

COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY STORIES

NOW
10¢

APR.

POPULAR DETECTIVE

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



**MURDER
IN MOROCCO**
By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

**HUNDRED
GRAND LIBEL**
By **DALE CLARK**



Common-BOYS-GIRLS-MEN-WOMEN PICK YOUR PRIZE

THESE PRIZES ARE GIVEN TO YOU—Just send for 24 packets of easy selling Garden Spot Seeds which you can easily and quickly sell to your friends and neighbors at 10c each. Return the \$2.40 collected and select your Prize in accordance to our offers. SEND NO MONEY—WE TRUST YOU.

22 Piece TABLEWARE SET



6 Knives, 6 Forks, 6 Teaspoons, Butter Knife, Sugar Shell. **GIVEN for selling only one order.**

Good Luck FISHING OUTFIT



Steel rod, reel, casting line, 12 snelled hooks, 12 lead sinker, sink float and stringer. **Sell only one order.**

Household CLOCK

Can be used anywhere. Richly finished in two tone effect. 30 hour movement. **Dispose of only 1 order and Clock is yours. WRITE TODAY.**



Real Live CANARY



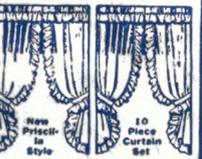
What a pet! You will love it. Canary and Cage both guaranteed for selling only one order. **WRITE TODAY.**

Latent Rubber Valve Type Seed No Means

Just name and address. **GIVEN for disposing of only 24 pkts. of Garden Spot Seeds at 10c a pkt. WRITE FOR SEEDS TODAY. Hurry! Be First.**

SEND NO MONEY Just MAIL COUPON

10 Piece Priscilla Curtain Set



Curtain Set in refined white pattern, finish with 2 1/2 inch ruffles in color. Each curtain is 2000 inches, 2 pairs, 4 Curtains, 1 The Backs & 2 Ruffled Valances. 10 pieces in all. **ALL GIVEN to you as one premium for distributing only one order. Postpaid.**

Blue Bird Granite Cooking Set



Convenient and sanitary kitchen utensils. Entire Set, given as one Premium, consists of four regular-sized pieces. 1 Mixing Bowl, 1 Pudding Pan, 1 Preserving Kettle, with handle, 1 Sauce Pan. **GIVEN for selling only 24 pkts. of Garden Spot Seeds at 10c a pkt. Write for seeds TODAY. Send No Money. We Trust You. Hurry! Be First.**

VIOLIN, BOW & INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN



Handsome finish highly polished. **GIVEN for selling only one order.** Set of strings and bow included. **MAIL THE COUPON TODAY BE FIRST.**

32 Piece Rose Petal DINNER SET GIVEN



Set Given for selling 2 orders. Sent express collect.

Home BARBER Outfit



Here is a money-saver, you can trim children's or adults' hair yourself without spending them to the barber. Consists of one pair of sharp antique Hair Clippers as well as a razor and the latest style cuts. **GIVEN on a pair Diamond Point Barber Shears & 7 inch Barber Comb. GIVEN for selling 1 order.**

JUNIOR GUITAR GIVEN



Get this handsome instrument NOW. Here's How—Just send your name and address. **SEND NO MONEY. WE TRUST YOU** with 24 pkts of Garden Seeds to sell at 10c a pkt. When sold send \$2.40 collected and **WE WILL SEND** this mahogany finished guitar and Five Minute Instruction Book absolutely **FREE.** Send for seeds NOW.

Ladies' New Fashion WRIST WATCH GIVEN



More Than a Guaranteed Timekeeper. Sparkling enamel faced Ivory case. Guaranteed Movement Yours for disposing of only two orders of Garden Spot Seeds. **MAIL COUPON TODAY.**

PRIZE TYPEWRITER GIVEN



\$10 for best and nearest letter written on this machine by July 1 1940. Simply dispose of only one order of Garden Spot Seeds at 10c a pkt. and Typewriter is yours.

GIANT SPY-GLASS



See moon, stars and people miles away. Gives new pleasure. Always ready. **GIVEN for selling only one order. Send for seeds today.**

Midget Pocket RADIO GIVEN

For selling only two 24 packet orders of Garden Spot Seeds at 10c a pkt. Radio needs no batteries or electrical connections. Is complete and ready for use anywhere. **SEND NO MONEY. WE TRUST YOU. Hurry!** Just use this Coupon. Do not wait. Do it NOW.

Write for Seeds to Lancaster County Seed Co., Sta. 320, Paradise, Pa.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

5 FREE

PROMPTNESS PRIZES!

SEND NO MONEY WE TRUST YOU.

SENT RIGHT ALONG WITH YOUR REGULAR PREMIUM IF WE GET THIS COUPON IN THE NEXT 5 DAYS. SO HURRY! FILL OUT TODAY AND MAIL.

TRANSFER PICTURES

MULTI-TION WRIST WATCH

G-MEN BADGE

A DELIGHTFUL GIFT FOR YOU

MAIL COUPON TODAY

Lancaster County Seed Co.
Station 320, Paradise, Pa.

Please send me 24 packets (one order) of Garden Spot Seeds to sell at 10c a pkt. for a fine Gift. I will sell and pay for seeds in 30 days. Also send right along with my Regular Premium the 5 FREE PROMPTNESS PRIZES SHOWN ABOVE.

Name

Post Office

State

Street or R. F. D. Box

Print your last name plainly below

Save 8 cents by filling in, pasting and mailing this Coupon on a 1c Post Card TODAY



To the man who wants to enjoy
an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER



IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$2,000 to \$10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now*.

Over 1850 Certified
 Public Accountants among
 LaSalle alumni



LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

4101 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 4329-HR, Chicago, Ill.

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name

Address City

Position Age

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XVIII, No. 3

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April, 1940



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Where Readers and the Editor Meet

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published bi-monthly by BETTER PUBLICATIONS, INC., at 23 West 48th Street, New York N. Y. N. L. Rimes, President. Subscriptions yearly, \$6.00; single copies, \$1.00. Foreign and Canadian, postage extra. Be entered as second class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1940, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.



YES- I'M CONVINCED THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD MONEY IN RADIO. I'M GOING TO START TRAINING FOR RADIO RIGHT NOW.

NO- NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.

BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW



THIS N.R.I. TRAINING IS GREAT. AND THEY SENT REAL RADIO PARTS TO HELP ME LEARN QUICKLY



YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER.

I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND I'M ALREADY MAKING GOOD MONEY IN MY SPARE TIME

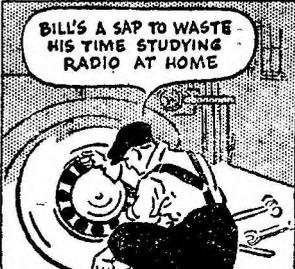
THANKS



OH BILL! I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A GOOD JOB NOW AND A REAL FUTURE. THANKS TO N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR LUCK



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND -- SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE -- I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE, TOM, UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 years.

Radio is a young, growing field with a future, offering many good pay spare time and full time job opportunities. And you don't have to give up your present job to become a Radio Technician. I train you right at home in your spare time.

Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

shows many letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a penny post-card—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. ODO9,
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, Commercial Radio, loud-speaker systems, electronic devices, offer good opportunities. My training includes Television, which promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television;

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. ODO9, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which points out Radio's opportunities and tells how you train men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

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





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at **LOW Prices**

Send today for New 1940 Catalog listing thousands of bargains in Fishing Tackle, Baseball, Basket Ball, Golf, Tennis, Archery, Guns, Clothing and Sporting Equipment of all kinds. Top quality—**Money Back Guarantee!**

HERE ARE A FEW MONEY-SAVERS

- \$17.50 Bamboo Fly Rod, Alu. Case & 2 Tips **\$8.95**
- \$9.00 De Luxe Split Bamboo Fly Rod . . . **\$4.95**
- \$4.00 Split Bamboo Bait Rod, 9 1/2' extra tip **\$2.85**
- \$3.00 1-pc. Steel Casting Rod, Offset handle **\$1.89**
- \$2.75 1-pc. 3 1/4' Split Bamboo Casting Rod **\$1.79**
- \$3.75 Automatic Fly Rod Reel, light weight **\$2.29**
- \$6.50 Feather-weight Bamboo Fly Rod, 7 1/2' **\$3.95**
- \$5.00 Double Tapered 80-yard Fly Line . . **\$2.95**
- \$1.00 doz. assorted snelled Trout Flies doz. **49¢**
- \$1.00 doz. Ringed Trout & Bluegill Flies doz. **49¢**
- \$1.00 assorted 6 floating Bass Bugs, 1/0 hook **59¢**
- Spalding matched Bobby Jones steel shafted Woods, 1940 models, ea. **\$4.95**
- Spalding matched Bobby Jones steel shafted Irons, chrome finish, ea. **\$3.95**

Order any above specials C.O.D. or remit cash. FREE with \$6.50 purchase or more, metal snelled hook holder or metal ribbed sport glasses. Other premiums.

FREE 136-Page Catalog

Yours for the asking. Invaluable to every sportsman. Contains the famous "Fisherman's Calendar."



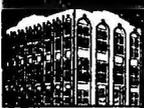
GATEWAY

SPORTING GOODS CO.
131 Gateway Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

INVENTORS

Small ideas may have large commercial possibilities. Write us for FREE book and Record of Invention form. Delays are dangerous in patent matters. Free information on how to proceed. Clarence A. O'Brien, Registered Patent Attorney, Dept. ODS, Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

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Increase your income at home by new, simple Wentworth Tempera Color method. We instruct you and supply you with work. Write today for FREE BOOKLET.

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EVERY HOME CAN AFFORD THIS AMAZING LOW COST NEW IMPROVED ELECTRIC WATER HEATER

Made by an OLD Reliable Company. Amazing New Principle Heats Water Instantly. Just plug in the light socket. SELLS FAST and Pays Agents up to 178% PROFIT. No Risk SAMPLE OFFER. Write at once for details.

THE LUX COMPANY
Dept. H-123 Elkhart, Ind.

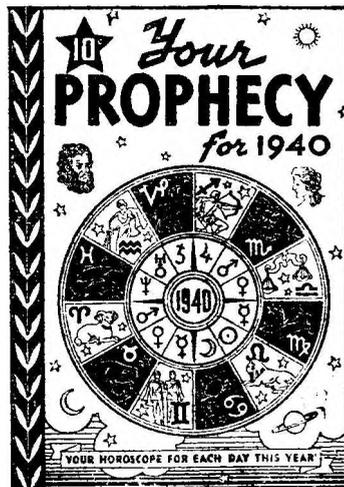


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NOW ON SALE **10c** AT ALL STANDS

Your Star-Guide for the Entire Year!



Now on Sale **10c** At All Stands

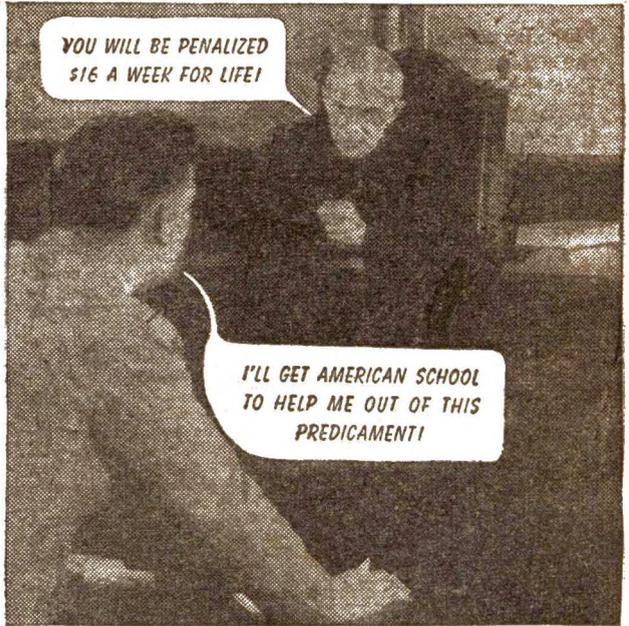
FINED FOR IGNORANCE!

Don't Let It Happen to You!

The average grade school graduate earns \$16.30* a week less than high school graduates earn.

The average high school graduate earns \$25.25* a week less than do men with college or vocational training.

*Figures computed from Government report. For basis of computation, write American School.



College Grade Training Pays Up to \$40 a week* EXTRA income Study at HOME!

You Too Can Win a Better Job!

HAVE YOU thought about *home study*? You look around you at your friends, neighbors and fellow employees: This one earns \$10 a week more than you—that one earns nearly double—a third, though appreciably younger than you, seems to be making better progress. Why? How can you catch up with them? You know that *thousands* of ambitious men and women have won substantial success through using their spare time at home to master the principles and practice of their chosen lines. How can HOME STUDY help you make good?

The "Magic" of Home Study

There's no magic to home study. It's hard work—but it is worth the effort because it helps you overcome the handicap of having left school too soon. It frees you from the penalties of Ignorance—enables you to compete to better advantage in this NEW world of *college trained* men and women.

In 1900, only ONE person in 800 was a *high school* graduate. Today, one in every 837 is *college* trained. That's why you need so much more "on the ball" today than ever before. That's why American School has *stepped up* all its complete courses to include so much work of *college level*. You NEED it, to win out today!

These Advantages Speed Your Progress

More than 150 noted educators, engineers and executives helped prepare American School courses. An *Advisory Board* of 20 outstanding authorities—each an active leader in his field—is consulted when our work is prepared or changed. A Staff of competent instructors—home study *specialists*—works closely with the individual student.

Courses are not prepared from the "academic" viewpoint—but from the *practical*. Although dozens of leading universities and colleges use the same texts, the primary aim of *home study* is to help graduates win **BETTER** jobs at **BIGGER** pay as **QUICKLY** as possible. Every course is geared to this end. Jobs and job requirements are analyzed, circumstances of the average student are weighed, then every course is *speed-lined* to put the *Man in the Job* he wants at the **EARLIEST** opportunity.

Write American School about *your* promotion problems **TODAY!**

American School
Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

Promotion Begins at HOME

Pay raises depend largely on what you do in SPARE time. Make it pay you dividends!

American School, Dept. G-458, Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: I'll sit down and consider my Promotion Problems carefully if you will send me FREE information covering special training in subjects checked below. No obligation on my part.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School Course | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting and Auditing | <input type="checkbox"/> Drafting and Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberal Arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Automotive Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio and Television |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elec. and Gas Refrigeration | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail Merchandising |

Name

Address

DON'T let Rupture make you Look Old!

Not the rupture itself, but the *worry and fear* it can cause makes many a man and woman look old beyond their years. But this is one kind of worry that is *absolutely needless*. Right here and now we offer to *prove* that it's needless and it costs you nothing if you are not 100% convinced.

If you have reducible rupture, wear a truss, and still have to worry, there is just one reason—an old-fashioned truss that doesn't half do its job. A hard, gouging pad is making you miserable. You constantly fear your rupture will slip down. You feel your condition is growing worse and can never get better. You can't be normally active and, in short, you worry all day and dream your worries at night. Stop it!

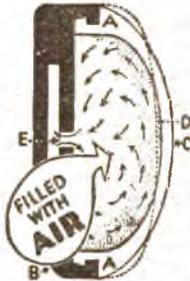
YOU WON'T WORRY WITH A BROOKS PATENTED AIR-CUSHION RUPTURE APPLIANCE!

If you knew the grand and glorious security and comfort of the Brooks Patented Air-Cushion truss, you'd be wearing it right now, instead of just reading about it. You would be feeling free as air to do whatever you liked in every normal activity, hardly aware you had a Brooks on, and with not a rupture worry in your mind. You see, with a Brooks your rupture is held securely in place by a patented, air-cushioned pad of soft, yielding rubber instead of a hard, gouging pad. That patented Air-Cushion is designed to flatten and cling in any position. It is so comfortable you can wear



THE FAMOUS BROOKS PATENTED AIR-CUSHION

- A—Pad which comes in contact with the body.
- B—Light weight disc which holds pad.
- C—Shows the shape of soft rubber pad before it is pressed against body.
- D—Dotted line shows how the pad flattens out under pressure, expelling air.
- E—Orifice through which the pad figuratively breathes as it adjusts to conform to different body pressures.



BROOKS CUSHIONS ARE MADE IN OVER
75 SHAPES AND SIZES

it night and day. That and the fact that the Air-Cushion holds like a hand gives Nature the greatest possible chance to close the rupture opening and free you from wearing any truss, the Brooks included.

YOU'D WEAR A BROOKS APPLIANCE ON TRIAL WOULDN'T YOU?

If complete deliverance from all your rupture worries sounds "too good to be true," don't let that stop you! BROOKS asks no man or woman, or parent of a ruptured child, to buy a BROOKS Appliance outright and "take a chance". No, we will send you a complete BROOKS appliance for a thorough trial. Wear it. Compare it. Put it to every test you can think of. Get your doctor's opinion. Then if you are not satisfied, if you don't bless the day you heard of BROOKS, the trial costs you nothing. Anyone can afford a BROOKS. It costs no more than many old-fashioned store trusses. Yet it is made up for you *individually*, after your order is received. It is never sold in stores or through mail order houses—only by BROOKS. Remember this and steer clear of imitations.

OVER 9000 DOCTORS HAVE ORDERED THE BROOKS FOR THEMSELVES OR THEIR PATIENTS

The principle of the Patented Air-Cushion appeals to the physician's scientific knowledge of rupture. That's why we say "get your doctor's opinion." There are no stiff, punishing springs to set your nerves on edge and make you want to scream—no metal girdle to rust and corrode. A velvety soft body band holds the Air-Cushion in place with glove-like comfort. And you prove every advantage on trial, with an absolute guarantee of satisfaction or no cost.

Send for FREE Rupture Book and Amazing PROOF OF RESULTS

The more you know about BROOKS, the more eager you will be to try it for yourself. You wouldn't be human not to want such glorious freedom from worry, such comfort and the peace of mind, the fresh, rested feeling that we say will make you younger looking, happier and more efficient. Send for FREE Book this very day!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
480-L STATE STREET MARSHALL, MICH.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

Brooks Appliance Co.,
480-L State St., Marshall, Mich.

In **PLAIN ENVELOPE**, please send your **FREE BOOK** on Rupture, **PROOF** of Results, and **TRIAL OFFER**. No representative is to call and bother me.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

State whether for Man Woman or Child

NEW LIFE POLICY INSURES WHOLE FAMILY FOR ONLY \$1.00 PER MONTH



One Policy Protects Entire Sullivan Family,
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UP TO
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BENEFITS!

For Only \$1.00 Per Month

Ages 1 to 75!
Men—Women—Children

\$3,000 maximum in event of travel death as outlined in this marvelous Family Group Policy.

\$2,000 maximum in event of death by auto as shown in the policy.

\$1,000 maximum in event of ordinary or natural death as explained in the policy.

**PAYS FOR DEATH
FROM ANY CAUSE!**

**SEND COUPON FOR
FREE DETAILS!!**

FROM BABY TO GRANDPARENTS!

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Now you can insure your whole family at amazing **LOW COST!** Think of it! \$1.00 per month protects entire family—husband and wife, their parents, and children! Pays benefits for death from any cause, as specified in the policy.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION! NO AGENT CALL!

No medical examination of any family member required. Just mail coupon for full details how to get the Family Group Policy for Free Inspection. No agent will call.

UNDER STATE GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION!

The Family Group Policy issued by the Marquette Life Insurance Company is under state government supervision. Pays cash for death from natural causes or accidental injuries as stated in the policy.

LEGAL RESERVE BASIS!

Approved securities, equal to the full legal reserve for every Marquette policy in force, are locked in the vaults of the State of Illinois.

SEND NO MONEY!

Remember, you do not send one cent! Just mail coupon. No obligation! No agent will call!

MARQUETTE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Desk 70, Jefferson Station, Chicago, Ill.

NO AGENT WILL CALL!

MARQUETTE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
Desk 70, Jefferson Station, Chicago, Ill.

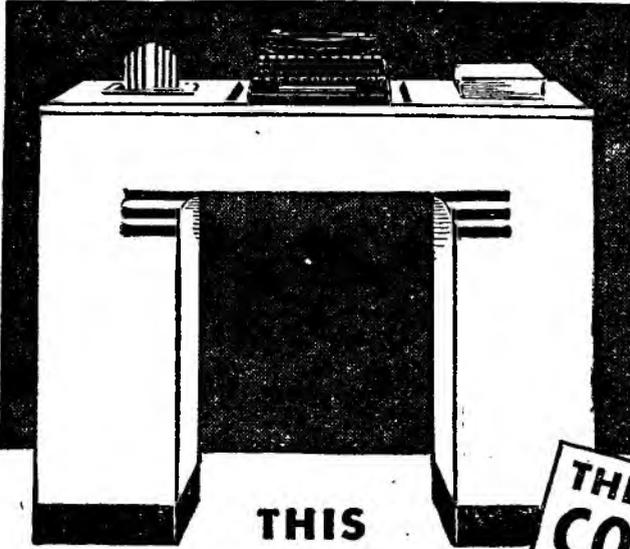
Please send details how to get the Family Group Insurance Policy for Free Inspection without obligation.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____



**THIS
BEAUTIFUL
DESK FOR ONLY \$1.00**

WITH ANY

REMINGTON PORTABLE TYPEWRITER

A beautiful desk in a neutral blue-green fits into the decorations of any home—trimmed in black and silver—made of sturdy fibre board—now available for only one dollar (\$1.00) to purchasers of a Remington Noiseless Portable Typewriter. The desk is so light that it can be moved anywhere without trouble. It will hold six hundred (600) pounds. This combination gives you a miniature office at home. Mail the coupon today.

**THESE EXTRAS FOR YOU
LEARN TYPING FREE**

To help you even further, you get free with this special offer a 19 page booklet, prepared by experts, to teach you quickly how to typewrite by the touch method. When you buy a Noiseless you get this free Remington Rand gift that increases the pleasure of using your Remington Noiseless Portable. Remember, the touch typing book is sent free while this offer holds.

SPECIAL CARRYING CASE

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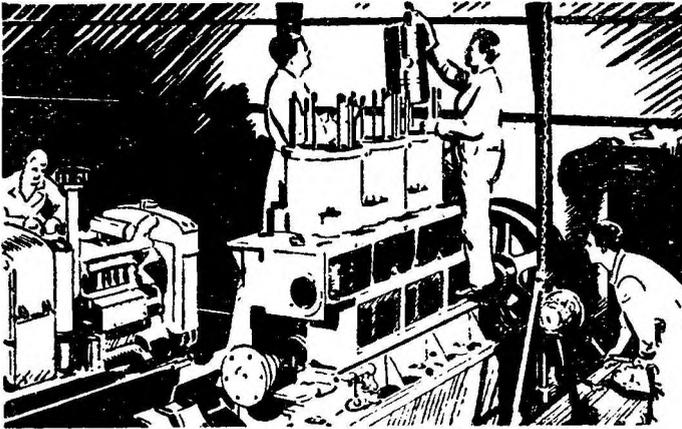
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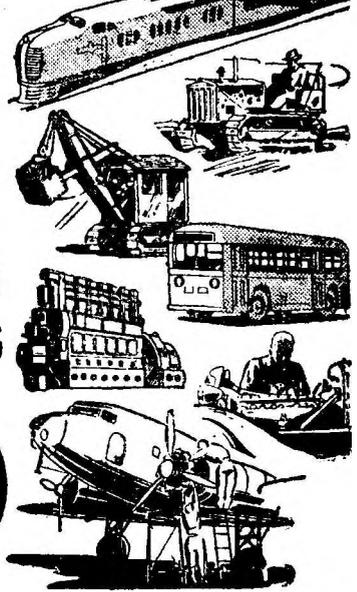
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Murder

CHAPTER I

MARRAKECH LE ROUGE

MARRAKECH, Morocco, at noon! A *khamzin* wind like the breath of a furnace, sweeping off the stark, arid *bled*, and yellow with choking dust. Overhead a brassy African sun, merciless and terrible. In the Place *Djma El Fna*, the very heart of Marrakech, a thousand donkeys honk in horrid notes. Thousands of Berbers, yell, shout, laugh and fight. For just beyond the square are the famous *souks*, or market places, where come desert tribesmen from as far south as Timbuktu, to sell their wares and buy their necessities.

Moorish girls twist and wriggle in ancient dances. Professional story tellers scream the deathless legends of Islam. The snake charmers pirouette with black cobras and sand asps, to the accompaniment of drums beaten by calloused hands. Pipes squeal shrilly, piercing an endless roar.

Marrakech, Morocco, at noon, and a slim, supple girl coming to her destiny.

She stepped out of the C.T.M. office, the bus line that runs from Casablanca to Marrakech, and stood there beneath the white hot sun, exquisite in her white doeskin suit. Her face beneath the white summer hat was oval, crowned by reddish-gold hair. Her eyes were bright blue and her mouth was full and generous.

The noise buffeted her ears. The



Sir Zerby Quintaro clicked his own flashlight, leveled his pistol



Death Lights the Fuse While Steve Hilary

in Morocco

A Complete
Novelet

By
FREDERICK C.
PAINTON

Author of
"Murder on Stage," "Brute Kill," etc.



*Steve whirled,
but it was too
late*

Combats a Scheming Munitions Monarch!

primitive savagery of it made her shudder, and these brown men, with their rifles and knives, frightened her. Desperately, her gaze swept the endless throng. Had he been unable to come? Her eyes filled with tears.

And then, suddenly, the Berber crowd swept into new formations and she saw, through a new opening, the olive drab uniform, the red and blue *kepi* of a foreign legionnaire on point duty as police. He was leaning against a bicycle, and now, as he turned, she saw his bronzed youthful face clearly.

A cry of joy burst from her.

"Basel!" she called. "Oh, Basel!"

Instantly she ran, skirts flying, toward him. He saw her, and his own expression of disgust and unhappiness lifted to one of indescribable joy.

"Susan!" he called. "Dear God, you did come."

He dropped the military bicycle with a crash and in two bounds had her in his arms.

"Oh, darling!" She clung desperately to him, laughing, crying in the same breath.

He held her in a fierce embrace, and could only kiss her hair, her cheeks and finally her coral eager lips and mutter:

"Susan! Susan! Oh, I've missed you so!"

Around them the *djellabed* Moors closed in, amused by the sight of the *Franswazi* soldier putting his mouth against that of a thin *sitt*, and muttering to themselves that the *ferengi* were, indeed, strange animals that they touched lips instead of hands, heart and forehead. This *sitt*, she was so thin and slight that there wasn't a good day's work in her. And saying that Allah—upon whom be prayers—knew that a fat woman was beautiful, and this one was not.

"After months of these brown devils," Basel whispered, "you look like an angel. Oh, I hadn't known your hair was so golden, or your eyes like cornflowers in the summer wind. I spent endless nights trying to remember the soft touch of your skin, the little lovely laugh in your voice."

Oblivious to those laughing Moors, they stayed in close embrace until Susan Darrel thrust him back.

"Gosh," she said, "they're laughing at us."

Basel Quintaro waved it aside. "I was afraid you'd never get my note, telling where I was. And then I was afraid you'd never come."

"I got your note," she said, "and I've come to take you away."

"Take me away?" he repeated. "Darling, you forget! I'm in the Foreign Legion—and I'll stay as long as my father wants me to."

His young face grew bitter. His father, the fabulous Sir Zerby Quintaro, salesman for cannon and battle-ships, had objected to Basel falling in love with the young American girl, Susan Darrel. Always, hitherto, Basel had obeyed his father, for all of his twenty-four years. This time, however, he had rebelled and fled. Before he could get to Susan he had been captured by his father's private detectives. He had run away again, been caught, and there had been a terrible scene.

"You'll marry the Greek Princess Dactos," his father had thundered.

"I'll marry Susan or no one," Basel had said. "And you can't stop me."

HE HAD been stopped. He had forgotten his father's enormous influence. The man, who made and unmade wars, had merely had his son enlisted in the Foreign Legion for five years.

"You could escape detectives," the old man had said, "but you'll not escape the Legion. I was in it once myself. You try to escape and see what happens."

Basel had tried and the punishments inflicted haunted him even now. He found that fellow soldiers could also be spies for his father and for officers in his father's pay.

His father had said:

"When you give up this silly American girl you can leave the Legion, not before."

So now Basel laughed harshly. "Darling, I can't leave the Legion. I can't stir a step out of Marrakech."

"But you will," she said flatly. "It's all arranged."

"Arranged? What do you mean?"

"If you can get out of French

hands," she said, "the French can't extradite you for desertion from the Legion. Steve told me so."

"Steve? Who is Steve?"

"That big man drinking beer on the terrace of the *Café du Glacier*," she explained. "He's a private detective and I hired him to come with me. And he's worked out the scheme."

"How?" Basel turned his eyes across the plaza to where a man in crumpled whites was just dunking his mouth into an enormous mug of beer.

"I've chartered a plane," said Susan, "and we've got a car. We can reach Tangier and the plane there will fly us to London. We catch the *Exochorda* and a week later we can be married in New York."

Longing and desire flamed in his eyes.

"If we only could," he whispered, "but golly, darling, you don't know the power of my father! People are afraid of him. They'd probably stop the liner—or make it turn back."

