man does not invade the presence even of his friends

without welcome and invitation," said Yung Kee sternly.

"That doesn't matter," said Barney Dall patiently. "Morder—or this w e n c h—has got my girl. Jen. They've kidnaped her to shut my mouth. I'm shut until I get her back. Don't you see? You've got to help."

They stared in silence. A fragrant wisp of frankincense drifted across Barney Dall's nostrils. He looked into the Mongol faces: slant eyes revealing nothing, faces as set as wax masks.

"They might kill her," he said. "I've lost the trail. You can put me back on. That's all I ask." He felt of the gun resting warmly against the bulge of his hip.

Yung Kee said, "Mister Dall, you are an honorable man, and one who would keep the custom if you knew it. We think well of you. But now you interfere beyond the limits of friendship. I can do nothing except ask you to go."

At this second the great Manchurian burst into the room, a knife which to Dall seemed a foot long, glittering in his hand. Dall jerked his gun but even this did not stop the Manchu. A quick order from Yung Kee did. The giant bowed submissively but the glance he turned on Dall was full of hatred. Dall shivered slightly; he was surprised now to see how big the man really was that he had dropped with a punch. The Manchu withdrew. Barney put away his gun but kept his hand near.

"You must speak," he said.

"No," said Yung Kee.

Christie Carle ran to him, seized his hand. "They're going to torture me, kill me. Get me out and I'll save your girl."

Barney stared from her to the impassive faces in front of him. She might be lying but he had to take a chance.

With a sudden movement he drew the gun and covered the two Chinese. Almost as if he had looked into a

crystal, he could foresee now what would shortly transpire.

"Sorry," he said briefly, "then it'll have to be this way."

Again he encountered the stolid looks, the blank wall of an Oriental face. Yet their glittering dark eyes spoke of things he could not read.

Yung Kee said, "Such rewards from white foreign devils are to be expected. The account is closed, Mister Dall."

The girl sighed and ran to the door. Barney lingered strangely enough. "We had, when I was a kid," he observed, "a saying that there were many ways of skinning a cat. Maybe Confucius could say it better, but that's the way it is."

The two Chinese exchanged quick glances. Barney said to Christie Carle, "Watch my back. I've got that man-mountain to get by."

"God," she muttered, "I'll never forget this. Never. They were going to stick hot needles under my fingernails." She shuddered.

Barney thrust the gun snout under the Manchu's nose. "Nothing from you but silence," he ordered.

The Chinese did not watch the gun; he watched Dall's eyes. His great hands hung beside him, fingers moving as if he were tightening on an invisible throat. The woman muttered in terror; Barney felt her breath on his neck. As he backed out she got behind him, and in this manner they reached the street. And continued backing to Mott Street.

Barney pocketed the weapon. "Now, Christie," he said softly, "just try to double me and see what happens."

She protested all the way to Canal Street that she wanted only to get free of the Chinese. "I've always been afraid of them," she sobbed. "No kidding, I'll help you to your doll and then I'm lamming. For good and for all."

Barney let her keep that thought. They came to a hack and a car dart-

ed forward with eagerness and a driver leaned out. "Taxi," he said.

Christie climbed in. Barney de-
layed.

"Wait a minute," he said.

"What for?" she cried quickly. Barney moved down to the next cab. He whispered softly to the driver.

"Is that a regular cab on this stand?"

"Hell, no. He's been waiting."

Barney nodded.

"Here's twenty bucks," he offered. "You follow that cab and don't lose it, and there'll be twenty more where this came from. And it's on the level—" He flashed his police badge.

"You bought something," said the driver.

Barney went back to the cab and got in. "Tell him where," he said to Christie.

"Morningside Drive," she said. "The Albemarle."

"Okay, Miss," said the driver. The way he said it told Barney plenty. But he pretended to ignore it. The cab whined away and settled down to the long run uptown.

Barney sat on the right side; the gun was in his right hand pocket. He slumped down carelessly.

"What's Morder thinking of?" he demanded. "He can't get away with this."

"He's got away with worse," she retorted. "It ain't you, flatfoot; it's them Chinks."

Barney relapsed into silence. If he noticed her fingering her purse bag nervously, he pretended not to. Occasionally, twisting in apparent impatience at the ride, he perceived the pursuing taxicab. Past Seventy-Second Street, Christie Carle fidgeted. She started a conversation about a holdup in a night club she had once seen. She switched into a violent tirade on crooked cops.

At Ninety-First Street, she had her old bravado. Barney Dall never seemed more careless; and never had he been more alert.

The cab driver swung into a side street leading to Morningside Drive. Not the right one, Dall noticed.

Suddenly Christie Carle said, "What's that?"

"What's what?" asked Barney Dall, turning.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw her strike with the purse bag—a chunk of lead doubtless in its base. The bag hit his head. He weaved just enough. Then he groaned loudly, said, "You—" and slumped forward. But, slumping, he made sure he could dodge a second blow if she chose to deliver it.

But she did not. "Okay, honey," she cried to the driver, "slow down—quick!"

The cab slowed down; Christie Carle pushed and thrust at Barney's body until she tumbled him to the running board. He was not going slackly. He was falling with all the skill he possessed. He rolled off the running board. He heard her say, "Quick—step on it!"

The cab roared on its way.

It was fairly dark here. Barney instantly got to his feet, rubbing his ear which the slungshot had really hurt. He saw no following lights, and cursed. Had the cab lost him after all?

"Damn that driver," he muttered, "and she's going straight to Morder."

He could see the twin tail-lights, winking ruby red against the slight rise in the asphalt pavement. And then a car slid alongside him and a voice muttered, "Geez, I almost didn't see you."

Barney exclaimed, leaped on the running board and wrenched at the door. "Get after that cab," he ordered. "And leave your lights off."

The cab roared a half block before the driver said, "I figured maybe you didn't want them to know you had a tail, so I cut them."

Barney was too relieved to make remark. He sat grimly fingering his gun, watching the tail-lights of the cab ahead.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH PLAYS TRUMPS

THE staircase was dark, and as he tiptoed from landing to landing Barney Dall almost wished he had chosen the fire escape in the back to invade this hide-out. He had passed it up because it looked too risky, just as he had not waited to telephone McLacey. Christie Carle would bring alarms and fright. The murderers would flee and any delay might permit an escape. He tiptoed to the final landing, close enough behind Christie Carle to hear the door click as she pulled it closed after her.

Had Barney had time, he might have thought what a swell hide-out this was. A fine old residential section of New York, among respected Columbia professors and research students. But he had mind only for the fact that the end of the trail lay behind that door over there.

The immediate problem was how to get in and not be killed in the doing. Morder would shoot on sight—and the door was locked.

While he was pondering this point, he heard footsteps on the stairway up which he had just come. There was no light in the hallway. He shrank back against the wall and extended his automatic. He could barely make out a silhouette against the lighter darkness below as the figure came into view. First head, then shoulders and finally an extended oblong shadow.

To his surprise, the shadow went straight for the hide-out door. The shadow rapped, four times rapidly, then a pause, then one.

Chains rattled on the other side. The shadow said, "Poulios, Paul. I got the chow."

Barney's heart leaped. Perhaps the breaks had been against him, but this was one for his ledger. As silently as a stalking tiger he came away from the wall. He was behind the squat figure, so close that he felt his breath must fan the man. That Poulios must

literally *feel* him there. But the man did not.

The door opened a fraction, then half way. Barney could not see who was opening the door. Nick Poulios started to walk in. As he took the second stride, Barney Dall rammed the gun snout firmly against the broad back.

"Keep on walking, Poulios," he said softly, "and don't look around."

The force of the jab made the man trip forward. Barney followed him into a room whose blazing lights made him blink. He eased to the side instantly, to get his back to the wall, and his gun was very blue and very dangerous.

"Reach 'em, Morder," he said briefly.

Poulios, quivering with terror, had stopped in the center of the room, only half way turned around. Christie Carle had frozen, half rising from a divan. A drink of liquor was in her right hand. After the first abortive attempt to draw a gun, Paul Morder had stiffened and stood motionless, expressing supreme astonishment. Then rage as his hands went up.

"You dirty, double-crossing—" he began at Christie.

She gave a frightened cry. "Not me, Paul, I swear to God. I dumped him—"

"Cut it," said Barney. "Where's Jennie?"

"She ain't here," snarled Morder.

"That's a lie. Go get her, you—" Barney gestured with the gun toward Christie. Something in his expression started her on her way. A momentary silence fell, and Nick Poulios, pale, his face a desperate mask, turned all the way around to face Barney.

"You got nothing on us," he snarled. "I'll have you busted for this."

He waved his right hand in a fist. Barney Dall's eyes studied that fist.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered.

In that second he knew who had killed Nell Parr.

POUlios yelled, "For God's sake, do something, Paul."

Morder looked murder but his hands stayed up.

Christie Carle reëntered the room and behind her came Jennie Muller, rubbing her wrists as if she had been tightly bound. The girl's red hair was tousled, her clothes rumpled, but her dark Irish eyes were alight and unafraid.

"Barney!" she said.

Barney looked at her and she had never seemed so beautiful, so fine and splendid. But his face did not change.

"Go downstairs, Jen," he said, "and you'll find a taxi about a half block to the right. Get in it and find a telephone. Tell McLacey to come here right away. Have him send a couple of squad cars."

She came across the room, slim, rounded, with the lithe eager walk of the young. Her face clouded.

"But you, Barney, you—they'll—I'll stay with you."

"Go on," he said harshly, "this is police duty. Call McLacey like I told you."

Her glance became one of pride. "Right," she said.

Without coming close to him to get in the line of fire, she went on through the door. Paul Morder cursed, but the unswerving gun muzzle held him motionless. Poulios uttered a loud groan. Then silence came upon the room.

Barney finally said, "Get the money you robbed Nell Parr of, Morder."

Loud protests. "You got me wrong, I never had anything—"

"Skip it," said Barney wearily. "Get the dough, or I'll find it."

Christie Carle said, "He's got us, Paul. I'll get the money."

She went toward a sort of *escritoire*. Barney watched her, but he never saw her produce that gun. She must have got it when she released Jennie. He only saw the sudden whirl of her, the hiss of dress against silken legs. Her white arm flashed up.

Barney had his weapon trained on Paul Morder. He swung, but too late.

The sharp report of a small pistol roared in the room. Barney felt the lead go into him. Even as he whirled to the impact, he saw Paul Morder's hand dive like a streak for a shoulder holster. Morder's hand and the gun reappeared almost simultaneously. His eyes were fiendish.

The gun roared, but another explosion preceded it. Barney, choosing to stop Morder, ignored Christie Carle and his gun had fired a fraction of a second ahead of Paul Morder's. The .38 slug from his weapon hit the crook over the belt buckle. An *oof* of sound escaped Morder's lips as the bullet knocked the wind out of him.

He buckled slightly in the middle, and then went down in sections, first his knees, then his buttocks and then he rolled on his side, still trying to fire again. Barney could see the white knuckle of the trigger finger tightening. But Paul Morder hadn't the strength.

"He's got me," he exclaimed in utter astonishment, "he's got me."

His voice seemed a release to the electric tension of the room. Christie Carle fired again, and Barney Dall never knew how she missed, for his eyes were on Nick Poulios.

The man was running for the door to the next room. Christie Carle ran at Barney screaming, "What's it take to knock you over?"

He turned to fire at her. But he never pulled the trigger. She was wearing white. As she charged at him, he saw blood appear on her dress. Some invisible hand stopped her as if she had run into a stone wall. Another roar of sound struck on his ears. He heard Nick Poulios scream. A strange weakness assaulted Barney then, and to his own surprise he found himself on his knees.

He saw Nick Poulios lying on his back, holding his hands to his neck through which a crimson flood pumped.

Barney took a breath; it hurt him as if he had a stitch in his side. What had happened here anyway?

His glance still roved, and then he saw the two Chinese near the window and, beyond the window, hanging against the night, a rope. The first Chinese was Yung Kee, the old Chinese, and he held the gun. The other was the huge Manchurian.

And this one was coming toward Barney, clacking shrilly in Pekinese dialect. Barney didn't understand what the man said, but he didn't have to. Every movement was a betrayal of the intent to kill. The expression was saying that the white foreign devil must die to shut his mouth, too.

Yung Kee's voice stopped the Manchurian in his tracks. Barney fell to one side, braced himself, got in a sitting position with his back to the wall.

"So what?" he said.

Yung Kee advanced in worried fashion. The gun vanished into his pocket.

"Mister Dall," he said, "we must have an accounting."

Incredibly weak and weary, the wall felt comfortable against Barney's back. "About what?"

"Again I ask your help," said Yung Kee agitatedly. "You are clever, Mister Dall, and your remark about skinning a cat told us what you intended. We followed your second cab. We, too, were trying to locate Poulios to save my son."

"Yes," said Barney.

"But your intrusion forced us to play the game a different way than we had intended. In your presence I have wounded this woman and killed Poulios."

The old man wet his lips. "This will mean arrest and notoriety for me, unpleasant time in jail even if these be crooks. We played the game your way—we could have stopped you from taking the woman from our midst—it is time you helped me now."

Barney listened languidly. He knew he must be losing blood. This sleepy feeling. But his mind was clear and calm. What Yung Kee said was right.

Yung Kee was still talking. "We are all in this room without right. Unless it can be proved that these three killed Nell Parr, technically we both could stand trial for murder."

This was true. But Barney with that lucidity of mind that now gripped him, saw all the answers.

"Listen," he said groggily, "the police will be here any second. Get back the way you came. I'll attend to this."

"And we will be cleared?"

Barney nodded.

Yung Kee said, "And you can save my son?"

"Yes," said Barney. "Beat it—quick!"

Yung Kee looked at the corpses. He bowed jerkily as if to ghosts.

"Nell Parr," he said distinctly, "the debt is paid in full."

He was gone and with him the Manchurian. Silence came to the room. Barney Dall had his eyes closed when McLacey, leading policemen with drawn revolvers and Tommy guns, burst into the room. McLacey looked at Poulios and Morder, dead. At Christie Carle groaning from her slight wound. At Barney Dall, pale and weak.

McLacey stooped and cradled Barney Dall in his arm. "Up to your old tricks, eh, you black-headed Mick," he muttered. "How are you going to alibi yourself this time? Where's the proof these killed Nell Parr?"

Barney opened his eyes and smiled. "Take me to Poulios," he muttered. Carrying him as gently as a babe, McLacey put him beside the corpse.

Barney called on his will, lifted Poulios's right hand. Here even McLacey could see that the ring finger between the knuckles was thin, barely skin covering the bone, as if a ring had been there a long time and had not permitted flesh to make the finger pudgy as Poulios's other fingers were pudgy.

"Poulios killed Nell Parr," Barney said. "He deliberately veered into

Yung Lee to cause an accident to establish himself with the police somewhere else. He wore a ring. Remember that piece of carnelian? It broke when he was torturing the poor old woman."

McLacey exclaimed and bent over the corpse. He searched it and finally put before Barney's tired gaze a solid gold ring with empty prongs where the jewel mounting had been. "A bit of carnelian under one prong, lad," said McLacey roughly. "That proves it."

"And her hair will show brunette under the microscope," said Barney, gesturing toward Christie, "that will prove that she was the woman in the room. She and Poulios framed it, and Morder, being Christie Carle's lover, was called in to help the situation out when I balled their plans up. And Christie will confess."

He grinned sleepily, "Anything else?"

"Why did you kill Poulios and Morder?" cried McLacey. "Geez, what we could have learned from them! The commish will tear his hair."

Barney knew that with his answer his chances of promotion would go glimmering. But he had promised Yung Kee.

"They resisted arrest," he said. "I killed them in self-defense."

"Horsefeathers," said McLacey.

BARNEY DALL was right. There was no promotion. A palm for his Police Cross and a half eulogy, half reprimand—for being so quick on the trigger—finished the matter.

After a month in the hospital, he went back to Chinatown. At the end of his first day's tour, he sought out Jennie.

"Look," he said, "what do you think of that?"

She stopped brewing the strong tea to look. It was a beautiful piece of rare white jade with Chinese characters cleverly carved upon it.

"From Yung Kee," he said, "and it makes me brother to every Chinese in America and China, too."

Jennie's eyes glowed. "Oh, Barney, it's beautiful."

"Seems nice," he admitted. "But I'd rather have had promotion."

"You'll get it," she said, pouring a cup of tea for him. "They can't keep you down."

"Maybe not," grinned Barney, "but they're trying hard enough."

He poured some of the tea into his saucer to cool.



Murder Debt



By Paul Chadwick

A *The Ghost was behind this latest deluge of "queer" money. The T-men knew it, and set a trap that they were sure no normal human being could escape from. But the Ghost lived up to his name and lured them into a bullet-ringed nightmare.* **P**

MELVIN PRENTICE, youngest and newest recruit of the Treasury's undercover men, crept stealthily up the slope toward Hilltop House, heart thudding with excitement.

Night pressed around the drab walls of the old building. The darkness was like a black backdrop across a stage already set for violence, blood-

shed, death. The grim-eyed Treasury operatives moving forward with drawn weapons, were actors in a drama of vicious crime; men who would soon speak their lines in staccato bursts of flame from gun snouts, punctuating each sentence with screaming lead.