"Not the *Exochorda*," said Susan firmly. "The captain is a friend of Steve's and, besides, it's an American ship." She looked adoringly into his lean, sensitive face. "Oh, darling, let's try it. If I have to wait five years for you I think I'll die."

He was silent, confused. She waited anxiously for his answer.

"Let me talk it over with this Steve. He must know the risks," he said finally.

HAND in hand they walked toward the café.

From the south end of the Place *Djma El Fna*—where you get the best view of the snow-capped Atlas Mountains—a huge Rolls Royce limousine moved slowly toward the spot where Susan and Basel must pass to reach the *Café du Glacier*.

Their every movement was watched by the white-haired man within the car. He stroked a white mustache and white imperial, and somehow looked like a European imitation of Buffalo Bill.

"Seize them and be sure to gag them so there will be no outcry," he ordered the two men with him. "Use your blackjacks if necessary."

"Yes, Sir Zerby," said one. "We may have to. The boy is strong and she is a veritable she-devil."

Sir Zerby Quintaro ignored this. He spoke to his chauffeur.

"Cut them off from the café. When I give the word, swing and go swiftly back."

"But all those Berbers, Monsieur!" said the chauffeur. "They will block us."

"Do not stop for them or any one," ordered Sir Zerby. "I have influence here. No one will punish you if some are—er—hurt."

By now the limousine was bearing down steadily on Susan and Basel.

On the terrace of the *Café du Glacier*, Steve Hilary continued to get outside a quart or so of beer. You had to start beering early in Morocco, he had learned, because at this season of the year you could fry an egg on a shady sidewalk, at high noon.

A young Moor, in a bright new tarboosh came up, scanned the drinkers. His liquid dark eyes finally examined Steve's new solar topee, studied Steve's square-cut homely face. Finally, he examined the big, enormously powerful body that looked so awkward in the tropical white ducks.

"You are Hilary, *Sidi*?" he asked in Arabic.

Steve nodded, replied in Arabic. The boy handed him a blue cablegram. Steve read:

STEVE HILARY, HOTEL CONTINENTAL ET ORIENT, MARRAKECH, MAROC MESSAGE BEGINS YOU SCREWBALL COME BACK TO PARIS AT ONCE BIG ASSIGNMENT IN LONDON RECOVERING LORD ASHTON'S STOLEN DIAMONDS STOP FORGET THAT DARREL DAME BECAUSE SHE DONT LOVE YOU MESSAGE ENDS
LELAND THORPE

Steve's smoky gray eyes stared across the howling square, past the snake charmer and so to the slim girl in white doeskin walking slowly toward him, hanging onto the arm of the stalwart young man in Foreign Legion olive drab.

"*Garçon!*" yelled Steve, and got a pen and a cable blank. He sent:

LELAND THORPE INTERCONTIN-

ENT INVESTIGATION BUREAU PARIS
FRANCE MESSAGE BEGINS RIDICU-
LOUS STOP I AM ON VACATION AND
ABOUT TO BECOME A CRIMINAL
STOP LORD ASHTON'S JEWELS
DOUBTLESS TAKEN BY THE RED-
HEAD HE WAS WITH LAST MONDAY
AT CIROS STOP ANYWAY TO HELL
WITH HIM AND YOU HAVING A FINE
TIME AND WISH YOU WERE HERE
MESSAGE ENDS

STEVE HILARY

He threw the Moor boy a handful of brass francs and gave him the message. "Imshi, and Allah's smile go with thee," he said.

He ordered another quart of beer. For a brief instant his gaze rested on the slim, sunny-haired girl. His smoky gray eyes, usually so hard, became wistful, and the disarming smile, with which he covered the workings his keen brain, died.

THAT'S the way it is, he thought. You go twenty-eight years ploughing furrows around the world, and redheads and brunettes, and blondes and platinums, fall and are forgotten. And then, just when you think you're immune, you kindle a torch for Susan that is burning you up.

He frowned, gulped a vast swig of beer and deliberately turned his attention back to the snake charmer. Snakes didn't make you sad and, besides, he had been waiting for hours to see if the black cobra would bite the charmer.

A few moments later he heard a quick, impressive step beside him. He turned to stare up at a man as big as himself, a man whose face was the color of an old saddle and as hard as the steel of a sword. The man had greenish eyes that flashed like green ice under the sun. You knew he had come up the hard way, lived tough, and would die hard.

Steve contemplated him calmly, not missing a thing.

"Buck Eastman, as ever was," he said. "What brings America's foremost gun-runner to Africa in the hot weather."

Buck Eastman, who had begun as a machine-gun operator in teapot revolutions in Central America,

pulled out a chair and sat down opposite Steve.

"I'm here to collect half a million dollars, Hilary," he said harshly, "and if you're here to get in my way I'll kill you dead as hell. This is Morocco and I can get away with murder."

CHAPTER II

QUINTARO STRIKES



STEVE had been staring at Susan and Basel. Now a Rolls Royce limousine cut them from view. He drank another gulp of beer and smiled.

"In me, guy," he said, "you see Cupid, halo, wings and sweet disposition. I am here to see united

in the bonds of holy matrimony that beautiful young lady walking toward us, and the young legionnaire with her."

Eastman switched his gaze. Susan and Basel were in sight now, curving around the stopped car. His jaw dropped.

"Hell, man, that's Basel Quintaro, Sir Zerby's son. She can't marry him."

Steve drank a third of the remaining beer. He didn't like Eastman. He was curious about what Eastman was up to, and for a moment he had a regret that he couldn't jump in here and draw cards. As it was, however, he sighed.

"He's walking with his future wife now and you can make book on it."

To his surprise Eastman sneered:

"I get it. You're lying. Quintaro hired you to watch his kid for fear I'd snatch him."

"Does Quintaro owe you the half million?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, and to hell with you and your big Luger. I'm going to get it." He leaned forward. "Listen."

Steve interrupted to summon a waiter and order another quart of beer.

"Go ahead, I'm listening."

"Three months ago"—Eastman bent closer, lowered his voice—"I had

a shipload of ten thousand rifles, ten thousand hand grenades, twenty million cartridges, three knocked-down airplanes, and fifty Stokes mortars and sixty field guns, all going to a certain spot in the near-east. The stuff cost me two hundred thousand bucks, and I had another ten grand tied up in the ship.

"I stood to make—me and my friends—three hundred thousand when we dumped that cargo on the beach. That's a turnover of a half million bucks. That ain't hay, Hilary."

"No," said Steve, "it ain't."

He was watching how Susan's slender, lovely fingers were tightly clasped about the boy's brown ones. He noticed, too, that the Rolls Royce had darted ahead, turned around and was going back.

"Well," Eastman was saying, "Sir Zerby Quintaro's guys hi-jacked that load of arms. They killed every man I had aboard. After they had transhipped the cargo, they sank my ship."

Steve nodded. "He's done it before. You knew what you were up against. Quintaro starts wars to settle his private grudges. Where do you get off trying to muscle in on his munitions racket?"

Eastman cursed softly. "I'm here, Hilary, to collect that half million. I'm going to get it if I have to shoot my way into that electrified estate he's got on the edge of the town. I'm going to get it if I have to shoot my way through you."

Steve wiped his lips of beer, fished absently for a cigarette, found it, and lighted it.

"Eastman, I hate your guts," he said softly. "At another time, as much as I loathe Quintaro, I'd take that challenge just for the hell of it. As it is, I don't care what you do to Quintaro. But I'm seeing to it that that boy and Susan get married if it's the last thing I do. So don't get in the way of *that*."

HE LEANED forward. The Rolls had suddenly stopped, blocking Steve's view of Basel and Susan. The car door opened. Two big men jumped

down. Steve couldn't see what they did. But he heard Susan scream. A suddenly muffled yell must have been Basel's. Then Steve saw two human bundles shoved into the car. The Rolls motor awoke, roared.

Steve Hilary jumped up, tipping over the table with a crash, spilling beer over Eastman's silk suit. He shoved Eastman out of the way. Into his hand, as if by magic, had leaped the huge Luger eight shot pistol. His face was white, his nostrils pinched.

He came off the terrace in two bounds. The big gun in his hand roared once, twice, three times. The dust kicked from the road near the rear tires but the car kept on rolling, attaining enormous speed. Before he could throw another shot at the rear tires, the Rolls lurched around the edifice of the *Banque de Maroc* and was out of sight.

One Berber was down, his leg broken where the front wheel of the car had run over it. A woman ran up, snatched up a Berber baby by the single black scalp lock, and darted back into the shouting mob of natives.

His gun still smoking, Steve Hilary turned, saw Eastman standing there and suddenly jammed the muzzle into the gun-runner's stomach.

"All right, Buck," he said softly. "You kept me occupied while your guys made the snatch. Now go and bring them back."

Eastman turned white. Hilary's eyes were blazing sparks.

"Lay off," he protested. "That wasn't my job. Hell, didn't you see the license numbers, ZQ-Four? And Sir Zerby Quintaro was inside himself. I saw him."

"White mustache, goatee?" Steve said.

"Sure. That's him."

Steve put away the big Luger. "Okay, Buck," he said. "Sorry. But I didn't figure a father would snatch his own son."

"Hell, you don't know Quintaro. He's probably had that skirt tailed and figured he'd put her out of the way permanently."

"You mean — murder?" asked Steve.

"Why not? He's killed plenty in his time. You can't own eighty million bucks without hurting somebody."

Steve looked around for a conveyance.

"What are you going to do?" asked Eastman interestedly.

"Go out to Quintaro's and get Susan," said Steve.

Eastman laughed. "Fat chance! Cripes, don't you know Quintaro practically lives in a safe and you can't get in unless you know the combination? The guy is screwball about protecting his life. He's scared somebody will assassinate him.

"I know. I've been trying for two weeks to bust into his place. He's got electric wires around the joint—electrocute you if you touch them. The doors are steel, double windows of bullet-proof glass are always locked. The guy has air-conditioning. To get in you'd have to heist the place like a bank safe."

STEVE said nothing. He waved a summons to the Arab driver of a victoria, drawn by a tired, fly-exhausted horse.

"Listen, Hilary," said Eastman suddenly. "You and me are playing the same pitch. I want dough; you want the girl. Throw in with me. I've got a way to bust into that Quintaro joint and I'll cut you in."

Steve hesitated. He wanted to know how you got into Quintaro's place, wanted to know badly. But Eastman would entangle him in his plans to get a half million. Steve sighed.

"No, I'll play it my way."

He jumped into the victoria and had himself driven to the Palmerie, the northern oasis of Marrakech where, from the headquarters of the Fourth Regiment, the French Foreign Legion conquered, policed and governed that part of Morocco.

He was rudely disappointed when he got there.

The French colonel, Armand, shrugged. "Monsieur Hilary, you must be mistaken. Sir Zerby is a great man. I know he would not kidnap his son, or a girl, either."

"Then where is the boy now?"

asked Steve angrily. "He's not on duty as he should be."

The colonel looked at a memorandum.

"He was relieved, given a twenty-four hour pass to visit his father."

Steve scowled.

"I get it. Quintaro telephoned and cracked the whip. . . ."

"Monsieur, you are insolent," the colonel jumped up. "I think your story is preposterous and I must ask you to leave."

Steve left, knowing that in a militarily policed area like Marrakech, Quintaro held all the aces and kings and queens. He got into the victoria and was driven back to the Place *Djma El Fna*.

The sun in that open carriage was brutal so he paused at the *Café du Glacier* for a quart of beer. He reloaded his gun. He deliberately watched the shaven-pated snake charmer get bitten by a sand asp and torment a deadly black cobra.

Watching the snakes, drinking his beer, Steve thought it out, made his decision. He finally climbed into the victoria.

"The house of Sir Zerby Quintaro," he said.

The driver gave him a queer glance, whipped up his nag, yelled "*Imshi*," and drove off.

CHAPTER III

SIR ZERBY QUINTARO



IN a fertile oasis, a mile south of Marrakech, Sir Zerby Quintaro had built a steel and concrete fortress. It rested in the center of a million and a half dollars worth of landscape gardening and Greek statuary.

He lived there six months out of the year because, as he often said, "In civilized countries there are laws that make me defenseless but cannot protect my life. In Morocco I am the law, and protect myself."

It was a swell place, as Steve im-

mediately admitted. Through the wire and stone fence was one gate. A man came out of the gate house, scowled.

"Go away. No one enters here without Sir Zerby's permission," he said.

"Really?" smiled Steve, and although he apparently made no quick movement, the gateman suddenly was looking down the muzzle of the big blue-steel Luger. He turned pale. "Unlock the gate and take me to Sir Zerby or I will shoot," Steve said. "I am insane and I never miss."

The gateman tottered but he unlocked the gate. Steve entered, very pleased with himself. "I'll bet Eastman never thought of walking through the gate when he said this was impregnable," he said to himself.

Prodding the gateman with the gun he walked up the concrete driveway.

They reached the house and a Turk in baggy trousers and a bright scarlet fez came out onto the vast enclosed porch. Steve pushed the gateman in front of him. In good Turkish dialect he said:

"Unless you take me at once to Sir Zerby I shall shoot you in both knees. I am mad and Allah, upon whom be peace, protects me." He leveled the big Luger.

The Turk turned green and retreated. Steve and the gateman followed.

The inside of the house was moist and ten or twelve degrees cooler than the blazing heat of the day. It felt marvelous.

Steve walked over a quarter of a million dollars worth of rugs, past priceless pictures and statues, and into a room that was so big it had marble pillars to hold up the ceiling. Here, smoking on a cigar and sipping what appeared to be a glass of sherry, sat a man with pure white hair and a Buffalo Bill mustache and goatee.

Steve looked at the famous salesman for Death and his heart started drumming in spite of himself. It was a powerful, brutal face, and the eyes glinted dangerously as they stared at Steve.

Steve had his silly grin at its widest.

"Sir Zerby, I presume," he said.

"Don't get up. I'm quite all right. I've just stopped by for a couple of people and I'll go on at once."

Sir Zerby's tricky, lidded eyes hid the glitter.

"Steven Hilary, no doubt," he said quietly. "I've heard of your—er—queer methods of achieving results."

"We can talk about it some other time," said Steve. "Now, I want Miss Susan Darrel, and while I'm at it I'll take Private Quintaro."

"You'll take nothing out of here," came the reply. "And if you continue to act the fool, as you are now, you may leave your life."

"Now, now," chided Steve. "This cannon of mine shoots very straight and very fast. And to get Susan I'd be glad to use it—say on both legs to start with."

SIR ZERBY was unmoved.

"I see," said Sir Zerby. "But did it occur to you that I am prepared for such an invasion? Remember, Hilary, that I have, as the newspapers have said, a phobia on assassination. That's why this is a steel fortress with safe combinations on the doors. That is why I keep several guards around."

"The guards couldn't be as quick as this gun," said Steve.

"I think so," said Sir Zerby casually. "Look at the walls, for instance. Do you see those men with the machine guns? What chance do you think you have?"

Warily Steve let his eyes swivel. There was something about the way Sir Zerby spoke that made him look.

He saw that three apertures, like ports, had opened in the wall. He could see three faces, and they were behind three light Spandau machine guns. The guns were set, and could spew five hundred bullets into the room while a man was coughing to clear his throat. Instinctively, Steve grabbed the Turk and the gateman for shields. Sir Zerby smiled grimly.

"They wouldn't save you, Hilary, after they had fallen."

Steve swallowed. What kind of an egomaniac was this Quintaro, who would kill two of his own men to get an enemy?

"I see," he sighed. "You've doubtless got on a steel vest."

"Of course."

"What do you suggest?" asked Steve after a pause.

"That you drop your weapon, and sit down and talk the matter over."

"And if I don't drop the weapon?"

"Then, when I knock the ash off my cigar, my men will start shooting."

Steve shrugged. He released the Turk butler and the gateman. He heaved the heavy Luger onto a sofa.

"I'll listen for a while." His face remained impassive in the face of this defeat.

As he sat down Sir Zerby was dismissing the Turk butler and the gateman. They were scowling angrily at Sir Zerby. Steve didn't blame them and looked up at the gun ports that would have snuffed out their lives. The ports had closed. But Steve knew the men were there, watching. He relaxed, waiting.

"Suppose I let you take Susan away," Sir Zerby said, "and paid you money to find my secretary, Biester. Would you accept?"

"What's this about Biester?" Steve said, to gain time to think.

"My secretary, Roland Biester, is missing. I'd like to have you find him."

"Good God," Steve was thinking, "with this maniac for a father-in-law Susan could get no happiness out of marrying the kid. I wonder."

"I think Biester stole two hundred thousand *kronen*," Sir Zerby said. "I want him found and punished. I'd pay a thousand American dollars."

She could forget the kid in time, Steve thought, and be thankful. I love her and I could make her happy.

"I'd see that Susan Darrel met with a fatal accident before Basel married her," Sir Zerby said.

"You do," said Steve, "and you'll die even if you're protected by a machine-gun regiment."

"She will not marry him. He will continue the Greek Quintaro dynasty." Quintaro paused. "Find Biester, have her renounce Basel, and I'd make it five thousand dollars to you."

Abruptly Steve asked:

"Can I talk to her—and him?"

"If you like," shrugged the baronet. "I hope you can convince both of them." He clapped his hands. The Turk butler appeared.

"Selim, take the *effendi* to my son and the *sitt*."

STEVE was taken to a rose-colored room upstairs, a room whose windows were covered by battleship steel blinds, securely locked into place.

The butler first brought Susan and then Basel. Susan flew into the boy's arms and Steve watched grimly what happened.

Finally he spoke harshly.

"The turtle-doving can wait. Listen to me and the jam we're in."

Steve pointed to a couch across the room. "Sit there, the both of you. Susan, this boy's father is crazy. If you try to go on with Basel he's liable to kill you."

"You're exaggerating, Steve."

"Ask Basel," shrugged Steve.

Basel frowned. "Darling, father was always queer, even when I was younger and saw more of him than I have lately. And he is ruthless, terrible. He seems changed, even to me. Worse than ever. Harsh, devilish. He's changed for the worse, even in his looks."

"Then you think . . ." Susan began.

"Oh, Hilary is wrong. He wouldn't kill you. But he'd keep you a prisoner."

"He'd kill her," said Steve. "I saw it in his eyes."

Basel scowled. "He's changed terribly since the last time I was here. He—he—" Basel's voice died away.

Steve walked to Susan, took her hands, pulled her to her feet. He gazed deeply into her eyes.

"Susan," he said slowly, "this is a bad spot. We can get off it simply by your giving up Basel and my finding some lug named Biester."

She didn't reply but he felt her quiver.

"Is this the McCoy with you?" Steve asked. "Do you want to stay here? We can take our chances."

"Steve," she said, her throat dry, "I hired you as a friend and a great detective to help me get Basel away

from this horrible place. I still want you to."

"You mean nothing will make you give him up?" Steve asked.

For reply she went to Basel, who had risen, and kissed him on the lips and clung to him.

"Steve," she said, "I am not silly. But I say, that if I can't have Basel I don't want anything."

Basel suddenly embraced her. "And that goes for me, too."

Oblivious, momentarily, to Steve, they clung together and Steve, watching their eyes, knew this was the love that came once in a lifetime. He suppressed a sigh and forced a grin.

"Okay, Sue," he said. "We'll go on from there."

She ran to him, pressed his hands fiercely. "You can get us away, can't you, Steve? You always think of something. I'm not afraid with you here."

"Nor I," cried Basel eagerly.

Steve rescued his hands. "Well, kitten," he said, grinning, "I'll make you a wife yet. Keep the chin up."

CHAPTER IV

ATTACK BY NIGHT



DOWNSTAIRS once more, Steve glanced casually at Sir Zerby.

"Well," he said, "she wants some time to think it out. And I think she'll agree. I'm for it."

Sir Zerby smiled unpleasantly.

"You're a bland liar, and if I did not

have a microphone in each room and an amplifier here"—he gestured—"I might believe you. As it is, it doesn't matter. I will settle with them."

Steve took out his last package of American chewing gum. He doubled up a stick, put it in his mouth.

"And what about me?"

"You," Sir Zerby shrugged. "Tomorrow you can start looking for Roland Biester."

Steve never saw the gesture, but suddenly two thick-set men, looking like Greek wrestlers, were standing

beside him and one had quickly put a come-along around his left wrist. It hurt terribly as he brutally tightened it.

Steve turned and, with a savage ferocity, drove his fist into the man's face. The man cried out in pain and his bulbous nose spurted blood.

"Tell your gorillas to handle me carefully, Quintaro," Steve said thickly, "or I'll make you shoot me and that's murder you can't get away with."

Quintaro spoke in Greek. The come-along was relaxed.

"I doubt it," he said, and broke off to curse the Greek who was shouting passionately.

The man shut up, but not until Quintaro's eyes were blazing murderously.

The two men took Steve upstairs. On the way, he added two more sticks of gum to his cud and masticated lustily until they reached a room in the east wing.

Here the heavy steel lock was thrown. As Steve entered he removed the cud, stuck it on the outside panel near the lock. Pressing it down, he also pressed firmly into it a piece of what is called invisible cord, the kind that is used to bind paintings upright.

He stood by the door and pretended to lose his head.

"Okay, you cheap monkeys," he raged. "You've done your stuff. Close the door and get to hell out of here."

They were armed and he was not, but that made no difference. As he slammed the door at them, they both jumped backwards. The lock clicked into place.

But the cord, held outside by the gum wad, ran through the door-jamb, back of the lock-tongue and the other end was in Steve's hand. Come the moment to move, he had only to pull cautiously on the cord, the tongue-lock would be drawn back, and the door would open.

It's an old stunt, but you can always use it, thought Steve. For the moment, however, it was enough to wait and think and figure out things.

At ten o'clock he heard an airplane whistle downward to a landing nearby. Steve thought of Buck Eastman.

A guy could rent a plane, drop a flare and land inside that electric fence. But this couldn't be Eastman. It was probably Quintaro's plane.

At eleven Steve figured the house had gone to bed. It was time to prowl. Cautiously he tugged at his cord. The lock was well oiled and presently it retreated enough to permit the door to slide ajar. Steve left it so while he went to the light switch.

IT WAS then that he felt giddy suddenly, lost his balance and fell down. He got up, his throat now on fire, his ears roaring, his feet hitting the floor, which moved unexpectedly, like a ship's rolling deck, making him lurch crazily.

"God!" he croaked hoarsely, and staggered toward the door. The lights, which he had never doused, swam before his eyes.

His hand finally found the knob, pulled the door open. But he never went out. He fell drunkenly against the door-jamb.

There before him, swimming crazily, was a man with a pig's face. Only it wasn't a pig's face. It had big, goggle eyes, a pig's snout and, from the mouth, a tube led down to a box strapped to his chest.

Steve's reeling brain finally got it.

"Gas mask!" he croaked hoarsely.

He lurched forward, fists and arms upraised.

The masked man struck him full on the mouth. The floor suddenly bent upward and hit Steve in the face. The roaring in his ears became a fierce buzzing.

"There's been some mistake. I'm dying," he said distinctly.

Then his heels drummed three or four times and he lay perfectly still. The man in the gas mask lifted the mouthpiece, exhaled as he looked carefully at Steve. Then, he laughed heartily, kicked Steve in the ribs, replaced the mouthpiece and walked hurriedly away.

Steve Hilary opened his eyes and instantly felt terribly ill. He fought down the nausea to stagger to his feet. The hallway swam violently. But he finally saw his room, the door still open, the lights still burning. He

lurched to the bathroom, violently ill. When he could retch no more he drank water and started all over again. He got a whiff of himself then.

"Ethyl-chloride," he muttered, recognizing the surgical anaesthetic. "I'll toss my toenails unless I get a drink."

He gagged and staggered dizzily to the staircase. In the big living room he found a taboret containing a decanter of Napoleon brandy. He tilted a good three fingers into a glass, and tossed it gingerly into the back of his throat.

"Whoof!" he gagged, as the potent liquor burned a way to his stomach and exploded. He started to put back the decanter, then muttered, "A bird can't fly on one wing," and threw another three fingers after the first.

He felt better immediately and set out to investigate the deathly silent house. The results were astonishing. In the servants' quarters he came on the three Greek wrestlers, prone and thoroughly anaesthetized. He didn't bother them. In the butler's pantry he found Selim, also breathing heavily. The Turk had a bundle of keys and Steve's big Luger. Steve took both and then, just to be safe, he bound all four of them hand and foot.

Finally, he unlocked a room, beautifully done in blue, with every necessity of a woman's toilet. He found a wisp of handkerchief that was Susan's and knew she had rumped that bed.

BUT Susan herself wasn't there.

The muscles in Steve's neck constricted. He unlocked the next room. Here was one single clue—a red and blue *kepi* with the gold exploding bomb of the Foreign Legion on the front.

But Basel Quintaro was also gone.

Steve cursed thickly. "If Quintaro gassed us to snatch them both out of the country—" He let his voice die away, and started looking for the munitions baron.

He was surprised to find Quintaro in a big safe of a room in the west wing. Somehow, he had had it firmly in his mind that Quintaro, for his own reasons, had done this mysterious

thing, so that finding him in bed in that darkened room was a shock.

It was also a shock to find the man unconscious and exuding fumes of ethyl-chloride. Moreover, Sir Zerby's face was bruised and purplish and there was a lump over his right ear as large as a robin's egg.

Steve was nonplussed. For the moment he did not disturb the heavily breathing man. Instead, he rapidly cased the room. He found nothing until he came to a series of chiffonier drawers. In the bottom of it was a human hair wig of white, a white mustache and a white goatee. Also, a theatrical make-up box.

"Cripes!" muttered Steve.

Swiftly he hurried to the bed. He tweaked the hair, the mustache, the goatee.

No doubt of it, these were not affixed with glue.

His experiment brought only one result. Sir Zerby turned over, moaned horribly and continued to sleep. Steve did not disturb him again.

This time he ransacked the house from attic to cellar. And he made only two discoveries—the house was locked up as soundly as a bank safe, and there was a hospital-size, empty can of ethyl-chloride in the chamber that housed the air conditioning unit.

The anaesthetic had been poured into the intake manifold, blown throughout the house and then gradually sucked out as new air was taken in.

"And that's a hell of a lot of help at a time like this," muttered Steve with a grimace. He wondered wildly if Basel had rigged this scheme to get away with Susan.

But Steve remembered the masked man who had socked him. Whoever the man in the gas mask was, he was not Basel Quintaro.

Steve went back to Sir Zerby. He got a pitcher of water from the bathroom. He tossed this on the gun salesman, and began to shake and pummel him.

Five minutes of this brought a groan.

As Sir Zerby sat up, Steve looked at him grimly. "You've been doped, and so have the rest of us, and Susan

and Basel are gone. Did you plant this?" Steve asked.

"I don't understand," Sir Zerby groaned.

Steve gave him all the details. "These," he concluded, pointing to the wig and fake mustache and goatee, "made me think you did it."

"No, no," cried Sir Zerby with a semblance of his usual arrogance. "I have a phobia about assassination. For a while I had a bodyguard wear those and sleep in my bed. That has nothing to do with this."

"What has?" asked Steve.

"Roland Biester, my cursed secretary."

"Biester, the guy that lammed with the money? Why should he do it?"

"He hates me and he'd do anything for revenge."

"Well," said Steve, "while you were out cold he could have cut your throat."

"And gained nothing. This way he hopes to force me to pay—I say, what is this?"

IN MOVING around Sir Zerby had upset his pillows. And now there fell from between them a folded note. Steve snatched it up and read:

Sir Zerby—If you wish to see your son alive, you will come alone to the Red Kasbah tonight at eleven, and bring two hundred thousand pounds. If you tell the military, I will know it and you will only find your son and the girl dead. Tell Steve Hilary to stay out of this and he will get Susan Darrel back unharmed. If he tries anything, she will die. Wait in the Kasbah for the sound of the thrush.

There was no signature.

"Who does that sound like?" demanded Steve.

"Who else but Biester?" growled Sir Zerby. "The devil is cleverer than I thought. Two hundred thousand pounds! Why, that's nearly a million dollars."

"I wouldn't argue for the difference," muttered Steve.

"And, good God, that devil will kill them if I go to the military. He's made friends around here and he'd know."

Steve looked thoughtfully at the banker.

"He certainly gets news quick. He knew all about me."

"Of course," shrugged the banker. "He probably has a spy here who let him in and permitted him to gas us and make the abduction."

"It seems queer, though . . ." began Steve, but he broke off quickly, because from below stairs there came a terrific thumping and shouting.

"*M'sieur le Baron!*" screamed the voice. "*A moi!*"

"It's that foal gateman, Pierre," Sir Zerby groaned.

"*M'sieur le Baron*, the summer house!" Pierre called. "It burns to the ground and there is a man burning inside."

Steve muttered an oath and raced for the stairway. As he reached the porch where the gateman stood dancing up and down in excitement, Steve saw the summer house beyond the marble swimming pool blazing furiously. He ran to it as fast as he could.

The heat of the flames forced him to stand yards back. But even so he could see, at intervals, the body of a man lying right in the heart of the flames. Already it was so burned as to be unrecognizable, and long since dead.