There was a pause among the black pines that rimmed the lawn. A cau-

tiously whispered conference ended in a quick command: "You, Tyler, take two of the boys and cover the back. Burns and Larsen take two others, divide up and see to the sides. Prentice and Stimson, come with me."

Tenseness quivered in the hard-bit-ten divisional chief's voice. Old "Dad" Kelly was keyed to the highest pitch tonight. This was no ordinary raid. It might end the tide of queer money that had been flooding three whole states. Based on a stoolie's information, it was being directed against the "Ghost," one of the most elusive, cunning criminals in the country; a masked maker of counterfeit cash who could turn out a ten, twenty or fifty dollar note that fooled the sharpest eyes.

Young Prentice knew this and was ill at ease. His lean, sunburned face was creased with worry. The tip that had sent the "T-men into action had come too suddenly to suit him. There hadn't been time to properly prepare. The Ghost had slipped through the law's fingers often before. He moved like a phantom, unknown, unseen, leaving a trail of spurious bills behind him; leaving confusion, suffering, suicide, murder even, in his wake.

And Prentice, newcomer though he was to the T-men's ranks, had a bitter personal grudge to settle against the Ghost; a murder debt which must be paid.

He gripped the hard butt of his police positive and followed in the footsteps of his chief. Stimson was close beside him, holding one of the new automatic rifles that could hurl a dozen cupro-nickel slugs in the space of a second. There was danger in the task tonight. Queer shovers as a rule were sly, cowardly man-jackals who would turn and run at the least sign of peril. But the passers who worked in secret for the Ghost, combined craft and furtiveness with the ferocity of wolves.

Pine needles made a soft, silent carpet beneath Prentice's feet as he advanced. His colleagues had spread out

around the house as Kelly had ordered. Each of the raiding group had been told to shoot first and question afterward if the counterfeiter tried to resist.

For a moment, like a dimmed spotlight turned on a stage, announcing the beginning of a play, a watery moonbeam broke through the black clouds overhead. A fitful wind stirred the highest branches of the pines. Melvin Prentice got a glimpse of Hill-top House. Its gray, paintless sides, its Mansard roof, its black, curtainless windows reminded him of a huge skull with staring eyes. Then the moonlight faded. The sudden, weird suggestion of the thing was gone.

In the darkness that followed a noise came; the faint, stealthy squeak of a window being raised. Dad Kelly's whisper cut through the night. "Look out, boys! Get behind trees!"

HIS warning sounded barely in the nick of time. As Prentice angled his lean body back of a pine, hell seemed to break loose in the blackness straight before him. The moonlight had revealed the raiders to a sentinel posted in the house. A greenish flame appeared in an upstairs window, winking intermittently like a devil's eye, while bullets cut a swath among the pine needles where Dad Kelly and his men had stood. The machine gun yammered and clattered, a destroying monster gone insane.

Melvin Prentice raised his police positive and fired at the winking flame. He heard Stimson go into action with the automatic rifle.

Glass crashed and tinkled in a splitting salvo of sound. Bullets ripped against wood. Prentice, whose marksman's eye had been made keener by hours spent on a government pistol range, sent another slug at the window. A man gave a guttural cry, and for a moment the firing from the upper story stopped. But gunshots sounded in a deafening fusillade at the sides and rear of the old house. Above them came the grim voice of

old Dad Kelly: "Get ready, boys—we'll rush the front!"

As though in answer, a light stabbed out from a lower window, playing among the trees. Dad Kelly leaped back as an automatic cracked and a bullet came so close that a white streak appeared across the trunk of the pine before him.

Stimson was thrusting his arms around his tree. He sprayed lead toward the house in a vicious stream from his rifle muzzle. Again an automatic spoke, from a different window this time, with the light still set, and Stimson crumpled with a groan, his shoulder shattered.

In a wave of horror, Prentice saw the T-man's body pitch to the side of the tree. He heard the automatic bark, saw the lash of a bullet close to Stimson's head. The murderous marksman inside the house was trying to finish his work.

Snarling deep in his throat, lips curling back from his teeth like a dog about to plunge into a fight, Prentice swung his gun up and blasted a shot straight at the light which rested on a window ledge.

There was a smack as the lens broke. The light went out. In the darkness, Prentice leaped to the spot where Stimson had fallen and pulled his body back behind the tree. "Easy, boy, lie as still as you can!" But Stimson didn't hear him. He had gone unconscious with the battering blow and the pain.

Dad Kelly's curses filled the night. Prentice pocketed his own pistol, snatched up the fallen automatic rifle and stepped into the open. For a moment he crouched, then darted forward straight toward the big house, with Dad Kelly close behind.

A gun ripped death from the same window out of which the shot that had struck Stimson had come. Prentice let go with a sweeping volley of lead that crumpled glass before it and brought a high-pitched scream. A machine-gun yammered again from a window directly in front. Its bullets beat a tat-

too of death close to the T-men's heads, kicking up dirt in miniature geysers along the unkempt lawn.

Prentice sent a single burst in return and plunged toward the house door. Dad Kelly's gun was barking as he ran. The old divisional chief was a hard-bitten veteran of many fights.

Prentice's shots had silenced the machine-gun above. He groped toward the door, and as he found it Dad Kelly yanked him aside. "Wait—they may be—"

His words were cut off by the tearing, murderous stream of bullets that came through the door. "Give it to 'em, boy!" snarled Kelly between set teeth.

The automatic rifle in Prentice's fingers clattered again. He swept its nose across the door and heard a man inside cry out in pain and fury. The shooting stopped. Prentice flicked on a light, pressed the rifle's nose against the lock metal and blasted with a rivet hammer beat till the lock gave way.

He put his hard young shoulder down and battered inward. His fighting blood was up. The masked counterfeiter, the Ghost, must not be allowed to get away.

The hall was acrid with the smell of powder smoke. A wounded man lay groaning on the carpetless floor. Dark liquid oozed from a spot by the fallen man's leg. Prentice thought of Stimson lying outside and his face grew hard. His big-knuckled hands still cuddled the rifle butt.

"Careful!" warned Dad Kelly in a whisper. "The other boys will be coming in."

Prentice listened a moment and heard a volley of firing from the rear hall that showed the queer shovers were still holding out. He sprayed his light along the hall, dashed recklessly down it.

A man came running through a door that opened off the hall. He dropped his weapon and raised his hands at sight of Prentice. Prentice motioned him savagely along the wall till he faced the thrusting menace of

Dad Kelly's gun. The divisional chief took charge of the prisoner and called a warning to his men outside. "Hold your fire!"

Prentice ran along the hallway and flung open a door at its end. He whipped sidewise as bullets came through, then thrust the rifle's muzzle around the frame and sprayed lead viciously till cries and curses sounded and the bullets ceased.

"Okay," a harsh voice called. "You got us—we give up!"

Prentice kept the gun trained on the half dozen men who shambled through the door. Kelly's operatives came in from all sides quickly and started a clean-up of the house, making the raid complete.

But as Dad Kelly's grim eyes swung from face to face, he shook his head. None of these prisoners surely was the Ghost. They didn't have the necessary brains. They were gunmen, desperate underworld scum; but passers only. And there were no plates, no presses or paper in any of the rooms.

"Look for a cellar," Dad Kelly snapped. "That's where we'll find him and his junk."

He glared at the prisoners. Their scared and sullen silence seemed to confirm his words.

Four T-men, Prentice among them, began to hunt for cellar stairs. They found a door, the inside bolts of which gave way under the impact of bullets. There were steps behind it, leading downward into black, chill depths. Flashing their hand lights, they began a cautious but swift descent.

A basement extended under the building's largest room. Dad Kelly followed the exploring group, leaving assistants to keep the disarmed prisoners quiet. He cursed as his waving flash moved across the cellar. "Empty! Nothing and no one in sight!" he snarled.

THE place had no windows. Its floor and walls were made of concrete, and the only objects in it were an oil lamp on a shelf, a board table

and a single straight-backed chair.

Prentice, taut with disappointment, was the first to see the cracks of another narrow door. He gave a shout that drew the other's attention, then ran forward. The door swung open under the pressure of his arm, exposing a narrow, straight-cut passage.

"The Ghost was here all right," he gasped. "He was here, Chief—and made his getaway through this."

"Follow it!" snapped Kelly harshly.

They did, and saw at the end of five minutes that this was an exit and nothing more. While they had crept up the slope, the masked counterfeiter had slyly followed this passage down to the hill's very foot. There, among thick bushes it opened, and the Ghost had easily slipped away unseen. They had the gang, but once more the masked leader had been too smart.

Back in the cellar of Hilltop House, Dad Kelly paced and swore. He had the oil lamp lighted. He searched the place for any sign of bills or printing presses. He went to the board table and the chair and started to examine them. It was then that Melvin Prentice pointed tensely to the floor.

Dad Kelly nodded. "Uh-huh—matches. I see 'em—paper ones. The Ghost sat here in this chair and smoked; but where is he and where does he make his bills? Those mugs upstairs don't know any more about him than you or I. They figured just as we did, that the plant was here. That's why they put up such a fight. We've caught his passers before. All they ever told us was that a man who wore a mask was handing out the stuff."

Prentice's gaze was still focused on the floor. He touched Dad Kelly's arm, eyes suddenly alert.

"We didn't get the Ghost—but here are clues!"

"Clues!" Dad Kelly snorted. "Matches you mean."

"No, Chief—clues! They—they point to Adolph Molnar—the man I always thought was the Ghost."

Dad Kelly's lips went grim. "Look here, boy," he said. "I know how you feel. You want to nail the rat who slipped your brother Vance that dose of cyanide. And I'm willing to agree it was the Ghost, since Vance was tailing him at the time. Get the Ghost and you've got your brother's murderer.

"But when you accuse Molnar off-hand like this, you're getting in above your depth. Molnar's been studied, shadowed for months. His house and studio have been searched. We've proved he's not the man we're after. He's been dropped."

"But Vance had Molnar's address in his pocket when they found him," said Prentice stubbornly.

"Sure, sure he had. And he carried a lot of other etchers' and engravers' addresses, too. Those are the boys we always watch when bad money starts to come."

"There was the cyanide angle," persisted Prentice.

"All etchers keep cyanide around to clean their plates. That doesn't prove a thing. And proof, boy, is what this business calls for. Uncle Sam can't send a man up on suspicion."

"Those matches!" repeated Melvin Prentice.

"Forget 'em, kid—forget 'em. You're no Sherlock Holmes that you can look at a bunch of matches and name the man who dropped 'em."

Prentice was silent. But while the others searched every foot of the cellar room he continued to eye the matches. Then presently he turned to the table, took his penknife out, and probed along the crack in its center. He tensed as a tiny bit of blank cardboard came into view. He picked it up, saw that its corner was rounded. There was blue color near one torn edge. It had come from a playing card obviously, which had wedged in the crack and broken off when someone played or shuffled. It seemed to indicate that the masked counterfeiter was an addict of solitaire. Prentice pocketed the bit of card, said nothing.

Later that night, after the prisoners had been lodged in jail and the T-men had disbanded, he drove off alone into the darkness.

HE turned his battered roadster into a wide avenue, nosed into a section of quiet residential streets. Here he parked and set off cautiously on foot.

The house before which he stopped at last wasn't large, but it was set in the center of a wide lawn as though its owner appreciated privacy. Melvin Prentice moved into the shadows and deftly vaulted an iron fence.

His automatic with a freshly filled clip was in his hand as he crossed the lawn. He shifted it and took a set of skeleton keys from an inner pocket. He was on ground which he had secretly looked over many times. This was the studio of Adolph Molnar, etcher, painter, and fashionable devotee of all the arts.

With rigid muscles and fingers that were tense but deft, Prentice found a key that fit the old fashioned lock. The entry was more simple than he had dared hope. It was almost as though Molnar invited burglarious visits.

Prentice slipped through a short hallway where a dim light burned. He moved up a flight of stairs on rubber soled shoes, paused at the studio door and saw by the crack beneath it that the room was dark. Cautiously he thrust it open and stepped inside.

The blackness and sense of space made the big chamber eerie. Prentice waited many seconds before turning on his flashlight. If Molnar was the criminal he believed him to be, then death lurked in this quiet place.

His flash made a silver beam across the room. Canvases, easels, tables littered with paints and etcher's tools, showed up. There was a huge open fireplace, a well-worn etcher's press against one wall. He held his breath, stepped forward quickly; but a brief inspection of the press was disappointing. There was nothing on it, nothing about it to arouse suspicion.

Prentice looked at the many prints on the wall and saw that Molnar really practiced a legitimate etcher's craft. If Molnar was guilty, then Molnar had the cunning of a fiend.

Perhaps Dad Kelly was right—perhaps. But Prentice's fingers closed over the minute corner of the playing card. He walked toward a big desk that stood away from the side of the door. It was then that a voice spoke to him, suddenly, quietly out of the dark.

"Lift up your hands. Quick! I've got you covered. Drop that gun."

Prentice clicked out his flash with reflex movement; but as he did so, the big lights in the room went on. Adolph Molnar stood in a side doorway, a dressing gown covering his sparse frame, a blue automatic in one claw-like hand. He was a tall man, bald headed, with a red vulture face.

"This is the first time," he said quietly, "that a burglar has considered my art valuable enough to steal. Drop your gun, man, or I'll shoot. I'd rather turn you over to the police alive. I'm a dead shot; but squeamish when it comes to spilling blood."

Prentice hesitated an instant only. Molnar had him covered. Yet even under the menace of Molnar's pistol, he would have risked lead if a shot had seemed the proper play. A hard smile spread his lips as he opened his fingers slowly and let his gun fall from them.

"I'm not a burglar, Molnar—you know that. I'm a Treasury man—Vance Prentice's brother. The game is up for you. They've got your gang, every man Jack of them. You couldn't get away, even if you shot me."

Prentice was watching Molnar's face. He saw no change come over it. This to him was further proof that Molnar was guilty. No innocent man would show such complete composure.

Molnar came slowly forward, spoke evenly. "You sound convincing. I've been annoyed by Treasury men before. But I don't intend to take chances with a thug. Which pocket are your credentials in?"

Prentice told him, and Molnar re-

moved them with a left hand. He looked them over, lowered his own gun; picked up Prentice's gun and handed it and the credentials back.

"Foolish of you," he said, "to be so theatrical. You might have been shot. Exactly what was your purpose in sneaking in?"

He was the suave, sleek Molnar now, the man against whom no federal operative had ever been able to get a scrap of evidence. But Prentice suddenly watched with hawklike interest as Molnar lifted a curve-stem pipe from the mantel and set it in his mouth. The etcher struck a match with his left hand and held it to the bowl.

A fierce sense of triumph filled Melvin Prentice at that moment. It was mingled with an abrupt awareness of the danger he was in. Yet it was worth any risk to trap this man who, he felt certain, had slain his brother. His voice was toneless as he spoke.

"Small things, Molnar, sometimes betray a criminal. You've been clever, clever as all hell. I've watched you for days, studied your movements, all your habits—and never found a thing suspicious, except that you have an odd way of disappearing. But tonight you slipped up badly. That pipe, Molnar—you smoked it or one like it, in the cellar of Hilltop House, didn't you?" Molnar was silent and Melvin Prentice went on coolly. "I saw the matches on the floor—all on the left side of the chair. No cigarette or cigar stubs—just matches. And I knew you were left-handed, Molnar, and smoked a pipe."

For the first time Molnar started, and Prentice's heart leaped. But the man before him did not lose his poise. He chuckled deep in his throat.

"You're amusing, my friend. You sound like a correspondence school detective or a writer of mystery plays. Do you think any jury would convict a man for smoking a pipe left-handed?"

There was a challenge in Molnar's eyes. Melvin Prentice continued, a ring of steel in his voice.

"There's another thing, Molnar—another little thing. Are you willing to let me search?"

Molnar's eyes wavered for an instant only; then he made an expansive gesture. "Search all you want to. The studio, the house is yours. If you find any plates, any paper or counterfeit money, I'll go with you as meekly as a lamb."

Molnar seated himself on a sofa and puffed contentedly on his pipe.

Prentice turned at once and moved toward the desk again. He opened a half dozen drawers, peered inside. Suddenly he stooped and lifted something from one.

"You play cards, I see, Molnar!"

"Cards?" There was a sudden sharpness in Molnar's voice, a glitter in his eyes.

"Yes, another small habit—solitaire. It was boring sometimes to wait in the empty cellar of Hilltop House for your men to come. There were times when solitaire came in handy. I can picture you sitting at the table, masked, shuffling and dealing your cards alone."

Molnar had stopped smoking now. "What are you driving at?" he snapped.

"This!" Prentice picked up the pack of well-thumbed cards he had found, a blue design on their backs. He shuffled through them, tossing card after card on the desk, finally lifting one whose edge was missing. "I found this card's corner in the table at Hilltop House. It should make a choice bit of evidence in court."

Molnar had risen from his seat. Prentice caught the stealthy swift movement of his head. But he wasn't quick enough to anticipate its meaning. The lights in the studio went out abruptly as an unseen finger pressed a switch.