Steve commandeered Pierre and two buckets, and for an hour he and the gateman heaved water on the body. Because of this, when finally the flames subsided so that Steve could dash in and jerk the corpse out, he had more than just blackened bones.

But not too much. The head was only a charred skull. There was some flesh on the hand and a gold signet ring with a queer crest. There were a few fragments of buttons, charred tweed cloth, some odd pieces of shoes. But to Steve they gave no clue to the dead man's identity.

All he knew definitely was that the fire had not killed the man. A bullet hole through the skull, squarely between the eyes, was mute witness to this fact.

Examining this burned debris, Steve heard a noise and turned swiftly. Sir Zerby Quintaro stood there, his face gray and twisted into

such malevolent hate as to shock Steve.

"You know him?" asked Steve.

"Aye," growled Sir Zerby fiercely, "it's that dirty thief, Roland Biester."

"Biester!" exclaimed Steve.

"Aye! Look at that ring. I've seen it on him manys the time. And that suit, those shoes. It's he all right, the thief!"

Steve Hilary stared up at the muni-tions baron.

"If this is Biester," he said quietly, "then he couldn't very well have kid-naped Susan and Basel."

"No," said Sir Zerby. "Unless—un- less he tried and ran into someone else who killed him and went on with the abduction."

"Someone," repeated Steve very thoughtfully, thinking of the airplane he had heard in the night. "Eastman, for example?"

Sir Zerby swore a mighty oath. "That dirty swine of an American, Buck Eastman! That's who it was."

CHAPTER V

CASH AT THE BANK



ENDING down,

Steve was examin- ing the rather thick- ish bones of the dead man's knees. The flesh had been burned absolutely off, so that he could study the forma- tions clearly. They were, he realized, unusually thick, as

were the bones of the ribs. He prodded and poked delicately with his fingers.

"What are you going to do?" he asked Quintaro. "See the military about this?"

"My God, no!" cried Quintaro. "Don't you realize Eastman is dan- gerous? He hates me. He'd kill Basel."

"So you'll pay out nearly a million dollars?"

"What is a million dollars along- side of my son's life? Besides, to me a million dollars represents a month's income."

Steve whistled softly. He couldn't even imagine a million dollars, let alone that sum as a month's income.

"How old a man was this Roland Biester?" he asked suddenly.

"Thirty-six, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"Was he sick recently? Did he have arthritis, perhaps?"

Sir Zerby stared at him hard "Good God, no. He was in perfect health as far as I know."

Steve stood up, frowning. He was sore, baffled and worried.

"You'd better count me in on that pay-off," he said. "I don't like this."

Sir Zerby scowled. "I shall do nothing of the kind. I will handle this in my own way. I want no interference from you or any one else."

He turned. Down the walk from the main house were staggering two of his bodyguards. He turned back to Steve.

"Don't get in my way, Hilary," he growled, "or you'll regret it."

He spoke to the leading Greek. The man moaned but turned obediently to the garage.

"Nikolas will drive you to your hotel," continued Sir Zerby. "Stay there."

"And Susan?"

"If she is unharmed I'll return her to you, and you shall take her away at once."

Steve knew the baronet was lying. As soon as the man had achieved the

ransom of his son, he would continue to oppose the marriage of his son by any means. But to say this now, would, Steve realized, get him nothing. So he pretended to acquiesce.

"I'll wait," he said, "and you . . ."

Sir Zerby gave an exclamation of horror and jumped back convulsively. "Look!" he shouted.

The sand asp had apparently lived under the summer house and the flames had driven it out. Now it wriggled along the ground, going directly for the baronet on its way to safety. The man got a chunk of charred wood. Viciously he pounded at the writhing asp until it was merely horribly mashed flesh. Steve turned away in disgust.

"Remember," Sir Zerby growled, as Steve entered the car, "get in my way at this crisis and I'll . . ."

"Save your threats," said Steve, "they bore me."

The car drove on.

As he passed the main gate Steve saw the gateman, his head bandaged, repairing the copper wires of the electrified system. Steve ordered the car to stop.

"What has happened?" he asked the man.

"Monsieur, all is madness. Last night came someone who cut the wires. When the alarm bell awaked me I was struck on the head. When I regain my senses the summer house

[Turn Page]

BOB: Say, fellow, are you taking Ex-Lax? Thought that was for women and kids.

JIM: Wrong, Big Boy! I've been taking Ex-Lax for years. It fixes me up fine!

BOB: Ohyeah! Well, I'm pretty husky... I need a laxative with a wallop.

JIM: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax tastes good, but it's plenty effective!

LATER

BOB: Thanks for the tip, pal! I tried Ex-Lax and it's great stuff!

JIM: What did I tell you! It's the only laxative we ever use in our family.

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

10¢ and 25¢

burns with Monsieur Biester in it and my electric system is temporarily smashed."

Steve scowled. That sounded like Buck Eastman all right, but if Buck had smashed through the electrified fence, then why had the airplane landed and who came in it?

"This," he thought, "is the honey of honeys."

THE British Bank of Morocco is one street removed from the main place, *Dima El Fna*, and it is one of the more substantial business buildings of the town. At noon a Rolls Royce sedan rolled up and discharged the erect figure of Sir Zerby Quintaro.

As he entered the door the two guards suddenly stiffened to obsequious attention. Cuthbert Rayburn, the boss of the bank, also saw the famous figure of the munitions king and literally ran to greet him.

Sir Zerby Quintaro nodded coldly to the greeting.

"I want two hundred one-thousand pound notes at once," he said. "Never mind keeping the serial numbers."

"Ah, Sir Zerby, we must keep the numbers of such sized bills," said Rayburn, leading the way to his own desk. "The Bank of England requires it."

Sir Zerby shrugged it aside as of no moment.

"But for me," he ordered, "you will ignore that regulation, too."

He took out the small checkbook with his name embossed on it in gold, filled in a check and carelessly rolled his thumb across the place where the signature should have been.

Rayburn took the check, reached across his desk for a small tin of iodized water. He dipped the signature of Sir Zerby into the water. Immediately the thumbprint became plainly visible.

From a file in his desk Rayburn took another enlarged print, and this he compared. But the gesture was almost perfunctory. He knew what he would find. He had done this for over a year and for larger amounts than this.

He disappeared into the main part of the bank and came back a few mo-

ments later with two hundred one-thousand pound notes which he counted into Sir Zerby's hand.

"You have hurt yourself, sir?" he said, pointing to the bandages on Sir Zerby's forehead.

"It is nothing," growled the baronet. "Call General Delage. Tell him I wish a military permit for my plane to fly from here to London via Paris."

"I shall gladly do so," bowed Rayburn.

Sir Zerby went out to his Rolls Royce, climbed in and was driven off. As his car vanished around the corner of the Pasha of Marrakech's vast estate, Steve Hilary emerged into the blinding sunlight and headed into the bank. He inquired for the manager and was finally brought to Rayburn.

He showed his credentials, countersigned by Scotland Yard and the Sureté Générale of Paris.

"Your bank is a client of ours, and I want information. How much money did Sir Zerby draw?"

"It's against our rules to divulge such information."

Steve's eyes narrowed.

"If you want a court order—" he began, waving his credentials. Hastily, Rayburn shook his head. He knew the Intercontinent Investigation Bureau and its strange international power.

"Two hundred thousand pounds," he said reluctantly.

"By check?"

"Yes." Rayburn reached across his large desk and brought out the now dry check. Steve saw the amazing signature. As his eyebrows went up in astonishment Rayburn explained. "All of Quintaro's checks are signed like that. He gives and takes money all over the world. There can be no chance of forgery this way, and no chance of not knowing his signature."

"You saw him sign this one?" Steve asked.

"Yes. He always places his thumbprint in front of witnesses. Thus his signature cannot be forged."

Steve brushed his hand across the check. He picked off a flake of wax. He asked how Sir Zerby had taken the money and Rayburn told him.

"He once drew a million pounds and I paid it," Rayburn added proudly.

It was ten minutes walk from there to Buck Eastman's room in the Hotel *Continental et Orient*. Buck was not upstairs. He was in the small bar off the lobby, drinking with the blond barmaid. Steve walked in and ordered a big beer.

At sight of Steve, Eastman's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I'm just going down to buy a cobra."

"A cobra?"

"Yeah," said Steve, drinking half the huge mug of beer, "a black cobra."

Eastman scowled. "Don't rib about snakes. I hate 'em. I saw a pal of mine die of a bushmaster bite once and the sight haunted me for years."

Steve smiled slightly. "What I wanted to see you about was this—you made a proposition yesterday about me going in with you against Quintaro. I'm ready to talk about it now."

Eastman stared, then roared with laughter, his eyes flashing triumphantly.

"That was yesterday, guy."

"You mean it's off now?"

"You said it, it's off."

Steve knew then that Quintaro's hunch was right. Eastman had Basel Quintaro and Susan Darrel. His eyes narrowed.

"Okay!" he spoke indifferently.

"You should have known that you couldn't crash Quintaro's joint alone," Eastman said. "I'm playing it by myself now."

For one brief instant Steve Hilary's eyes blinked wide in utter astonishment, and then they masked again. He forced a smile.

"Go ahead. I'll bust into Quintaro's and get Susan. Wait and see. And I pack a big gun, Buck, and if she's been hurt I'm going looking for the guy that hurt her."

Without waiting to see how Buck took this threat, he swung out to the dusty red street and back to the Place *Djma El Fna*.

But he went with a new motive now. Unknowingly Buck Eastman had given him a vital clue to this

puzzle. A clue, Steve realized, that didn't explain everything but one which told Steve what he must do.

He stopped at the snake charmer's pitch.

The snake charmer was still howling and jumping around while his assistant beat a drum with calloused hands. The snake charmer recognized Steve, grinned toothlessly and permitted a sand asp to bite him in the ankle, after which he screamed and flopped awkwardly to the intense amusement of his Berber audience.

Steve gestured and took out a ten franc note. A ten franc note in Morocco is vast riches and the snake charmer literally fawned on Steve.

Steve spoke in Arabic. "Thou has permitted the sand asp to bite thee, because in thy youth thou hath eaten of the sand asp venom and thus came to feel it not. But now, Allah willing, I will give thee ten francs to permit the black cobra to bite thee."

FOR an instant the snake-charmer's tiny beady eyes stared at Steve. Then he yelled, "*Wallah!* In the name of Allah the Magnificent, the All-knowing, I will do it."

He went to a burlap sack, untied the throat of it and then he got a box, opened it, and held the box to the sack. Silence had come momentarily and Steve heard the slithering sound as the snake passed from the sack to the box.

"I mean the cobra in this box," Steve protested. He pointed to one that the snake charmer had been using all day. Steve could see venom on the corners of this snake's mouth.

"That one is tired," said the snake charmer. "All day he has struck and his venom sack is exhausted. In the name of the Prophet let me use a strong one."

With that he jumped and shouted, boasting of what he was about to do in such a screeching voice that the crowded square hugged close to watch him. He opened the box. Instantly there rose a ropelike body, two inches thick, black as jet, and the hood fanned out like a huge spoon.

As the snake charmer danced around, the cobra turned, never for

an instant taking its gaze from the tormentor. And then suddenly the snake charmer bent over, put out his shaved skull toward the snake. Closer, closer, closer! A cold hush fell. All watched breathlessly.

The cobra was utterly motionless, but its beady eyes were watching that brown skull, weighing the speed of its own strike, the speed of the charmer's withdrawal. The snake had been fooled many times.

Now the cobra rose a little higher. A foot of its black body was above the box.

"*Ayah, ayah, ayah!*" the snake charmer cried.

His head was within a foot.

Then like a blinding flash the snake struck.

The snake charmer drew back, but not fast enough. On his forehead two tiny spots appeared, and two tiny holes leaked blood. Steve, watching, knew that this man had been bitten by a black cobra, the most poisonous snake known to man.

"*Ooah, ooah!*" the snake charmer cried. He ran to him, holding out his hand. Steve gave him the ten francs, in American money the equivalent of forty cents.

"I will give you a thousand francs for the snake," he said.

The snake charmer looked cunning and said two thousand, and Steve came up two hundred and fifty and finally bought it for fifteen hundred, which was what he had intended to pay from the very beginning. He watched while the snake charmer put it back in the burlap sack.

The Arab—for he was a Bedouin and not a Berber—grinned again as he handed it to Steve.

"Have a care, *Sidi*, when you take the snake out."

"Why?" asked Steve.

"But, *Sidi* . . ." began the man. Then he read Steve's glance and laughed. "Thou art wise, *Ferengi*," he grinned.

As Steve turned away he saw Buck Eastman staring at him.

"So you bought one at that," cried the gun-runner.

"Yes," said Steve. "It's going to help me get Susan back."

He walked away, the burlap sack slapping his leg.

CHAPTER VI THE RED KASBAH



THE *medicin-chef*, or chief surgeon, of the Foreign Legion hospital, was curious.

"So you want to see X-rays of bone formations, Monsieur Hilary. May I ask why?"

"Yes," replied Steve in French. "I am trying to rescue a girl who is in trouble and to do it I have to solve a murder."

The *medicin-chef* stared as if at an insane man. Then he shrugged.

"M'sieur will have his joke. Come and the roentgenologist will show you a selection." He handed Steve back his credentials and led the way to another room.

Here Steve began staring at countless X-ray photographs of gunshot wounds, fractures, osteomyelitis diseases, and finally he saw two of acute *arthritis deformans*.

The customary adhesions had enlarged the bones so that in a way they resembled the knobby formations he had seen on the dead Roland Biester.

The *medicin-chef* explained. "The difference in the adhesions is due to age. This one, for example, is a younger man. He would ordinarily have perfect bone structure, so that the arthritis deposits alone, are due to the disease."

He picked up another photograph and held the black and white shadows to the light. "This, however, is of an older man. The human skeleton, Monsieur, takes on arthritic deposits due to age alone. Thus, it is hard to tell how much is due to age and how much is due to the disease itself."

Steve turned suddenly pale and caught his breath.

"You can actually tell the age of a man by his skeleton?"

"Oh, but assuredly, Monsieur," said the chief surgeon. "One can tell within one or two years."

"Good God!" Steve thought. "There never was any intention of releasing Susan and Basel alive. They will be killed—and tonight. Unless—"

For the first time he knew fright, not for himself but for those two poor kids who had become pawns in murder and a gigantic theft. He was sick at the thought that perhaps nothing he might do could stop this new slaughter.

The peril to Susan and Basel drove him to risks he would ordinarily have avoided, for he liked to work unobtrusively and spring surprises that shocked the truth into confessions. But he couldn't now.

He hurried into the *souks*, that smelly, filthy labyrinth wherein a hundred thousand Moors work and trade, and love and hate. He bought a *djellab*, a *kaffan*, an *egale* and a *kafieh*, those being the elements of Moorish garb. For a few francs he got a walnut stain that darkened his skin. He did not need much. He was already deeply tanned.

In the back of the *souk* of the leather workers he donned his costume. From his belt fastened around his naked hips he slung the burlap sack and the cobra. On the lanyard to which Moors usually fix their curved scimitars, he fastened his big Luger.

Then he cased the Red Kasbah.

This was a blow. The Red Kasbah was a huge sprawling palace made of red clay and camel dung. Before the Shereefian government, it had been owned by the Sultan of Turkey and troops had barracked there. But, for years, it had stood unused, save by the beggars and paupers. And lately, they had been kept out by steel gates. These had been put up by Sir Zerby Quintaro who had bought the Kasbah from the Pasha of Marrakech.

THERE were two entrances to the Red Kasbah, one from the *souks*, and the other from the military road that led south to the Atlas. It meant Steve could not see all who came in, nor all who left. This was the source of his disappointment.

He might be terribly outnumbered, and there was no chance, really, for

surprise. But somewhere in the Red Kasbah, Susan and Basel were hidden—or would be brought there. Whatever the handicap of its construction, here was where the pay-off would be.

With his flashlight concealed beneath his *djellab*, Steve stole into the Red Kasbah from the *souks* entrance. He had hoped that he might find Susan and Basel before the time to pay the ransom arrived. But he found nothing.

Bats flew dismally around his ears. Two sand asps hissed at his feet. He went through twenty different rooms. Dust and dry rot was everywhere.

He shrugged and returned to the entrance from the south military road. He could only watch one. He would gamble on this.

Never in his life had minutes crawled so slowly. Never in his life had he crouched immobile, knowing that two young people might be dying at that very instant. But he waited.

Then out of the blackness came a man. A solar topee, white linen suit, a European. Steve couldn't see his face. He was not alone. Behind came two Berbers, their loose slippers slapping loudly on the sandstone.

The white man spoke in Arabic.

"Ali, stay here and watch for him. Lead him to me when he comes."

The voice was Buck Eastman's.

The Berber spoke assent, crouched down in the shadows. Steve heard a knife jingle.

Eastman went inside with the other native. Steve followed.

This became easy now, for Eastman had a flashlight and made no attempt to be secretive. And so Steve saw why his earlier search had been futile. In what was evidently an old guardroom there were two archways boarded up. Steve had tried both and gotten nowhere.

Now, Eastman banged at one of them and the whole board partition fell away, opening a passageway. He and the native went in.

Steve followed—and stumbled. The floor of this new room was higher.

"*Wallah!*" husked the native in fear.

Click!

Eastman doused the flashlight. The

blackness was impenetrable. Steve heard another soft click. Eastman had pushed the safety off his automatic pistol. Steve knew the man was tense, desperate, crouched there ready to fire at the slightest sound. And, out of seven shots, an old hand like Eastman wouldn't miss. Steve listened.

Utter silence!

Working with maddening slowness, so as to make no noise, Steve unfastened the burlap sack and lowered it to the floor. He loosed the purse string at the top of the bag.

Then he silently moved to the right, hugging the wall, holding his breath that its sound might not betray him.

AND the silence continued. Then the cobra sliding out of his confinement made a soft rustling sound.

Crash!

The blackness of the room lit to the flashes of Eastman's gun. The roar pounded on the ears. And in the flashes Steve spotted Eastman, not five feet away. The Berber was crouched across the room, ten yards away.

Taking advantage of the last flash, Steve jumped the intervening distance, slammed his Luger muzzle into Eastman's stomach.

"It's me, Hilary," he said softly. "Only my thumb is holding the trigger."

He felt the starch go out of Eastman.

"Drop your rod, Buck."

The gun thudded on the earthen floor.

"Light the flashlight."

A click and the room was once again lit brightly. Eastman's face, red with baffled fury, turned to Steve Hilary.

He cursed. "And you were laying for me here."

"Give me the flash," said Steve calmly, "then go over and tie up the Moor."

Sullenly, using the man's turban, Buck Eastman obeyed. Then he stood dourly waiting.

"All right, take me to Susan and Basel," Steve said.

"I don't know where they are."

In two steps Steve reached him. He jabbed him with the Luger gun muzzle, jabbed him hard.

"I'm in no mood for kidding, Buck," he growled. "I want those kids and I want them now."

"But damn it all," shouted Eastman furiously, "I don't know where they are. To hell with you!"

"I see," said Steve softly. "Buck, I could pistol whip it out of you—like this," and Steve slammed the gun barrel against Eastman's pulsing throat. "Those kids mean a lot to me."

"But I don't know where they are," growled Eastman.

Steve slapped him again.

"Dish it out," sneered Eastman. "I'm tough, and I don't know."

Steve swore softly, baffled. Then his gaze caught the sheen of a long black rope wriggling across the floor.

"Okay, Buck," he said softly. "There's my black cobra over there. I'll leave you with him—and see how tough you really are."

Eastman's eyes bulged. Sweat of terror broke out on him. The Moor groaned and called on Allah for deliverance. Sensing something, the cobra coiled and his head rose, hooded, and his eyes shone iridescently as he watched them.

Eastman groaned. "I don't know where the kids are, now. I swear it."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't me who put the snatch on them."

"Then who did?" asked Steve.

"Sir Zerby Quintaro himself."

CHAPTER VII

EASTMAN'S STORY



ANGER flared in Steve's eyes.

"Stop lying," he growled hotly.

"But I ain't lying so help me God. I went out to Quintaro's joint last night because I was gonna collect a half million—or else. I had it all fixed to get through

the wire. I had snippers, and I had Hassein there with me. I figured once

I got inside I'd grab Quintaro or his kid and hold him until I could get one of his checks cashed and get out of Morocco.

"But when I got through the wire I found the front door open. I smelled something that made me dizzy, so I backed out plenty quick and waited to see what was coming off.

"A minute later Sir Zerby Quintaro, wearing a gas mask, came out of the house carrying the body of a man. He had the body wrapped up so I couldn't see who it was. But I figured it was Biester. That's his secretary. Biester knew plenty about Quintaro, and maybe he was putting the blackmail spot on him. I wouldn't know about that. But Quintaro hated him.

"Quintaro came back again, came out with a clock mechanism. Whatever it was, I heard it tick."

"It was a firebug's time clock to touch off the summer house fire," said Steve. "Go on."

"Quintaro came out two more times. The first time it was his own kid. Then he came out with the girl you was talkin' about yesterday. He put them in a car and drove out. I followed him.

"I didn't know what was really up. I don't yet. But I knew the first guy he carried out was dead as hell. I figured Quintaro cooled him. And if I had the goods on him he'd have to shower down like a jackpot

"I tailed him to this here Red Kasbah, but I lost him inside. The lousy place is a labyrinth.

"I saw him come out, though, alone. I heard him say—I was crouched by

the door—the ransom note—the ransom note."

"Today, I know, he drew a million bucks out of the bank. And I knew he was coming here with it. So I came, ready to get that dough, and more besides."

"How did you know about this room?" asked Steve.

Eastman moved farther away from the cobra.

"Hasein knew about it. I wanted to ease the joint first and maybe grab the kids myself."

"Then you think Sir Zerby murdered Roland Biester?"

"He's dead, ain't he?"

"You're trying to tell me that Sir Zerby snatched his own son and the girl, and then wrote himself a fake ransom note."

"That's right," said Eastman doggedly.

"It's fantastic," muttered Steve. "It could only make sense if Quintaro was scheming to cover his murder of Biester and blame it on you."

"The rat," growled Eastman.

"And you haven't any idea where Susan and Basel are?"

"No. If I did I'd get them and surprise Quintaro for the whole million."

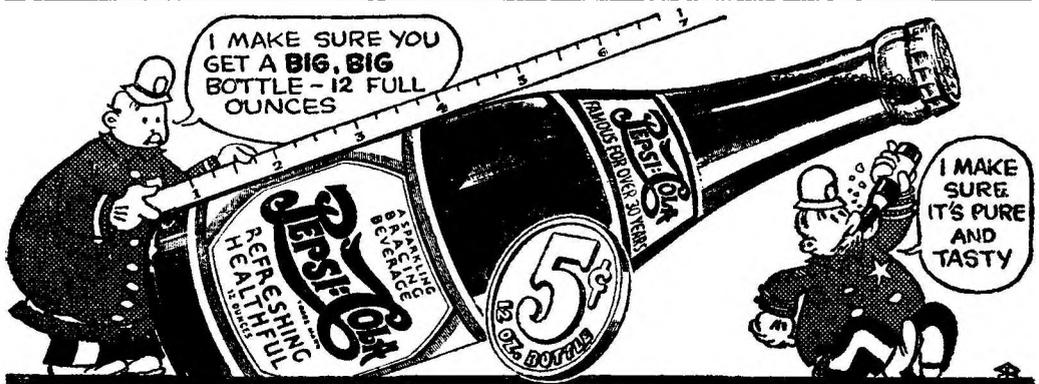
"As it is," spoke a new, harsh voice, "it is you who are surprised."

Steve whirled but he was too late. As he pivoted Sir Zerby Quintaro clicked his own flashlight. He leveled his pistol.

"Neither of you will blackmail me, or otherwise interfere," he said coldly.

The pistol in his hand flashed twice.

[Turn Page]



Steve had hurled himself to the floor, shooting upward as he fell. He missed Quintaro but he had the phenomenal luck to hit the baronet's flashlight.

ONCE again the Kasbah was plunged into blackness. But Steve's own flashlight had fallen so he had no advantage until he found it.

Before he had scarcely started groping for the light, he heard Sir Zerby's voice *outside* the room.

Speaking in Greek. Whatever he had said, men were coming into this room. And then Sir Zerby called in Arabic for Selim, and a light.

A large gasoline lantern flared in the next room. By its light Sir Zerby's men could slaughter them.

The black cobra had evidently slithered away in the dark.

"You can play with me and shoot it out," Steve whispered hoarsely to Eastman, "or we both fold up here for keeps."

"Gimme my rod," said Eastman. "You're a square guy. Say I get my dough and I'll shoot it out."

"You get your dough," said Steve. He slipped Eastman his gun.

As he did so he heard movement in the room.

Out of the shadows the two Greek wrestlers bore down upon him and Eastman. At the same instant Quintaro came to the threshold and by the new light re-opened fire. The gun's explosions crashed and eddied like cannon roars.

But Steve was not in line with the slugs. The Greek coming toward him with the upraised knife suddenly stopped as Steve charged him. Steve jerked the man's body to him as a shield. With his gun he broke the Greek's knife arm with a bullet.

But that wasn't really necessary, because Quintaro's slugs were going accurately. The Greek screamed horribly. Then the body in Steve's arms sagged and jumped convulsively every time a bullet hit it. One slug went through, tore into Steve's clothing.

Steve twisted to see how Eastman was faring. The gun-runner was on the floor, rolling with the Greek, choking in some strangle grip. When he turned back Quintaro had a new gun

and was walking slowly toward him. Steve cursed and threw the corpse.

Quintaro dodged and as Steve Hilary bounded after it the baronet started to shoot. But Steve's gun already was raised. It was a snap shot, aimed as instinctively as you point your finger.

A gout of blood leaped from Quintaro's shoulder and he whirled to the impact of the big German slug. He collapsed slowly and the gun fell from his paralyzed hand. Steve kicked it swiftly away and turned to face the door.

But Selim, who held the light, wanted no fight.

Steve yelled, "Eastman," and then turned to see what was happening there. He was in time to see Eastman smashing his gun butt against the skull of the Greek. Eastman came over to him then, his neck running blood, his face purple and his lips swollen.

"Damned near had me," he muttered. "Dirty holds."

"Watch Quintaro," Steve said.

Steve strode to Selim and drove the gun muzzle into the man's big belly.

"All is made known now," he said in Arabic. "Tell me where the boy and the *sitt* are, and I will speak well of you. Fail and the *Franswazi* will shoot you."

SELIM quivered gelatinously. "Come, *Effendi*, I will take you."

The passageway was there to the right, filled with rubble that had to be pushed aside to let a man through. Selim went first with the light. Then Steve went down the time-worn steps and saw the reddish-gold of Susan's hair, the brave blue of her eyes. He cut her loose.

"See to Basel," she whispered. "Steve, he . . ." and she collapsed.

Steve cut the boy loose. "I can't stay here and look after her," Steve said. "Anyway, that's your job. Can you do it?"

"I'm all right," said the boy hoarsely.

"Then bring her around and get upstairs first. I'm going to need you to straighten out this mess."

He made Selim leave the gasoline

lamp. As they groped up the stairs Steve heard new voices.

As he reached the top of the steps he cursed softly at what he saw. The khaki of Foreign Legionnaires, the trim gold braided *kepi* of an officer who had a big Ruby pistol in his hands, greeted his eyes.

And Quintaro from the floor was saying harshly, "Arrest Hilary and Eastman. They were the kidnapers of my son and the girl."

"Drop your weapon, *Monsieur*," said the officer sharply to Steve. He spoke a quick order and his men raised their Lebel rifles and covered Eastman and Steve.

CHAPTER VIII

PAY-OFF



GETTING his gun drop, Steve chuckled softly. "Nice going," he said to Quintaro, "but it won't work."

"The hell it won't," groaned Eastman. "Them two kids was gassed out when he snatched them. They don't know who grabbed them."

Sir Zerby Quintaro turned to the officer. "I charge them with abduction and murder. Lock them up and I will speak to your commanding officer tomorrow about the court-martial. I am Sir Zerby Quintaro."

"Don't do it, Lieutenant," said Steve quietly. "He is *not* Sir Zerby Quintaro."

The officer looked bewildered.

"The man is insane," Quintaro said sharply. "Look at me, Lieutenant, any fool can see who I am. Pay no attention to him."

The lieutenant stared hard at the white-haired man.

"I only saw you once at the barracks, *Monsieur*," he said, "but to me you are Sir Zerby Quintaro." He shrugged. "We are the patrol. We saw lights in here so we investigated. You own the place, of course, so I beg pardon."

"He doesn't own anything, Lieutenant," said Steve. "He's a murderer.

He murdered Sir Zerby Quintaro. On him you'll find a million dollars. He came here to kill a boy and a girl. And he has an airplane waiting to take him away. Let him go now and you won't catch him again and you will lose your commission."

"Why — er — nonsense," said the lieutenant.

"Oh, Basel, say something," cried Susan from the stairway. "You know Steve saved our lives."

"I know but—but," stammered Basel palely, "it looks like father. I . . ."

"Of course I'm your father," snapped Sir Zerby. "Don't be taken in by this conspiracy, not only to steal two hundred thousand quid from me, but also to marry you to that girl."