PRENTICE hurled himself sidewise as Molnar's gun streaked flame, straight through the pocket of his gown. A bullet seared across Prentice's arm. He whirled and fired, know-

ing that Molnar had moved and he had missed.

There was a moment of breathless silence in the room, the silence of death with living beings waiting to make a kill. Then Prentice, whose ears were attuned to the faintest sounds, heard a man's hoarse breathing at his left. It wasn't Molnar. The etcher couldn't have crossed the room so quickly. This was the man obviously who had seen his signal and snapped out the overhead light.

Prentice swung his gun softly that way. He stretched out his foot and pushed at a chair with studied caution, making a deliberate scrape to draw a shot. It was an old trick, but it worked again.

A flame blossomed in the darkness from where the breathing had come. Lead smacked close to Prentice's ankle as an unseen, deadly marksman fired.

Prentice himself, unhit, let go at the muzzle spark. He pressed trigger viciously and heard the smack of a bullet mingled with the report. There was another split second's silence, then a thud as a body fell. It was followed by a hoarse gasp from Adolph Molnar.

Prentice winked on his light then, and its straight beam caught the etcher close to the door. The man was running like a rat. "Stop, Molnar—just where you are!"

The vulture-faced etcher paused and stiffened as though frozen.

"Drop your pistol! Turn on the light!"

Molnar obeyed under the menace of Prentice's gun. He moved mechanically to the wall and touched a switch. The overhead bulbs came on again and the room was light. From the corner of his eye, Prentice saw the man he had hit, a huge servant with bloated, ugly features, lying now unconscious with blood running from his neck.

Molnar spoke viciously from between clenched teeth.

"Fool—you've murdered my butler. Your mad story of the playing cards forced me to act. I knew you were try-

ing to frame me—but it won't work. You have no proof. What—what are you going to do?"

"Do? I'm going to show you up for the criminal you are, make you confess where you keep your phony bills. You're the Ghost, my brother's murderer, and I'm going to prove it, here and now."

Molnar's thin lips split and he laughed harshly.

"Search—search all you want to! You'll never find any bills. There are none. You can't arrest me."

For answer, Prentice snapped a pair of handcuffs over Molnar's wrists and flung him in a chair. He snapped other's around Molnar's ankles, holding him fast. He knew the chance he was taking; knew that if he couldn't prove Molnar guilty, it would spell dismissal from the service and disgrace. He had gone against Dad Kelly's council in coming here.

He commenced a quick search of the place again. He tapped the walls. He examined the chairs and tables and every piece of furniture in the room. He emptied the contents of the desk. Then went on to other chambers in the studio-house.

Molnar lived as a bachelor with one servant only. Prentice found the kitchen and pantry and even searched through those. He discovered a small closet where Molnar kept his chemicals. In here was a jar with a screw top marked "Potassium Cyanide" and Prentice stiffened. He stared with horrible fascination at the white, harmless looking stuff. Perhaps some of this very powder had killed his brother. He left the poison where it was and continued his search, looking in every part of the house till he saw that the task was hopeless. If there were any counterfeit bills or equipment for making phony money, Molnar had hidden them with foxlike cunning. Only Molnar himself could reveal the secret.

Desperate, discouraged, Prentice returned to the closet where the cyanide was kept. There was a grim twist to

his lips as he paused before it. He opened the door, lifted the jar of deadly poison in tense fingers. For seconds he eyed it with a strange look on his face.

FIVE minutes later he entered the studio again. A jar with a screw top was in his hands. Molnar saw it and shrank back.

"Fool—that's deadly. Don't open the cover. Put it down!"

"It's deadly! I know it, Molnar—you don't have to tell me. It's the stuff you used to kill my brother—and it's the stuff I'm going to use on you."

"Idiot! Are you mad? Put it down, I say!"

"Not until you tell me where you keep your counterfeits. If you don't—I'll make you eat it."

Molnar's face went livid. He gasped, strained at the steel that held him. His eyes were fixed on Prentice's face, half unbelieving. He watched in horror as Prentice unscrewed the cover of the jar and plunged his hand in. He stared aghast at the white stuff that the T-man's fingers lifted.

"Stop! Don't—this is murder!"

Molnar's voice was choked with terror. Slowly Prentice thrust his hand toward the etcher's lips. "Eat it, Molnar! Eat it—or tell me where the stuff is hidden!"

Molnar was trembling now, shaking as with palsy. He saw death in the merest flick of that white powder across his lips. He knew what cyanide could do. Sweat was streaming off his face. Suddenly, as the T-man's hands came on relentlessly, he collapsed and made a gesture toward the mantel.

"There—on the left side you'll find a concealed button. Press it—and—for God's sake take that away!"

Prentice dropped his fingers then, still holding the white powder in their curve. He turned and walked to the mantel quickly. A moment's search and he found the location of the button. He pressed it—and the whole fireplace, blackened bricks and all swung slowly out.

A
Fast-Moving
"Crime Busters"
Novelette



The Crime Busters, these two headquarters detectives were called, by cops as well as crooks. A pair of relentless manhunters, they wormed their way into a blood-smeared killers' den—only to find themselves trapped in the barred-up hide-out, along with the body of a murdered man, while flames roared and played their devil's mischief, the living and the dead to destroy. And all the while, the death house waited for criminals long overdue.

While the Hot Seat Waits

By Norman A. Daniels

CHAPTER I

PAID WITH DEATH

LISTEN, you weasel," Slugger Jack Brady waved a fist of the proportions of a grapefruit in front of the bulging eyes of the man who slumped in the chair,

"talk, or I'll smear you through the wall. Where'd you get that dough?"

"I—I don't know, I'm telling you," the little man half screamed. "Somebody gave it to me—in change. That's all I know about it."

Coke Luby was thin, with the pallor of prison still prominent on his

sunken cheeks. He took a long breath, averted his eyes from that giant fist and talked further.

"You guys ain't got a thing on me. You can't pin that Safety Trust Company job on me either. I was doin' time when that happened and you know it."

Slugger, rocking his six feet three inches of brawn on number eleven shoes, turned to face his partner. Lieutenant Guy Peyton tapped a cigarette on the back of his silver case, wet it with precise motions and applied a lighter.

"There is no use in trying to make that rat talk," he offered. "He's mixed up in this business somehow, but he's more afraid of someone else than he is of us. You might as well save your breath, Slug."

"Just the same," Slugger grated, "Luby stays behind bars until he gets a chance to think it over."

"You can't keep me locked up," Luby protested shrilly. "You can't, I tell you. I was pinched two days ago. I ain't charged with anythin'. You gotta let me go."

"Shut up," Slugger warned. "I'd just as soon paste you in the eye as I would drink a glass of suds—and I like beer. You stay right here, rat, until we get through with you."

The phone on Peyton's desk buzzed. He picked it up, idly dusting a thread from the sleeve of his fashionably styled coat. Peyton was the direst antithesis of Slugger Brady. He was lean of stature and he always dressed in the height of fashion. A white carnation decorated the buttonhole of his coat and the automatic he invariably carried was nestled under his left armpit in a fashion that defied anyone to spot it.

Peyton was alert, his gray eyes flashing every instant and on occasion his square jaw could clamp down like a vise. Together these two men formed a partnership that had made history in police annals. The Crime Busters, a newspaper had

dubbed them and the name had stuck. It caused more than one frown in the haunts of the underworld. Crime, organized and individual, feared the mighty fists of Slugger and dreaded the alert mind and lightning fast gun hand of Lieutenant Peyton.

Slowly Peyton hung up the phone. He grinned at Slugger. "Carlo is in front, Slug. He's going to get a habeas corpus unless we let Luby go free."

Slugger used colorful language for a moment. "I oughta slam that lousy shyster. What'll we do? Let this rat go?"

"Certainly." Peyton tapped his fingertips together. "He's probably telling the truth and anyway we can't sew him up on that job."

He moved his swivel chair to face Luby. "Listen, you—remember you're on parole. You've been found with hot money in your pockets and we could send you back to your cell on that, but you finished a two year term and that ought to be a lesson to you. Now beat it!"

Luby got up, smiled with a new confidence and sneered. He surveyed Slugger's huge body up and down, spat contemptuously at his feet and opened the door. Slugger stepped closer. Luby felt himself lifted and thrown forward with the force of a battering ram. He collided forcibly with a pompous little man who was striding down the corridor.

CARLO, mouthpiece for gangland, heaped condemnation on Slugger.

"We could sue you for this, you big ape. This man is a client of mine—a poor, innocent client who just got out of prison and wants to start a new life. You'll be sorry for this."

Slugger grinned, lifted his right shoe and gravely saluted it. He closed the door and eased himself into a chair.

But Peyton was on his feet. He grabbed his hat, placed it carefully on his head and straightened his tie in the mirror.

"Where you goin'?" Slugger queried.

"After Luby. You don't think Carlo was hired by that rat, do you? Someone else called him in. Luby didn't have a chance to phone anyone. How did Carlo know he was here? Use your brains, Slug, if you have any. Come on. Get your gun. We may run into something."

"Swell!" Slugger slipped a thirty-eight service revolver into his trouser pocket. "We've worked two months on this Safety Trust Company job and the only clue we got is Luby. But hell, he can't be mixed up in it. He was doing time when it happened."

"Sure he was," Peyton agreed as they hurried toward the main entrance of Police Headquarters. "Half a million in cash was taken on that job. About a dozen people know the bills were recorded by number and can be traced. But no reporters found it out and most of the bank employees don't even know it."

"Now, suppose the gang who engineered that job had an idea their loot was hot. How could they prove it? By sending out some sap like Luby to see if he could spend some of it, even try to get himself pinched and searched like Luby did. If we held Luby, then the money must be hot. Luby was a perfect set-up. We certainly couldn't hang that job on him."

Slugger scratched the back of his neck and silent praise betrayed itself with slow shakes of his head. Secretly he admired Peyton's thinking apparatus; but when he found the opportunity, he laughed at Peyton's trend of thought.

Carlo and Luby were vanishing into a taxi when they carefully emerged from headquarters. Peyton let the taxi gain half a block before he summoned another.

"Tail that hack," Slugger ordered the driver. "Lose it and you'll lose six of your best teeth. Now get goin'."

The two detectives settled back for the ride. Peyton kept his eyes glued

on the cab ahead while Slugger puffed morosely on a cigar.

"This case is a headache," he complained. "Right from the start it shows brains. Seven masked guys stuck up the bank and got away with half a million in cash. There ain't a soul that can identify them even if we run the rats down."

"Luby will lead us to part of that gang," Peyton said softly, never losing sight of Luby's cab for an instant. "The money they stole hasn't been put into circulation and Luby could have obtained fifty dollars of it in only one place—the men who are keeping it for the gang. Look—they're stopping."

Peyton tapped on the window and the cab slid to the curb. Slugger reached for the door handle. Peyton shoved him away. "They'll spot us if we get out now. They're going into that club. I've a hunch we'll find some of the gang there."

"Then let's go," Slugger cried. "What's the use of waitin'? I've waited two months for a crack at those guys. If they're in there, I'm goin' after 'em."

"On what charges will you bring them in?" Peyton checked him. "They won't keep that money close by. The way they handled the whole job shows they must have some sense. Why, they haven't even peddled a single bill from that job except what they gave to Luby. Don't be in a hurry and spill everything."

"Sometimes," Slugger complained, "you give me a pain. For the first time since we teamed up, the newspapers are squawkin' because we ain't made a pinch on that holdup. You say yourself some of the bandits must be in this dump and yet you want to park out here doin' nothin'. If you wasn't a lieutenant and me a lousy sergeant, I'd go in myself."

Peyton smiled and his shoulders shook a little in mirth. He knew that Slugger meant none of this, but often the huge detective's impatience was something to contend with.

Peyton glanced at the two stories above the entrance to the club. He saw something gleam in the afternoon sun, something that had the polish of steel. It was hastily drawn away.

Before Peyton could explain to Slugger, Carlo the lawyer hurried out and waved his hand for a cab. His usually smug face was pale and drawn. He darted a hasty glance toward the cab where the detectives were hidden and fear was prominent in his face. In a moment, his cab vanished around the next corner.

Peyton shrugged, loosened the gun in his holster and nudged Slugger. "You get your wish, Slug. We're going in. They know we're here and I've a hunch poor Luby is going to go places before long. I figured they might have a lookout planted somewhere, but Carlo stopped his cab so fast I didn't have time to look around. I saw a rifle in one of the windows. Make a line for the wall and keep close to it! We go in with guns in our hands."

Slugger nodded eagerly. He yanked open the door of the cab, darted across the sidewalk and flattened himself against the brick wall. Peyton followed. They edged toward the entrance of the club. Peyton watched the upper windows and one hand was thrust beneath his coat.

ONE or two pedestrians eyed the two men curiously, but shrugged and moved on. Peyton reached the entrance first. Carefully he tried the knob. The door was open. He flung it wide, waited a moment and stepped in.

Instantly a gun was shoved into the small of his back. As quickly, it came away, for Slugger had spotted the crook who guarded the door. His big hand gripped the man by the throat and throttled any warning cry he might wish to give. His other hand jerked the gun free.

"Keep him quiet," Peyton warned. "Knock him out if you have to. They must have figured we trailed Carlo

when he left here or there would have been a reception committee waiting here for us. Make no noise!"

Slugger grinned in glee. This was work to his liking. He thrust the crook's gun in his pocket, drew back his fist and smashed the man smartly under the chin. He pulled the blow for, had he used all his strength, there would have been an inquisitive coroner to explain things to. The crook's head snapped back, his eyes glazed and he went limp. Slugger carefully deposited him in a corner.

Peyton had his gun in his hand and the safety was off. He moved silently toward the stairs leading above. Slugger followed with a grace exceptional for a man his size. They tested each step before placing all their weight on it. Voices, domineering and coarse, reached them. Peyton held up his hand and they listened.

"Are you sure that cab tailed Carlo?" one man asked and his voice was heavy with authority.

"Sure, Trigger. I saw it start right after him. Those two dicks didn't get out."

"Just the same," the man called Trigger argued, "those two mugs are dangerous, but if they monkey with us, they'll find out we're that way too. Now you, Luby, how much did you tell them?"

"Nothin'," Luby replied frantically. "Honest, Trigger, I didn't spill a thing. They didn't have nothin' on me so they had to let me go. Hell, Carlo told you that, didn't he?"

"Yeah. Okay, Luby. Sit down—right here. We told you there'd be plenty in this if you kept your trap closed. This is the pay-off."

For a moment, the sound of thrashing feet reached the two detectives. Peyton moved forward slowly with Slugger behind him. No other sound came from above until a telephone broke the stillness. Trigger's voice barked a greeting. Peyton heard him drop the phone back into its cradle and whisper something.

"Let's go," Peyton nodded to Slugger. "Keep your gun ready."

They raced up the remaining steps. Peyton shot by the partly open door from which the voices originated, while Slugger took up a stand on the other side of it. They closed in carefully, on the alert for any death dealing weapons that might be shoved out of the doorway at them. But only silence—an ominous hush—reigned.

Peyton chanced a quick glance into the room. He drew back, startled. Suddenly Slugger, his head low and his body bent like a quarterback's with the ball, barged through the door and into the room. He drew up short and gasped in surprise.

One man only was in that room. He sat in a dejected position, his head resting against his chest and his arms lax upon the table top. Peyton stepped close to him. It was Coke Luby.

"Keep your eyes and ears open," he warned Slugger.

"Okay—but this time Luby goes in the can to stay," Slugger rumbled. "The rest of 'em got away, but—"

"Luby has been in his last cell," Peyton said slowly. "He's dead, Slug. There's a hypo sticking in the back of his neck. They paid him off all right. Paid him with death!"

CHAPTER II

FIRE TRAP

SLUIGGER gaped. He forgot that murderers were somewhere within this building. He stepped close to Peyton.

The door slammed behind them with a metallic clang. Startled, both men whirled. The door which they had used as an entrance was closed. Peyton sprang toward it, tugged at the knob and was greeted with a derisive laugh.

"See if you two wise dicks can run a race," the voice of the man called Trigger taunted them. "See if you can beat Luby—to hell!"

"Out of the way," Slugger snapped. He took a long breath and hurled himself at the door. He was thrown back as if it had been a powerful spring. With a grimace of pain he nursed his shoulder.

"There's a steel lining to that door," he cried. "Let's try the windows."

"No use." Peyton had already surveyed them. They were heavily barred. "We've got to find the secret door they used in making their escape. It's our only chance, Slug. Take that west wall and go over every inch of it."

Slugger hurried to obey. He stopped suddenly and sniffed, like a Great Dane scenting danger.

"Smoke!" he said tensely. "This dump is on fire, Peyton. They're going to roast us alive."

Peyton didn't reply. He was scrutinizing the wall carefully. Slugger walked to the window. He scooped up a chair and crashed it through the glass. Grimly he curled both hands around the iron bars. The muscles in his neck became whipcords and his face was crimson as he exerted every ounce of strength he possessed. There was a crashing sound. One bar came loose, sending a cascade of cement upon the floor.

"Good work!" Peyton applauded. "Try again, Slug, while I keep looking for this door."