Steve laughed heartily. "Nice going, Biester," he said, "but it just won't do. You've overlooked one point."

"Biester!" shouted Eastman, in amazement.

"Biester!" cried Basel.

The white-haired man flung back his head. "This is preposterous, calling me Biester. Biester is dead."

"No," said Steve quietly, "but Sir Zerby is." He held up his hand to get silence.

"Listen, all of you, because this is how it is," he said. "Yesterday or the day before—or the day before that—Roland Biester killed Sir Zerby Quintaro. His whole problem was one of getting rid of the body and escaping quickly with a fortune in cash.

"Biester himself wore a brown mustache and imperial, presumably imitating his master, actually waiting for this moment. He used a platinum hair-dye. He had been secretary to the man so long, he knew his every attitude and gesture.

"The only people he couldn't fool were his three Greeks and Selim, the butler. So they were cut in. They were to fly with him tomorrow to London in the plane.

"He could fool his own son for a short time because Basel had been three months in the Legion and had seen his father only once. Right?"

He turned to Basel.

"I did not see him closely this

time," said Basel. "And I've seen him only once or twice since my youth."

"It was not a question of permanent impersonation," Steve went on. "All Biester wanted to do was draw a million dollars and get away safely. Then he could shave his face, change his appearance, and be reasonably safe, provided that Basel Zerby was not alive to make a fuss and demand a police investigation. He had to kill Basel."

"Nonsense," said the white-haired man. "How could I forge Sir Zerby's thumbprint?"

"You didn't," said Steve grimly. "That was the beauty of it. After you had killed him *you rolled his thumbprint on two blank checks. His dead thumb!*"

Steve glanced at the lieutenant. The man was listening intently.

"Then," continued Steve, "you went to the bank and pretended to roll your thumb on the check. But you really didn't. You had paraffin on your thumb and it left no print at all. But it did leave a flake of wax which was the first tip-off to me."

"A very neat theory," said the white-haired man, "but I will leave it to a hundred witnesses that I am Sir Zerby."

"Don't be a sap," said Steve. "There are two giveaways that you can't beat."

"What?" cried the man.

"X-rays, you fool," said Steve. "Yours is the body of a *young* man. Your skeleton will be young. Sir Zerby was sixty-eight years old and there are doctors at the hospital in Marrakech who can X-ray you and tell your age within five years."

He saw the blank paleness sweep Biester's face. He laughed grimly.

"And suppose we just rolled a thumbprint of yours and compared it to Quintaro's thumbprint on file."

Biester's face dropped wide open, but only for a second. The rifles of the legionnaires were trained on Eastman and Steve. The lieutenant was looking at Steve, trying to comprehend this denouement. For a second nothing stood in the way of Biester.

He turned and with a curse he

hurled himself past the legionnaires, and as he ran he crashed into the lieutenant and knocked him flat.

That delayed him just long enough for Eastman to plunge forward and swing a right hook. Biester's head shot backward at the punch and he crashed to the floor.

Steve fell bodily on the impostor.

"Easy, Biester," he said grimly. "You're lucky. Out here they shoot you for murder—no guillotine."

Then the lieutenant took charge.

"As I was saying," Steve went on, "Biester's main motive for killing Quintaro was to get a million dollars. All the rest of this was to cover up. By pretending that his son and Susan were kidnaped, he had a reason for their disappearance and death. He also had a reason to order a plane to be here to fly him away, pretending to hope to recover his son and get him away from this dangerous place. After he brought Susan and Basel here he went back to bed to pretend he had been gassed, too.

"Also, even if he was caught later, the destruction of Sir Zerby's body by fire, and its subsequent burial here, where corpses become dust quickly, would enable him to beat a murder rap. He'd say Sir Zerby was alive and who could prove the man wasn't? He had seen to it, by using Sir Zerby's great power and prestige, that the serial numbers of the bills weren't taken down."

"Enough," said the lieutenant. "We shall take X-rays and a thumbprint to prove your point. But I believe you. Now, all of you come along to the barracks."

The next morning at ten o'clock Steve Hilary sat on the terrace of the *Cafe du Glacier*, drinking a quart of beer. It was getting awfully hot.

Susan and Basel hurried up to him and he saw that Basel was in civilian clothes, a black armband sewn to the suit.

"The court-martial will find Biester guilty," Basel said. "He will be shot next Tuesday." He saw Steve's eyes on the suit. "I bought my way out," he added. "I've much to attend to now. But not the way my father did. I will sell no munitions."

"Then that much good has come out of it," said Steve.

He looked past the boy and saw Eastman coming toward the C.T.M. office.

"I wanted to say, you would consider working for me?" said the boy.

Eastman clumped onto the terrace, saw Steve's look and nodded, patted his pocket. He gestured to the boy.

"He paid it himself, in cash, all on the up-and-up," said Eastman.

"Well," grinned Steve, "you see what comes of doing your good deed for the day."

"Would you shake hands?" Eastman asked.

"Why the hell not?" countered Steve, giving him a grip.

After Eastman had gone Basel re-

peated his request. "I need a man like you."

"I wish you would, Steve," said Susan.

"Yeah," said Steve, not looking at her. "I know you do. But I've been living out of a suitcase too long to settle down. Thanks, but no. Meanwhile, on your way. I've got my drinking to catch up on."

As he paused, Susan stepped forward, kissed him on the lips. Her own warm ones were fragrant. Then she stepped back.

"I'll never forget you, Steve," she said.

"And I'll never forget you," said Steve slowly.

To himself he added:

"I wish to God I could!"

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

DEATH OF THE SPOTTED DOLLS

A Complete Novel of Voodoo Murder by ARTHUR J. BURKS



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All Rats Were the Same to
Whitey Crocket—and He Went
After Them With a Will!



Whitey leaped for cover

FARM KID

By EDWARD P. NORRIS

Author of "Murder on A Deck," etc.

SO THIS was New York City? Whitey Crocket's eyes beamed and bulged until they threatened to pop from his lean, brown face. He'd seen it in the movies, of course, but this "beat it a mile!" He hung back breathlessly against a show window at the northeast corner of Forty-second and Fifth Avenue and drank it in. Humanity swarmed past him like "folk headin' for a fire down to Farmer Shenk's 'gin sheds." Automobiles, taxicabs, trucks and big buses honked and wrestled each

other like "haws loosed ter th' swill tubs."

A whistle blew and the crazy snarl of traffic straightened itself out and stopped. A man in blue uniform in the middle of the street tooted his whistle again and the rush started another way.

"Gosh," reflected Whitey, in awe, "Farmer Shenk oughter see a New York policeman! He's the real thing! He don't have to holler to git obeyed!" So did the New York cop rate aces with Whitey.

"Go west, young man!" had never hit Whitey's ears, but its equivalent had. He'd been content with the odd dollars he'd earned from Farmer Shenk. The work he did was fun to him and left him lots of time for "messin' around." Then Jeff Oates had come back from the Big City. Jeff had acquired the gift of gab if little else. He'd sold Whitey on the Big Town. Now Whitey was here, thrilled, dazed and contented.

He suddenly realized that he was hungry, and wistful remembrance of Farmer Shenk's kitchen table came to him. Tightly holding onto the battered grip that held all his possessions, he steered carefully through the people streaming along the sidewalk and ducked up Fifth Avenue.

His eyes roved alertly as he moved uptown. Poor Whitey—he was looking for a hamburger stand on upper Fifth Avenue! He passed aristocratic perfumer's establishments, swank jewelry stores and glittering windows that displayed beautiful wax ladies in sleek, flowing dresses. They briefly held Whitey, then his stomach pushed him on.

Up in the Fifties and in sight of Central Park, Whitey was about to turn and trudge back in his tracks when there came something that made him forget his rebellious stomach. It was the ringing crash of gunshots. He recognized them instantly for shots echoed that way in Farmer Shenk's tall barns when he'd—

NO TIME was allowed him to reflect further. Just then a policeman ran across Fifth Avenue right under Whitey's nose, whipping out his gun. From a swank building across the street came tumbling three well-dressed men, all with guns in their hands, and a couple of them were smoking. One carried a bag.

Whitey saw people scatter to right and left as though a twister had leaped from the sky. The policeman opened fire. The running men were heading for a big, shiny car at the curb. The one with the bag kept on,

the other two stopped and their guns thundered lead at the policeman in the road, only ten feet in front of Whitey.

Petrified on the sidewalk, every other soul having scattered, Whitey heard bullets whine angrily past his ears, felt sharp tugs on his loose pants. The cop suddenly gasped and tottered backwards. He fell in the gutter at Whitey's feet and his gun bounced and clattered against a fire hydrant. The two men sprang for the car.

Whitey snapped from a trance at a loud groan from the policeman. Dropping his grip, he swiftly stooped for the gun and then dropped on a knee beside the cop.

"You got hurt?" he asked.

Even Whitey thought it was a silly thing to say. Once he'd been mistaken for a rabbit and had gotten a taste of lead pellets. The cop's lips were flecked with blood and he stared strangely at Whitey.

"Get them," he gasped. "Get the—"

Whitey looked puzzled. His eyes darted to the men piling into the car. Something was wrong, he knew, but he hesitated. He'd seen a hold-up once—four men in rough clothes and handkerchiefs over their faces had stuck up the Stookfield bank. But the fellows piling into the shiny car were even better dressed than the president of the Stookfield bank.

The cop got himself onto an elbow, tried weakly to take the gun from Whitey's hand.

"Got to—kill—the rats!" he gasped.

A sudden look of keenness came to Whitey's eyes. That was something he understood! He understood even better when from the window of the shiny car a gun roared and bullets spattered about him and the half sitting policeman. The cop choked and rolled on his back again.

Whitey bounded like a scared rabbit to cover behind the fire hydrant. The cop's gun glittered in his brown, capable hand. As the motor of the car roared he took careful aim over the top of the hydrant. The gun leaped explosively in his hand. The

man at the wheel sagged sharply, slumped forward against the windshield and the motor's roar died. An apprehensive thrill traveled up Whitey's spine and ran to his very fingertips. He'd shot a man!

He had no time to wonder whether he'd done wrong. Bullets spattered off the hydrant and he knotted himself behind his meager shelter, no easy task for his lanky frame. Peeked out again and saw that another man was squeezing in behind the wheel while a third tried to lift the injured man clear.

Again he took careful aim and fired, and again the roar of motor stilled and a man slumped. A savage face showed at the car window, a gun barked and skin peeled stingingly from Whitey's face. Cold sweat broke on his brow as he ducked. This affair didn't seem real. It was kill or be killed, though. he got that much. The policeman had called them rats, and rats had never licked him.

A THIRD man had jammed his way behind the wheel. Whitey fired hurriedly—missed and merely broke glass. The car leaped away from the curb. The rats were running! He steadied the revolver and this time got the crouching driver squarely. The car spun and came swerving crazily across the street, mounded the curb on Whitey's side and crashed noisily into a building front.

Distant spectators screamed. Whitey hardly heard. A lone man leaped from the car with spouting gun. His target was Whitey! Whitey cringed low, took snap aim, and then his heart bounced to his mouth—the gun clicked empty!

His hand flew to his pocket in an automatic motion, but froze there hopelessly. In horror, he saw the man nearing fast, his face twitching in a horrible snarl. He wanted to get up and run, but was paralyzed. A bullet scraped his head and the shock knocked him back in the gutter. Then, right before his scared eyes he caught the glitter of cartridges. The wounded cop was lifting his coat to expose the belt.

"Great going—kid," he gasped. Whitey's scared fingers ripped one out and hurriedly thrust it in the chamber of the gun.

The man with the smoking gun and snarling face was coming fast along the sidewalk. Whitey rolled over, blinked once to clear blood from his eyes and fired upward as the running man loomed over him. He had a hazy notion that his shot hit squarely between the man's eyes. The man stumbled, dropped crushingly on top of him. Then, for Whitey, black curtains fell.

HE WAS out of the hospital the next day, a plaster patch on his tow-colored head, the number one hero of the town! In the hospital he'd been interviewed and photographed and shaken by the hand until the doctors had put an end to it. Even the mayor dropped in to praise and thank him.

The policeman had lived long enough to add his graphic description of the battle and he'd painted Whitey's doings in vivid tones. There wasn't a newspaper that did not have Whitey Crocket's picture in it, Whitey in a hospital night-shirt, a bandage on his head, a shy grin on his brown face.

Now Whitey was in the District Attorney's office, telling it all over again to the D. A. and a lot of detectives and newspapermen who were looking at him with funny looks on their faces.

"And then," said Whitey earnestly, "when the policeman says 'git them rats,' it kinder woke me up inside. At first I wouldn't a dreamed o' shootin' at fellers in them slick clothes. But the policeman said they was rats and I believed him. I could see he couldn't handle the gun, an' I knew I could handle rats and a gun. Used ter pop 'em off in Farmer Sherk's barn an' git four cents a tail. There was times when I would wait for hours, watching 'em sneak up on the chickens. They're kinder smart, rats is, but scairt at heart. I remember once—"

"You certainly got four good rats this time, Whitey," said the D. A.

his fascinated eyes on Whitey. "They were worth better than four cents a tail to us. Especially that last one, Mike Liske. You drilled him between the eyes, a pip of a shot!"

"I could pip a rat even if I only could see his eyes," said Whitey modestly. "I'm sorry I killed that feller. Seems like the only thing I could see was his eyes—they looked awful mad."

"What kind of reward is Whitey going to get, D. A.?" a newspaper reporter inquired.

There was applause from the other newsmen. The D. A. rubbed his chin.

"Well, there was nothing on the heads of these particular fellows. Of course, Whitey should get something, though."

"All I'd like," Whitey broke in eagerly, "is ter have that there gun I handled." He added, "And mebbe a job, if that ain't too much to ask."

The policeman's revolver was on the D. A.'s desk and still had bloodstains on it, either the cop's or Whitey's, or perhaps some of each. Grins came to the faces of the newspapermen. The D. A. looked nonplussed.

"Why the gun, Whitey?" he asked. "It won't be of any—"

"It's a peach of a gun," exclaimed Whitey eagerly. "Shoots every time without missin'. I used ter use a big old revolver what my grandpap had. The pin missed mebbe every third or fourth try. Lots o' rats got away from me on account—"

"But this is New York, Whitey," explained the D. A. "Only special persons are authorized to—"

"Doesn't Whitey Crocket come under the heading of special persons?"

It was the newspapermen again. They were all for Whitey. The D. A. realized he had to play along with them, also their public.

"All right, Whitey, the gun's yours. Only remember, in New York City you can't go around using a gun on cats or dogs just because we don't have any rabbits or—in fact, you won't be able to use the gun at all!"

Whitey's joyful look dulled a bit.

"There's the police pistol range—he could use that," said a reporter.

"I guess that could be managed," agreed the D. A. "Now, about the job, Whitey. What do you have in mind? What would you like to do?"

"Well, I hadn't any p'tic'lar ideas," confessed Whitey. "I got a sneakin' notion now, though, that I'd like to be a policeman."

A FEW grins were hastily smothered. The D. A. looked as though he'd swallowed a fishbone.

"We couldn't manage that very easily, Whitey," he said regretfully. "You see, policemen have to go through long training courses—"

Again the newspapermen rallied by Whitey.

"How about making him an assistant to one of your special detectives?" demanded one of them. "You're looking for Mal Liske, the biggest rat in town, twenty grand on his tail. You need a crack rat killer like Whitey. And he took care of Liske's brother, Mike!"

Whitey's eyes shone. "Gosh, that'd be great," he murmured. "A real detective's assistant! Why, folks in Stookfield—"

"I wish you fellows would keep out of this," said the D. A. plaintively.

"We want to see Whitey done right by," chorused the newsmen, riding the high horse with a vengeance now. So do the people of the city."

The D. A. frowned, suddenly got up from his desk.

"All right," he announced gruffly, "Whitey's hired! I'll assign him with Ned Pritchard here. Ned's my number one man in the hunt for Mal Liske. Are you satisfied now? Well, clear my office."

Whooping at what was a smashing climax to an already crackerjack yarn, the newshawks rushed out. A few detectives were left and in the front of these was a big man with lazy gray eyes and a jaw that moved slowly on a chew of gum.

"Did you mean that, D. A.? The reporters will print it."

"Of course I meant it, Pritchard,"

the D. A. said firmly. "Whitey Crocket is your assistant, starting today."

Whitey's face beamed, his fingers pulled at his stringy necktie.

Biting the end off a cigar, the D. A. moved off to a far corner of the office. The big detective followed.

"The kid's riding on top of the town right now, Ned," the D. A. quietly told him. "We daren't turn him down on anything he wants. People'll talk about ingratitude and stuff. You trail around with him for a while till it settles down. Use him for a valet, errand boy, shoe-shiner—I don't care. Later, we'll slip him into a job somewhere, a nice, steady job that doesn't need a lot of brains to hold on to."

"You're forgetting to mention one thing," Ned Pritchard said calmly. "The kid isn't riding on top with everybody!"

The D. A.'s eyes hardened. "You mean Mal Liske? Yes, I suppose Whitey's a boil under his hide right now. There's a spot in Mal's rotten heart for brother Mike. But Mal's a rat under cover, twenty grand on his head. Besides that, Whitey's too high in public feeling right now for any mobsters to try to hurt him."

Pritchard turned his gum and his lazy gray eyes crossed the room to Whitey, relating things to a trio of interested detectives. "Mal Liske never cared much about *anybody's* feelings—unless, maybe, Mike's."

SO WHITEY CROCKET, late man of general utility for Farmer Shenk of Stookfield, became ward of special detective Ned Pritchard of New York City's D. A.'s office. Pritchard's first move was in regard to Whitey's personal appearance. Casting a pained eye over the loose tweed suit and shapeless hat on the tow head, he frowned.

"We'll have to put a suit on you, kid," he said. "What's the big stain on your lapel—gravy?"

Whitey fingered the indicated spot—it was caked stiff—and grinned shyly.

"I think it's blood, Mr. Pritchard. It warn't there 'fore yesterday."

Pritchard's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Well, be sure you don't get any on your new suit," he said.

It was a dark gray suit, fitting tighter than Whitey was accustomed to having them; but, with a snap-brim, light gray hat transformed him into something he never got tired of looking at in mirrors and store windows. His brown eyes became golden in the transfiguration. With some misgivings, but reassured that Whitey was thoroughly at home with one, Pritchard let him keep the gun, even gave him cartridges for it.

"Remember, though," Pritchard warned, "a gun's something you hardly ever use. There's times—like that hold-up yesterday, for instance, or when rats gang up on you."

"Rats never gang up on anything, Mr. Pritchard," corrected Whitey, mildly. "At least, not on anythin' that'll nigh back an' has teeth, too."

"I guess that's why I'm letting you keep your teeth, Whitey."

Whitey's first day with the big, tolerant detective was one long round of thrills. Pritchard eased up on his regular work and pretty near covered the town with Whitey. He did get close to business, however, in taking in a few of those night club and bar-restaurants that the crooks frequented.

"It's in places like that," he told Whitey, as they left one after eating a sandwich, "that the underworld cooks up its crimes."

"Underworld?" said Whitey, his thoughts turning to rabbit warrens, rat holes under the hedges.

"Yeah, that means thieves, crooks, racketeers like Liske."

"I heard mention of this Liske feller a few times. He's a bad guy, I s'pose?" asked Whitey, thirstily drinking in every word dropped by his privately installed god, Detective Mister Pritchard.

"Slightly," said Pritchard laconically. "You rubbed out his brother, Mike—the one you drilled through the lamps."

Whitey digested this. "I reckon this Liske don't like me," he reflected.

That night, a tired Whitey was in-

stalled in a room on the floor below Ned Pritchard's apartment.

"Lock your door, kid," the detective ordered. "And don't open it for anyone but me. I'll shake you out in the morning."

"I'll be up at sunrise, Mister Pritchard," said Whitey.

Only once did Whitey Crocket get in dutch during the week that followed. It was one early evening when he was waiting for Ned Pritchard—they were going to take in a show. There was a dumbwaiter shaft running through Whitey's room and some mice had found it to be a good recreation center. They hadn't annoyed Whitey although their squeaking festivities reached him during the night.

Now with his spirits bubbling at prospect of the evening's pleasure ahead, he could not resist a mischievous impulse that sent him creeping upon the dumbwaiter, gun in hand. He flung open the door, saw frightened mice reverse themselves on the pulley ropes. Whitey fired, grinned as the shattering roar flung mice headlong from the ropes. A minute later, feet pounded out in the passage and then fists hammered on the door. Whitey let in a drawn-faced Ned Pritchard. Relief was followed by a terrific bawling out.

"You young sap, I'm taking the gun away!" shouted Ned.

WHITEY was thoroughly dejected. He'd never seen Mr. Pritchard angry. If he'd had a tail it would have been between his legs.

"I'm sure sorry, Mr. Pritchard," he said contritely. "It was jest that I was excited about goin' to a theater with you—an'—an' I guess I mebber missed the rat shootin' a bit."

Pritchard just couldn't stay sore with the penitent tow-head. And he didn't take the gun. It had been settled, anyhow, that Whitey was to be installed in a warehouse job the next day. The D.A. could tell the kid how it was he'd have to turn the gun in.

The next day they missed breakfast but had early lunch together. It was in a busy restaurant. Pritchard had broken the news about the wait-

ing job and Whitey's appetite was suffering a setback. Pritchard suddenly pushed away his plate, not too hungry, either.

"I've got to phone the D.A." he said, "and find out where I should take you."

"I'm gonna miss you, Mr. Pritchard," said Whitey, his eyes round and serious.

"I'll be seeing you at times, kid." Pritchard clapped Whitey on the shoulder, but didn't look long into the brown eyes. "You'll like the job, I think."

The big detective hurried through the filled tables in search of the telephone booths. Whitey stared unseeingly at his hardly tasted lunch. After an uncertain period he looked up at a man who loomed over his table, a well-dressed man in a snappy hat and blue suit. He had close-set eyes and he spoke from a corner of his mouth.

"Come on, Whitey, the big guy's waiting for you outside. We got work."

Whitey swallowed. "You mean Mr. Pritchard's waiting for me?"

"Sure. He said to hurry. Grab your hat."

Whitey followed the man whose slit eyes darted sharply all around as they left. There was an ugly slew to his lips and he seemed in a big hurry. These things escaped Whitey. Only one thing was dismally apparent—he was no longer to work with Detective Pritchard. A job in a warehouse lay ahead. The prospect of hard work wasn't terrible, but—a yearning for Farmer Shenk's barns and the rat shooting came creeping into his heart.

Outside, he was hurried into a big car at the curb. The car moved away immediately. Whitey looked at the driver, a slim, stoop-shouldered man, at the man who'd rushed him from the restaurant.

"Where's Mr. Pritchard?" he asked.

The man sucked his teeth. "Oh, Detective Pritchard? Heh, Lippy, didn't Pritchard want to wait?"

The man at the wheel stared into the mirror.

"Naw, he had to rush away."

Whitey bit a lower lip that wanted to quiver. He thought Mr. Pritchard needn't have been in such a hurry. He didn't pay much heed to where they were until the car stopped and they got out and entered through the grimy doors of a bar-restaurant. That did seem funny—going from one eating place to another.

This one didn't compare with the other. It was dirty, not very light, and the customers sprawled low over their tables reminded him of weasels. He was led through the length of it, around a back passage and to a door. The man who'd brought him called through the door.

"It's me, Olly," he said. "We brought the kid."

The door was opened by a sallow-faced man who gave way as Whitey was walked in between Olly and Lippy. It was a small room and a man sat at a table eating. This man had thick eyebrows bunched over hard, darting eyes, a coarse mouth, a head and neck like a bull. He wore a light gray suit and a bright green necktie with a pin. He smiled.

"Attaboy, Whitey. I been waiting for you. Sit down."

WHITEY sat. He wasn't impressed with his company or surroundings. But he hadn't questioned from the beginning that Olly was a detective acquaintance of Pritchard. He hoped nobody here was going to be connected with the warehouse job.

The bull-headed man took a bite at a big corn-on-the-cob, and said:

"You're gonna work with me now, kid—Detective Mal McGinnis," he said. "I'm taking you along right away. A tough guy's holed up and we're gonna smoke him out. There's Detectives Olly Brown and Lippy Dinlin—they'll be with us."

Whitey's heart leaped wildly. "Then the warehouse job—Mr. Pritchard said I was goin' to work today in a warehouse. Wasn't that—"

McGinnis waved his corn. "Naw. He musta been kidding you all along. Bet you're pleased, eh, kid?"

Whitey moved in his chair, stared

at McGinnis. He didn't know whether he was pleased. He didn't believe that Mr. Pritchard had been kidding. Staring around at their faces he knew that he didn't like any of them. They didn't look like the detectives he'd met, although they were dressed smartly and acted important.

"You got your rod with you, kid?" asked McGinnis carelessly.

"My what?"

"Roscoe, gat, gun."

Whitey nodded, patted his pocket. "I've got it."

McGinnis' eyes narrowed. His nose crinkled over the corn. Whitey stared hard at him. He was comparing the sniveling of McGinnis' nose over the corn with a rat when it nibbles at its scavengings. They had points alike, too, in their dark, roving eyes. Instinctive dislike welled sharply in him.

Mal McGinnis—or Ma! Liske, as he really was, read Whitey's eyes and his own hardened. He tossed the corn down.

"We ready to go, boys?" he asked.

Liske stuck his arm through Whitey's. They didn't go out through the front entrance, but came out on a much quieter street not much better than an alley.

"I suppose the bull—I mean Pritchard, didn't give you a real job to do yet?" said Liske, his thick lips grinning, but his hard eyes alert and missing nothing in the narrow street.

"No," said Whitey quietly. He was still deeply hurt by Detective Pritchard's run-out on him and still instinctively distrustful of his three companions although not to the point of thinking that they weren't detectives. He'd never been shown a photograph of Mal Liske although he'd been given a rush look through the rogues gallery.

"Well, you're gonna go places with me, kid. First, we're gonna round up this tough egg, a real rat. I don't mind telling you he's poison. We gotta be smart to get him without getting mussed up ourselves."

This was action talk compared to Detective Pritchard's lazy tales of

city life. But somehow, Whitey couldn't get enthused.

"We gotta be smart," said Liske, as the four approached the dingy entrance of a tall, shabby building. "This guy's room's on the top—sixth floor. It's what they call a flop-house. Anybody gets a room for two bits. The idea is this." He stopped Whitey. His eyes darted around. His voice lowered. "You go in there. You ain't known like us detectives. Lay down your two bits and ask for a room on the top floor. We'll slip in while he's giving you your number and we'll meet you on the stairs. Got that? Now go ahead."

IT WAS on the tip of Whitey's tongue to say that he didn't want to do detective work any more. But he remembered all he'd told Ned Pritchard. After all, a feller couldn't always work with people he liked. His chin squared away and he did as bidden. An old man with thick spectacles sitting in a cubbyhole office peered at him and for the quarter handed him a tagged key.

Outside, Liske told his companions, a vicious look on his face:

"The old guy'll swear he hired a room on his own. The kid's in the dumps about this job they're planting him in. They'll lay it to suicide. C'mon."

Toiling up a stone, spiral staircase—a fall down the well being prevented only by a low, iron railing, Whitey was overtaken on the third floor by the three.

"Here's some more dope, kid," muttered Liske, as they labored upward. "You never let a tough guy see you're heeled. When he opens the door, you don't let him see you with a gun in your hand. Smart detectives keep their hands in their pockets and fire from the pocket. Get me?"

Whitey stared at Liske, and then, as Liske stared back, he nodded. At the moment he needed his hands, however, for the upward haul. They didn't meet anybody on the long climb. They reached the top floor, Whitey the only one of the four not puffing too hard. They paused. Liske gripped Whitey's arm, pointed to a

numbered door just beyond the head of the spiral staircase.

"He's in there," he muttered. His glittering eyes took in the other men. They were close by Whitey who was nearest to the low railing. Beyond the railing was a drop to the stone hall six floors below. "You boys ready?" asked Liske.

He took a step in the lead, paused, looked back at Whitey.

"Put them hands in your pockets!"

Whitey's hands went into the pockets. But flew out immediately as he was given a violent heave by the two men behind him. His body hit and launched over the rail, and, but for the instant release of his hands from his pockets, an uninterrupted fall to the bottom would have been inevitable. But as he hurtled over, clawing hands found the uprights of the stairguard and he jerked to a halt, his feet dangling over space.

Savage oaths exploded above him. Smashing blows from gun butts on his hands made him grit his teeth in pain. He let go with the left hand. The vicious battering doubled on the right hand. His body swung and by a superhuman effort he got a foot up high enough to hook it between two uprights of the rail.

The oaths grew more savage above him. Through a mist of sweat he saw three snarling faces through the uprights. A last smashing impact on his right hand crushed out the last resistance and his shattered hand lost its hold. His shoulders fell away and his weight was taken cruelly by his right leg, the foot of which was twisted between the uprights.

He felt them wrenching at the foot, trying to break its hold. The blood rushed to his head from his inverted position.

"You bumped Mike, did you, Kid?" he heard a voice that he recognized as Liske's snarl. "You're getting your last bump now!"