"Damn those guys," Slugger raved. "When I lay my hands on 'em, I'll bust every jaw. The smoke is gettin' worse. We gotta step on it."

Again Slugger tugged at the bars. This time he met with defeat. The heavy iron pinions refused to budge. He sucked in huge breaths of fresh air and tried again.

"We've got to get out of here," Peyton warned. "This place is dry as tinder. If we can't escape from this room, how will the fireman get in to drag us out? It's a clever trap, Slug."

Perspiration poured down Slugger's face. It had grown dark out-

side. So far no one had observed the smoke that now poured from the window. The room was full of it. A lambent flame broke through the floor and licked eagerly at the flimsy rug. A pair of lace curtains vanished in a puff of fire. Slugger set his jaw, took another grip on the bars, but before he could apply his massive strength, something whizzed by his head and slammed into the wall.

Peyton whirled at the sound. "Duck!" he yelled. "They're shooting—silenced gun."

Slugger moved away from the window. "Hell," he cried. "Now we're in for it. If they cover the windows, we can't get out."

"Empty your gun out the window. That will give an alarm," Peyton ordered. "Then start to work on the walls. We've got to find that door."

Slugger yanked the trigger of his gun six times and the reverberations made their ears ring. Two minutes later they heard a police whistle, then the wail of a radio car. Help was on the way. But would it be of any use? How could aid reach them behind barred windows and steel lined doors?

Suddenly Peyton gave a cry of eager delight. Slugger stepped to his side and through the smoke peered at him.

"Look!" Peyton cried. "Finger marks. Dozens of them. That door is right here. Now if we can only find the combination."

A sheet of fire made them drop to the floor and cover their heads for an instant. Then they were up again. Slugger banged his fists on the secret panel, grunted in pleasure and motioned Peyton to stand aside. This time his two hundred pounds of muscle struck something that yielded. Again he threw his weight against the panel. This time it gave way. A burst of smoke careened out of the passageway.

Slugger turned, dashed through fire that now swept the floor and

grabbed the body of Luby. He threw it across his shoulder and followed Peyton into the dark morass of smoke.

The passageway was short and ended in steps leading upward. In two minutes they were on the roof. Fire apparatus was below and ladders were already being shot upward.

"Wait until I get those swine," Slugger roared. "I'll give them a taste of something that will hurt as much as fire. How are you, pal? Can you make it okay?"

"I'm all right." Peyton was gasping in deep gusts of fresh air. "We're not going down to the street here, Slug. From now on, you and I are dead—understand? We're still in that room below. So is Luby's body. We're going to reach that roof to our left."

"But what's the idea?" Slugger protested. "You ain't gone daffy from the smoke?"

"No. I've suddenly acquired sense. If those men think we're alive, they'll go into hiding so we'll never find them. As long as they feel we can't trace them, they'll figure they're safe and won't hole up."

"Swell, but how do we trace them? We didn't see any of the guys and Luby can't talk."

"CARLO can. And don't forget, one of that mob is called Trigger. That name isn't common. We've got two leads. Now let's get out of here."

They made their way to the roof edge. Peyton gauged the distance. It was a drop of half a story, but the next building was very close. He waved to Slugger and jumped. He was up instantly, reaching for the dangling body of Luby that Slugger was preparing to drop. Peyton laid the dead crook gently on the roof. Slugger struck the roof with a thud.

"We'll leave Luby up here," Peyton said. "They can smuggle the body down later. We've got to reach a telephone quickly."

The trap door was locked, but Slugger wrenched it open without great effort. They slid down the ladder, hurried down the two flights of steps, passed by the front door and found the cellar. They emerged into a dismal alley through the basement door.

Peyton looked about carefully. He saw no one. Together they made their way across a back alley, hoisted themselves over a fence and came out on the block below.

Peyton headed for a drug store and a phone.

"Slugger and I are dead," he told the astonished inspector at headquarters. "At least we want that assumed. Pretend that you found three bodies in the room on the second floor of that building. They can't be identified at once so there will be little to explain afterwards. On the roof of the building to the south, you'll find Coke Luby's body. He was killed with a hypo—cyanide I'd say, off hand."

"I'll do it," the inspector agreed. "But I feel sorry for you if you have to keep Sergeant Brady quiet. I can imagine he's ready to start things going. Good luck, Lieutenant. You'll read your obituary in the next edition."

Peyton found Slugger lounging in a darkened hallway. They took a cab, drove uptown and spent two hours in a high class cafe where Slugger swallowed a dozen beers and consumed two huge steaks.

He wiped foam from his lips and grinned at Peyton. "If this is bein' dead, I'm gonna stop the next slug sent my way."

Peyton sipped brandy from an inhaler and considered the situation. "In a few minutes the newspapers will describe the fire and state that three unidentified bodies were in that blaze. Carlo and Trigger, whoever he is, will come into the open again, confident that we'll never tell what we know. Carlo is a wily scoundrel, but he's our first bet, Slug. He knows

who Trigger is and where he can be found."

"And will he talk!" Slugger grunted. "I've been achin' to lay my hands on that guy for months."

A waiter, previously instructed, brought them a paper. There was a prominent item concerning the fire and it dwelled strongly on the three unidentified bodies presumably found in the remains of the building.

Peyton rose, dropped a tip on the table and went to the cashier's cage to pay the bill. Slugger followed. They ascertained the residential address of Attorney Carlo, taxied to within a few blocks of the place and went the rest of the distance afoot, moving carefully to blend with the shadows. They paused to survey the big house where the crooked lawyer lived.

"He's at home," Peyton told Slugger. "I saw his shadow move across the curtain of that lighted room. He won't have servants around either. Too many men with rewards on their necks visit Carlo at night. Servants would only be in the way. We're going in through the back door, Slug. Be sure your gun is ready."

"Gun, hell. I'm usin' my fists. Come on, let's get the louse and scare hell outa him. If he read the papers, he'll think we're croaked sure, so he's gonna see a couple of ghosts."

They slipped through the brush surrounding the house, reached the back door. Peyton tried it carefully. It was locked. He considered a kitchen window and decided upon that method of entrance. From his pocket he took a bit of thin, highly tempered steel. He slipped this between the window casements, found the lock and moved it. Very carefully he raised the window, listening every second or two for a sound that would warn them if Carlo overheard.

"Stay here," Peyton whispered to Slug. "I'll open the back door. You'll tear the house apart if you try to slip in through that window."

Slugger nodded impatiently. He lifted Peyton as if he were a child, held him and pushed him through the window. A moment later the back door opened and Slugger went in.

CHAPTER III

THE JAWS OF DANGER

THEY moved silently through the house. A radio was playing softly and the odor of an expensive cigar struck their nostrils. From the hallway they looked into the library where Carlo sat behind a desk, his eyes on a late edition of a newspaper. Carlo was apparently alone in the house.

"Don't move," Peyton hissed. He had his gun ready and Slugger at his side, growled a different warning and emphasized it with the thick fingers of his hands.

Carlo whirled. The newspaper dropped and he gaped in mingled astonishment and horror.

"The—the Crime Busters," he managed. "But—but you were in that—that—"

"Go ahead and finish, Carlo," Peyton grated. "We were in that fire. You know of that so it makes you a party to attempted murder on us and the actual murder of Luby. Stand up and back against the wall!"

Slugger strode forward, but not for an instant did he block Peyton's aim. He searched the thoroughly frightened lawyer, removed a small automatic and flipped it into the waste basket.

"Sissy gat," he grinned. "How'd you like to make a jury spiel to this one?"

Slugger's big gun prodded Carlo in the stomach.

Peyton stepped closer. "Who is Trigger, Carlo, and where can he be found?"

"Go to hell!" Carlo rasped. "I see what you did now. It's a trick. You framed that newspaper yarn. Well, you won't frame me. I don't know a thing."

"Maybe," Slugger shoved his broad face very close to Carlo's, "you could remember things, huh? Especially if I decided I didn't like that parrot nose of yours. Listen, you shyster, open your trap and talk! I used to be a patient guy, but mouthpieces like you made me quick on the trigger. You heard what the lieutenant asked. Speak up!"

Carlo sneered, but there was fear in his eyes. Slugger was as dangerous as an angry lion and he knew it. That same fear robbed him of reason. He dropped his hands and lashed out.

His fist caught Slugger on the cheek. With a roar the giant detective short-armed a jab to the pit of the lawyer's stomach and when he doubled up in pain, clipped him lightly on the chin. Carlo howled. Slugger prodded him again in the stomach, shoved his head back and grinned at him.

"Try that on a jury sometime. And try to remember who this mug Trigger is, or should I help you?"

"I—I don't know who he is," Carlo whined. "He—he's a new man in town."

"He pulled that Safety Trust Company job, didn't he?" Peyton demanded.

"I—I don't know."

Slugger lifted his right fist and fanned Carlo's nose with it. "Try to remember," he said softly. "It'll be healthier for you."

"I don't know, I tell you!" Carlo cringed. "I'm as afraid of him as his whole gang is. He's a killer."

"Where is the money he looted that bank of and where is he holed up?"

Carlo wilted. "If I—I tell, will you promise I get protection? I—I don't know anything about the money, but Trigger and his mob are hiding in—in—" The lawyer drew a long breath. "I can't squeal. They'll kill me if I do. They'll kill me slowly. I know that gang."

Slugger shoved him against the wall and shook him lightly. "Sure you know 'em. What's their address?"

"A—a house on Parkview Avenue. N-number four hundred and six. Now you've got to protect me. Every crook in town will be on my neck if I'm known to be mixed up in this."

"We'll take care of you," Peyton told him. "But just to be sure, we're going to tie you up until we get back. Sit down, Carlo! Put your arms in back of you."

Carlo seemed lifeless. He obeyed and Peyton quickly fashioned a rope of Carlo's necktie. He strapped his legs to the rungs of the chair with the lawyer's belt, tested the ropes that bound his wrists and gave a satisfied grunt.

"We'll be back when Trigger is behind bars, Carlo. Until then, just take it easy."

"Yeah," Slugger grinned. "You'd better stay home—stick to that chair, too. If any of Trigger's rats show up, tell 'em the night air is bad for you."

The detectives walked out through the front door. The moment they were off the porch, Peyton motioned Slugger to follow and they raced around the house to the still open rear door. Peyton went in softly. Slugger, consternation plain on his face, followed.

PEYTON went directly to a wall phone in the kitchen, lifted the receiver and cupped one hand over the mouthpiece.

"He'll get loose in about two minutes," he grinned. "That was the poorest job of tying a man up that I ever did."

"But what's the idea?" Slugger begged. "He'll tip off that mob."

"I hope he will do just that," Peyton whispered. "Listen—he's getting loose now. If he only used the phone! Slip toward the library, Slug. The minute he calls the number, grab him. Don't let him get connected."

Slugger moved silently through the house. Peyton pressed the receiver close to his ear. He heard the instrument click as Carlo lifted the phone in the library. Carlo dialed a

number and Peyton, trained to count the clicks of a dial telephone, quickly determined the number.

Suddenly he heard Carlo scream. The receiver banged down as if dropped. A second later, someone answered at the number called. The voice made Peyton stiffen. It was that of Trigger, the only identification Peyton had of the killer.

"Hello!" Trigger repeated. "What's the matter? Carlo—is that you?"

Peyton kept his hand over the mouthpiece. He heard Trigger curse and hang up. Peyton sped to the library. Carlo was crouched in a corner and in his hand he gripped a wicked looking knife.

"You framed me," he accused. "You rotten police spies. But you won't get away with it."

"Sure we framed you," Peyton agreed. "You frame juries and witnesses, don't you? Drop that knife, Carlo! You can't get away with this."

"Come and get me!" Carlo offered viciously. "I'll sink this blade in one of you anyway."

Peyton suddenly scooped up a heavy paper weight and hurled it directly at the attorney. Carlo yelled, ducked, and Slugger went forward as though shot from a spring gun. One hand grabbed the knife and wrenched it free. The other collided forcibly with Carlo's face, sent his head thudding backward to hit the wall with a loud smack. The attorney slumped to the floor, unconscious.

Slugger picked him up, draped him across one shoulder and, motioning Peyton to follow, climbed the steps to the second floor. He placed the inert body on a bed and fell to work strapping Carlo's arms and legs with strips of surgical gauze Peyton found in a medicine cabinet. Finally Slugger wound strips of bandage around the entire bed until Carlo resembled a mummy. As a last gesture, Slugger thrust a gag between his victim's lips and pulled it tight.

He stepped back to survey his work. "That's the way to tie a guy

up," he approved. "Take lessons from me, Peyton."

"Later, Slug. Right now we're going to interview Trigger. I'll trace the number Carlo called. We've got to work fast before Trigger gets suspicious and finds a new hideout."

Peyton used the phone in the library. He learned that the number Carlo had dialed was located deep in the haunts of the underworld. Slugger locked up the house. They whistled a taxi and relaxed for a moment.

"We've got to slip into this place where Trigger is holed up," Peyton said. "If we barge in with a raiding squad, we might not find that money and it's the cash that's going to convict Trigger and his gang. No one can identify them so we've got to make our own evidence. This is going to be ticklish, Slug. There won't be much hope for us if we're captured."

"Yeah?" Slugger inquired. "And if we corner those rats, it ain't gonna be so nice for them either. We'll go in and take the whole damned bunch of 'em."

"I thought you'd suggest that," Peyton said. "Nothing doing, Slug. This calls for tact and a little snooping. If we don't find that cash, we can't tie the gang up with the stick-up—nor with the murder of Luby for that matter. Don't forget—so far we haven't seen but one member of the gang, the man who met us at the door. I've an idea he's either been shipped away or buried by this time. Carlo knows them, but he's too slippery in court. We know Trigger and his mob did it, but we've got to *prove* it. We must create every bit of evidence from this point on."

Slugger lapsed into silence. His inner mind told him the wisdom of Peyton's plans, but foremost in Slugger's brain was the thought of meeting these killers hand to hand.

The address to which Carlo had phoned proved to be a brick garage set behind the building line of a score of empty tenement houses. A dead

silence greeted the two detectives. No one lived in the vicinity, for the whole block was soon to be razed.

"A perfect place," Peyton commented, "and one that's going to be hard for us to work in. We'll find a method of gaining admittance to that garage, Slug. Once we're in there, we'll have to take things very quietly. The moment we know where the loot is hidden, we can start taking the crooks one by one."

"I still think you're wrong," Slugger protested. "We oughta barge in, grab every guy we see and sweat the truth outa them. Hell, what's the use of handling these babies with kid gloves?"

They walked softly down an alley, watching every flitting shadow and listening for sounds that might betray any guards. A stone rolled as Slugger's foot kicked it accidentally. Instantly a black form emerged from a cranny in the wall. It was a man armed with a rapid fire rifle. He kept the weapon at a ready angle.

Slowly he began to advance. The two detectives flattened themselves against the wall and held their breaths. A single blast from the blunt nose weapon which the crook held would wipe them out of existence with one stroke. More and more Peyton realized the danger they were going into.

Slugger took a thirty-eight cartridge from the pocket of his coat, held it between his thumb and forefinger and flipped it high into the air. It landed behind the guard. He turned like a flash and Slugger leaped. He wrapped one thick arm about the crook's throat and throttled him while he gripped the gun hand cruelly, paralyzing it so that the eager finger against the trigger couldn't send forth a warning blast of death.

Peyton yanked the gun away. Slugger gave the crook a shove; lashed out with a direct right that crashed squarely against the jaw. The crook slumped. Slugger tapped him

again to insure silence and followed Peyton toward the garage.

"This gun may come in handy," Peyton said. "Stay out here, Slug, and if anyone tries to get in, stop them quietly, if you can. Give me ten minutes."

"What?" Slugger queried in an amazed whisper. "Are you goin' in that dump alone? Oh no! I'm goin' too! Why leave me out here while you have all the fun? Nothin' doin'. You stay out here and let me go in."

"You stay here," Peyton ordered with grim finality. "Two of us would make too much noise and you're the equivalent of two people yourself. If any shooting starts, come fast."

Slugger mumbled objections under his breath, but Peyton left him there. He moved toward the building and discovered a partly open door leading into a cement ramp that wound its way upward. He began to climb it stealthily, his ears attentive for the least sound.

The first floor was abandoned except for junked parts of cars. The dank odor of a place long in disuse greeted his nostrils. He continued his climb.

Voices reached him. He paused to listen.

Trigger was giving orders. "Tonight we split. The dough from the bank job is hot, so I'm turning it over to a fence at a sixty percent take. It ain't much, but he's gotta get rid of it and take plenty of chances. Each guy gets about twenty-five grand in good dough."

"Swell, Trigger," one of the crooks approved. "Do we get our slice tonight? I'm nervous. Those cops were a little too close for comfort."

"They're croaked," Trigger replied. "Didn't the papers say three bodies were found? Hell, that was a smart idea."

"But that phone call," the same crook broke in. "Nobody but Carlo knows the number we use. All of us were here when that phone rang. If it was Carlo, why didn't he talk?"

"We'll know about that damned quick too—just as soon as Brophy gets back. I sent him to Carlo's house."

Peyton's heart sank. Trigger's messenger would find Carlo, release him and a warning would be instantly given. Anything that was done would have to be accomplished with all speed.