LIKE a horrible film a scene raced through Whitey's brain—the incident on Fifth Avenue, that last man bearing down on him on the sidewalk with flaming gun and

deadly eyes. He'd managed to get that man with a lone bullet.

Suddenly his hands groped for his pockets. For once he had reason to be glad that the coat was tight-fitting and that it was buttoned. His right hand found the gun, but the crippled hand couldn't hold it and his left had to take it.

It was hard to locate the figures smashing at his foot—they seemed to be swimming around above him. He laid the gun along his right leg and fired. The gun roared crashingly in the close confines of the top floor. Faintly into his deafened ears penetrated vicious oaths and the groaning of a man, followed by a heavy fall.

Achingly he twisted his head up, saw in blurred fashion a man slashing at his foot. He fired at the pale blur of a face, was rewarded with a coughing oath and a stop to the hammering on his foot. The foot now felt further jammed between the close uprights.

Whitey gritted his teeth as his senses swam. He heard feet pound down the stone stairs. Then, opposite him, staring above the low rail, he saw a distorted face, upside down to his aching eyes. He saw more clearly the green necktie, and a gun. The gun spouted stunningly and he felt a heavy impact.

It was the end, he thought, but managed to raise an aching arm. His gun exploded at the green necktie, then it fell from his numb fingers, shot down the stairwell. But the green tie sagged lower over the rail, that inverted face snarled more

strangely. Whitey fainted dead away, hanging sixty feet from smashing death by a precariously jammed foot.

The riot squad arrived no sooner than did Detective Ned Pritchard, who had been trailing Whitey ever since he had learned the boy from the country had left the restaurant while the big detective had been telephoning. His was the first face Whitey saw when he recovered. Whitey was at first surprised to find that he was alive but an examination had shown that his hurts consisted of a slight shoulder wound, badly bruised hands and a wrenched ankle. The presence of Ned Pritchard was tonic enough for him to be able to relate the happenings.

"... When I got positive they was rats, Mr. Pritchard, was when he told me to shove my hands in my pockets. That kind of ties a fellow up, I figured. An' it's just what a rat likes, to have its victims helpless, handicapped, when he jumps. So I was ready to whip 'em right out again."

"Whitey," said Ned Pritchard, "you know amongst them thugs laying on the stairs is Mal Liske, the guy we've all been looking for? Kid, you ought to get anything your heart desires. You'll collect a twenty-grand reward!"

"All I want, Mr. Pritchard," said Whitey weakly, "is to be a detective's assistant. Your assistant."

"The job's yours, kid, for keeps, even if I have to go into private practice to do it," Ned Pritchard said swiftly, "I wouldn't want a better assistant. You've sure got an instinct for spotting rats!"

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No Place Likes Homicide

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Author of "Scent to the Jug," "Death from Beyond," etc.



The criminal citizen was yelling bloody murder and his clothes were hanging from him in strips

Willie Klump Stumbles Over Satchelfoot Kelly and Plops into a Hornet's Nest of Crime!

WILLIE KLUMP, president of The Hawkeye Detective Agency, sat in his office one fine morning and took stock of his opulence. Willie had garnered quite a chunk of legal tender from his last case, and after deducting bills pay-

able he found that he was worth approximately eight hundred and sixty-three dollars and some odd cents.

Willie was as happy as a cat locked up in a fish market overnight. He decided that Willie Klump would go out and try living like the other half of the world lived. He would get himself a room with a real bed in it. For after all, it was not very dignified for a citizen to make a boudoir out of his office.

Willie picked up a newspaper and scanned the ads. After awhile he stabbed his finger at two fine lines of type. They said:

NEATLY FURNISHED ROOM. QUIET
NEIGHBORHOOD. GENTLEMEN
ONLY. \$3.50.

"I'll look into that," Willie said.

Fifteen minutes later, Willie was being admitted into an old brown-stone edifice on East Forty-fifth Street. The landlady was no Myrna Loy when it came to pulchritude. The eyes with which she surveyed Willie could have outstared a wolf and her outthrust jaw was as hard as a bride's first biscuit.

"What you want?" she said. "If you're working your way through college, don't try to put the bee on me."

"It is about a room," Willie said.

"Why didn't you say so?"

"You didn't ask me."

Willie was led up to a room on the third floor. It was about the size of three packing cases and had one window.

"Well?" the landlady said. "Make up your mind, Mr. . . .?"

"Klump. I—I'll take it."

"Give me three-fifty. What is your business?"

"I'm a detective," Willie said.

"Oh, you are? Well, I guess you can find the bathroom then without me walking my feet off. One thing I want to tell you. No cookin' in the rooms, understand? If I ever catch you, I'll throw you out on your ear, Mr. Slump."

"Klump," Willie said.

The landlady went out and the door slammed. Willie looked over his cubicle, ran a finger across the top of the rickety dresser. It cut a big path through the dust. He tried the bed and came to the conclusion that the landlady did not allow culinary art to be practiced in her hostelry because she furnished the board.

Willie sighed and looked at the rent receipt he had in his hand. Well, he could try it for seven days. Willie left the rooming house and went over to a garage and got his jalopy. He drove that to where he kept his office and went up to pack a couple of bags.

Willie drove back to East Forty-fifth and on the way he braked his coupé and eyed the window of a leather goods store. A sign said:

SALE—WHILE THEY LAST.
BRIEFCASES—\$1.39.

"Huh," Willie said. "I could carry one of them and crooks would think I was anything but a detective. The correspondence course said that a detective wants to hide his identity just the same as a dishonest criminal. And anyway, it would make me look dignified to carry a leather case and people would let me in places that I couldn't get into without one."

WILLIE parked the jalopy and went into the store.

"I'll take one of the briefcases," Willie said.

"Okay. Going like hot cakes. Sold a hundred I bet," the clerk said.

Coming out of the establishment, Willie met Satchelfoot Kelly, a citizen he disliked worse than parsnips. Satchelfoot was a detective on the city's payroll and he had as much regard for Willie as a horticulturist has for a Jap beetle.

"I thought you would give up," Kelly tossed at Willie. "What are you going to sell?"

"I guess you forgot it was me who captured the last public enemy, Satchelfoot," Willie said loftily. "You could not locate one of them if he set up housekeeping in Macy's window, could you? Kelly, you should give up your job. With those airedales you could clean up stamping out grass fires."

"Smart cracker, ha-a-h?" Kelly growled. "Well, when I get the characters that knocked off that bank messenger yesterday afternoon and stole sixty grand, I'll see who laughs last. I'll. . . ."

"Put marbles in your mouth, Satchelfoot. That helps," Willie said and hopped into his coupé.

He drove to the rooming house and took his personal belongings up the three flights of stairs. In the room again, Willie unpacked. He lifted an electric grill and toaster out of the

bottom of a valise and sat down to think a little.

"There must be a place to hide them," Willie said to himself.

He let his eyes stray about the room and they finally settled on the ancient wardrobe that leaned against the wall like a canned-heat drunk. He went over there, got down on his knees and thrust a hand under it. He withdrew the hand and looked at the dirt smearing it.

"Ha," Willie said, "she has never been under there, so that is where I'll hide the grill."

His hand went under the wardrobe again and he fished out a small stack of papers. They were yellow papers with figures written on them. Apparently, Willie thought, a citizen who had been stuck with the room before had tossed them there to get rid of them. They would be just the thing to put in his new briefcase as it would look very foolish to anyone if Willie should be walking around with an empty portfolio.

HIS extra blue serge suit hung in the wardrobe, Willie sat down and gave his thoughts to crime. The latest outrage in the big town was on the front pages of all the journals and he had devoured the details early that morning.

It seemed that two or three rough characters had waylaid a messenger who had been carrying quite a lump of sugar for the People's Fidelity and Trust and they had tapped the currency carrier over the noodle with a hard object just as he was walking up the stairway leading out of the Fifty-ninth Street subway. The criminal character who handled the duster had been just a little too energetic and the messenger, ten minutes after the outrage, found out for certain what clergyman had been guessing at for years.

"I would like to get a lead on that case," Willie said. "It is a pretty state of affairs when an American citizen cannot carry sixty thousand dollars from one place to another without getting killed. Well, I must go over to the office as I work much better there."

Later, the president of the Hawk-eye Detective Agency parked his briefcase in the desk in his office and took paper and pencil from the desk drawer. He wrote:

No. 1—An inside job at the bank. Somebody tipped off the dishonest persons. I will hang around the bank and see who plays horses there or who is living beyond his means. Not bad!

No. 2—One clue. Before the messenger succ—surcom—died, he said he was sure one of his assassins wore a brown suit with pin-stripe. I could canvas haberdashers and find out who bought suits like that the last six months. Worth trying. Tough case though.

No. 3—One suspect, the cops say. Dutch Masters. Job was his mod—modust operandy. Pulled a job just like it in Punxatawney, Pa. All crooks have own method of working. I will keep my eyes peeled for Dutch. That's all for now.

Willie went out to get a bite to eat. He climbed a stool of a beanery on Lexington and glanced around the place. Willie gasped. A tough looking taxpayer tossed a half dollar to the counter, turned around and went out. He wore a pin-striped brown suit. Willie grabbed up a paper napkin and covered his fingers with it before he snagged the glass that stood beside the plate the customer had just cleaned.

"What's the idea?" the counterman yelled, "Put that down!"

Willie flashed his badge.

"I'm goin' to take this downtown and get fingerprints took of it. I think he was a criminal. Boy, I think this is my lucky day."

"Yeah? Public enemy, maybe, huh? Don't forget about the reward as it was my restaurant."

Two hours later, a big *gendarme* with gold on his sleeves, tried to get at Willie to choke him to death.

"Dutch Masters, huh? Why, you fathead wasting all this time for them guys in the lab. The prints are here all right. They belong to a detective-sergeant named Mike O'Neill. He just told us he was in that restaurant and was the guy in the brown suit."

"Now you get outa here, Klump, before I lose my temper and get booked for homicide. There oughter be a law against you clucks wearing them Dick Racey badges! I'll write to my congressman about it."

WILLIE KLUMP went back to his office and brooded there until dark. Then he picked up his briefcase and departed. Willie felt as low and as much out of things as the St. Louis Browns as he got into his jalopy and drove away. He crabbed to the curb in front of a Budweiser *bistro* and got out of the coupé and went inside. Before he got through the door, two citizens in a hurry to get out, tangled with him and quite a to-do followed. Willie bumped heads with one of the tavern tipplers and they both went down.

"You clumsy creep!" a husky character yelled at Willie. "Why don't you get one of them seeing eyes, huh? An airedale to lead you or carry a tin-cup so's we'll know you're blind, you..."

"Now it was all an accident," Willie gulped. "I do not see any reason for getting mad."

"Slug him, Chips. Let him have it!"

Willie looked up and saw that it was a nice-looking doll who was trying to prod her escort to fisticuffs.

"Ah-h, nerts with him," the male character said and scrambled to his feet.

Willie looked around for his case, spotted it and made a grab at it. He saw the testy pair of customers trot out and get into a parked sedan at the curb.

"That is an awful big handbag she is carrying," Willie said. "I'm glad she did not slug me with it."

He got up and ordered a beer. He ordered four more beers. Willie felt better when he went out.

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency went over to the People's Fidelity & Trust the next morning. He loitered inside the lobby for an hour or two, asked the tellers if they would like a hot tip on a good thing at Hialeah.

A bank cop ran Willie out into the

street and Willie almost caused a panic on the avenue. A woman screeched, "Holdup" and fainted.

During the fuss, Willie got his coupé away from there and drove back to his office. There he sat down and mentally crossed the holdup and rubout of a bank messenger off his memo pad.

"I will see if something smaller won't turn up today," Willie sighed. "The mail will be in soon."

Ten minutes later the postman dropped a letter on Willie's desk. It was from Gertie Mudgett, his torch after a fashion, and Gertie had written that she would not be able to see Willie on Wednesday night. In fact she wondered what she had ever seen in him. Satchelfoot had told her about Willie and the fingerprints and she thought it was too silly a thing even for Willie to do and she was not going to get laughed at in public.

"That is dames for you," Willie sighed. "Well, I wish I could get in on that holdup case. Wonder what Satchelfoot knows. Ah-ha. I will go down to that tavern where Gertie likes to go and get into a booth where they don't see me. She always picks the same spot to sit in. I will eavesdrop. Satchelfoot is a loud-mouthed and bragger and he will talk to Gertie."

Willie glanced through the *Evening Times*, on the alert for news of criminal persons. One item caught his eye briefly. It said that the Gs were after a firm down on Pearl Street for evading the bee that Uncle Sam puts on citizens.

IT WAS a wholesale spice company and the paper had it that the partners, Knipp & Tucker, had held out on the Treasury. The head bookkeeper of the outfit was in the toils accused of destroying evidence.

Willie had no idea of cutting in on G-men and he turned the page and forgot about Knipp & Tucker. Latest dope on the rub-out of the bank messenger was that the police were hot on the trail of the criminals and would make an arrest shortly.

"The old oil," Willie said. "I bet they don't know anymore about the

outrage, than I do. I wish I could get a clue."

Willie ate in a restaurant on the way home to his rooming house. Willie had made a very discouraging discovery a few hours after he had been stuck for the hole in the wall. There was no electricity in his room. The landlady was still furnishing gas in the way of light and so Willie's electrical appliances were even worse than useless.

After a frugal meal, Willie went home and changed into his best serge. Then he hied to a tavern, made himself as inconspicuous as possible in a booth and waited. Sure enough, Satchelfoot Kelly and Gertie Mudgett trotted in a few seconds later. Satchelfoot was in a very bad mood as he settled down into the booth next to Gertie.

"Ain't that the way, sugar?" Kelly complained. "Just when I'm all set for a swell spree with you, they send me up to that little hick town upstate to pick up a guy who was trying to get across the border. They say he was working for a feller named Knipp and was taking something to him maybe.

"Here I was getting warm on that bank messenger murder and they cool me off like that. It seems that these two guys, Knipp & Tucker are on the spot with the Gs and they can't find either one right at this minute. Tame stuff, this income tax racket. Well, I gotta run, Gert."

"Aw, nerts! And here I give Willie a stand-off," Gertie said. "He was better than no boy friend. I'll give him a ring, Kelly. Don't take any wooden money, huh?"

Willie crouched closer to the wall, kept his face turned away from the dim light.

"Oh, I'm good enough now, am I? Well, I will show you what I think of fickle dames," Willie mumbled to himself. "Satchelfoot still has no leads on the bank stickup, ha-ha."

Willie went out of the tavern in a hurry after Satchelfoot had powdered and Gertie had hopped to a phone booth. He sauntered toward the East River, swinging his briefcase jauntily. Up to date the gendarmes, Wil-

lie mused, had been unable to locate the suspect in the bank messenger erasure so he had as much chance as taxpayer to snag Dutch Masters.

He picked up a newspaper on the way home and when he got to his furnished room he sat down and perused it diligently. Two headlines intrigued Willie. One said:

OSCAR CUPPY, KNIPP & TUCKER
BOOKKEEPER, DENIES GUILT

The other screamer was:

SLAYER OF BANK MESSENGER
STILL AT LARGE

THINGS began to happen the next afternoon. The late afternoon journals announced that Aloysius Kelly, New York detective, had been slugged in the men's washroom of the Utica Railroad station and had had his prisoner stolen from him. Willie Klump hurried down to the Grand Central and waited to see Satchelfoot come in. The flatfoot, his noggin wrapped in gauze, was ganged by galley slaves when he shuffled out through the gate. Satchelfoot unloaded in a hurry.

"Look, I pick up the guy and I grab his bag. In it is twenty grand worth of what he calls negoshable securities, see? He says he is Chester Gimp and works for Knipp & Tucker. I says to myself, 'I bet he is Knipp hisself,' but I won't be able to prove it until I get him to the big town. He's shaved off his mustache, I says. This Gimp says he wants to go to the washroom and I let him. We are in there when two guys come in and one conks me with a blackjack. When I come to, I have not got Gimp and my noggin feels like it is stuffed full of buckshot."

"Well, well," Willie grinned, "no wonder crime pays. Dishonest persons will be giving you a testimonial dinner yet, Satchelfoot. I can see they did not wish to knock out your brains so they hit you on the head."

"You shut up!" Kelly roared at Willie and a big crowd gathered in front of Track 41.

The cops chased everybody away, including Willie but the president of

the Hawkeye Detective Agency never felt better in his whole life.

"It is very puzzling to me, to say the least," Willie Klump said as he sat in his office. "Why would anyone want to kidnap Knipp even if it was Knipp in disguise? That firm must have been a very crooked one. I see they have let the bookkeeper go for lack of evidence, too. Well, it is Dutch Masters I am interested in. Why don't the G-men do their own work? Let's see now—the cops have grilled twenty suspects who wore brown pin-stripe suits but all were innocent. I can't see no clues no place, myself. Looks like a perfect crime."

Willie left his office quite late and when he reached the door of his furnished room, he wondered why his spine felt as if a trickle of very cold ice water was being poured the length of it. He turned the key in the lock, discovered that he had forgotten to lock his door. Or had he?

Willie stepped inside the room and looked around but not quick enough. Kerwhacko! Willie sighed and sank down on his knees. His mental machinery went a little haywire, began to cut a rug. After awhile the butterflies in his noggin stopped fluttering and Willie got to his feet and groped his way across the room. He lit the gas and then looked things over. The room looked as if two very big gorillas, man and wife, had been having a tiff in it.

The wardrobe was leaning against the window. Willie's mattress was ripped off the bedstead and tossed into the middle of the room. Willie's good blue serge had been tossed into a heap along with the rest of the stuff that he had arranged quite neatly in the closet. An old rag rug on the floor had been ripped up and thrown over the one chair in the humble cubicle.

"Burglar!" Willie sighed and kicked his briefcase out of his way as he staggered to the chair to sit down. "Why would they break and enter a joint like this? Why nobody with no brains would ever think I had dough!"

Willie called down the stairs to Mrs. Grabowski. The landlady trotted

up and wanted to know what was eating Willie.

"I was slugged. Somebody got into my room while I was out and he had a key! He tried to rob me. I thought you only had gentlemen here?"

"H-m-m-m. I thought it was you that come in awhile ago, Skrupp," the landlady said. "H-m-m. Your door was locked. Seems like a roomer did walk off with a key a couple of weeks ago. Couldn't remember what he looked like. I bet I've had forty roomers in this same room, Kump."

"Klump," Willie corrected. "I can believe that all right. Well, I am getting out of here when my week is up."

"You've stayed longer than anybody so far. Well, I got me own troubles. G'night, Slump."

Willie put his bed to rights and undressed and crawled into it. The pillow under his aching noodle did not act as a Balm of Gilead, it was that flat. Willie got up and got his briefcase and he slid it under the pillow.

Thirty-six hours later, Willie drove his coupé toward Broadway and who hailed him from the sidewalk but Satchelfoot Kelly. Willie pulled over to the curb and yelled:

"I never pick up hitchhikers, Satchelfoot. It is dangerous. Well, nice to see you."

"Nuts to you and that heap of iron. Read the papers when they hit the stands. I grabbed off Dutch Masters, Willie, ha-ha! He's in the hoosegow figuring out an alibi. My pitcher is going to be in all the papers. I guess I ain't a detective, huh?"

Willie groaned, started to nudge the coupé away from there. A cop came up alongside and wrote out a ticket.

"Driving along a one-way street the wrong way and illegal parking, Stupe!" he said. "See you in court."

WILLIE drove away wondering why everything bad had to happen to him. He could hear Satchelfoot laughing until he turned a corner. Willie drove home. When he got out of the jalopy in front of the

rooming house, a tall stoop shouldered character stopped him and asked him for a match.

"Nice day, buddy, huh?" the stranger said. "Say, I want to ask you a question. Er—I used to room in this roach palace an' I—well I hid something there and—you didn't find nothing any place in there, did you?"

"No," Willie said. "I—say was you in my room last night? I am a detective and good mind to arrest you. Why I bet—"

"Uh—I was mistaken, ha-ha. I thought you was a different guy and I guess I was thinking of another rooming house. No harm done, huh?"

The citizen took it on the lam and Willie slumped down on the brown-stone steps and pawed at his face.

"I must look around up there when I get to my room," Willie said. "That was a criminal person who has cached ill-gotten gains there some place and forgot where. Maybe he did a stretch in stir and his memory has left him."

Willie made an extensive search of his three-fifty per week room but found nothing. He even pried up loose boards in the closet but all he discovered was a rodent as big as a cat. Willie chased the rodent out through the window and then sat down again to wipe worry water off his face.

After awhile he changed into his best blue serge. Willie felt the need of nerve tonic that came out of a keg. He left the rooming house and strolled over to the tavern where he had had the unpleasant experience with a customer and his torch.

Willie Klump slid into a booth that was near the kitchen door of the grog shop. Willie imbibed for an hour or two and he felt much better. The newspaper in front of him had a picture of Dutch Masters on the front page and handcuffed to the dishonest citizen was Satchelfoot Kelly. The caption read:

SUSPECT IN MESSENGER SLAYING
AND CAPTOR

"Why didn't I get the clue?" Willie sighed. "I know I am as smart as Kelly. I couldn't be no dumber.

Well, something else will come along and I'll show them cops—"

Willie sighed again, got up and left the tavern. Walking toward the river he was needled by an uncomfortable feeling that he was being followed. Willie kept shooting quick glances over his shoulder and he quickened his step. He got to his room and locked the door behind him. Willie waited awhile, then opened the door and walked along the gloomy hall to the front of the house. He looked out a window. Across the street he saw a female character and she was jotting something down on a newspaper she carried.

"It is a doll," Willie gulped. "Maybe it is Gertie and—nope, her feet ain't as big as Gert's. I wish I could figger things out. First I am robbed and then I am followed by a dame. Maybe she is a pal of the character who asked me about the room."

Willie slept with one eye open that night. His eyes were bleary the next morning and his noggin felt as if it had been crammed full of cotton batting. He went out to a lunchroom and nibbled at sinkers and coffee.

HE LOOKED at a newspaper a customer had left on the counter and it said that the cops were having a very difficult time of it with Dutch Masters. The criminal character had an alibi as tight as a Dundee miser and he dared the cops to try and hold him in the klink. Dutch, the type said, was threatening to sue for false arrest. A doll would prove he was in Jersey City at the time of the rub-out of the bank legman.

The day dragged. At noon Willie got the word that Dutch Masters had been put back into circulation. The cops were as stalemated as a couple who have been married ninety-nine years. But Willie felt a lot better now that Satchelfoot had laid an egg. Willie went home to his room and read a mystery story. Night moved in and Willie got up to light the gas. His fingers were on the little dingus that turns the illuminating vapor on when a knock sounded on the door.

"Who is it?" Willie called out.

"An old pal, Klump."

Willie crossed the room and opened the door a crack. A big foot was shoved between the door and the casing. Then the door was pushed inward and Willie saw a big citizen holding a very large toy cannon in his right fist.

"Not a word from ya, pal! Good, no light, huh?"

"You get out right this inst—" Willie forced out.

"Awright, can the chatter, wise guy. Sit down on the bed. You holler loud and you get it in the bread basket, see?"

"Y-yeah."

"Now let's get down to business, pal. Maybe you ain't got a good memory, huh? A few nights back me and my canary tangled with you in that tavern over on Fifty-ninth. Remember?"

"Sure," Willie said. "You're the guy who—"

"Nice going. Now listen, I don't want to hurt you, pal. But what did you do with the sixty grand, huh?"

"What!"

"Oh, acting surprised, huh? I figured you would. But this roscoe'll make you open up. Now look, Mister. When we got tangled up that night, my dame was carrying a briefcase and so was you. They got mixed up in the brawl and you got the dame's and she got yours, see? Now, all I want is only what belongs to us. That's fair enough, huh, pal?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Willie squeaked.

"Okay, I gotta git rough. Look, I did a kidnaping on account of that briefcase, pal. That's bad, ain't it? I slugged a dick up in Utica to grab the guy I thought had the sixty grand. They say his name is Knipp. Well, I found what Knipp was carrying and it wasn't my sixty grand like I thought.

"Now why did I snatch Knipp? Because what I found in the briefcase I got by mistake was stuff with Knipp's name on it and figured then that it was Knipp what tangled with us that night. But I was wrong, pal. It was you. How did you get that stuff I found in the briefcase you was toting that night?"

WILLIE wanted to faint but his brain was in too much of a spin to think of anything but briefcases.

"I-I-I d-don't get it," he gulped.

"Huh, I hate to mess this place up but I see I've got to. I made a deal with Knipp—that's why I contacted him—snatched him from the flatfoot up in Utica but I see Knipp was the wrong guy. I wished to h— and back I'd never bought that case at that sale for one thirty-nine. I bet everybody and his grandmother bought them, huh? But let's get back to business. I had my cookie tail you last night. I put her in the tavern to see if you would show up there again. Well you did. Now come on, palsy walsy, and hand over the briefcase like a nice mans."

Willie Klump felt his heart jump up and play post office with his palate. Suddenly things started to clear up in his muddled noggin. Slowly, but surely. Ice cubes formed on Willie's spine.

"I offered Knipp a fair swap," the visitor to Willie's room said. "Dope on the juggling of the books at Knipp and Tuckers for the sixty grand but Knipp told me I was mistaken. He couldn't figure out how I got the stuff the Gs would give their right arms for. Quite a mix-up, huh Pal?"

Willie gulped. Sixty grand! The amount taken from the messenger of the People's Fidelity & Trust. The assassin right in this room with Willie Klump. Willie could hear harps getting tuned up. The smell of formaldehyde was heavy in his nostrils. The briefcase over there under his blue serge coat across the room!

The air smelled pretty heavy in the room and Willie felt groggy. The stuff he had crammed into his briefcase just for props! The stuff he had found under the wardrobe the night he had moved in. Figures on ruled yellow sheets!

Oh, everything was getting plain to Willie and the revelation was knocking his teeth together. For three days Willie had been carrying the sixty thousand taken from a rubbed-out messenger! Why didn't he faint?

"Okay, pal. Time's up. Hand over the briefcase. You've got it hid. Now this watch says nine-seven. By nine-fifteen you will be a dead pigeon, pal, as I am desperate and my canary is waiting over at the tavern. Say, do you smell anything?"

"Lilies," Willie gulped.

Willie's scalp lifted. He thought of something.

"All right," he said. "I will hand over the stuff, p-p-pal. H-Have a cigarette, huh? I know w-when I-I-I'm licked."

He walked toward the bed that was pushed up against the one window in the room. The window was only open a crack. It occurred to Willie that he was a gone goose even if he did turn over the briefcase, for the tough boy with the roscoe would never let a citizen live who shared knowledge with him about the sixty grand. Willie, scared almost out of his skivvies, was sure that no one would ever see Mr. Knipp again if that was who he was outside of a morgue. He glanced over his shoulder and he saw his visitor who sat under the gas jet, rip a match off a paper holder and strike it. Just as the match flared the rough person barked:

"Say, I smell. There's—!"

Boo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om!

Willie had Eleanor Holmed under the bed just as the escaping gas was ignited. When he came out from under it again, the criminal citizen was hopping up and down and yelling bloody murder and his clothes were hanging from him in long strips. Half of the hair on his scalp was burned off and parts of his bare torso were exposed. Willie snatched up the roscoe and yelled:

"Don't you make a move or I'll shoot! Ha-a-a-a-a-a-ah!"

MR. GRABOWSKI hot-footed it up from below and she wanted to know the reason for everything.

"Call the police!" Willie yipped. "Tell them I have got the murderer of the bank messenger and the dope on Knipp & Tucker. Ha-ha, it was a good thing I forgot I left the gas on. Don't just stand there—!"

"You will leave this house tomor-

row, Mr. Skump! You might have burned us all up or aspixed all of us, you—"

"Call the police, will ya?" Willie screeched, "before I faint and then he will escape."

"Where's the bathtub?" yelled the rough citizen. "I'm going to burn up. Turn on some water somebody!"

"You move a bullet and I'll put a muscle th-through y-you!" Willie said.

In due time two carloads of *gendarmes* came over to Forty-fifth and swarmed up to the top floor of the rooming house. Satchelfoot Kelly looked at Willie and snorted loudly.

"Kidding us, huh? You show us proof that this is the guy!"

Willie tossed a big cop the briefcase he took from under a blue serge coat.

"Look in it. I guess you will find—er—I hope—"

Satchelfoot opened up the leather portfolio, looked inside.

"Yeah. It's filthy with dough."

Willie slumped down in a chair and grinned at the cops.

"Arrest the bookkeeper who worked for Knipp & Tucker. He tore out the pages of their books and hid them in this room. Ask him why. Make this crook tell you where they are now, those pages out of the books. He had them as he told me. He—"

"Sa-a-a-a-y!" a big flatfoot cried, "this mug is Chips Chutney. He's wanted in Illinois for—why Klump, how did you ever—?"

"I wish I knew," Willie said weakly. "Why, what do you mean? Are you incinerating? Why, I had him tagged for a couple of days. It was a sale of briefcases at one thirty-nine, I guess. All the time I had the sixty grand and—well, it's goodby, huh, Mr. Chips?"

"Somebody git me to a croaker," Chips groaned. "Can't you see I'm half fried? Ain't none of you got no hearts?"