Peyton crept upward. He peered around the last corner of the auto ramp. A single overhead light illuminated a room and revealed a dozen crooks seated about a table.

At their head sat a hulk of a man. His shoulders were as broad as Slugger's and his face was seared in a mask of sadistic cruelty. Peyton gasped. Trigger was an escaped murderer known to the Federal men as Wrestler Burke! The almost inhuman countenance was pasted in every post office and police station in the land.

CHAPTER IV

MURDER ROOM

A COLD chill raced up and down Peyton's spine. He was in the presence of a band of killers utterly without mercy. Peyton didn't think of himself. He visualized the havoc this gang could wreak with a man such as Burke at their head. All of the gang were from out of town and most of them could walk the streets of this city without fear of being molested by inquisitive police.

"And don't forget," Burke went on, "you guys call me Trigger. The cops don't know me by that moniker and the G-men are looking for me in the Northwest right now. Soon as the cops cool down and bury the Crime Busters that we busted, we'll tackle another job I got lined up. From now on, guys, we walk into banks shootin'. We'll get every damned cop and teller so scared of us, they'll drop dead when they see us."

"That's okay," the spokesman for the rest of the gang approved. "But

we want to see the color of the dough you got from the fence before we talk about other jobs."

"He's here now, countin' it in the back room," Burke told them. "He oughta be finished by this time. I'll go see."

He arose and headed directly toward Peyton. The detective crouched down, held his breath and raised the muzzle of the gun he carried in his arms. If Trigger spotted him, he would have to shoot it out.

But Trigger didn't appear. Peyton could hear his footsteps crunching against debris along the floor.

Carefully Peyton crawled toward a door leading to the third floor. From here he could see that the crooks were still huddled close together about the table. The dim overhead light cast weird shadows and didn't illuminate the large garage entirely.

Peyton was able to crawl along the side of the wall, feeling his way and gently brushing aside loose bits of plaster and cement. He faced an open doorway and went in. Trigger was coming back, marching along the same corridor that Peyton was now in. There was another man ahead of him. He drew himself prone against the wall and waited.

A short, nervous man hurried by. He held a brief case tightly under his arm. Trigger followed, one hand gripping a suitcase.

Peyton reached out, yanked the suitcase free and gave Trigger a mighty shove that sent him reeling off his feet.

Instantly Peyton dashed away, heading into the darkness. He came to a closed door, tried it and went into a small room. He could hear Trigger yelling in rage.

"One of you guys did that," Trigger accused his men. "You want that dough for yourselves. Who yanked it outa my hand? Speak up, you rats, or I'll bump every one of you."

The man with the brief case didn't wait to hear more. He ran down the ramp like a rabbit only two jumps ahead of the hounds.

"Wait a minute, Trigger," one of the crooks protested. "We didn't do anything. You went after that dough alone. None of us left this table. Say—maybe you're the guy who is holding out. Maybe you hid the dough and you're gonna leave us out. I'm tellin' you, Trigger, no matter how much of a big shot you are, we don't stand for that!"

"You damned fools," Trigger spat. "If one of you didn't snatch that suitcase, there's somebody in this garage who did. What's more I'm gonna—"

A bell tinkled. Trigger grabbed the phone. There was tense silence for a moment. Then Trigger's curses made the air blue.

"It's those damned Crime Busters!" he raged. "They didn't croak in that fire. The newspaper stuff was all a frame. Carlo says so. Brophy found him tied up. Those two dicks had been there. He tried to call us and they traced that call. Those flatfeet are in this joint!"

"Everybody on their toes. Joe, you and Tony take Tommy-guns and cover the front. Anybody hanging around gets filled with lead. Two more of you cover the back. The rest of us will spread out and go through this joint. If they're in here, they can't get out. Whoever grabbed that dough musta beat it toward the old office at the end of the hall. Let's go!"

Peyton heard it all and no matter how much he tried to dispel the idea, Trigger's orders formed a death sentence. He couldn't escape. Already a half dozen men were coming toward the room where he was hidden. To hold them off would provide time for Slugger to make a getaway—but would those men sent to reconnoiter outside find him?

"Go through that door fast," Trigger barked to his men. "They'll have gats and don't give 'em a chance to use 'em. Whoever plugs those guys gets ten grand outa my cut."

Peyton raised his rifle, curled his finger around the trigger and waited.

If the men sent outside didn't find

Slugger, the giant detective would come barging in at the first sound of a shot. Peyton groaned. It seemed the end of the Crime Busters was drawing nearer. If only Slugger would go for aid! But Peyton knew him too well to expect that. Slugger would stick.

A FLASHLIGHT broke the darkness and began to sweep the room. In a second it would reveal Peyton. From outside the garage came the sharp, insistent bark of a gun. That was the beginning. Slugger would go into action now. Peyton squeezed the trigger of his rifle. The flashlight went out, clattered to the cement floor and a body followed it.

Curses and shouts arose. Trigger gave orders.

"Get away from that door," he yelled. "There's one of them in there and he can't get out. Let him shoot. Nobody can hear him. The walls are too thick and the windows are boarded up. There ain't a soul living for a whole block around this dump. If they try to bust open a window and get out that way, the boys outside will give 'em a welcome."

Peyton edged toward the door. The eerie darkness helped him. With one foot he kicked the door shut. Bullets ripped through its panels, but a short burst from Peyton's rifle put an end to that.

Trigger spoke again. "Let him stay there. We'll smoke him out with tear gas. Watch that door, boys. If he tries to slip out, let him have it."

Peyton went to the window. His exploring hands told him that it was thickly boarded. He visualized the location of the garage and estimated that even if he did get the window open, there would be none to hear his cries for help.

Outside the door he could hear the crooks muttering maledictions upon him. So far he was safe enough. He had a gun well loaded and in one corner of the room lay the suitcase crammed with the money these killers needed for their getaway.

There was a scuffling outside the room. Peyton lifted his gun and trained its muzzle on the door.

"I'll take as many of them with me as I can," he told himself savagely. "I wonder what happened to Slug? He should have been roaring like a bull somewhere inside this garage by now."

"Take him boys!" Trigger's strident voice ordered. The door flew open. A flashlight cut the darkness. Peyton saw men in the doorway. His finger began to squeeze the trigger.

But no shots came toward him; no automatics or revolvers spat death. There was something wrong.

The flashlight moved to seek him out. Its ray revealed the foremost figure in the door. It was a man slouched far over and supported by hands that gripped him firmly.

Peyton lifted his gun an inch and fired a burst. The men let their victim drop and fled for safety. Peyton fired once more through the open doorway, hurried forward and dragged the inert form into the room.

A gun cracked and lead tugged at his sleeve, but Peyton didn't heed it. He knew who this man was. Slugger, unconscious and saturated with blood, was lying limply upon the floor.

Peyton kicked the door shut again, rested his rifle on one knee and bent over the figure. He found a package of matches in his pocket, lit one and held it high.

From beneath bruises and welts, Slugger opened one eye, winked solemnly and his lips cracked into a grin. He struggled to his feet, took a long breath and began to curse.

"A swell idea those bums had. They were gonna hold me up in that doorway so you'd plug me with your Tommy-gun. I tried to yell, but one of them had his mitt against my face and I couldn't. I didn't dare make a move because I thought maybe—you bein' nervous and all that—"

"You thought I'd kill you," Peyton cried. "I almost did, Slug, and if I

had sent one bullet into your hide, I'd have wiped out every one of these murderers. It was the ray of the flashlight that showed me who you were so I fired high to scare them off. They can't face a machine gun, Slug, but we can't hold out forever. What happened to you?"

Slugger grimaced. "I saw two guys come out holding gats and lookin' for trouble. I could hear them talkin' about us—one said something about the Crime Busters. I figured they'd grabbed you so I sailed into 'em. I knocked one for a loop and had the second guy on the ground when a coupla other skunks tapped me on the head. Damn it, why didn't you let me plow into the bunch of 'em right off? Now look at us!"

Peyton handed Slugger the rifle and said: "Here, take this and watch that door. If they try to come through, shoot straight. They're looking for tear gas bombs to smoke us out with. Don't let them throw any into this room."

"I'll watch 'em. But how do we get outa here? They'll blow in a couple of minutes. Maybe they'll even fire the joint like they did the club room. You and your brains! Think a way outa this mess, wise guy. You thought us into it."

Peyton made no reply. He went to the window, pulled free one of the boards and a faint illumination met his eye. Before he could yank any more boards loose, a gun spat and lead crashed into the strip of wood near his head. Peyton ducked. He reached up, pulled hard on the boards. One more came away. He backed up a little. In front of him, he saw what caused the light. It came from the nearby windows of the only building still in use on this abandoned block.

"Safety Trust Company," he read aloud the words inscribed on the windows. "Slug—that's the bank this gang stuck up. No wonder we couldn't find them. They made their escape in cars that were abandoned a block from here. They just jumped out, headed

back to this old garage and holed up while we figured they had getaway cars parked somewhere. While we searched the whole city, they were a thousand feet away from the bank they robbed!"

"And what does that make us?" Slugger queried. "Hell, man, we're right here too. There's almost a dozen guys who'll bump us on sight just waiting outside that door. Nobody lives around here. The whole block is gonna be ripped down. Think us a way out, will you?"

Peyton lit another match. In one corner he spotted a pile of old tires. He started toward them, but a concerted attack on the door stopped him. Slugger poured a fusillade of death into that doorway. The hammer of the rifle clicked dully. The cartridge drum was empty.

Something careened through the partially opened door. Without a second's hesitation Peyton scooped it up and hurled it with unerring accuracy through the slit in the boarded window. It crashed through the glass.

"Tear gas," Peyton said hoarsely. "Next time they'll throw two of them and then we're licked!"

“WATCH the door, Slug. I have an idea.”

"So have I," Slugger stood up. "I'm gonna wade into the bunch of 'em. That's better'n waiting here like a scared rat. Maybe they'll get me, but plenty of 'em won't brag about it. We're licked. My gun is empty."

"Wait!" Peyton gasped. "So is my automatic and if this idea doesn't work, I'll be at your side. Just hold them off a second or two longer."

As he spoke, Peyton was ripping the inner tube out of one tire. He found a small penknife in his pocket, slit the tube into a long strip of rubber and tested its tensile strength.

There were two iron bars across the window. Without exposing himself he tied both ends of the strip to the bars so that he had an improvised sling shot.

"Slug," he whispered, "come over here."

Slugger backed toward his partner. He could see, by the faint light streaming in the window, what Peyton had done.

"You ain't gone crazy?" he asked solicitously.

"I'm going to call the nearest precinct," Peyton told him. "See if you can bend that key almost in half."

Slugger laid down his useless gun, accepted the proffered key and slowly bent it to form a curved bit of metal. Peyton took it, inserted the center of the heavy rubber band in it and drew back. Slugger pushed him away, gave the crude sling shot a husky pull.

"What do I do now?" he asked.

"Hit a window of the Safety Trust Company," Peyton ordered. "Those windows are heavily wired with a burglar alarm system. If you can break the glass, you'll set it off."

"Cripes!" Slugger cried in elation. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Because you haven't what it takes, Slug. We'll argue it out later on. Break that window, but look out for those killers below. They're watching."

Slugger drew back the heavy piece of elastic even further. He let it go and held his breath. There was a crash as glass splintered and the silence of the deserted block was split by the crashing gong of the burglar alarm system.

CHAPTER V

WHILE BULLETS FLEW

OUTSIDE the door, the crooks prepared for a charge. Trigger spoke crisply.

"Somethin' happened. That's an alarm! I dunno how they sent it or if they even did, but the cops will be down on us in a second. No use trying to scam. They'd get us in the alleys. We'll fight it out and make a getaway over the roof. Half of you guys beat it to the front windows and the door. Plug the first cop who shows up."

"How about those two dicks inside?" someone asked.

"I'll take care of them right now. We're gonna rush 'em. They ain't got many more slugs. Make 'em use them up and then we'll croak the rats!"

Slugger lifted the heavy rifle over his head and as the door flew open, he hurled it. Two men went backward, swept off their feet by the force of the missile. Again they tried to get through that door and again Slugger repulsed them—this time with his fists. The crooks had no opportunity to shoot.

A tear gas bomb hurtled into the room and burst. Lead whistled by Slugger's head. One bullet caught him high in the shoulder, but he scarcely felt it. The fumes of cordite and tear gas made the room unbearable. Slugger crouched and darted out.

He struck against a form as burly as his own. A gun came up. With a grunt he knocked it away and sent his right fist deep into the stomach of his opponent.

Outside the garage, shouts and guns raised an unholy din. The siege was on. A powerful searchlight from one of the hastily dispatched riot cars sent its beam against the ceiling of the room. Slugger had a glimpse of his opponent. It was Trigger!

Two hands fastened themselves on Slugger's throat and began to squeeze. Peyton maneuvered about, but before he could act, two of the gang hurried into the room, took in the scene with a glance and prepared to shoot. Peyton scooped up a weapon dropped by a wounded crook and fired once. Both men lifted their hands high.

Slugger jabbed a series of powerful blows directly over Trigger's heart. They carried weight and made the murderous crook groan as each one connected. Trigger cursed luridly, but his deadly grip never relaxed. Slugger lifted his right knee, placed it in Trigger's stomach and with all his strength sent the equally big man flying away.

Trigger crouched and charged. Slug met him and their bodies collided with a smack. Slug used his fists like trip hammers, flattening the ugly features of the killer's face with every blow. Trigger panted for breath. Slug saw him tense for a rush. As he came, the detective stepped aside, lashed out a heavy right and cracked Trigger's head to one side. Before the crook could recover, Slug ended it. He measured his opponent with his left fist.

"This is for trying to roast us," he grunted and his right let go. The blow started from the floor. It lifted the crook off his feet and sent him crashing against the wall. He slumped, eyes glazing and head lolling on his shoulder.

Slugger bellowed, faced the two crooks that Peyton had covered and charged them. He held their struggling bodies apart and brought them together with a crash.

"Keep away from the windows," Peyton warned. "Our own men will shoot us for members of this gang. They can't know we're in here yet."

"Where's the rest of this bunch of yeggs?" Slugger glared belligerently. "You figured our way out of here, but I'm gonna finish the job."

"We'll have to take them from the rear," Peyton explained. "They're shooting at the squads outside. Work fast, Slug. We can prevent loss of life if we hurry things."

Slugger moved forward. Peyton behind him, raced down to the second floor and in the flood of light from the searchlights he made out the forms of five men posted against the front windows, sending a withering fire down on the police below.

The crooks were intent on their work. Slugger reached one and with a single blow put him out of the fight. The others saw Slugger now. Their guns swung around toward him.

Peyton began to shoot. Every bullet found its mark. Two of the men crashed to the floor. The others gasped

at this unexpected turn of events and quickly raised their hands.

Peyton barked an order. "Pick up one of those rifles," he told Slugger. "Shoot if these men move. I'm going to open the front door."

TWO minutes later the garage swarmed with police. Inspector Callahan stared his amazement as he surveyed the wounded men and the subdued crooks.

"What happened in here?" he demanded. "I know we call you two men the Crime Busters, but this is—is—well, it's a miniature battlefield. How did you get in here? We came in answer to a burglar alarm from the bank, heard the shooting and lead began to plop all around us."

"Lieutenant Peyton busted the window with a sling shot, Inspector," Slugger grinned. "That sent in the alarm. We were prisoners in here—ready to be gunned out."

"This gang is the one that stuck up the Safety Trust," Peyton explained. "We traced some of the money to this place. The man who heads the gang is unconscious upstairs. He's Burke, wanted also by the Department of Investigation."

Burke was led into the room between two patrolmen. He cursed in fury and struggled to tear himself away.

"This is your finish," Inspector Callahan surveyed the murderer coldly. "Take him away, boys. If he tries anything, shoot him."

"You can't hook me with that bank job," Trigger roared as he was pulled away. "That dough ain't here. The stuff in the suitcase is regular cash."

Peyton sped to the floor above and returned with the suitcase he had yanked from Trigger's grasp. He opened it and groaned a little. It was stuffed with money all right, but a single glance told him that Trigger had sold the loot and that these bills could never be traced. He didn't know who the fence was and Trigger would never tell.

"Never mind that," Inspector Callahan said. "We've enough on this gang to put 'em away for life if not to the chair."

"But that bank job has to be cleared up," Peyton protested. "Trigger sold that loot to a fence. We've got to find that man before he disposes of the stolen money."

Sluggo rubbed his chin. "Say," he broke in, "I just remembered. While I was waitin' in the alley, I saw a little guy come runnin' out with a brief case. I grabbed him and dumped him into the ash bin. He's still there I'm sure, because I walloped his jaw a good crack. I didn't look inside the brief case but I think there was dough in it."

Callahan gave quick orders and hurried out to the ash bin. Peyton stepped close to Sluggo and patted his unwounded shoulder.

"I was wrong," he apologized. "You have a few brains at that. It was a clever idea to stop that man. He just exchanged good bills for the hot money that will convict this gang and clear

up the bank holdup. You're better than I thought, Slug."

"You mean I heaved almost half a million into that ash bin?" Sluggo gasped. "That little guy was carrying all that dough?"

He wiped perspiration from his forehead. "Cripes, what if somebody has found it?" he muttered to himself. "Half a million bucks and I tossed it into an ash bin!"

"What?" Peyton asked as they approached the ash bin and saw officers with the unconscious fence and the brief case.

"Nothin'," Sluggo grinned brightly. "But after I get this shoulder fixed up, you and me are gonna take time out. I'm thirsty and you owe me all the beer I can drink. Callin' me a sap, huh? Hell, we'd never have solved this case if it hadn't been for me. And listen—you pay for the drinks."

Peyton tried to smooth his disheveled clothing. "We'll do that," he agreed, "—after we put our friend Carlo behind bars. Doing that would make any drink taste better—even beer."

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Jordan



|| *State Trooper Tom Sterling hit a manhunt trail lined with too many clues. When he saw trail's end staring him in the face, he realized too late that he had plunged headlong into a no-quarter battle with Satan's satellites.* || P

CORPORAL TOM STERLING, New York State Trooper, shivered as an icy wind cut with knifelike intensity through his heavy sheepskin coat. An inward foreboding of tragedy held the big Trooper in its grip as the two big coal-black horses ploughed along the ravine's ice-crust-ed surface. Iron shod hooves crunched through the crust as Sterling glanced back over his shoulder to where Trooper Harry Irish followed, his cold-reddened face patiently expressionless. It was a long patrol, and a hopeless one—

Sterling's mount suddenly leaped to the side, a piercing whinny shattering the silence. Caught off guard, Sterling's numbed fingers lost their grip on the reins. His body shot sideward as the startled horse floundered into deeper snow. Irish's alarmed cry rang in his ears as his body shot through the air and slammed against the snow-laden stunted spruce that blanketed

the sheer slope of the ravine. Sterling caught a flashing glimpse of a grotesque object tumbling down upon him, then his vision was smothered as he struck the drifted snow flat on his face.

Gasping, Sterling floundered to regain his footing on the steep slope. One outflung hand grasped a hard, cold object. Shaking the feathery snow from his eyes, the Trooper clambered upright, still retaining his hold on the thing he had inadvertently grasped.

Simultaneously a startled exclamation of horror jerked from his lips. His left hand was locked about the ankle of a booted foot! And protruding from the heel was the gleaming steel of a blunt spur!

Harry Irish was lurching along the bank, mouth agape. "What—" he began.

The lean corporal fought down that first stunned spasm of horror, tugged his burden down to the floor of the

ravine. In a moment, both officers were staring down at the death rigid body of a gray and black uniformed trooper whose sleeve bore the chevrons of a sergeant.

The sheepskin coat was stained with a dark blot at one shoulder where blood had oozed from a gaping bullet wound. Sterling turned the frozen body face upward and when he spoke his voice was curiously choked.

"It's him!" he muttered. "It's the sergeant, all right. That's the end of the search, Harry."

"The dirty rats got him after all," Irish grunted. "I'd hoped—"

But the corporal wasn't listening. A series of vivid pictures swept through his mind. The inevitable end for hard-boiled Hart Langley. Once, not so long ago, Sterling had ridden with Langley. The sergeant was a corporal then, and Sterling had been a rookie. Now Hart Langley's success in smashing dope smuggling rings had presumably led to this lonely death.

Some few weeks previously, orders from Albany had sent Langley from the Troop barracks at Malone to cooperate with the U. S. Border Patrol in tracking down the deluge of opium which was somehow crossing the Canadian Border. For a time the sergeant had reported. Then, suddenly he had vanished. The Border Patrol had lost touch with him. And Sterling and Irish had been detailed to the search.

For days, the two officers in gray and black had quartered the lonely stretches of the Adirondacks, until this macabre discovery had ended the trail.

"We'll have to finish our job," said Sterling dully.

With an effort he brushed the past from his mind and bent over the dead trooper. Gently he cleared the face of snow and crushed spruce needles. Suddenly he paused, staring incredulously.

Stamped deeply across one side of the dead man's forehead were letters!

"Harry!" Sterling pointed, his gloved hand shaking.

"Looks like a word stamped into the flesh with a brand or something of the sort." Irish bent, tracing the faint outlines of the letters which had been frozen into the rigid flesh.

"First one looks like an A," Sterling grunted, "then W . . . A . . . T. That last mark isn't so plain, but seems to be a T. That spells AWATT! Mean anything to you?"

Irish shook his head. Sterling turned toward the shivering troop horses. "Bring my mount over, Harry. We'll have to get him on the saddle."

Together the two men lifted their grotesque burden. Something long and snaky trailed from Langley's neck. Sterling picked it up, stared in bewilderment. It was a twenty foot length of new half-inch rope!

STERLING'S eyes swung to the corpse. The dead man's head lolled at a grotesque angle, and one end of the rope terminated in a noose which had bitten deeply into his neck.

"Good God! Langley was hanged! This rope—and his neck is broken!"

The stillness of death held the gloomy ravine in a moment's silence. Then Sterling pointed up the slope of the gully to a clump of small spruce slowly straightening back to an upright position.

"Evidently the body was thrown over the rim of the ravine and lodged in the tops of the spruce," the trooper snapped. "My horse saw it and shied. I struck the spruce when I was thrown and the body was dislodged. But hanging! Why should he be hung? And what struck his forehead?"

A sudden tiny sound crackled from the edge of the ravine. The troopers' eyes jerked up just in time to glimpse a bearded face peering down at them. Instantly the face disappeared and the thud of snowshoes slapping down on snow followed.

Sterling's Colt leaped into his hand. "Up the bank!" he shouted. "Get that man, Harry!"

Slipping, scrambling, clawing, the troopers fought their way up the slip-

pery incline. Sterling cursed as he realized that the quarry would be well on his way to escape before they could reach the top.

In a flurry of flying snow, Sterling threw his body up the last few feet. A burly shape on webs was in the act of fading into the woods a hundred yards distant. The officer cried out once in stentorian warning, then the .45 leaped and bucked against his hand. A severed twig floated down beside the fleeing figure, then a gargantuan bellow of derisive mirth rolled back. A half dozen steps in the deep snow told Sterling that without webs he hadn't a chance of overtaking the fugitive.

"It's no use," he panted to Irish. "Let's get back to the horses. We'll take Langley into Benton's Mills, and notify Malone. A troop car can come there after him. And don't forget that rope, Harry. That may hang more than one man before we're through!"

Hours later Sterling watched the chubby storekeeper at Benton's Mills examine the rope.

"Can you tell whether this was bought in your store?" Sterling demanded. He knew that practically all the trappers in the district outfitted at Benton's Mills. It was a slim chance, yet aside from the dimly imprinted letters on the dead man's forehead it was the only clue.

Benton, the storekeeper, suddenly nodded and spat accurately toward a box filled with sawdust. "Yep," he cackled, "this here's part of a lot of rope I got 'bout a week ago. See this here trademark?"

He indicated a small tin band which encircled the rope near one end. The tag bore a manufacturer's trade mark.

"And who bought it?" Sterling waited tensely for a reply as Benton puckered his brow in thought.

"Wal, let's see. I ain't sold but one length from this lot. Feller came in here I didn't know, big guy, ain't been around long, or I'd known him. What'd that feller say his name was, Joe?"

"Al Watts," the clerk told him. "He

got seventy-five feet of rope. Said he had a cabin up Bear Creek way."

Sterling's brain leaped triumphantly. Bear Creek—less than five miles from the spot where they had found Langley's body. Al Watts . . . AWATT, the letters stamped on Langley's forehead!

Within ten minutes he had borrowed snowshoes and was slogging rapidly off toward Bear Creek, taking his rifle from his saddle boot, leaving Irish to attend to getting Langley's body to Malone. Before leaving, Sterling took time to carefully measure, in the presence of witnesses, the imprinted letters on the dead sergeant's flesh.

If Watts were the murderer, why had he not removed the damning evidence of the brand? And how could such a brand be inflicted? As he shuffled on, Sterling remembered that most trappers stamped their traps with either their name or initials. And of course, the murderer had overlooked the print left in his victim's flesh. Langley's fur cap, by sliding forward an inch or two, could have obscured the letters.

But Langley had been working on the drug smuggling traffic. Why should he have encountered a trapper? Could the man Watts be connected in some way with the smugglers? Sterling shrugged. Why conjecture, now? He'd find Watts; then . . .

Almost before he realized the fact, the trooper found himself crossing a fresh snowshoe trail. With a start he realized that these were the tracks left by the burly watcher whom they had surprised in the ravine. He followed the trail, noting the peculiar pattern of the tracks left by the rawhide thongs. Finally he lost it altogether.

Turning back to Bear Creek, Sterling followed it until he came suddenly upon a cabin perched on one bank. He slipped out of his webs at the door, at the same time examining a pair that hung outside the shack. His pulse quickened. These were the webs that

had left those tracks about the rim of the ravine!

The next moment, he flung open the door and stepped inside, hand resting on the butt of the heavy Colt. A bearded giant swung from a rusty stove, his hand mechanically reaching for a rifle a yard away. Sterling's Colt snapped from the holster.

"Don't do it!" he snapped. "Your name Al Watts?"

The big man nodded, his arms slowly rising. "What's the game, trooper?" he snarled.

"You're under arrest!" Sterling barked, eyes watchful.

Watts' upraised arms quivered. "I ain't done nothin'," he growled. "If that cop claimed I stole them furs, I can't help it. He didn't have nothin' on me!"

"So a trooper *has* been here!" Sterling said quickly. "Listen, Watts. Get that length of rope you bought in Benton's Mills a few days ago."

"You gone nuts?" Nevertheless, Watts picked a coil of rope from the wall and tossed it at Sterling's feet. Keeping a watchful eye on his prisoner, Sterling picked up the rope and began measuring it by his extended arms. When he had finished, he knew that his estimate had been accurate, within a foot or two. There was approximately sixty feet of rope left from the original seventy-five—and about fifteen feet had been used to hang Sergeant Langley!

"You killed a trooper named Langley," he told Watts harshly. "This rope will probably hang you. Why'd you come back to the ravine where we saw you this morning?"

WATTS' features were at last convulsed with fear. "Say, I didn't have nothin' to do with that! Lemme explain! I thought you was after me for stealin' furs! A trooper was in here awhile ago, askin' questions about these here furs. I thought you come about that."

"What about this rope?"

"Somebody musta stole a length while I was away from the shack on my trap line. I was at the ravine this mornin', sure. My line runs past there and I looked down and saw the cop's body in the trees. Then I heard you fellers comin' and I ducked. When you saw me, I run, o' course. I knew it'd look bad, me bein' there."

"You left your name stamped on Langley's forehead," Sterling said inexorably.

"No! I tell you I didn't have nothing to do with it! Why'd I want to hang a man? There ain't no sense to that! Whoever done it hung the cop somewhere else; there wasn't no tree over him back there in that ravine!"

Sterling shrugged. He'd been asking himself that same question. The hanging was so crazy, so out of place. Why? Why had Langley been wounded by a bullet, then hanged? The trooper's mind revolved frantically about those questions. Suddenly he straightened, staring at the eyes of Watts. The pupils—they were contracted to pin points!

"Where'd you get the dope?" he snapped.

And instantly Watts shut his sullen mouth tightly, a sudden silence that told his captor he had hit the truth. Watts used dope—Langley had been on the trail of it. The coils were tight around Watts now.

The door flung unceremoniously open and Harry Irish barged in. "What's the idea of running off without me?" he demanded resentfully.

"You're just in time," Sterling told him. "Take this man in and have him booked for murder."

The corporal was staring at several steel traps, stamped with the name A. Watts. The table, even the butt of the rifle standing in a corner, now that he had time to examine them, bore the same identification.

"The guy's fond of stamping his property, even to his dead men," said Irish grimly, as he watched. At last Sterling found the instrument used to stamp the letters. Yet these letters

were not the same size as the ones branded in Langley's flesh, and search though he did, he could find no other. Yet he did discover a small canvas bag, empty, of the sort often used for carrying payroll money. Inked on the bags was the legend: Dominion Mining And Developing Company.

"I ain't stole nothin' from them," Watts snarled defiantly. "I worked for 'em last summer—that's all."

"Take him in," Sterling said swiftly to Harry. "I'm going to talk with these fellows at the Dominion mine. I was by the place last month; it isn't far. Take my rifle—it would only arouse suspicion. If Watts really worked for them, they may be able to shed some light on where he got the dope he's been using."

SCATTERED over the northern reaches of New York State, a region almost as wild and lonely as the Arctic, are a few small hamlets, far apart, and in the more remote sections the log shacks of trappers. Here and there appear small gold and platinum mines which, once abandoned, are again being operated.

Sterling emerged from the dense forest into a clearing in which stood several rough buildings. In the hillside at the further edge of the clearing loomed the gaping mouth of a mine shaft.

He continued on across the frozen surface of a tiny lake which lay on the opposite side from the shaft. Two men emerged from the nearest building to stand staring curiously at his approach.

"How's chances for some grub and a bunk for the night?" the trooper asked.

"Pretty good, Corporal," the taller man replied, glancing at the chevrons on the trooper's sleeve. Sterling judged him to be about forty, with a hard, intelligent face and cold blue eyes that surveyed the officer bleakly. His companion was shorter, broader, with the flat simian features of an ape.

"My name's Wentworth, and this is

my assistant, Joe Elber," the miner went on. "We're staying here during the winter doing a little experimental work in the mine. Not really working it, you understand, but driving a few little trial drifts to see if it's going to be worthwhile to operate on a bigger scale next spring."

"A Canadian firm owns this mine?"

"Yes, the Dominion Mining And Development Co. What's on your mind, officer?"

"Nothing that won't keep until after supper," Sterling replied easily.

"Well, come on in. We were just about to eat when we saw you coming."

Sterling removed the webs and started toward the cabin a short distance ahead of his hosts. An instant later his foot stepped down on thin air instead of the solid ground!

He threw himself backward, conscious of a yawning cavity directly in front of him. At the same moment, loud cries of warning rang out from Wentworth and his partner. Half the trooper's body had pitched into the abandoned mine shaft treacherously covered with snow before his wildly flailing hands caught hold of a sapling. As he pulled his body back to safety, a tiny bell of warning rang in the trooper's brain. Hadn't those shouts of warning come a split-second too slowly?

"Lord, you nearly got it!" exclaimed the hard faced Wentworth. "We're used to avoiding that old shaft; never thought to warn you."

Sterling glanced down into the dark depths with a shudder. "It's all right, but you'd better cover that before someone gets killed," he said curtly.

Half way through supper, Sterling said suddenly: "One of our men was murdered not far away. We found the body today, and arrested a trapper named Watts. He claimed he worked for you last summer. Right?"

Wentworth exchanged a swift glance with his brutal faced assistant. "Watts? Why, I believe he did. Killed a trooper, did he?"

"We—" Elber started to say. He broke off in mid-sentence as a droning roar swelled out of the night. The sound swept over the cabin, circled again. Both miners leaped to their feet.

"That plane sounds as if it intends to land." The trooper started toward the door.

"It does," explained Wentworth. "That's the ship that brings our supplies. He visits the several different mines the company owns, leaving dynamite and foodstuffs, and taking out all the high grade ore he can carry, for assay. But he usually gets here in daylight—must have had trouble."

"That's it, he must have had motor trouble," suggested Elber eagerly, "We'd better get out there with some lanterns, Jack."

A dark shape dropped over the frozen surface of the little lake; touched skis to the snow in an expert landing. Sterling was at the plane's side when the cabin door opened.

"Meet Corporal Sterling of the State Police," said Wentworth quickly, as a thin faced man leaped to the ground. "Corporal, this is our company pilot, Phil Newton. Have trouble, Phil?"

"Yeah," grated the pilot. A patch over one eye gave his wind-bitten face a sinister cast in the flickering lantern light. "One motor cut out—slowed me down."

For the first time, Sterling noted that the center motor in the nose of the ship was silent, though both port and starboard engines were idling softly. With expert swiftness, the three men unloaded bundles of foodstuff and several boxes of dynamite. Sterling clambered into the cabin and sat down at the controls. He became suddenly conscious that the eyes of the three were fixed intently upon him. He forced a light laugh. "You know, this is the first time I've sat behind a control stick since my war flying days."

He glanced casually about the interior of the cabin. It was a Canadian

plane, all right. A bronze plate on the right hand side of the instrument board bore the words Ottawa Flying Club, and the pilot's Canadian license was in its case beside it.

The truth struck Sterling with almost physical force then. He realized that death was scant inches away. One wrong move, one false word, and his life wouldn't be worth a plugged coin!

HE managed to fish out a cigarette unconcernedly, light it, and clamber to the ground.

"Brings back old days," he said easily, then yawned. "Well, I'm turning in; got to get on into Malone early in the morning. You needn't get up, Wentworth. I'll grab a bite and be on my way before you'll want to roll out."

It took all the will power he possessed to climb into the bunk and close his eyes. Over and over again a question pounded through his mind. Why did a comparatively small ship like Newton's need three motors? The plane had twice the horse power usually used in a ship of that size. The miners came in, whispering furtively.