"We will have you well-done all over soon, Chips," Willie said. "The rotisserie up the Hudson is waiting. You better grab his canary, too, fellers."

Willie was still trying to explain

everything to the cops downtown the next morning. The bookkeeper of Knipp & Tucker, Inc., helped out a lot. He told Willie that he was the character who had upset his room and had slugged Willie. He had lifted the sheets out of the books of the spice firm when he had heard rumors that the Gs were going to put the heat on his bosses. He saw a nice way to start a blackmailing racket. He had hired the room over on Forty-fifth just long enough to stash the records and had put them under the wardrobe where nobody would think of looking for them. The landlady, he said, never cleaned under it anyway.

"Yeah," Willie said, "now listen good. I'll go over it once more. The briefcase I bought for show and I found them ledger sheets under the wardrobe because I was trying to hide my cooking things under it. I just put them papers in the case to make it look like it had lots of important papers in it. Then I got jostled by Chips and his moll and she picked up the wrong briefcase in the tavern as it looked just like the one I purchased as it come from the same sale. I thought she was carrying a handbag that night. Ha-ha!"

SATCHELFOOT KELLY moaned and dropped his head in his hands.

"Now when Chips opened up that case in his hideout, he found the Knipp & Tucker book sheets instead of the sixty grand. You see I had the sixty grand all the time. Imagine! So Chips says right then and there, 'Here is Knipp's books without covers. So he must have my sixty grand.' So he finds out they have a citizen supposed to be Knipp held by the cops upstate and he follows Satchelfoot who went to pick up Knipp.

"He kidnaps Knipp and gives him the lowdown but Knipp didn't have the sixty grand, so that was out. So Chips and the doll get together and say to each other, 'we will watch for the citizen who bumped into us back there in the tavern in the big town. Why this Knipp don't look like him anyway, does he?'"

"I can't stand much more of this," Satchelfoot groaned and swallowed two aspirins.

"The doll spots me in the taverns as I go there a lot," Willie went on. "She tags me to the rooming house and then she goes back to where Chips is hiding and gives him the dope. Chips called last evening, you remember? Now this Cuppy who keeps books for Knipp & Tucker went after his evidence when the cops let him loose after questioning and he slugged me that night when I walked in on him. Cuppy was let go because they couldn't find where he hid the books without the covers as they went to where he lived permanently. But Cuppy had stowed the stuff in that room I rented as he knew they would look first thing in the place he stayed all the time. Am I going too fast for any of you?"

Satchelfoot Kelly got up and staggered out of Headquarters. Satchelfoot said he was going out somewhere in the country where it was quiet. It was the only place where he had a chance to figure it all out.

"So Cuppy came to get the sheets as they would be worth a lot of sugar to him as he could blackmail Knipp & Tucker or make a cash deal with the D. A. Poor Knipp, I bet, is rubbed out right now. He was just trying to get over the border with some neg—neg—what did you call them, Satchelfoot? Oh, he isn't here, is he?"

"It was that briefcase I purchased. It was some bargain at one thirty-nine. If I had not bumped into Chips and his cookie in the tavern—I would have caught him some other way. I work alone and don't make much noise about anything. Is there a reward out for the assassin who bumped off the messenger? I bet the G-men will thank me for helping them get the goods on Knipp & Tucker, too. Two birds with one stone, huh?"

The Police Commissioner looked at Willie Klump and put the wrong end of his cigar in his mouth. The D. A. shook his head and reached for his hat and stick. "I—er—am going home for awhile. If I wake up there and

find I've been dreaming all this, you guys keep on the hop for the murderer of that bank messenger. We've got to grab that man. The papers are on our necks and—good-afternoon, gentlemen. You can reach me at my house in Westches—"

A big cop came in and said Chips was yelling for a mouthpiece.

"He wants to bet us a grand he don't fry."

"That reminds me," Willie said. "Has somebody got a newspaper? I must get me a room next time with electricity in it."

The papers carried pictures of Willie Klump again. Willie was the man of the hour. Satchelfoot Kelly made the front page too. *Gendarmes* grabbed Satchelfoot just as he was about to do a Brodie off the Queensboro Bridge. Satchelfoot was put away a few hours for observation. When they let Satchelfoot out, he assaulted a man on lower Broadway because the citizen was carrying a

briefcase. They locked Kelly up again.

Willie went down to his office, talked with reporters there and finally got rid of them.

An hour later Gertie Mudgett called to see Willie. Gertie said, "Oh-h-h-h, Willie, you're wonderful!"

"Please state your business, Madam," Willie sniffed. "This is a business office. I have no time to dilly-dally away with historical women. Here is my card, Madam."

"An' here is mine, you swell-head!" Gertie yelped and swung on Willie. Once—twice—three times. Two hours later an extra hit the street. It said:

KILLER'S PALS ATTACK

DETECTIVE KLUMP

CHUTNEY'S CAPTOR VICTIM OF REPRISAL FROM UNDERWORLD — HAS GOOD CHANCE OF RECOVERY—KLUMP UNABLE TO REMEMBER ASSAILANTS

FEDERAL MEN CRACK DOWN ON A BAFFLING ALIEN SMUGGLING CASE

in

THE TOUGHER THEY ARE

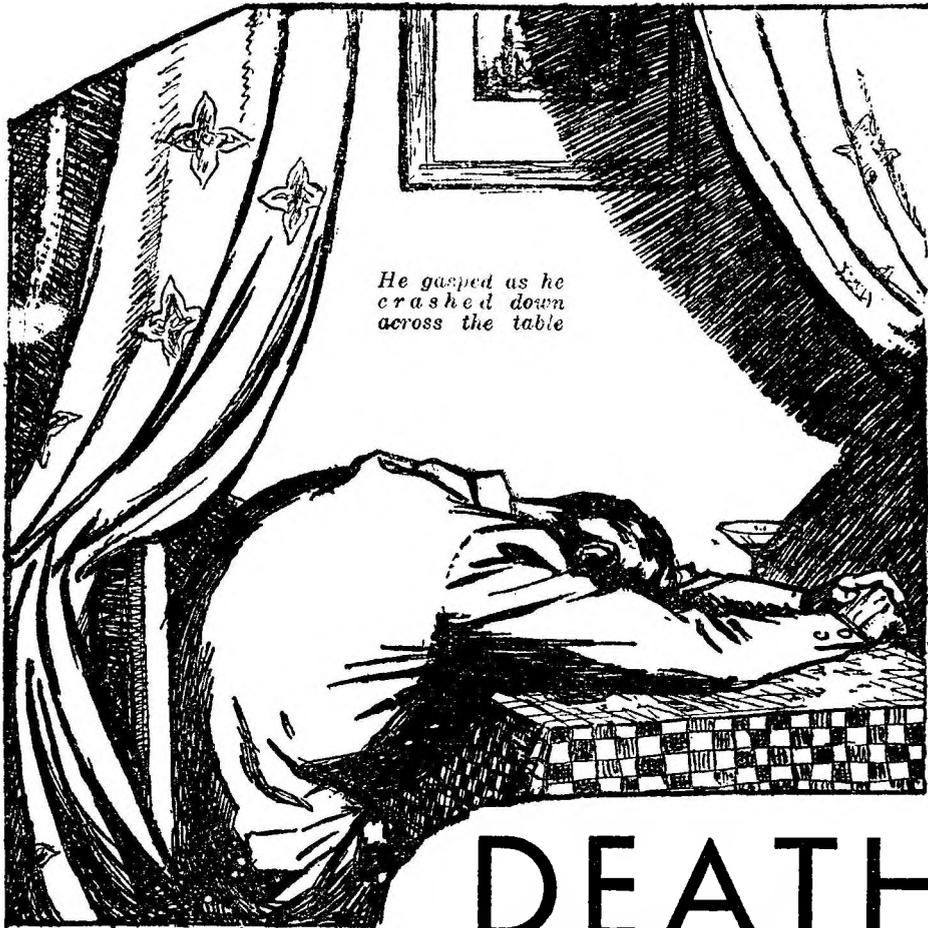
An Exciting Complete G-Man Novelet

By G. WAYMAN JONES

NEXT ISSUE



Murder Stalks a Deserted Shore as Bill



DEATH

CHAPTER I

DEAD MAN IN A BOAT

FROM the moment I dropped off the train at the little whistle stop along the New Jersey coast I was sorry I'd decided to make the trip. When the guy in the station told me it's two miles straight south along the beach to John Bryant's house and that there was no

*A Complete Novelet
of the
Disappearing Dead*

way of getting there but walking that didn't make me very happy either.

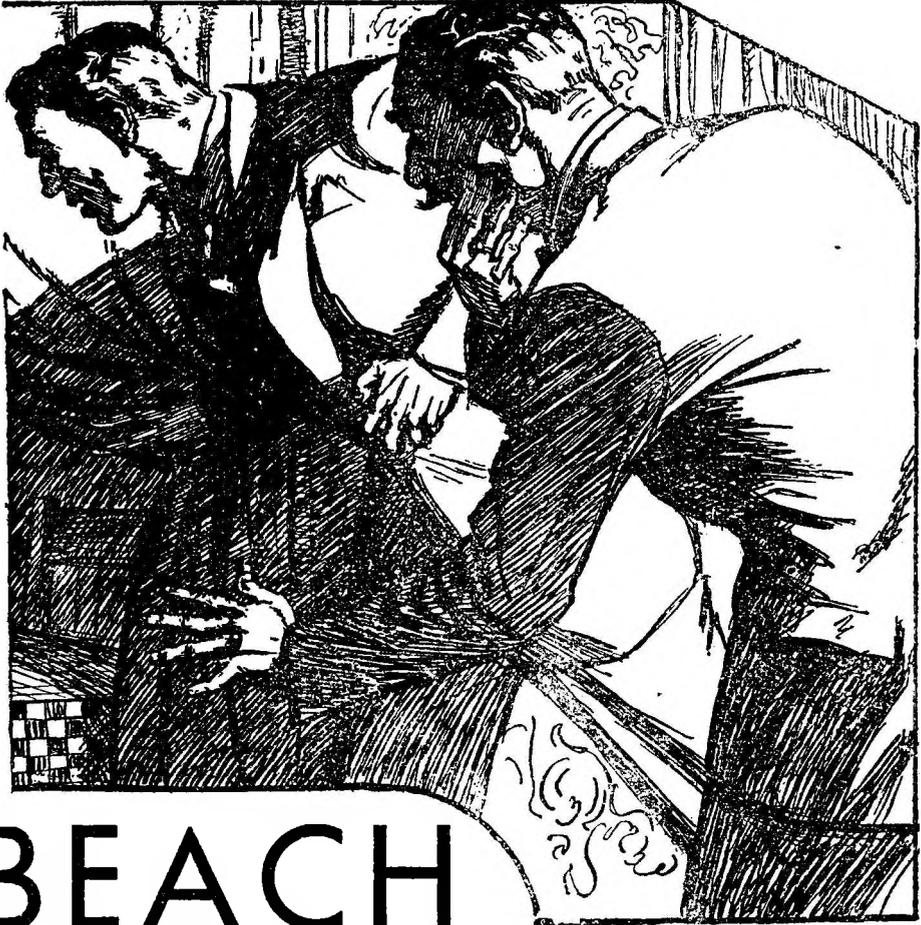
"How about a taxi?" I asked the station agent.

"Be nice if there was one," he said, "but there ain't."

He chuckled and disappeared inside his office, closing the door after him. There wasn't any point in standing there arguing with him through the door. I'd run into wise guys like that before. Just a riot with the men sitting out in front of the firehouse on a Saturday afternoon.

I'm Bill Norton, first grade detective, Homicide detail, New York City. Yesterday, which was the second day

Norton Answers a Corpse's Call for Help!



BEACH

of my two weeks vacation, I got a telegram from John Bryant.

We've been friends for years, though Bryant must be about sixty and I'm still in my thirties. I hadn't seen him for three years. He'd bought a house and moved out here on the Jersey coast. Since then I'd heard he'd become kind of a hermit. He was plenty rich and retired so if he wanted to pull a recluse act that was his business.

But the wire I'd received from him sounded like he was in trouble and needed my help, so I decided I'd take a run out to his place and see what was bothering him.

I picked up my bag and stepped out of the station into the mist and

damp of the foggy night. I didn't like the idea of plodding through the mist for two miles, but since I'd come this far I decided I might as well go the rest of the way and try to get to Bryant's place as soon as possible.

The sand was soft and wet under my feet. To my left I could hear the sea roaring somberly in the distance,

By
**DONALD BAYNE
HOBART**

*Author of "Cab for a Corpse,"
"Suicides Are Saps," etc.*

the wind blew the fog against my face and I couldn't see more than a few feet ahead of me.

I GUESS I'd gone about half a mile when suddenly a gaunt gray figure loomed eerily out of the mist ahead of me. It was a man with wild, glaring eyes and a pasty face that looked as if it had been made of damp ashes.

"Back!" he said. "Those you seek are dead!"

"Maybe I'm not going to the right address," I said. "Who the devil are you?"

"My name doesn't matter." He still acted as if he wanted to play ghosts. "You're on your way to John Bryant's house?"

"I am!" My tone was hard. I didn't like this gray-headed guy. "Any objections?"

"I don't think you'll enjoy your visit." His tone was sinister. "It is a house of death!"

"Then you're one of Bryant's guests?" I asked.

"Yes." The gray-haired man nodded. "The guest of honor in a house of death!" He laughed like a movie actor in a vampire role.

Maybe I was supposed to be all quivering with terror or something, but the guy sounded nuts to me. I guess he saw that the act was not going over as big as he had expected, for his manner changed and he spoke quietly.

"You asked my name a moment ago," he said. "It's Ash."

"Delighted," I told him. "Fancy meeting you here. My name is Norton, and if you don't mind I'll be on my way."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind after you see the boat," said Ash.

"What boat?" I asked.

"It's over there." Ash waved his arm vaguely toward the sea. "Follow me."

He turned and started away, a dim figure moving through the fog. I followed close behind him. The mist that blew against my face was dank and cold.

Finally I saw a boat looming ahead. It was a big coast guard lifeboat

drawn up on the beach just beyond the reach of the tide. I grew tense as I saw a figure sitting in the stern of the craft. A white face was a pale blur in the darkness and there was something strange about the guy who sat there.

I dropped my bag and drew out a pocket flashlight. The rays of the electric torch stabbed through the fog, the white circle of light lingering on the figure in the boat. It was a stout, middle-aged man, his face distorted into a ghastly grimace, his sightless eyes staring into the mist.

"He's dead!" I snapped.

"Of course!" said Ash. "They all will be soon!"

I merely grunted. Ash still sounded goofy to me. I leaned over to examine the corpse. There was a rawhide thong around the dead man's neck that had been drawn so tight it dug deeply into the flesh.

"This is murder!" I growled. "And you—"

I whirled abruptly, the flashlight still gleaming in my hand. I caught a glimpse of Ash plunging toward me, a vicious-looking knife in his hand.

I leaped to one side, but I was not quite quick enough. The keen blade ripped the sleeve of my topcoat, scraped my wrist, then clattered against the flashlight, knocking it from my hand.

MY right fist shot out, slid along the side of Ash's face as the gray-haired man ducked his head. I stepped in closer. My left hand caught the wrist that held the knife and twisted ruthlessly, my right smacked against Ash's chin. He uttered a curse that was half a cry of pain and the knife dropped to the sand.

"So you want to play rough," I muttered.

Ash smashed a fist against my chest that jarred me, but I was bigger and tougher than he was by a good bit. Again I swung. Ash ducked and my fist slid over his shoulder.

We closed in, fighting grimly and silently. The gray-haired guy's strength was remarkable for a man of his size. I'm a big guy but I found

I had my hands full. I felt as though I was being squeezed by swiftly tightening bands of steel as Ash caught me by the throat with both hands.

I sent blow after blow pounding into his body as I struggled to release myself. Finally I succeeded in jerking my head away and freeing myself from the clutch of those fingers. Both of my fists thudded into his face, one after the other. Ash staggered, and released his grip on my throat, but again he lunged forward.

My right landed with all of my one hundred and eighty pounds behind the blow. It was the final sock that did the trick. Ash crumpled, then dropped to the sand unconscious.

I found the flashlight and searched him. The knife was his only weapon and there was nothing in his pockets which identified him.

I stepped back, the torch casting a round circle of light on the damp sand. Something snapped beneath my right foot and I reached down and picked it up. It was a brown lead pencil. I glanced at it and then dropped it into my inside coat pocket.

I whirled as I heard a slight sound behind me. A big, broad-shouldered guy came closer, carrying a lantern in his hand.

"What's going on here?" he demanded as he saw Ash lying on the sand.

"Who are you?" I asked, longing for the automatic that I had in my bag. Then as I recognized the uniform of the big guy a wave of relief swept over me.

"Oh, coast guard, eh?" I said.

"Right! I'm Matt Gregory. Been patrolling this stretch of beach. What the—" He had suddenly discovered the corpse in the lifeboat and he went closer. "Say, this guy is dead!"

"Murdered," I told him. "And this man"—I waved an arm toward the still unconscious Ash—"must have killed him. Anyway he tried to get me with a knife when I saw the murdered man and started to ask questions."

"All right." Gregory swung around and raised his lantern so he could see my face. "Let's hear your story."

I told him my name, who I was, and

about being on my way to Bryant's house and meeting Ash on the beach and what had followed.

"Sounds like this Ash guy is crazy," said Gregory when I finished. The coast guardsman examined the motionless man. "You sure socked him—he's still out. You think he killed the feller in the boat?"

"I believe so, but I'm not sure of it," I said. "But he's dangerous."

"Yeah, he sounds like it. I'll take him to the coast guard station for the night and turn him over to the police in the morning."

"Good idea," I said. "I'll—"

I BROKE off abruptly as I heard the sharp crack of a gun from somewhere close by. A bullet thudded into the bow of the lifeboat. Instinctively I dropped the blazing electric torch. It made me too good a target. I didn't think of just switching off the light.

"Duck!" snapped Gregory. "Get behind the boat—quick!"

The coast guardsman dropped the lantern, it landed upright on the wet sand, still burning. I beat him to it in getting around in back of the lifeboat, and I had picked up my bag. Gregory drew out a heavy Colt .45.

Again there was a roar from the gun of the guy who was hidden by the fog.

The lantern went out as a bullet shattered the glass.

"No sense to that," murmured Gregory. "As long as he left the lantern burning he had more chance of spotting us."

I didn't say anything. I was getting my automatic out of the bag as fast as possible.

Gregory sent two slugs from his .45 plowing through the fog.

"See anything?" I asked.

"Nope," he said. "Just wanted him to know he hasn't the only gun on the beach."

For fully ten minutes we waited, but nothing happened. There were no more shots from our unknown foe. No sound save the roaring of the sea in the distance. The fog was a white mist all around us.

"Looks like the party's over," said

Gregory finally. "Guess he beat it. I don't get the idea."

"I do," I told him. "He wasn't trying to get us with those shots. It was just the old army game."

"A barrage, eh?" Matt Gregory wasn't dumb. "What for?"

"To give Ash a chance to get away," I said. "Let's take a look."

I found that I was right. Ash was gone. He had made his getaway while the other man had kept us busy, just as I suspected. I looked for my flashlight, but couldn't find it.

"Look!" said Gregory sharply. "There's a light over there!"

We both peered at a faint light looming dimly through the mist. The heavy Colt in the coast guardsman's hand roared. The light didn't move.

"Come on!" I snapped.

We ran toward the light, guns ready in our hands. I cursed when we reached it, for it was my own flashlight lying in the sand. Ash had taken it when he escaped and then deliberately left it switched on where it would attract our attention.

I grabbed up the flashlight, then swung around and started running back toward the lifeboat.

"Hey!" shouted Gregory, as he pounded after me. "What's the idea?"

I didn't answer. I paused when I again reached the boat and the beam of my electric torch swept the craft from bow to stern. The body of the stout man had disappeared.

"Thought so," I said quietly. "Somebody on this beach tonight is pretty smart."

"I don't get you?" Gregory spoke in a puzzled tone.

"You've got to produce the body before you can prove a murder," I said.

MATT GREGORY uttered a string of profanity that was so colorful that I stood listening in silent admiration.

"And I've got to go back to the station and report this," he finished in a mournful tone. "I can just see the skipper when I tell him what's happened. 'Gregory,' he'll say, 'what in the ringtailed blue blazes is the idea of drinking on duty?'" The coast

guardsman sighed. "He won't believe a word of it. Listen, Norton, you've got to go to the station with me."

"Can't be done," I said. "I told you that Bryant sent for me. The sooner I get to his place the better. I'm afraid he's really in danger, after all this."

"Maybe I'd better go to the house with you," said Gregory, "even though the coast guard has orders to keep away from the place. But I should report back to the station right away."

"You go ahead and report," I said quickly. "I've got a gun and can take care of myself. If there's anything wrong at Bryant's I'll try and get to the coast guard station before morning."

"Right!" said Gregory. "And if you don't show up by then I'll come looking for you."

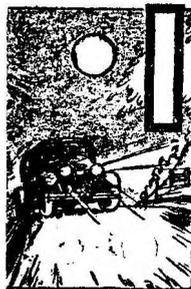
"Do that—and thanks, Matt."

"Forget it, Bill."

The coast guardsman's words floated back to me as he turned and walked away to disappear into the fog. I dropped the flashlight and gun into the side pockets of my topcoat, picked up my bag, and headed down the beach in a hurry.

CHAPTER II

THREE VICTIMS GONE



KEPT on along the beach, guiding myself through the mist by always keeping the sound of the sea on my left. I carried my bag in my left hand while the right clutched the automatic in the side pocket of my topcoat.

There was a murderer somewhere on this isolated beach, perhaps two of them, and I was ready for trouble.

It seemed that I had been plodding along for hours before I finally reached John Bryant's place. And then as the big rambling white house loomed dimly through the mist I saw that the windows were dark. An air of bleak desertion hung over the

structure, yet I was sure there must be someone still in the house or Ash would not have tried to stop me from reaching it.

"A house of death, Ash called it," I said aloud. "Hope he wasn't right!"

When I climbed the steps of the porch it was with a feeling of relief that I discovered a faint light gleaming through the crack of a closely drawn blind at one of the windows on the lower floor. I lifted the heavy brass knocker on the front door. Twice I let it drop with a loud clang, but there was no response. I waited and then banged the knocker again, louder and more insistently.

The fog that blew about me was cold and clammy, and I was chilly and uncomfortable. I lifted my hand and the knocker clanged again.

This time it brought results. The door opened slowly. I stood watching it tensely, my fingers again clutching my automatic.

A face peered around the edge of the door. Cold blue eyes gazed at me from beneath shaggy black brows, a dim light gleamed down on a shock of heavy gray hair.

"Good evening, Malone," I said, as I recognized Bryant's sullen old servant. "Is Mr. Bryant at home?"

Malone growled something and started to shut the door in my face. I stopped him and stepped inside. The servant closed and locked the door. A heavy bolt rasped as he shoved it into place.

I glanced about the dimly lighted hall. On my left was a closed door. To my right, a circular staircase wound to the floor above. Beyond, the hall was filled with shadows, gloomy splotches of black that extended toward the rear of the house.

"You must remember me, Malone." I removed my hat and turned to the stocky old Irishman. "I'm Bill Norton, an old friend of Mr. Bryant's. He's expecting me. Please tell him I'm here."

Malone did not speak. He just stood there glaring at me. I looked right back at him, my eyes hard. Finally he dropped his gaze and bowed.

"Yes, I remember you, Mr. Norton," he said quietly, "though I

haven't seen you since Mr. Bryant bought this house and moved here two years ago."

"What's wrong here, Malone?" I asked.

"Nothing, sir." Malone's tone was coldly polite. "May I take your hat and coat?"

I took off my hat and coat, after first removing the automatic and sticking it into a back pocket of my trousers. Malone watched me impassively. He took my hat and coat and placed them in a hall closet. Then he went to the door opposite the stairs and drew it open.

"Mr. Bryant will be sorry to have missed you," he said softly.

I GLANCED at him, puzzled by his words, and then walked to the door he had opened. An eerie sensation swept over me as I gazed into the room beyond.

In front of an unlighted fireplace stood an ornate black and silver casket resting on velvet draped supports, that held the coffin about four feet from the floor. Tall white candles burned at the head and the foot of the bier, four of them that cast a wan yellow glow over the room.

I shuddered as I saw the white face of John Bryant rigid in the immobility of death. I went closer and reached out a hand to touch the cheek of the elderly retired banker who had been my friend, in a farewell gesture. At its iciness I hastily and unconsciously drew my hand back.

I glanced over my shoulder, peering through the dimly lighted room. Malone was standing in the doorway, his face expressionless in the flickering glow of the candles. The house was very still.

Outside I could faintly hear the wailing of the wind.

I again turned my gaze to the coffin. I felt terrible. I had seen a lot of dead people in my years of police work, but this was different. John Bryant had been my friend.

Vaguely I wondered how they had been able to secure the ornate casket for him so quickly. He obviously had not been dead more than a few hours. He couldn't have been, for I had heard

from him, alive, only such a short time before.

"He sent for me," I said softly. "And I got here too late."

The words of his telegram lingered in my mind.

NEED YOUR HELP STOP SITUATION HERE MAY PROVE DANGEROUS STOP COME AT ONCE

He had wired me, and I had arrived too late to help him.

A gray cloth had been drawn up over the corpse so that only Bryant's head was visible. I drew back the cloth, anxious to learn how he had died, though from instinct alone there was no doubt in my mind that he had been murdered. The wire, what had happened on the beach, all pointed to that being the case.

I scowled as I saw a dark stain of dried blood on Bryant's white shirt directly over his heart. He had obviously been stabbed, there was a tear in the shirt that revealed the wound. The odd part was that he should be prepared for burial in the same shirt. Why such haste? But he was, and I touched the spot on the shirt and found it was partially dried blood.

My fingers felt sticky and without thinking I rubbed them on the gray cloth which lined the sides of the casket. As I did so, my eyes narrowed and I looked thoughtfully at my hand.

"This is murder!" I snapped, without turning. "I want to know why it was done and who did it!"

"I'll tell you."

I swung around as I heard the strange voice. A slender blond man swayed slightly as he stood in the doorway. His face was white and there was a wild expression on his eyes. Malone had disappeared.

"Tell me!" I snapped. "Who killed him and why?"

"It was because of the diamonds—"

THE blond man's voice died away in a ghastly gurgle as he sprawled face downward on the floor.

I stood gazing at the blood spreading around the blade of the knife that projected from the tweed-clad back of the still form. For an instant I remained motionless, then I leaped for-

ward and knelt beside him. A swift examination told me that the man was dead. He had been dying as he stood there in the doorway.

"Three of them," I muttered. "The man in the lifeboat, then Bryant and now this poor devil." A wave of grim rage swept over me. "Somebody around here is going to talk and talk plenty!"

I got swiftly to my feet, and placed the automatic in the right-hand side pocket of my coat where I could get at it easily. I walked grimly to the door, my eyes hard.

"Malone!" I called loudly. "Malone!"

From the hall there came the sound of rapid footsteps and an instant later the old servant appeared in the doorway. A startled expression passed over his face as he saw the body on the floor.

"It's Mr. Stanton!" he exclaimed. "Is he dead, sir?"

"Yes," I snapped. "Murdered just as Bryant was, with a knife. You were out in the hall a few moments ago, Malone. What do you know about this?"

"Nothing, sir." Malone's face was again expressionless, but he looked about him anxiously, and I was conscious of the sinister atmosphere that brooded over this old house. "I felt that you would like to be alone with Mr. Bryant, so I retired to the kitchen."

"That's what you say!" I reached out and grabbed him roughly by the arm. "Damn it, Malone, stop stalling! You've been Bryant's servant for years. He's told me of your loyalty. If you know who murdered him and this other man—say so!"

"That's just the trouble, sir," said Malone gently, withdrawing from me. "I don't know—and so perhaps it is wise for me to say nothing."

Again he looked about him anxiously as we stood just inside the door of the room.

"Who else is there in the house?" I demanded.

"I am, for one," said a suave voice from the hall.

A tall, dark-haired man was standing in the doorway. There was some-

thing much too smooth about his face with its tiny black mustache, and the lips beneath it were thin and cruel. I'd seen guys like this before, and they were usually tied up with some crooked racket.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am one of Mr. Bryant's guests," said the man in the doorway. "Guido Anaton is my name. And you?"

"Bill Norton," I told him. "From Police Headquarters." I didn't say New York. This was New Jersey and I really didn't have any authority in this state. "Who murdered Bryant and Stanton?"

"I don't know," said Anaton dryly. "Perhaps that is fortunate. If I did I would probably be the next victim."

"Outside," I said, motioning Malone and Guido through the door.

Silently they obeyed. The key was sticking in the lock, so I locked the door from the outside and dropped the key into my pocket. I wasn't taking any chances of Bryant's and Stanton's bodies disappearing as had that one in the lifeboat on the beach. Besides, there were things I wanted to investigate in that locked room when I got the chance.

"ALL right, Malone," I said. "That will be all now. I'll talk to you later, but don't leave the house."

"Naturally not, sir." The old servant's expression did not change. "Hardly a night for wandering about, if I may say so."