It seemed ages to the sleepless trooper before the dial of his watch indicated that dawn was approaching. Yet he must make sure; must do nothing to arouse suspicion.

Moving quietly, he prepared a quick breakfast and swallowed it without appetite. It was still dark when he stepped through the door and swung off toward the woods. But against the snow he knew his body offered an excellent target. His back fairly crawled from the impact of watching eyes. Each moment he expected to feel the shock of a bullet in the back. If by word or act he had aroused suspicion—

Yet he reached the timber safely, and paused to mop the cold sweat from his face. He swung in a wide circle, came back toward the plane from an angle that made him invisible from the building. Half running, he reached the plane. His first act was to swing the propellor of that silent center

motor. The blade swished around easily.

"No compression!" breathed Sterling. "Why?"

After a moment of swift work, he knew why. The motor was a clever dummy. Genuine enough, save that the pistons had been removed, and there was no oil in the sump! But there was something else in those big cylinders. Flat packets wrapped in oiled silk fell to the snow as Sterling pried out the tight fitting covers that held them. In five minutes he was staring at forty pounds of opium, worth, perhaps, twenty-five thousand dollars! No wonder that motor was silent! It always would be, filled with a small fortune in drugs!

The trooper, face hard as iron, stood outside the shack door. It wasn't the opium he was thinking of now, but memories that turned his bronzed features grim. He flung open the door and stepped quickly inside.

Wentworth and Elber were both working over the stove. There was no sign of Newton.

Wentworth turned. "I thought you'd left," he said casually. But his jade eyes had hardened, grown watchful. He flashed Elber a significant glance and the ape faced man sidled cornerward where leaned a Winchester. Sterling's right hand hooked casually into the cartridge belt an inch from the gun butt. Elber froze motionless.

"I've been looking over that dead engine, Wentworth," Sterling said flatly.

A second's pregnant silence, then—"He's wise!" yelled Wentworth. "Get him, Joe!" At the same time, his own hand darted beneath his coat as Elber lunged for the rifle.

The big Service Colt leaped into Sterling's hand, spat flame and smoke a fraction of a second before the wicked automatic in Wentworth's grip snarled. The tall man's gun went spinning. Elber had reached the rifle, was swinging it to cover Sterling. The Winchester spanged. The trooper's fur

cap went flying as his finger tightened again on the trigger. The heavier boom of the .45 crashed over the rifle's report, blotting it out. Elber sat down, cursing, nursing a shattered wrist.

Sterling took one step forward, halted as he saw a light gleam in Wentworth's slitted eyes. A shadow loomed behind Sterling. He whirled, gun swinging up. There followed a searing flash, almost in his face. A gun roared as a streak of red hot lightning ripped across Sterling's skull. Even as a black wave of unconsciousness rose to claim his reeling senses, he realized that Newton, lurking outside the cabin, had shot him.

HIS senses fought their slow way back to his aching brain. He became aware that voices were yelling above a steady roar of sound. Covertly he opened his eyes and glanced around.

Elber sat on the snow a few feet away, whining curses of pain as Wentworth hurriedly bandaged his shattered wrist. Newton leaned against the plane, shifting his feet nervously.

"Hurry it up, you guys!" the pilot snarled. "We've gotta drag outa here!"

Wentworth scrambled to his feet. "Okay, Joe, climb in. Newton, give me a hand with the cop."

Sterling hurriedly closed his eyes as the two men turned toward him. Wentworth still held a gun in his hand; the trooper's own Service .45.

"He's still out," snapped Wentworth. "Grab his legs and shove him in!"

Rough hands lifted Sterling; jammed him into the front seat next the door. Newton scrambled behind the controls. The two motors roared and the ship swung for the take-off.

Faster and faster the plane slid over the packed snow. Sterling tensed for what he knew was coming, his hand seeking a small object far back in the lining of his heavy coat. Yes, it was still there, the little hide-out gun he always carried. Only a careful search would have revealed it.

The skis bounced, once, twice. Then it happened. The port motor cut out abruptly. The left wing sagged. A horrified cry broke from Newton and the occupants of the rear seats. The left ski crumpled as the full weight of the ship fell upon it. The wing tip dug into the snow as the plane groundlooped wildly.

Sterling already had his door open. The impact threw him sprawling a dozen yards away. The hide-out gun leaped into his hand. Elber was the first to crawl from the quivering plane. At the trooper's barked command, his left hand flashed up and a snub nosed automatic barked viciously. The bullet tugged at Sterling's sleeve as he snapped grimly: "You asked for it!"

He fired once, deliberately, and Elber slumped to the ground.

"Anyone else want the same?" he asked harshly.

Evidently the crash and Elber's swift retribution, had taken the fight out of the other two smugglers, for they crawled out to stand sullenly with upraised hands.

"I can't understand why that motor quit!" the pilot repeated over and over in stunned wonder. "It was working perfectly—"

"It'd still be working perfectly if I hadn't loosened the ignition cable so that a hard bump or two would jar it off," Sterling told him coldly. "I wasn't taking any chances of you birds making a getaway."

Wentworth's eyes went to the little pile of opium tins on the snow. "Well, we'll have to take the rap for smuggling, I guess," he growled sullenly.

"You'll burn for the murder of Sergeant Langley?" the trooper replied grimly.

Wentworth turned white. "You ain't got a thing on us for that! You can't pin that murder on us!"

"No? Watts told the truth, I discovered last night." Sterling herded his captives to the plane. "The fact that there was a man named Watts around here played right in your hands; almost fooled us. As I see it, you had a scrap with Sergeant Langley. Maybe he got wise to the dummy motor, too. You took him up in the plane when he was wounded and unconscious, with that rope around his neck for precaution. The other end could be fastened to a seat. You figured on dumping him somewhere where he wouldn't be found. But Langley came to and put up a scrap. After which he either fell out or was thrown out. Of course, the snap on the rope broke his neck, and one of you cut him loose.

"By flying low over the ravine, it was simple to cut Langley loose so that he fell into those young trees. A fifty foot fall on them, covered with snow as they were, hardly bruised his body."

"All theory!" sneered Wentworth. "Where's your proof?"

"I was going to tell you. We found several letters on Langley's forehead. AWATT, to be exact."

"What of it?" demanded Wentworth. "That points to Watts, all right, doesn't it?"

"We read 'em wrong at first," Sterling said coldly. "AWATT? Turn 'em around and you have TTAWA, which are the last five letters of Ottawa!"

He pointed to the plate on the plane's dash on which in raised letters were the words Ottawa Flying Club. "In the scrap, Langley must have hit his forehead against the dash, enough to scar himself with the letters. Oh, yes, they'll send you to the chair, all right. Measurements of the letters and the dope hookup will do that all right. Now we'll get moving. It's quite a ways to Malone, but not so much farther to Sing Sing and the electric chair!"



JANUARY, 1936

Would You Like An Original Oil Painting of a Cover of Your Favorite M-P Magazine? *Here's How to Get One Absolutely Free!*

Readers—Here Are the Last of the Winners!

RECENTLY a tired group of Editors emerged from a conference room and handed Ye Editor of the M-P NEWS FLASH a sheet of paper on which were written the names of the winners of our third cash awards contest.

In the opinion of the judges James Castles, 133 Eighth Ave., Newark, N. J., wrote the best letter telling us what he liked about the leading characters in five of our publications, and to Mr. Castles goes first prize of \$50.00. The judges tell us that closely following upon Mr. Castles' heels was Isabelle Welsh, 22 Maul St., New Rochelle, N. Y., so Mrs. Welsh gets the second prize—our check for \$25.00. Jack Williams, 309 W. Broadway, Enid, Okla., having written the third best letter, our check in the amount of \$10.00 has been mailed to him, while fourth prize—a \$5.00 check—is on its way to Gladys Sundquist, 2355 Orchard Ave., Ogden, Utah.

After considerable deliberation the judges awarded the ten \$1.00 prizes to the following: Ida Sackman, 6241 Northwest Hwy., Norwood Park Sta., Chicago, Ill.; Fay Audrey Eddy, 1 Providence St., Providence, R. I.; M. M. Evans, 2743 Main St.,

San Diego, Calif.; Jack N. Mumford, 603 W. 7th St., Chester, Pa.; Boyd R. Ogden, Altoona, Kans.; Leslie Cleary, 6238 Northwest Highway, Chicago, Ill.; Edwin R. Noepel, 34 Godfrey Rd., Upper Montclair, N. J.; A. C. Hartwell, 905 Christie Ave., Princeton, W. Va.; Elizabeth Harper, Garden Apts., Jamaica, L. I., and Julienne Smith, Washington, Kansas.

Thus comes to a close the last of this series of contests. \$300.00 in prize money has been paid out to those, who in the opinion of the judges, submitted the best letters. As mentioned previously, we do not consider that there are any "losers" since by way of these contests everybody concerned has gained by becoming acquainted with other magazines of our group, thus being afforded additional delightful sources of reading for the long winter nights ahead. And to all we extend our deep appreciation for the many fine letters received, for those letters impressed upon our minds in no uncertain manner the fact that M-P magazines are held in high esteem by a great bulk of the fiction reading public. Thanks again—everybody!

HERE'S a unique and unusual offer that will no doubt interest every reader of our group. It is one that cannot be measured in dollars and cents since the prizes involved are 9 beautiful oil paintings—the originals used in making the covers of recent issues of TEN DETECTIVE ACES—LOVE FICTION MONTHLY—WESTERN ACES—SECRET AGENT "X"—WESTERN TRAILS—SKY BIRDS—RED SEAL WESTERN—GOLD SEAL DETECTIVE and FLYING ACES. These works of art, measuring 24" x 25", are suitable for framing and every M-P reader has an equal chance to win.

In order to try for one of these paintings all you have to do is write a letter on the value of THE M-P NEWS FLASH. Don't feel that you "can't write" for we're not looking for literary ability, just tell us in your own way in what respect this page has aided you; whether or not the "highlights" of outstanding stories appearing in our other magazines proves of interest, and as to whether or not you use that information as a guide in your magazine purchases. We're also interested in knowing what you readers think of the "thumbnailed sketches" of our various authors. Does "knowing" an author cause you to enjoy his stories to a greater extent?

These paintings will be given to those writing the nine best letters. The judges will consist of a group of M-P Editors and their decisions will be final. You may write as much or as little as you like, and be sure to tell us from what magazine of our group you'd prefer a cover painting. All letters must be mailed not later than midnight, December 23rd.

Space limits our telling you very much about our fine current issues, but FLYING ACES, with its 16 additional pages, is great! Arch Whitehouse further discusses von Richthofen's death; Don Kayhoe's Philip Strange is there, while Joe Archibald presents another of his Phineas howls. RED SEAL WESTERN is a "wow," containing, among other treats, "Satan's Saddle-Mate," a thrilling story of rangeland intrigue, by the well-known author of Western yarns—L. P. Holmes. Let Frederick C. Davis thrill you with his latest "Moon Man" yarn in TEN DETECTIVE ACES, "The Robe of Blood," and be sure to read "Lobo Look," a "Preacher Devlin" novel by L. L. Foreman, as well as "Passport to Hell," by Larry A. Harris, in WESTERN ACES. And be sure not to overlook "When Death Double-Crossed," a "Bert Little" novel by Clyde A. Wardlaw, "Outlaw Hang Twice," a "Duke Buckland" novelette, by Frederick C. Davis, in WESTERN TRAILS.

If you enjoy romance, LOVE FICTION MONTHLY will interest you. There's "Rhoady in Red" by Lisbeth Walter; "Love Divided by Three," by Vina Lawrence, in addition to an excellent array of short stories. And—if you crave deep mystery, adventure and super-thrills, by all means read SECRET AGENT "X"! There you'll find, among other great treats, "Kingdom of Blue Corpses," a mystery novel by Brant House, and "Terror Tribunal," a "Mark Hazzard" novel by Frederick C. Davis.

Sorry we haven't more space to tell you more, but when you buy your magazines, be sure of getting the best by INSISTING on "M-P" magazines!

No, No, A Thousand Times No—

We Haven't Discontinued the Ring!

FREE!

OUR announcement last month to the effect that the pocket knife would be discontinued resulted in an avalanche of letters asking as to whether or not we plan to discontinue the Zodiac ring. Permit us to hastily say that as long as the ring proves as popular as it is at the present time, it will not be discontinued.

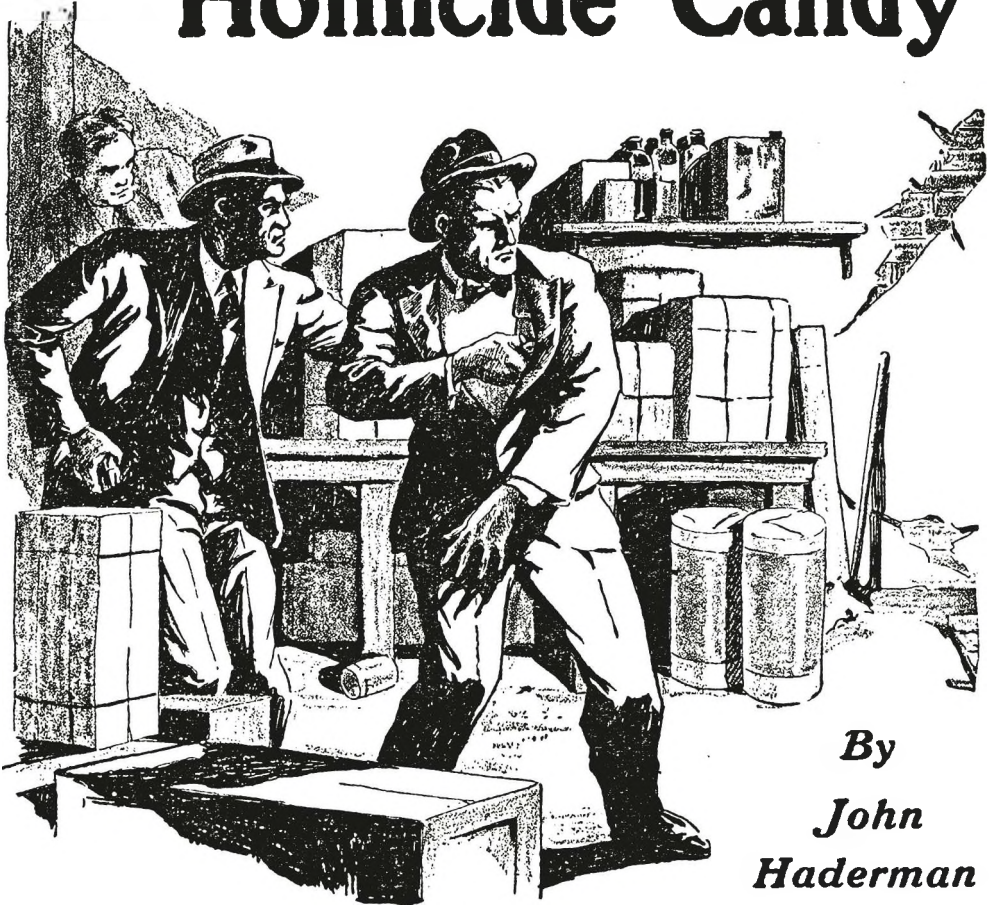
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Homicide Candy



By
*John
Haderman*

He was a killer—and he called his shots. And he taunted the cops with clues. Officer Mahoney lost sleep over that notorious gunman who mixed marshmallows with murder. For the Marshmallow Kid ate candy after every killing. But when he shot a copper—he bit off a big chunk of hell for himself.

OFFICER MAHONEY sat down at the table in the rear of the restaurant. For a brief moment he contemplated the steak before him; then, cutting off a small piece, he turned his attention to the evening paper that lay folded beside his plate.

Blatant headlines screamed the news of the day. Large black letters blazoned out momentous happenings. But Dan Mahoney, though interested, refused to become excited. He read slowly, casually—so slowly, in fact,

that he had almost finished his dinner before he turned over to the second page. Then, for the first time since he sat down at the table, Dan Mahoney tensed.

The item that caught his eye was not as large as others on the first page, but to Mahoney its import was larger.

STOREKEEPER KILLED IN HOLD-UP MARSHMALLOW KID SUSPECTED

Mahoney's dinner was forgotten while he read the account. The storekeeper had been ruthlessly shot down

while defending a few paltry, hard-earned dollars from a pair of dapper, masked robbers. A lone passerby had seen the hold-up; had seen the leader of the two killers in the act of transferring a marshmallow from the pocket of his tight-fitting blue suit to his thin-lipped mouth. And by that egotistical and deliberate gesture alone the Marshmallow Kid had been identified.

Any further details regarding the cold-blooded murderer and his partner were few indeed. The two always wore masks; always wore gloves. Newcomers to crime they were, undoubtedly, for not a stoolie had yet come forth with their true identity. A couple of small-time criminals, but dangerous—with the killing complex. The police force could do nothing but shrug its shoulders and pray for a break.

That break seemed remote. The Marshmallow Kid and his cohort chose their jobs with care. There was never a jam of pedestrians to thwart their getaway. Always they had slipped into the safe obscurity of the city.

And the papers, naturally, were raising hell.