I just glared at him as he hurried back along the hall and disappeared. Finally I turned to Anaton who stood patiently waiting for me to speak.

"What do you know about all this?" I asked.

"Perhaps we'd better find a place where we can talk privately," said Anaton. He walked back along the hall and I followed. "In here." He drew open a door and touched a light switch. "I think this will do nicely."

"Fine." I saw we were in what apparently had been Bryant's den. I closed the door and dropped into a chair as Anaton seated himself. "Now tell me what happened."

Guido Anaton started talking

suavely, in a voice like thick oil, and I still did not like him.

He told me that he was one of seven guests who had been invited to the house by Bryant's niece.

"His niece?" I interrupted. "Didn't know Bryant had one."

"Thelma Dean is her name," said Anaton. "She's up in her room. The shock and all, you know."

"I'll talk to her later," I said. "Go on."

He related how the seven guests had arrived at the house the day before yesterday.

Jack Stanton, the man who had just been knifed, had been one of them invited here.

They had found Bryant in a rather morbid mood, and he had shown them his coffin, stating that he was growing old, and was sure that he did not have long to live so he wanted to be buried in a casket he had selected himself.

"Get to the murder," I said finally. "How did it happen?"

CHAPTER III HOUSE GUESTS



ANATON explained that this evening they had had dinner about seven in the evening. Malone was both cook and butler; in fact, the only servant in the house.

After dinner Anaton said that he had gone up to his room to write a letter. Half an hour later he came downstairs, having told Bryant that he would play checkers with him. Anaton had entered the den and found Bryant sitting in his chair, murdered, a knife in his heart. That had been about eight-thirty, and it was after ten now.

I questioned him and he said that none of the other guests had been around at the time. He told me that he had called Arthur Hutton, who was Bryant's secretary. There was no phone in the house, so Hutton had gone for the local police. He had not

as yet returned, though he had been gone for some time.

"What did Hutton look like?" I asked.

"He's rather stout and bald."

"I see."

Hutton would never return with the local police. I was willing to bet on that, for from the description of him he was the corpse that had been in the lifeboat on the beach.

I decided that I wasn't going to say anything about what had happened on the beach until I'd talked to the rest of the people in the house. Not being simple-minded, I didn't see any sense in letting them know I was working alone on this thing. I didn't want to be the fourth corpse.

I hadn't forgotten what Stanton had said about Bryant having been killed because of "the diamonds," but I decided to keep quiet about that angle for the time being. I was pretty sure that Stanton had been killed because he knew too much about something.

"Let's go talk to the other guests," I said, when I found that Anaton had apparently told me all that he intended. "I want to learn all I can, of course."

"All right." Anaton got to his feet. "I forgot to mention," he said, "that when I found Bryant he was in his chair in the den, as I said, but later I discovered someone had placed him in his coffin in the other room."

"Thoughtful of them," I said ironically, but that explained several things to me, including why Bryant's shirt had not been changed.

As we walked back along the hall Anaton explained that on the north side of the lower hall there was only Bryant's den and the room where the bodies were. Opposite were the library, pantry and kitchen. A living room ran across the back.

"You seem to know the house very well," I said.

"I should," said Anaton. "I built the place ten years ago. It's not as old as it looks."

I said nothing, but this tall guy puzzled me. He was too frank and agreeable. I was sure that he was putting on an act for some reason.

"Here we are." Guido Anaton thrust open the door of the living room at the end of the hall and then stepped back. "Enter, Mr. Norton."

I looked at him, and let him get a glimpse of the automatic in the side pocket of my gray tweed coat. He just smiled and stepped back.

"Permit me to introduce Mr. Norton, from Police Headquarters," he said loudly. "I'm sure you will all be sorry he is here!"

I STEPPED in through the door, and as I did so I felt like a guy looking at a stage on which the curtain had just risen. I was waiting for the cast to speak their first lines.

I saw three men and a dark-haired woman seated at a card table in a little alcove, from which curtains were draped back, evidently playing bridge. They were as sleek and smooth as a bunch of trained seals that had just come out of the water.

All of them deliberately put down their cards and just sat looking at me. Their expressions were polite but bored, and I got the idea that they would have been more pleased if Anaton had said that he was introducing a pet skunk or something.

"Good evening," I said quietly.

"Optimist," said a stout, gray-haired man who reminded me a little of a codfish. "The weather has been perfectly ghastly."

"Don't mind Mr. Winter," said the dark-haired woman. She had a thin, pale face, lips that were much too red, and eyes that were amber. She was wearing a flame evening gown that fitted her plenty tight. "He really isn't as rude as he sounds."

"Of course not," said Anaton. "No one could be."

The tall guy who looked like Satan's double glided into the room as I turned toward him. It was the first time I'd really noticed the way he walked. If he had weaved a bit more, the resemblance to a moving cobra would have been perfect.

"This is Miss Marie Nogales, Mr. Norton," he murmured.

"And I'm Gordon Drake," said a thin-faced guy who wore shell-rimmed glasses. His head was com-

pletely bald except for a little fringe of hair just above his ears, and he had a voice like a couple of pieces of sandpaper being rubbed together. "The gentleman to my left is Mike Hogan."

"Yeah," said Hogan, who looked like a gorilla in a dinner jacket. "So you're a detective!"

"I am," I said, glaring at him. I didn't like the way he said it. In fact, I didn't like the whole quartet that I had just met. "And John Bryant was my friend." My voice got hard. "Somebody in this house killed Bryant, just as they murdered Jack Stanton a little while ago, and—"

"Stanton!" exclaimed Marie Nogales, half rising from her chair. "Oh, no, not Jack!"

"Norton is right, Marie," said Anaton. "Stanton is dead. He was stabbed in the back. He was alone with Norton at the time." Guido Anaton's smile was nasty as he glanced at me. "Too bad he didn't get the murderer."

I just stood there glaring at the whole bunch. If I ever saw a crowd of cold-blooded ghouls enjoying a wake it was Bryant's collection of guests. I had a strong hankering to slap the whole gang of them around and make them say "Uncle." All of them except Winter had got up from the card table, and were strolling around, casting me amused glances.

"Listen, all of you!" I snapped. "I don't know why you're pretending the murders of Bryant and Stanton aren't important—but I'm not having any of this sort of stuff. Two men were killed here tonight, and I'm going to find the murderer!"

"Of course," said Winter, and there was a scared look on his face. "That's why you're here, Norton." He shivered like a hunk of jelly. "Great heavens, man, can't you see we are all just acting? Pretending to take this thing calmly and casually because we're all so damn scared that we'll go mad if we don't?"

"That's true." Marie Nogales nodded. "There's something about this house that's simply horrible."

SORELY I felt like telling her that it wasn't the place, but the people in it, but I kept quiet.

"I'm afraid Norton won't be much interested in the spook stuff buildup," said Gordon Drake. "If he's just seen a murdered man he can probably stand a drink."

"Of course," said Anaton, going to a table on which were a number of bottles and glasses. "What'll it be, Norton?"

"Scotch and soda, thanks," I told him.

"Make me one, too, will you, Guido," requested Winter, shoving aside the cocktail glass that had held his last drink. He didn't mind mixing them apparently.

"Right."

Malone silently entered with a small bowl of cracked ice. He walked over to Anaton and placed the bowl on the table with the liquor.

"Thanks, Malone." Anaton put the drinks he had just mixed on the tray the old servant held. "For Mr. Norton and Mr. Winter."

"Very good, sir." Malone passed the tray to Winter and then walked over to where I'd dropped down into a chair. "Your drink, Mr. Norton."

"Thanks." I picked up my glass.

"I've taken the liberty of preparing one of the guest rooms for you, Mr. Norton," said Malone.

"If you sleep well you're better than the rest of us." Winter picked up his glass and took a long drink.

"Don't discourage the man," said Drake.

"I'm not trying to, but—"

Winter broke off and abruptly leaped to his feet. He gasped and then shuddered as he crashed face down across the table. He remained there motionless.

"Oh!" Marie shuddered, as she looked down at Winter. "He's dead!"

"Yes!" snapped Anaton, as he examined the fat man, then looked at me. "Don't drink that liquor, Norton! Somebody must have put poison in that bottle of Scotch!"

I was watching Guido Anaton as I got to my feet. I put down my glass deliberately, my drink untasted.

Then I suddenly realized that Malone was standing beside me. I glanced quickly at the servant. The old Irishman was gazing at the limp

figure on the floor, his face expressionless.

"Two," Malone said, so low that I was the only one who heard him, and then he turned toward the door.

I started to call him back and ask him what he had meant, then changed my mind. I decided I would rather talk to Malone alone later. I looked at Anaton.

"You mixed those drinks, Anaton," I said slowly. "That poisoned liquor was meant for me. Malone must have switched the glasses."

"I realize it looks that way, Norton," said Anaton. "But you're wrong. The poison must have been in the bottle of Scotch."

"If that's so," I said, "then why haven't any of the rest of you found your drinks poisoned?"

"Because those two drinks are the first that have been mixed for the past hour," remarked Drake dryly. "Anyone could have put the poison in the bottle before that. It was there on the table with the rest when we came in here and started playing cards while we waited for the police."

"Listen, Norton." Anaton moved close to me and looked at me intently. "I don't believe you think I'm a fool."

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"No one would try to get away with poisoning either of those drinks with everyone watching unless he was an idiot," said Anaton.

"Or a master of legerdemaine," said Drake in his dry, rasping voice.

"Either way," said Anaton, "if I did murder a man I'm sure I'd be more subtle about it."

I STARTED to speak, but my mouth snapped shut, the words unuttered as I heard a faint but unmistakable scream coming from somewhere in the house.

"It's Thelma," said Anaton tensely, "Bryant's niece! Something must have happened to her!"

I dashed out into the hall, raced along it and pounded up the stairs. Shooting a glance backward I saw that Anaton and the other men had not followed me.

A dim light was burning in the hall of the second floor. The corridor

extended to the rear of the house, just as did the one below and closed doors were on either side.

I stood listening for an instant, then I heard a faint sound coming from the second door on my left. I went closer and listened. It was a woman sobbing. I knocked on the door.

"Who is there?" demanded a feminine voice.

"Bill Norton. I'm a detective," I answered.

A bolt rasped as it was shot back, and the door opened. A slender blond girl dressed in a black evening gown stood looking out at me.

"Miss Dean?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered. "John Bryant's niece. You—you are really a detective?"

"Right." She moved back and I stepped inside the room and closed the door. "Your uncle wired me he was in danger and asked me to come at once."

"Then you must be Uncle John's friend Bill Norton," she said, as she dropped wearily down on the edge of the bed. "He was afraid something might happen when the others learned about the diamonds. That's why he sent for you." Her lip quivered. "But you came too late."

"I know," I said slowly. "I'll always regret that. But what about the diamonds? What diamonds? And how do they fit into all this?"

"Uncle John had a fortune of unset diamonds hidden in the house," said Thelma. "He loved them and played with them as a child plays with toys. I came to visit him a month ago. He seemed so lonely and morbid that I decided he needed cheering up."

"So you invited Anaton and the rest here for a visit in order to cheer up your uncle," I said. "From what I've seen of that bunch it might have been better if you'd brought in a collection of man-eating tigers. Where did you meet them, anyway?"

She explained quickly. Guido Anaton had started one of those summer theaters in a little village in New England. Bryant's niece had been there on a vacation and had met the whole gang. They were all actors. She

was on the stage herself, and they had proved quaint and amusing to her.

But after they had been here at the house they had suddenly changed. Bryant had foolishly shown them his collection of diamonds and from that moment on they had become as sinister as a pack of starving wolves. Bryant had grown frightened and had wired for me. Why he didn't throw the whole bunch out of his house right away I'll never know.

"Why did you scream a few minutes ago?" I asked, when she had finished telling me about the guests.

SHE shuddered. "I heard a strange noise. It frightened me, and I screamed. Oh, it's all so horrible!"

"Listen," I said. "We're in a tough spot. I'm certain that the murderer is still in this house. Of course, all of that bunch of friends of yours can't be murderers, but a chance of getting their hands on the diamonds makes them all dangerous."

"I know." Thelma nodded. She was gazing at the pencil that I had unconsciously picked up off the bureau as I talked. "What are you going to do with my eyebrow pencil?"

"Eyebrow pencil?"

A thought struck me. I searched through my pockets and drew out the pencil I'd found near the lifeboat on the beach. They were exactly alike.

"This is an eyebrow pencil, too," I said. "I found it on the beach near the body of Arthur Hutton."

"The body of Arthur Hutton!" she exclaimed in horror.

"Yes."

I felt that I could trust this girl. I talked fast and told her everything that had happened to me out on the beach and since I'd arrived at the house. She listened tensely until I had finished.

Finally I went to the window of the room and peered out into the night. The fog had lifted and I could see a group of buildings far down the beach. I turned to the girl eagerly.

"Come here," I said, and then as she stood beside me at the window: "What are those buildings?"

"Why, that's the coast guard station," said Thelma.

"Swell!" I exclaimed. "Then maybe we won't be working alone after all. I've got an idea."

CHAPTER IV

"WHERE ARE THEY?"



MOVING over to the bureau, I picked up a hand mirror. The girl watched me in puzzled wonder as I returned to the window. I hastily removed the shade from a floor lamp. As the light was reflected in the mirror

I passed my hand back and forth between it.

"What on earth?" exclaimed Thelma Dean.

"Heliograph," I said. "I'm trying to signal the coast guard that we need help. No way to tell if they see it, though. But I'll keep on trying for a few minutes."

I kept it up for a few minutes, sending a message in Morse with the aid of the reflected light.

Just as I stopped I heard a noise in the hall—a cough that seemed to come from just outside the door. With my gun in my hand I drew the door open and Thelma followed me out of the room.

Abruptly the dim light burning in the hall went out, leaving us in black darkness. I stood with the gun ready in my right hand, fumbling with my left for the pocket flashlight I always carried. It was smaller than the one I had left in my topcoat pocket.

I found it and a round spot of white light lanced the gloom. I whirled to my right as I heard a faint sound. The light gleamed on the gray face of the man who had called himself Ash, out there in the fog, a little earlier.

"Look out!" cried Thelma, as the gray-haired man leaped at me, a knife in his hand.

I ducked, leaping over a low hall table, and the knife just missed my right side. The sudden jar knocked the automatic from my hand. Ash caught my arm and the flashlight went flying.

"Oh, help!" Thelma's voice came from somewhere in the darkness, stark terror in her cry. Then there came a faint rustling as though she might be struggling with someone. A moment later somewhere nearby a door closed with a thud.

I wanted to go to her aid, but it was impossible. I was too busy trying to keep Ash from getting me with that knife. I caught his wrist with my left hand, my fingers digging into his flesh as I clung tightly. I swung blindly with my right and cracked him on the jaw. He grunted, and I heard the knife drop to the floor.

Both of us were fighting blindly in the darkness. My left fist shot out as Ash jerked away from my grasp. I felt my arm slide over a smooth head as he ducked out of range.

A blow caught me squarely on the chin, sent me staggering back for an instant. Suddenly feet pounded along the hall, and from somewhere in the rear of the house a door slammed.

For an instant I stood there, trying to see, but it was too dark. I no longer heard any slight sound that might indicate Ash was still close by.

I groped about on the floor, searching for my flashlight and gun. A feeling of relief swept over me as I found the electric torch. With the aid of the light finding the gun was simple. I grabbed it up, flashed the light around and found I was alone in the hall. Both Ash and Thelma had disappeared.

Abruptly the hall light came on. Of course, it had been deliberately switched off and now that darkness was no longer necessary it was switched on again. That meant that Ash must have somebody working with him—just as someone had helped him on the beach. Someone had turned off the light, probably from a switch downstairs, in order to give Ash a chance to murder me or the girl, or both of us.

BUT what had happened to Thelma? I was sure it had been Ash I had heard running toward the rear of the house—and alone. Then who had grabbed the girl when she had cried for help? It was a question

I couldn't answer, but I was plenty worried about her. The old house had again grown silent, and there was an air of menace lingering over the place.

Hastily I searched the rooms on the second floor. They were all empty, though it was obvious that they were being used by Bryant's guests.

Finally I decided there was nothing for me to do but go back downstairs and question the others again. I hurried down, the automatic again in the side pocket of my coat.

As I reached the lower floor I saw Guido Anaton coming along the hall. Satan's double gave me a nasty smile.

"Oh, hello, Norton," he said. "I'd been wondering what had become of you. We need a fourth for a game of bridge."

"Still acting as if you were taking rabbits out of a hat?" I snapped. "Well, I've had enough. Three guys have been murdered in this house tonight and the killer is still loose."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Anaton with a frown. "My dear man, I don't understand. There hasn't been anybody murdered here."

I stared at him for an instant, puzzled by his attitude. He sounded as if he really meant what he said. Then I stepped across the hall, drew the key out of my pocket and unlocked the door of the room in which I had first seen my old friend lying in state, and where Jack Stanton had died.

A wave of horror swept over me as I gazed into the brightly lighted room beyond the door. The casket containing Bryant's body, the tall candles that had stood at either end of it—all were gone. Where the coffin had been was a very solid-looking divan. There was no trace of the blood-stained figure of Jack Stanton that had been sprawled on the floor near the door.

"What became of Stanton's and Bryant's bodies?" I demanded, swinging around to face Anaton.

"Bodies?" He frowned. "What are you talking about? You know as well as I do that Bryant, Stanton and Winter left for New York early this evening."

I scowled. Guido Anaton was pull-

ing some kind of trick on me, but if the others in the house were working with him they might be able to bluff it through for a time.

The bodies of Bryant and Stanton were missing, and Winter's corpse probably was also. Evidently Anaton, Drake, Hogan and Marie Nogaes had planned it carefully. They were going to insist that nothing had happened in the house and without the dead men I would have a tough time proving my case.

Ash remained an unknown quantity. He might be working with the others, and then again he might not. The weird gray man was still a mystery to me, though during the past hour I'd developed a strong hunch regarding the elusive killer.

"You're staging a good bluff, Anaton." Abruptly my automatic appeared in my hand, and I covered him with it. "But it won't work!" I said grimly. "Get going. I want to talk to the rest of the guests."

"Certainly."

Guido Anaton walked briskly along the hall, with me close behind him. I dropped the automatic back into my pocket as I followed him through the door of the living room.

I FROWNED as I looked around the room. Drake and Hogan were seated at a table, apparently deeply interested in a game of checkers. There was no one else in the room. The body of David Winter had been removed.

"Where's Miss Dean?" I demanded.

"Miss Dean?" Gordon Drake glanced up, the light gleaming on his bald head and the steel-rimmed glasses as he spoke. "Why, in her room, I suppose."

"Stop stalling," I said. "Where is the girl?" I turned to Anaton. "Do you know?"

"Unfortunately I don't." He dropped into a chair and lighted a cigarette. "However, I'm afraid she may not be around if the police ever should arrive to investigate these mythical murders of yours, Norton."

"Gruesome thought," said Drake, as he glanced up from the checker-

board, then looked down again. "It's your move, Hogan."

"Yeah." Hogan moved a checker and jumped two of Drake's men. "You ain't so hot at this game, Drake."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Malone, as he appeared in the doorway. "May I speak to you a moment, Mr. Norton?"

I moved over so that I stood with my back to the oak wainscoting that ran around the lower part of the living room walls. From where I stood I could watch all four men. I felt like an animal trainer in a cage of hungry lions.

"All right, Malone," I said. "What is it?"

He drew close to me and lowered his voice so that only I could hear.

"Guido Anaton used to be a professional magician," he whispered. "And you were asking about Miss Dean."

"Right," I said. "Where is she?"

Before the servant could speak Anaton reached out and turned the top of a hammered brass tobacco jar that stood on the table beside him. Instantly the lights in the room went out, leaving the place in inky darkness. I heard a faint rustling sound and then an odd rumbling noise. Across the room I could see the tip of Anaton's cigarette glowing in the dark. I stood motionless, the automatic ready in my hand.

"All right, Anaton," I said finally. "Turn on the lights! I've got you covered with my gun."

There was no answer. The big room was grimly silent. I stealthily advanced toward the chair in which Anaton had been sitting, and cursed under my breath as I barked my shin against it. As I did so, the cigarette dropped to the floor.

I reached out with my left hand, found the top of the tobacco jar and twisted it. Instantly the lights again flashed on. But I was alone in the room. One of the casement windows was standing half open and the sea air was blowing in.

"Guido Anaton is an ex-magician and he built the house," I said thoughtfully. "Of course. That explains how Bryant's coffin and the

bodies disappeared. The place probably has secret panels."

I began searching along the panels that lined the walls of the room. It might be that a secret passageway would lead me to Thelma Dean. There was something sinister in what Anaton had said about the girl not being there if the police should arrive.

Malone had known the girl was in danger, I was sure of that. The old servant had started to tell me something about her when the lights had been turned out. Had Anaton done that because he was afraid that the servant would reveal him as the murderer?

"No," I murmured. "Not Anaton. He wants the diamonds, but I'm pretty sure he's not the killer."

I continued examining the wainscoting. It was not until I reached the panels at the right of the door leading into the hall that I uttered an exclamation of delight. There was a heavy black mark on the wood of one of the panels.

"Malone!" I called. "He must have marked this in the hope that I'd find it. I wonder if they got him in the dark?"

Anxiously I sought the button that would open the panel. There was a small light fixture of the electric candle type at the left of the panel, but the lights were not burning. I touched the switch. There was a rumbling sound as the panel slid to one side.

In front of me was a dark opening. I started along the passageway with my automatic in my hand. I had only gone a few feet when I stepped on what felt like a rubber mat.

Behind me the panel rumbled as it slid closed. I hesitated, then slowly advanced, reaching out my left hand to guide myself through the darkness by touching the wall. As I did so my fingers encountered something that felt strangely cold and clammy and I realized it was a face—the face of a dead man!

Hastily I drew out my flashlight. The light gleamed wanly on the round face of the stout dead man that I'd first seen in the lifeboat on the beach. Arthur Hutton, Bryant's secretary.

The corpse had been tied and placed in a closet door insecurely closed, and my hand had inadvertently knocked the door open. The corpse fell out as I touched it.

"So this is where they brought him," I murmured. "Poor devil."

I laid the body of poor Hutton on the floor, and went on along the passageway. The important thing was to find Thelma. The passageway slanted downward and I realized that it must lead to the cellar.

CHAPTER V CORPUS DELICTI



GUIDING myself with the electric torch, the automatic ready in my right hand, I descended the steps and finally reached the cellar. Here the passageway opened into a large room. As I flashed the light around I saw that

Bryant's coffin stood in one corner.

I went closer and saw that the coffin rested on an elevatorlike arrangement. A sheet had been thrown over the casket and I couldn't see whether or not Bryant's body was still in it. I dropped the gun into my pocket and reached out my hand to draw back the sheet.

As I did so I heard a faint sound behind me. I whirled and the flashlight gleamed on the shadowy figure of a man who had a black mask across the lower part of his face and a soft hat pulled down over his eyes.

"All right, Norton!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "You know where the diamonds are now—that's why you came down here." His voice rose. "But this is your finish!"

"Wait!"

I was stalling for time. I knew this guy was the murderer and while he had me covered I didn't want to try and get my own gun out of my pocket. There was a wild look in the eyes glaring at me through the holes in the mask that warned me he would shoot.

"Listen," I said hurriedly, "you've been smart. I've got a pretty good idea of just what happened here to-night, and this thing took brains."

"Go on," said the masked man. "Your guesses might amuse me."

Mentally I breathed a sigh of relief. This guy was an egotist—and if I could keep talking, I might get a chance to grab him.

"Evidently Bryant was foolish enough to reveal the hiding place of his diamonds when he thought no one was around," I said. "But you were watching and you killed him to get the jewels. Winter must have seen you, or at least suspected you. He forced you to let him in with you—"

"But he didn't know where I'd hidden the diamonds after I took them away from where Bryant had them," interrupted the masked man.

"Probably not," I said. "Anyway, Bryant's murder was discovered. Hutton went for the police and you and Winter followed. Or perhaps you started out first and Winter trailed you just to be sure you didn't get away with the diamonds."

"That's right. He followed me. Go on."

"The two of you murdered Hutton, then placed him in the lifeboat with the intention of pushing the boat into the ocean and getting rid of the body that way. You must have seen the wire that Bryant sent me, for you knew I was coming to the house. When I came along the beach you tried to frighten me away, Mr. Ash. When you found that weird warning stuff didn't work you showed me the body in the boat, and then tried to murder me."

"I won't fail this time," snarled the masked man. "Go on. I'll give you just three minutes more to tell me the rest of it."

"I knocked you out and the coast guardsman appeared. Winter realized that you were in trouble, so he started shooting at us and you got away." I started edging closer to him, and he didn't seem to notice it. "You left my flashlight burning on the sand some distance away from the lifeboat. Gregory, the coast guardsman, and I went to see about

the light. While we were gone you and Winter carried off Hutton's body and brought it back here."

AS I stood facing him I saw the white sheet that was draped across the coffin move slightly. The masked man stood with his back toward it, so he hadn't seen it. I kept on talking fast.

"When I first reached the house Jack Stanton must have suspected you two, and was going to tell me about it. You stabbed him in the back and he died before he could say anything. You put poison in that bottle of Scotch, knowing that I'd probably be offered a drink after coming out of the fog. In fact, you asked me to have one. When the poisoned drink killed Winter that suited you, for you hadn't any intention of splitting with him."

"All right, Norton," said the masked man. "You've done some good guessing—but there are two things you don't know. Where the diamonds are hidden and who I am."

"Wrong on both counts," I said. "I've known where the diamonds are hidden almost from the time I reached the house, and you made one or two little mistakes that gave you away, Gordon Drake!"

"Damn you!" growled the masked man. "Now I will kill you."

"I wouldn't," I said mildly. "The guy behind you has you covered."

"An old bluff, Norton," snapped Drake. "It won't work."

Again the sheet over the coffin moved and from beneath it came a loud cough. The masked man swung around as he heard it. That was all the chance I needed. I leaped at him, and gave him a hard wallop on the jaw. The gun dropped from his hand as he fell to the cellar floor.

I had my own gun in my hand covering him as the sheet was thrown back from the coffin and a gray-haired figure sat up in the box. It was Malone and there was a faint smile on the face of the old servant.

"Nicely done, sir," he said. "If I may say so."

"How did you get into that coffin?" I demanded.

"When the lights were turned off in the living room I decided I'd better disappear for awhile," said Malone. "I suspected that the murderer felt I knew too much."

"Where is Miss Dean?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I frightened her when I grabbed her as you were fighting the murderer up in the hall," said the old servant. "But I felt she would also be safer if she disappeared for a time. I carried her down one of the passageways and locked her in a room here in the cellar. She's quite safe, I assure you, Mr. Norton. I made a mistake in switching off the lights in the upstairs hall, but I turned them on again as soon as I managed to get Miss Dean away."

"Swell!" I bent over the unconscious form of the man on the floor and drew off the mask. It was Gordon Drake, all right, but he wasn't wearing the glasses. "I was right."

"But how did you know?" asked Malone. "I knew it was one of the guests here, but I couldn't decide which, and I hated them all. That's why I was glad when Stanton and Winter died. But how did you know it was Drake, sir?"

"I realized that Ash was wearing makeup when I found I'd picked up an eyebrow pencil on the beach. Not only that, but no one in the house even mentioned Ash—so I realized that he must be someone in disguise. Then later when I fought him in the dark in the upstairs hall I felt my hand slide over the smooth surface of his head. You see, Malone, he must have dropped the gray wig he was wearing, and Gordon Drake was the only man here who had a bald head."

THERE was the sound of footsteps. Evidently the others, Anaton, Hogan and Marie Nogales had found that there was something going on in the cellar and had decided to investigate.

"They're coming," said Malone, in a low voice. "What shall we do, sir?"

"Let them come," I said grimly, as I stood there with my gun in my hand. "I've got the murderer and the diamonds!"

"Where were they?" asked Malone.

"In the lining of Bryant's coffin," I answered. "I felt them there when I examined Bryant and unconsciously wiped the blood off my hand on the side of the box. I wanted to take them out of there then, but before I got a chance Jack Stanton appeared behind me. After he died I called for you, and Anaton also showed up. So I locked the door, intending to get the diamonds later, but the next time I looked into the room the coffin was gone."

The sound of footsteps and the rumble of voices grew louder. Malone switched on the lights in the big room. A moment later Guida Anaton and Hogan appeared. A blue uniformed figure was walking behind them, with a heavy Colt in his hand.

"Hi, feller," said Matt Gregory. "I got your signal. Been kinda watching in this direction all night. Some of the boys are outside. Found these two lugs starting to go places when we barged in, so I brought 'em along. There's a dark-haired dame upstairs that has been raising a stew, but we got her calmed down now." The big coast guardsman grinned at me. "Looks like you been having quite a party."

"He's the murderer," I said, as Drake sat up glaring at all of us.

"Then it was Drake," said Anaton, as Malone picked up the murderer's gun. "I suspected it might be when he told me that Hutton had been killed before he reached the police. But—"

"But you all wanted to try and get the jewels," I said, before he could finish. I smiled at Gregory. "You and Malone take care of this gang, Matt. I want to tell a girl about some diamonds."