All this flashed quickly through Dan Mahoney's mind as he finished the item; and there was a far-away look in his pale blue eyes as he sipped meditatively at his coffee.

What a catch that would be for some cop. There'd be an editorial for praise; perhaps a promotion, more money. If only the gods of chance would toss that break in his lap. If only—

Then it happened.

Mahoney was at first unaware of the entrance of the two men. He sat with his back toward the front of the small restaurant, and so was not watching the door to the street. A tall screen just as effectively concealed him from the doorway—his blue shirt, his Sam Browne belt, and the uniform cap lay on another chair.

(Continued on page 118)

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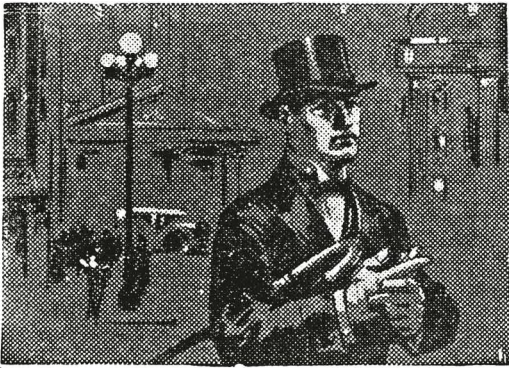
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Mahoney's first intimation of anything wrong came when a low, gritty voice seeped into his consciousness.

"This is a stick-up, mister!"

For a brief moment Dan Mahoney thought that his imagination was playing a trick on him. He turned, half expecting to see old Jim Hogan pattering around at the cashier's desk with some task or other, entirely alone. But what he did see brought Mahoney to his feet; sent his tough, bronzed hand down toward the holster on his hip.

Two men stood facing Jim Hogan at the desk—thin, dapper men, with large silk masks covering the entire upper half of their faces. Each held a gun, and each gun was pointed unerringly at old Jim Hogan's heart.

For a tense split second, Dan Mahoney took in the scene. His heart raced faster, as he saw the taller of the two men reach in his side pocket and bring out a white coated marshmallow, indifferently lifting it to his mouth.

Then Mahoney let out a bellow and ran forward, his gun streaking up.

But as quick as Mahoney was, the Marshmallow Kid was quicker. And even as Mahoney's finger constricted on the trigger, the Kid's gun roared.

Mahoney felt the hungry lead bite into his hand; felt his police positive slip from his nerveless fingers. Hot rage consumed him, blotting out all the instinctive laws of self-preservation. Before him stood a masked, cold-blooded killer. Scum of society. Forgotten was the smoking gun held in the murderer's gloved hand, a gun that might at any second blast him into eternity. He was a cop, a defender of the public. Mahoney dove forward.

He hurled himself through the air toward the blue-clad legs of the killer.

The Kid's gun spewed lead. Another gun roared, and Jim Hogan grabbed at his shoulder. All this Mahoney saw, as the two stick-ups started to beat a surprised, hasty retreat for the door. Then Mahoney felt his hands close securely about the ankle of the Marsh-

mallow Kid. Why, Mahoney then realized, this rat wore spats!

There was a tense struggle. Mahoney, gritting his teeth, clung on while the Kid fought to gain his balance; fought to free his leg from the grasp of the cop.

His hold weakening because of his wounded hand, Mahoney raised his good hand and grasped at the Kid. Clutching fingers caught the killer's coat pocket—ripped it down, wide open. Then a fourth shot rocketed through the small restaurant, and something burned along the crown of Mahoney's head. For a second or two consciousness remained with him. Then blackness, like an ebon curtain, slowly dropped over him.

WHEN Daniel Mahoney came to, he was soaked in a welter of perspiration. He sat up slowly, blinking his eyes in the sudden brightness. A terrific pain sliced through his head; jolted like the thud of a black-jack. For a few moments he was conscious only of his own existence. Then a voice by his side said slowly:

"Feelin' okay, copper?"

Mahoney looked up to see Joe Devlin, a radio cop, by his side. He smiled thinly, ran his uninjured hand over his head, and replied:

"I will be. Did you get 'em?"

Devlin's face was set. He shook his head slowly, sighed.

"Nope. We got the call but they'd beat it when we got here. Maybe they'll be picked up, though; the whole town's bein' watched. Too bad you—" He stopped, coughed suddenly, then smiled.

But Dan Mahoney had got the inference Devlin had tried to cover up. "I know. I was a chump. I had them, and let 'em get away. I'm probably in for it, all right, when Sergeant Hollis gets here."

Mahoney looked up, saw the crowd of people outside the restaurant held

(Continued on page 120)



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back by a couple of the nearby beat cops; turned back to Devlin again.

"Hogan hurt badly? I saw him get it just before I passed out."

Devlin's face seemed to grow even longer. He glanced quickly at the cashier's counter. Mahoney followed his movement and saw, for the first time, Devlin's prowl partner, Fogarty. Fogarty was standing at the end of the counter, looking down at the floor. As Mahoney glanced up, Fogarty's deep voice boomed out:

"He's dead!"

Mahoney started to say something, stopped and just stared into space. Jim Hogan dead. Killed in cold blood right before his eyes. And that death could have been prevented, too; if only he'd drawn quicker; if only—

Those thoughts throbbed in Mahoney's tortured brain as he sat there, staring blankly. From off in the distance came the banshee wail of the homicide squad car; and intermingled with it was the insistent clanging of an ambulance bell.

Suddenly Mahoney leaned forward, picking up a crumpled paper bag that lay on the floor by his feet. Small white flakes of powdered sugar clung to it.

He examined it closely, his forehead furrowed. It seemed to be a perfectly plain bag that had once held marshmallows. Then suddenly, with a start, Mahoney remembered that it had dropped to the floor when he had torn the Kid's pocket. Excitedly Mahoney carefully stretched the container out flat.

For almost half a minute, he went over the paper bag. Instead of calling Devlin's attention to something he discovered, he stuffed the paper in the breast pocket of his shirt, rose slowly, staggered across the room and got his gun.

He had almost reached the door when Devlin caught him by the arm.

"Hey, what's the rush? Wait'll the ambulance—"

Mahoney paused, took a deep breath.

"Can't." He glanced down at his blood-caked hand, clenched his fist. "It don't hurt much, and I've got to do something."

"But Sergeant Hollis will—"

"Listen, Joe. I've botched this thing already. I've got a slim chance to square things, but I've got to act fast! If I'm right—"

He left the sentence unfinished, started forward.

Devlin's grip tightened. The whining of the sirens came closer; snapped an urgent message to Mahoney's brain.

He loosened Devlin's grasp.

"I've got to hurry!"

He opened the door; stepped into the noisy crowd.

LESS than an hour after the shooting had occurred, Dan Mahoney was standing in the dark recesses of a tenement doorway. Directly across the street, the hazy yellow light of a small candy and stationery store tried feebly to thwart the dismal gloom of the night.

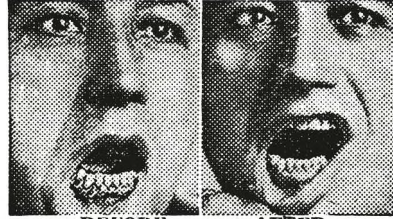
He was not in uniform. He had made a hurried stop at his small bachelor apartment and changed into dark civilian clothes. But his service gun still hung on his hip, and his coat was unbuttoned.

Mahoney was working on a hunch, and he was playing that hunch to the hilt. He kept thinking only of vindicating himself for what he considered a failure in his duty.

Time passed slowly, aggravatingly. Occasionally Mahoney felt that he had blundered. He realized, full well, that he should not have taken the initiative; that he should have turned his clue over to the homicide squad. But he knew what would happen if he had. They would have listened, nodded their collective head, and eventually get around to what Mahoney was al-

(Continued on page 122)

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ready doing. By then it might be too late.

So Mahoney had taken the chance. And now, if it proved that he was wrong, well— He shrugged his shoulders. No harm would have been done—except to himself. And that—

Suddenly Mahoney realized that he wasn't wrong. The two figures who appeared so abruptly across the street were all too familiar. Though Mahoney couldn't see their faces, he knew that the slim, dapper men who entered that stationery store were the killers. It was their carriage, their manner, as much as anything else.

He glanced up and down the el-covered street, adjusted his gun belt, and stepped out of the shadows. He crossed the gloomy thoroughfare slowly, keeping his eye on the yellow splash of light that filtered through the dirty window of the store. Reaching the opposite sidewalk, he didn't hesitate, but walked boldly in.

The little bell over the frame tinkled as Mahoney opened the door. The two men spun about as though motivated by the same spring. In the silence that followed the last echoes of the bell—a silence that seemed to hang heavily over the small store—Mahoney's gaze locked with that of the dapper men.

No one spoke. Speech wasn't necessary. Mahoney knew he had been recognized. The face of the taller man—the Kid—had become a hard mask, thin-lipped, cruel. His small black eyes glittered. Then his glance dropped and he started forward, as if to pass.

Mahoney backed to the door, easing his hand toward his holster.

"Take it easy, Kid. I've been looking for you."

As he spoke, Mahoney's fingers closed over the butt of his gun. The man before him tensed, made a move toward his coat lapel, then hesitated.

"Lookin' for me? For what?"

Mahoney's blue-barrelled gun glinted in the pale light as he brought it out.

"Are you comin' peacefully, spats and all, or—"

There was a sudden movement in the rear of the store. Something flashed through the air.

Mahoney ducked, felt a hard thud on the side of his head, heard the sound of breaking glass. Then he saw himself, for the second time that night, looking down the black tunnel of a nickel-plated .32.

The roar of a gun sounded immediately after the crash of glass. Flame licked out to lap hungrily at Mahoney's face. But in ducking the thrown object, he had also ducked the bullet. Now he went into action.

He felt the trigger of his positive give beneath the pressure of his finger. A dull boom caromed off the walls of the small store. The shorter man—the one in back who had fired both bottle and bullet at Mahoney—screamed, then slipped to his knees.

The Kid had his gun out now; had it out and was bringing it to bear directly on Mahoney's forehead. Mahoney fired. At the same moment, he threw himself forward.

The two shots sounded as one. The whine of a bullet lived in the receding noise of the guns as it spanged into an el-pillar out in the street.

Before the Kid could bring his gun down, Mahoney crashed into him. Once more he found the Kid's legs in his grasp. Together the two rolled to the floor. A third shot blasted like a charge of dynamite in Mahoney's ear, but the bullet, fired in haste, went wild.

Mahoney checked his fire. He wanted to take the Kid and his cohort alive if possible; wanted them to go through the tortures of the damned as they waited for the charge of electricity that would end their existence; wanted them to suffer the full penalty for their cold-blooded killings.

He twisted about, slashed out with his gun. It grazed the thin-faced killer's scalp, deflecting the aim of the fourth shot as the Kid blasted away. Burning powder stung Mahoney's

(Continued on page 124)

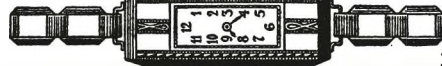
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eyes, singed his brows. Gritting his teeth, he raised his gun once again, brought it crashing down on the Marshmallow Kid's head. The form under him went limp.

For a moment Mahoney waited, alert for a ruse. Then, satisfied, he glanced over to where the shorter man lay, blood spewing from a wound in his shoulder, a vacant look on his unconscious features.

Once again Mahoney heard the distant whine of sirens. A pair of prowler cars were tearing to the scene.

He sat up, glanced idly at the bottle of soda water that the Kid's partner had hurled at him, and which crashed through the glass of the door. He turned as the owner of the store came up from behind the counter.

"Vat iss?"

The man—short, fat, wide-eyed—was panting. He stared hard at Mahoney, then at the two men on the floor. Mahoney, breathing deeply, watched him.

"For vy," the storekeeper went on, "you come into my store und—"

Mahoney glanced from the man to the packages of marshmallows displayed in the dirty showcase. He dabbed for a moment at his perspiring forehead, then saw the bottle of soda on the floor. He picked it up.

"Here—take this cap off. I'm thirsty."

MAHONEY was sitting on the Marshmallow Kid—now manacled to his partner—and sipping the soda through a straw when the first of the prowl cops barged into the store. He sucked in the last drop of soda, set the bottle down and grinned.

"Late again—as usual."

But Mahoney was not in a bantering mood when, after he had locked the prisoners up, he was on the carpet in Sergeant Hollis's office. The sergeant, big, beefy, red-faced, a recruit of the old school, pointed a stubby finger menacingly at Mahoney.

"This better be good," he thundered.

"Those mugs have got a shyster

mouthpiece already and he's squawking like hell. He claims they thought you were holding them up and that they were only protecting themselves. We can hold 'em on a Sullivan charge for the guns maybe, but there'll be plenty of trouble if we can't prove more."

Mahoney licked his dry lips; mopped nervously at his perspiring forehead.

"We can, all right," he said slowly. "You see, when I found that marshmallow bag in Hogan's restaurant, I figured how it might be a good lead on the Marshmallow Kid. For on the bag, you see"—he held out the paper container for Hollis to look at—"is the name of the store where they were bought—where the Kid bought 'em. It's stamped on pretty faintly, but if you look close, you can read it."

Hollis adjusted his glasses, squinted at the almost obliterated red markings on the bag. The name had been stamped there with a cheap home printing outfit. The sergeant's thick lips moved as he read:

Max Bernheim
230—3 Av

Mahoney went on as Hollis put the bag down:

"So I figured that if he bought some marshmallows there once, he might buy them there some more. In fact, if he happened to live around there, he might buy them there all the time. So, as I knew he was out of marshmallows, it was a good bet that he'd buy some more there tonight.

"It was just a hunch, but it worked out."

Hollis's face became very grim. He shook his head slowly, stared hard at Mahoney.

"Mahoney," he said softly, "you're a good cop. I appreciate your zeal. I have no doubt you meant well, and I can readily understand why you took the initiative instead of turning your evidence over to the detectives. I can

(Continued on page 126)

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understand, because I was a cop once myself."

He paused as the door swung open. A clerk stepped in.

"There's a *habeas corpus* downstairs for them two crooks that were just booked."

Hollis groaned, swung about and faced Mahoney.

"You know what that means?"

Mahoney nodded. "Sure—a hearing before the magistrate in night court."

"Exactly." Hollis's voice became deeper. "And at that hearing, their lawyer will rip hell out of that marshmallow bag evidence. We can hold them on a Sullivan charge, yes; but right now they're booked for murder. The papers'll raise—"

Mahoney smiled; tossed onto the table a package he had been holding.

"Take that along. It oughta do."

Hollis glanced at the package, a police department tag on it, picked it up, opened it. Inside were a pair of spats. He glanced at them for a moment, then at Mahoney.

"Well?"

His voice was menacing, but Mahoney smiled.

"That's another reason I didn't wait for the detectives. You see, in Hogan's restaurant I caught the Kid by the legs. Well, when I remembered that, I remembered seeing spats on him.

"You see, he took a shot at me in the restaurant, hit my hand. Well, my hand bled and when I caught him about the ankles, naturally some of the blood got on his spats. Now if you'll look closely, you'll see what I'm getting at—a swell set of Officer Daniel Mahoney's fingerprints."

Hollis looked over the spats carefully; found the red-smudged prints.

"So you see," Mahoney went on, "I had to get him before he might take them off. I took them when the Desk Sergeant booked him."

Hollis looked up.

"Well I'll be damned!" he said. "That's the first time I've ever heard of a cop's fingerprints convicting a killer."

Why waste time on old fashioned methods

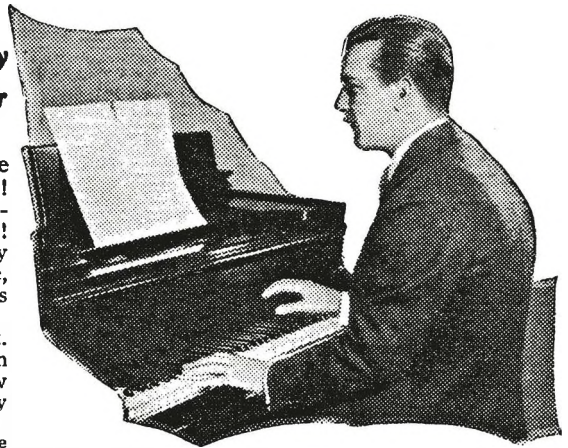
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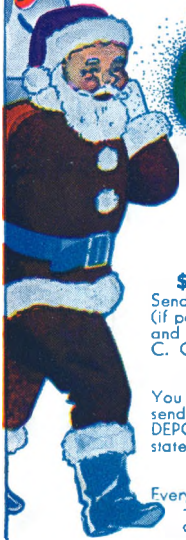
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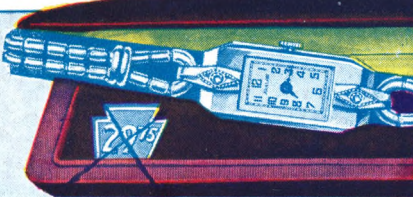
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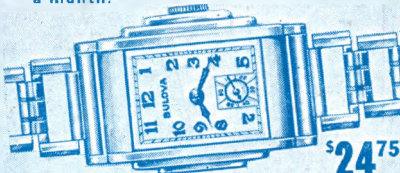
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