"The second door along the corridor down here, sir," said Malone, handing me a key. "I might mention I also took the liberty of hiding the bodies of the deceased until we were able to contact the police." The old servant smiled. "I thought it best to be sure we could produce the corpus delicti."

I gave him a friendly slap on the back. "And my answer, Malone, is 'Very good, sir.'"

Obvious Suspect

By
JOHN L. BENTON

*Author of "Murder in Pictures,"
"The Candid Camera Kid Murders," etc.*

*A Kit Carson of the Big Town
Whips His Weight in Thugs!*

TO GO barging into a guy's office and find a corpse waiting to greet you is hard on the blood pressure. I should know, for that's what happened to me. I'm "Canvas" Carson, one of the best spielers that ever drew the townies into the sideshows along the Midway in the old days when I was in the Carny racket.

But that was before I became a private detective—don't ask me why. Business was not good.

Then came the day when my phone rang. After I got over the shock, I answered it. A man with a deep voice was on the other end of the wire.

"Carson," he says. "I'm Jeffery Winter, the stock broker. I require the service of a private detective, and have decided on you."

"Why?" I asked. I was sure that he didn't know me from a bale of hay, and what would a broker being doing with a bale of hay anyway.

"Kit Carson was always my boyhood hero," says Winter. "You must tell me about your grandfather—and come right over."

The guy was obviously screwy, but I headed for his office. A case was a case. The reception room door was open, so was an office door beyond. I went right in, as there was no one around—and there was the body.

Not ever having seen Winter in the



I had them all covered

flesh, I couldn't tell if he was the corpse or not, but I had a terrible hunch he was.

There was a dictaphone beside the dead man's desk and it was still working, the reproducer running over the wax record and not registering anything but my own breathless silence.

Being one of those impulsive guys, I stopped the dictaphone, careful enough to use a handkerchief while doing it so as not to smear it up with my fingerprints.

"Is he dead?" asked a quiet voice behind me.

I turned around fast and there was a big, dark-haired, ugly looking guy standing yawning like he felt it was a pretty dull world.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"The murderer, naturally," said the big guy. "I always am—but David Foster is the name."

"And you say you killed Winter?" I gasped.

"Of course not." Foster frowned. "Surely you don't expect me to confess so soon. Why, the police aren't even baffled yet."

This flippant line of Foster's began to rile me plenty.

"Ham lug sticks out mug," I said, dropping into the bad habit I have of talking like the combined headlines of *Variety* and the *Billboard*.

"Sorry," says Foster. "I'm an actor—usually play the heavy—that accounts for the cracks about being the murderer." He frowned. "Fool thing to do, I'll admit."

"It could be practically fatal." I picked up a phone on the desk, dialed the operator and got the police. I reported what had happened and then hung up and looked at Foster. "They'll be here right away," I said.

"I realize that."

FOSTER started pacing the floor. I didn't like the color of his suit. It was an off shade of brown that was pretty glaring. There was a white spot on the back of his left heel, as if he had stepped in some sort of powder.

"Where's the blond?" he asked finally.

"What blond?" I asked.

"Winter's secretary," said Foster. "She—"

He broke off abruptly and with good reason. Two hard looking guys with guns in their hands had come bursting into the office. I leaped back and tried to make a grab for my gun, but my foot slipped on the polished floor and I went down. One of the tough eggs socked me over the head with his gun and I went out cold.

I came out of it to find myself sitting on a bench in Central Park. It was night and there was no one around. It had been late afternoon when I had gone to Winter's office and now it was dark.

I realized that the only thing for me to do was to head back to Winter's office. I discovered that the front of the building was closed for the night. The only way to get in was by using the freight elevator.

I went around to the freight entrance, and as I did so I saw a big auto truck drawn up to the curb. Men were carrying out big wooden packing cases, brought down in the freight elevator. The operator was also the night watchman of the building. I went to him and drew him aside.

"Too bad about Mr. Winter," I said. "Are the police still up in his office?"

"Naw," the night watchman grinned. "It was a false alarm. Nothing happened to Mr. Winter. Somebody phoned the police he had been murdered, but when the cops got here, Mr. Winter was sitting at his desk like always, looking very neat in his new brown suit. He told the police he was very much surprised about the whole thing."

I was standing there with my mouth open in surprise. Then I happened to look at one of the guys who were carrying out the big packing cases. It was the same bird who socked me up in Winter's office. I wasn't fool enough to shout and grab for my gun. There were at least six guys with the truck and I didn't want to be a corpse. I just waited until they finished loading and the truck started to drive away.

Then I jumped on the back of the truck and clung there for a few moments. I discovered the rear door

was open so I climbed inside among the packing cases. I'd noticed that only two guys had gone with the truck. The other four had driven off in a car.

The truck rolled right into a big warehouse and stopped. The driver shut off the motor and I could hear the voices of the two men up front plainly.

"Are we gonna unload tonight?" asked one of them.

"Only the one case so the dame will get air," said another guy.

I ducked down behind some of the cases as they came back to the rear of the big truck and lifted out one long case and stood it up on end. Then they left the warehouse—at least I thought they did. I found a hammer and managed to open the front of that packing case.

THERE was a girl inside, a blond girl in a red evening gown, and she was bound and gagged. Just as I got half the boards off the box a tough looking guy in a green suit leaped at me out of the shadows. I knocked him cold with a sock over the head with the hammer, for I knew this wasn't any time to act polite.

Then suddenly a trapdoor in the warehouse floor opened, and Foster appeared. He tried to get me with an automatic—but I had my own gun in my hand by this time. I blasted him in the shoulder, and he dropped the automatic.

I heard a slight noise behind me, and turned just in time to see a mean looking guy about to stick a bale-hook into my back. I let him have a bullet in the leg. He dropped. Others were coming down a flight of stairs. I grabbed up Foster's automatic. I stuck out my foot as the first of the new arrivals came barging through the doorway. He fell and the man behind him tumbled over him. There were only three of them—and I had them all covered.

The patrolman on the beat heard the shooting and put in a call for help. With the aid of the police I rounded up the whole gang. Then I turned to Foster.

"You were telling the truth when

you said that you were the murderer," I said. "You killed Winter. Just why, I don't know yet—"

"Because Foster had been blackmailing Mr. Winter," said the blond. "And finally Mr. Winter decided to hire a private detective. Foster came in while Mr. Winter was talking to the detective on the phone— Mr. Winter talked a lot of nonsense about Kit Carson and hung up. Then—then Foster killed Mr. Winter. I saw it."

"So Foster had his men take you prisoner," I said. "They took you outside along the hall somewhere—that's why the doors of the office were open. I arrived while Foster was still around. He tried to make himself



such an obvious suspect that no one would believe he did the killing."

"That's right," said the blond secretary.

Foster was an actor, he quickly made himself up to look like Winter, and when the police arrived he claimed that the whole thing was a false alarm."

It was all pretty clear in my mind now.

"His men left me in the park unconscious. They wanted me to come back and find I had apparently imagined the whole thing. But there were two things that gave the whole setup away to me."

"What were they?" asked Foster sullenly.

"First, the night watchman at the office said that Mr. Winter was sitting at his desk like always and looking very neat in his new brown suit. I remembered the brown suit that Foster is still wearing. Besides, one of the guys carrying out those big packing cases with the girl and the body of Winter in them, was the same lug who knocked me out. I wouldn't forget him in a hurry."

HALF AN INCH

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

Author of "Blood Debt," "Triple Cross," etc.



Trenehan shooed Mike out of the way, began triggering

AMMO
EVE

DAN TRENEHAN, detective-sergeant, insistently rang the doorbell that stood for his son's future. The house looked big enough for a man to get lost in if he didn't know his way around. A stranger would probably need a guide.

The thought quirked an unamused smile to Trenehan's lips, there in the darkness of the colonnaded porch. Phil Sprogue, he mused, would never get lost in the place. Not only because he owned it and lived in it. Phil Sprogue knew his way around, figuratively as well as literally. In twenty-five years, Sprogue had risen from cop to commissioner, to the chairmanship of the City Council. Anybody who could do that had to know all the angles.

With a Vague, Haunting Fear in His Heart, Trenehan Takes the Trail of a Mysterious, Ruthless Killer!

A butler opened the door and looked incuriously at Dan Trenehan.

"Yes?" he inquired distantly.

"I'd like to see Mr. Sprogue. Is he home?" Trenehan asked, vaguely uncomfortable under the butler's impassive scrutiny. He wasn't used to servants. You can't afford them on a detective-sergeant's pay when you need

every spare dime to put an only son through college.

"Have you an appointment—sir?" the butler demanded.

"No. Just tell him Dan Trenehan from Headquarters would like to talk to him."

Waiting in the drawing room, the sergeant felt old and more than a little weary. His surroundings made him ill at ease, quietly impressing him that he was out of his element here. It was funny, the changes the years had brought.

Once, he and Phil Sprogue had been rookie coppers together, had loved the same girl. Now Phil ran the town, and when you wanted to see him you were supposed to have an appointment. An appointment! In the old days, down at Mother Clancy's boarding house, you just went to his hall bedroom and yelled over the transom.

"Mr. Sprogue can give you five minutes in the library," the butler said.

Trenehan hadn't even heard him returning, so thick were the carpets, so soft the servant's footfalls. Trenehan wondered what it would be like to live in a house where the hired help pussyfooted around like second-story men. He didn't think he'd like it very much.

In a way, he was glad he'd never had Phil Sprogue's flair for politics. Even in his twenty-five years he couldn't get used to this kind of life, doling out his time in five-minute portions like a miser bestowing alms.

SITTING in the oak-paneled library, Sprogue looked sleek and well fed, but not friendly. His eyes were gray and hard, neither questioning nor interested. They were remote, like the eyes of a man glaring through the slits of a mask. He didn't get out of his big, upholstered chair, didn't offer his hand. He didn't even say hello.

Sergeant Dan Trenehan knew he was beaten. He knew he was fighting a cause already lost. Yet he forged forward with banners bravely flying, determined to have his say though the outcome was foregone.

"It's about Mike I wanted to see you, Phil," he rumbled.

"Mike? Oh, you mean your son.' As if Sprogue hadn't known!

"Yes. My son—and Nora's."

Sprogue betrayed no emotion, except that his eyes went even more frigid at mention of Nora's name.

"What about him?" he asked distantly.

"He's twenty-four and out of college now. He wants to be a cop."

"Very commendable."

Trenehan held himself in rigid check, not blurting out the anger he felt.

"If you think it's commendable, why block him?" he asked quietly.

Sprogue selected a cigar from the humidor on his desk, omitting to offer one to his visitor.

"Block him? What makes you think I'd even be interested?"

"It don't matter what I think," Trenehan said slowly, still in control of himself. "The boy passed the police exams. He scored high in the tests. Today he should have been given his probationer's notice and a uniform. Instead—"

"Don't tell me he was rejected!" Sprogue's flaring match covered whatever sardonic expression of amusement there might have been on his face.

"Yes. He was rejected. He was turned down because you jammed a new ruling through, last night. You raised the minimum height requirement to five feet eight and a half inches, knowing Mike just tipped the former minimum of an even five feet eight. You must have studied his preliminary application blank pretty carefully."

"So he was refused because he was a half-inch short. And you're blaming me." Sprogue surveyed the glowing tip of his cigar. "Why?"

Passion came into Trenehan's voice in spite of all he could do to hold it back.

"I blame you because it's your fault! You hate me, and this is your way of showing it—through Mike."

"And why should I bother to hate you or any other copper?"

"Because Nora turned you down and married me. Because she died bringing my son into the world in-

stead of yours. You're not kidding me, Phil. You haven't kidded me for years. I've always known how you felt."

Sprogue exhaled a fragrant, heavy blue cloud.

"Granting all that, I wonder why you're here now," he said casually, too casually.

"Because I'm asking a favor of you. I'm knuckling under to you—for the first time in my life. With my hat in my hands. Like a beggar, if you want to put it that way."

THE words were pouring out now, with a rough eloquence Dan Trenehan hadn't realized was in him.

"I'm not asking you to pull strings for him, or boost him up the ladder. All I want is a chance to let him prove himself. He'll make a good cop, a damned good cop."

"I disagree." Sprogue's voice was abruptly harsh and unrelenting. "You think I'm keeping him off the force because he's your son, because I loved his mother and she passed me up. You're wrong, Trenehan."

"Then what is your reason?"

"If you weren't blind, you'd know. The boy's no good."

Dan Trenehan's fists balled until the knuckles showed white under taut skin.

At the nape of his leathery neck the short hairs bristled.

"Say that again," he invited, hunching his shoulders ominously.

"I'll say it again. He's no good. He's tainted. He ran with criminals when he was a kid. Remember Whitey Larsko?"

Crimson mantled Dan Trenehan's seamed cheeks.

"So you're going back to that. Going back to when they were all in grammar grades."

"Yes, grammar grades. Larsko and a bunch of young plug-uglies. Stealing lead pipe. Looting vacant stores. Helling around until they were finally caught and sent to reform school."

"My Mike didn't go to reform school! He was pinched with Larsko's hellions, yes. But he wasn't one of the gang. Being with them that day was an accident. The committing

magistrate had sense enough to see that and turn Mike loose."

"The magistrate was a fool."

Dan Trenehan's shoulders sagged. Argument was useless, he realized.

"So you're going to keep Mike from being a cop on account of he got picked up with a bunch of rowdy kids, years ago. Is that it?"

"That's it." Sprogue came to his feet, terminating the interview. "The way I look at it, once you're on the wrong side of the law you stay there. Whitey Larsko himself proves my point. What is he today? A hoodlum with a police record a mile long. A public enemy, suspected of being the ringleader in that Third National Bank stickup last week. Nothing's been pinned on him but—"

"And you'd class my Mike with a rat like Larsko? You must be crazy! Why, the clerk that got croaked in that bank job was one of Mike's college pals. Would Mike have any truck with a guy that murdered his friend?"

"I'm not saying what he would or wouldn't do. I'm glad to know Mike and that teller were friends. It gives me something to think about. Somebody knew there would be excess cash in the bank that day. The stickup mob was tipped off. They knew when to pull the job, all right."

Trenehan's lips drew in harshly before he exploded.

"Damn you, Sprogue. You trying to say my son was a go-between?"

"I told you I'm not making any direct accusations. I'm merely pointing out that Whitey Larsko is rotten to the core. Everything he ever touched, as a kid or as a man, had to turn rotten, too, the way a bad apple spoils a barrel of good ones. Your five minutes are up."

OUTSIDE, trudging toward the bus line, the sergeant bleakly considered his failure. Sprogue, he told himself, had lied. Nobody could suspect Dan Trenehan's son of crookedness, actual or potential. The real reason behind the boy's rejection by the police department was personal. That extra half-inch hastily tacked onto the qualifications of a rookie copper was Sprogue's idea. He was the kind

who'd strike at anything in his hunger for revenge. Not that you could prove it, nor would proving it do any good.

The matter was settled now. It was irrevocably closed. Thanks to the lack of a mere half-inch of height, the entire channel of Mike's life would take a new direction.

Trenehán sighed, thinking how hard it was going to be to break the news to the kid. He'd be pretty bitter about it, and you couldn't blame him much.

It didn't add anything to the sergeant's peace of mind to find his son gone when he got home to his little bungalow. There was no note, no message, nothing but Mike's unexplained absence, which stretched through the interminable hours.

Seeking sleep, Trenehán remained uneasily awake until almost dawn. Even then his nap was troubled with foreboding dreams. This was the first time Mike had ever stayed away from home all night. It wasn't like the boy. Trenehán had a hunch something was wrong.

The phone call from Headquarters next morning was like a knife-thrust.

"Better get down here in a hurry, Trenehán. It's about your son."

They wouldn't tell him anything more than that, until he lumbered into the office of Captain Dayle of the burglary detail. Dayle looked grimly sympathetic. The young man sitting by his desk looked battered. Phil Sprogue was pacing the floor, an unlighted cigar frayed between his teeth.

"Sergeant Trenehán, this is Larry Crocker, Mr. Sprogue's nephew," Dayle said. "He clerks in the Western Jewelry store over on Bardon Avenue."

"I own the controlling interest," Sprogue growled around his cigar.

Dayle looked at the battered young man.

"Tell your story, Crocker," he invited.

Sprogue's nephew gingerly nursed a blue bruise on his jaw.

"I had a phone call from Mike Trenehán early this morning, at home."

"He called you? Where from?" Dan Trenehán asked quickly.

"I don't know. He didn't say. Mike and I were classmates at the university. He said he wanted to buy a diamond. He asked me to open the store early for him because he didn't have much time. Naturally, I didn't suspect anything wrong. He was waiting for me in front of the store when I got there a little after seven. I let him in and unlocked the vault. Then he stuck a gun in my ribs—"

Trenehán's mouth suddenly tasted coppery, as if he'd touched his tongue to a flashlight battery. His hands seemed numb.

"That's a lie!" he roared.

CAPTAIN DAYLE looked at him curiously.

"How do you know it is? Can you alibi the kid?"

"No, but—"

"When I tried to put up a fight, Mike slugged me," young Crocker went on. "Knocked me cold. I woke up and he was gone, along with most of our diamond stock. I called the police and Uncle Phil. And that's all I know."

"Where's your boy now, Dan?" Dayle asked.

"I—he didn't come home all night. But—"

"That's enough," Sprogue said. "It's open-and-shut."

"No! It can't be!" Trenehán choked out. "There's a mistake somewhere. Mike wouldn't pull a stick-up. He wanted to be a copper. He—"

"Sure. He wanted to be a copper." Sprogue's lips peeled back. "He got sore when he was turned down. So he went crooked. Maybe he was already crooked. It was a college classmate of his that got murdered in that Third National job. My nephew was another classmate—and he gets slugged, almost killed. And you ask me why I kept the rat off the force!"

"It's a frame!" Trenehán said thickly. "You weren't satisfied to jam through that extra half-inch ruling. Now you and this young pup are trying to frame Mike."

"Say that again and I'll have your badge," Sprogue warned.

Trenehán wanted to say it again, but the words wouldn't come. Where his heart should have been, he felt a vast emptiness. Doubts crawled through his mind like maggots. Maybe it wasn't a frame. Maybe the accusations were true. Mike, his own son, a crook! He winced physically at the thought, not wanting to believe it and hating himself because he wasn't sure. If only this Crocker fellow, Sprogue's nephew, weren't so insistent upon sticking to his damning story. . . .

"It looks bad, Dan," Captain Dayle said.

"Yes." Trenehán's voice was toneless, bereft of all inflection. "It looks bad." He drew himself up. "Will you give me the case to handle?"

"Like hell he will!" Sprogue cut in.

Dayle shook his head. "I can't, Dan. You understand why. Besides, we've already got the machinery in motion. The dragnet's out, the highways and railroad stations covered. It's just a matter of time."

A matter of time. The phrase echoed in Dan Trenehán's ears as he stumbled out of the building, into the morning sunshine that seemed to hold no warmth. A matter of time until they picked Mike up and sent him over the road. Already there were extras on the street.

**POLICEMAN'S SON SLUGS CLERK
Denied Badge, He Pulls**

Daylight Jewel Theft

His application rejected by the police department because he lacked a half inch of meeting the new minimum height requirement, Mike Trenehán, son of Detective-sergeant Dan Trenehán of the local force, this morning held up Larry Crocker, jeweler's clerk, and escaped with the store's stock of gems—

If Trenehán could just reach the boy before the police did, hammer the truth out of him, make him either admit his guilt or deny it! Trenehán wouldn't hesitate to turn his son over to Headquarters for punishment. But if the lad declared his innocence, Dan would fight it through until hell froze

over, even if it cost him his shield.

But how could he beat out a dragnet in time? Where was the kid? Why had he dropped out of sight so completely, without leaving any word?

Then a numbing thought struck Trenehán. Suppose Phil Sprogue had been right. Perhaps Mike was secretly tied in with the Whitey Larsko mob. . . .

LARSKO! It was a long chance. Savagely, Trenehán hoped it would not pan out. He almost preferred to find Mike dead somewhere than alive with a gang of criminals. But he had to know, had to make sure.

He trudged heavily toward the Tenderloin district, a plan forming in his mind. He must locate Whitey Larsko's hangout.

It was funny, the way Larsko and his thugs seemed suddenly to have disappeared from their usual haunts. As late as yesterday they had moved about openly, indifferent to the official suspicion that they had engineered the Third National Bank stickup and murder. Secure behind iron-clad alibis that were probably phony, they had laughed at police inquisitors. But today they were gone, like rats that had dodged into their hidden holes. Even the stools didn't seem to know about it.

After supper, though, Trenehán got a break. He spotted a furtive looking man coming out of a Chinese restaurant, carrying a big box of food. Unless the sergeant was mistaken, that thug was an occasional Larsko torpedo. The box of food certainly looked suspicious. It would take more than one man to eat that much chow mein. To Trenehán, it looked a lot like the kind of order a gang in hiding might send out for.

Trenehán tailed the sneaking tough.

His stalking ended in a frowsty tenement on Beech Street. Trenehán's quarry entered a first-floor flat and closed the door after him. From inside the flat, voices filtered through the flimsy door. Trenehán listened, heard a man talking raspily.

"How we gonna know you ain't

pullin' somethin' fast, Mike?" That was Whitey Larsko's voice. Trenehan had heard it too often at police line-ups not to recognize it now. His heart welled into his throat when he heard the answer in his son's soft drawl.

"I'm hot, Whitey. You've seen the headlines. That's why I'm asking you to make a place for me in the mob, keep me under cover until the heat's turned off me."

"I dunno. You tried to get on the cops. Funny you should go haywire right away after that."

"What's funny about it? They turned me down, said I was too short to wear a uniform. Okay, but I'm not too short to make monkeys out of them. That's why I pulled this diamond heist today. That's why I'm

Nora for marrying a rival. Through her son and Dan Trenehan himself, he was striking back at the innocent dead.

TRENEHAN unshipped his service .38 snub-nose. It felt heavy in his fist, but not as heavy as his heart. This was the payoff, he told himself. He was a cop, and a cop's duty was to arrest criminals. It didn't matter if the criminal happened to be your own flesh and blood. Duty was duty. It came first, before all other considerations. . . .

He kicked the door open and then walked in.

"Freeze, all of you," he grated hoarsely.

There were five in the room, Whitey Larsko, three of his mob, and

*Mysterious Figurines from Haiti Spell
Doom to Members of the United
States Senate in*

DEATH OF THE SPOTTED DOLLS

A Novel of Voodoo Murder

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



throwing in with you boys, if you'll have me."

Out in the dingy, unlighted hallway, Dan Trenehan fought to control his trembling. He'd heard more than he wanted to hear. Mike was a thief. The knowledge was bitter gall to the sergeant's soul. For the first time, he was glad Nora was dead. She had died peacefully, without the agony of knowing that her son was a thief, a killer.

Anger flared deep in him.

He cursed Phil Sprogue. Sprogue was responsible for this. If that new minimum-height ruling hadn't been jammed through, Mike might have been given a uniform. He certainly would have gone straight. Yes, Sprogue wanted revenge—and he was having it! After more than twenty-five years, he was getting even with

Mike. They froze under the menace of Trenehan's unwavering gun. Larsko spoke out of the corner of his mouth, to Mike.

"You dirty heel. So it was all a gag to put the finger on me."

"No, Whitey! I didn't know—"

"Shut up, the pack of you," Trenehan said. He looked at his son, and his eyes were bleak. "You're the one I'm after. I haven't got anything on these other rats. What did you do with the rocks you glommed?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Mike's sneer was a stiletto in Trenehan's heart.

"You won't talk?"

"Not to you or any other wise-guy who hides his yellow streak behind a tin-plate badge!"

"You're talking to your father, Mike." Trenehan couldn't help saying

that. He couldn't quite keep the break out of his voice. He was an old man, pleading for just one tiny bit of understanding, begging his son not to make it too hard for him.

"I'm talking to a copper," Mike said. "And I hate coppers. All of them. That goes for you."

"All right, boy. Is that all you've got to say?"

"It's all I've got to say."

"Then stick out your hands for the cuffs." Trenehan reached for the bracelets in his left pocket.

Somebody walked up behind him from the hallway door and pushed a gun against his spine.

"Drop the rascal, flattie."

Trenehan felt sick. He remembered, now, that there were four hoods in Whitey Larsko's gang. With only three of them in the room before him, he had forgotten that another would be floating around somewhere. He'd let himself be vulnerable from behind.

He dropped his gun.

MIKE walked up to him, doubled a huge fist and slugged him on the jaw. Trenehan hardly felt the impact of the threadbare carpet when he hit it. Dazed, he lay there, stunned not only by the blow itself. His own son had struck him!

"Look, you guys," he heard Mike saying, "you don't think I led my old man here. I didn't. I don't know how the hell he smelled me out."

"Yeah?" That was Larsko's rasp. "Well, what are you gonna do about it?"

"I'm going to take a powder, fast. This town's too hot for me now."

"Oh. So you're gonna take a powder. What about your old man? You can't leave him here."

"To hell with him. Take him out and bump him if you feel like it. You've got nothing to worry about, anyhow. You heard him say he didn't have anything on you."

Trenehan heard all this as he lay on the floor. For a moment he hoped he would wake up and realize it was only a dream, that his son hadn't really said these things. But deep in his pain-dulled mind, he knew he was

just trying to deaden the hurt. This was no nightmare. It was solid, agonizing reality. Why hadn't they killed him before he knew the kind of rat he had brought into this world? Shooting was a clean death. It would be better than the filthy knowledge his son had slugged into him.

"I'm shoving off," Mike was saying. "But I wish you'd do me one favor, Whitey?"

"What's that?" Larsko's grating voice held swift suspicion.

Something rattled, like glass beads.

"Here's the stuff I got in that jewelry heist this morning. Must be fifty grand worth of ice there."

"So what?"

"Take it off my hands. I've got to have some ready cash. You can fence the stuff later at a profit."

"How much you want for it?" Larsko asked eagerly.

"Two G's, cash."

"It's a deal." Money rustled crisply. "A hundred in fives. The rest in centuries. Better not try to shove them hundreds out for a while, though."

"Why not?" Mike asked, warily.

"Hot dough. Outa that Third National job. The serials might be registered."

A new quality came into Mike's voice then, a sting that made Dan Trenehan blink his eyes open. He saw his son pull an automatic and cover the startled Larsko mob. He heard Mike snap out like a lash.

"That's all I wanted to find out, you heels. You're under arrest for murder, all of you."

FOR a stunned moment nobody breathed. Then Larsko cracked. "Wha—what?" he yowled.

"You heard me. That jewelry hold-up this morning was a phony. The clerk, Larry Crocker, is a college pal of mine. We had a friend who worked in the Third National Bank. He was gunned down. When the police department wouldn't have me, I went lone-wolf, to get his killers.

"Larry Crocker helped me stage the fake diamond heist. That was to get my name in the newspaper

headlines. The headlines fooled you into thinking I was a crook. So when I found your hide-out and asked you to take me in, you weren't too suspicious."

"You dirty doublecrosser!"

"All I wanted was to prove you pulled that bank job. The cops couldn't find any of the stolen money in your possession. They went about it all wrong. But when I offered you a bargain in what you thought were stolen diamonds, you fell. Diamonds! That's a laugh. They're nothing but paste. And now I've got the skunks who bumped my pal."

It's a hard job to keep five men covered with one gun. Especially when you're young and triumphant and have a tendency to talk too much. That was where Mike made his mistake. He talked—and didn't watch as closely as he should have.

"I've got you," he gloated. "You'll fry, you scum!"

"That's what you think," Whitey Larkso growled.

He hurled himself sidewise, his weight buffeting the hood who had led Dan Trenehan to the flat. That poor torpedo staggered full into the path of Mike's automatic just as it went off.

That was the end of him. Larkso and his three remaining hoods then whipped their guns into action.

Gunfire roared in the little room. The thunderous blast bounced off the walls like booming kettledrums under the hornet whine of bullets. A slug kicked Mike's leg out from under him. He went down, rolling, smashed into his father.

Dan Trenehan snapped alive then. It was what he needed to dispel the daze that had held him helpless. He scrambled for the .38 he had been forced to drop. His hand closed around the knurled grip.

"Steady, son," he said.

He shoved Mike out of the way and started triggering.

A mule kicked him in the ribs. Only it wasn't a mule. It was a .32 slug

from Larkso's gun. Larkso was spraying lead like a maniac. Then he wasn't a maniac any more. He was a corpse. A .38 police snub-nose can do plenty of damage at close range. The top of Larkso's skull lifted as if it had been on hinges. That was the end of Whitey Larkso.

It was the finish of his hoods, too. They were both nicked, and they couldn't take any more. They threw away their automatics. "We got enough! We give up!"

Mike breathed. "Dad! Are you—okay?"

"Fit as a fiddle, lad," Dan said, ignoring the agony in his shattered ribs.

Then heard the whine of a police siren as squad cars, drawn by the gunfire, converged on the tenement. The ululant yowl was a lullaby to Sergeant Dan Trenehan. He reached out, found his son's left hand and grasped it, hard. After that he didn't mind the darkness that seemed to enfold him.

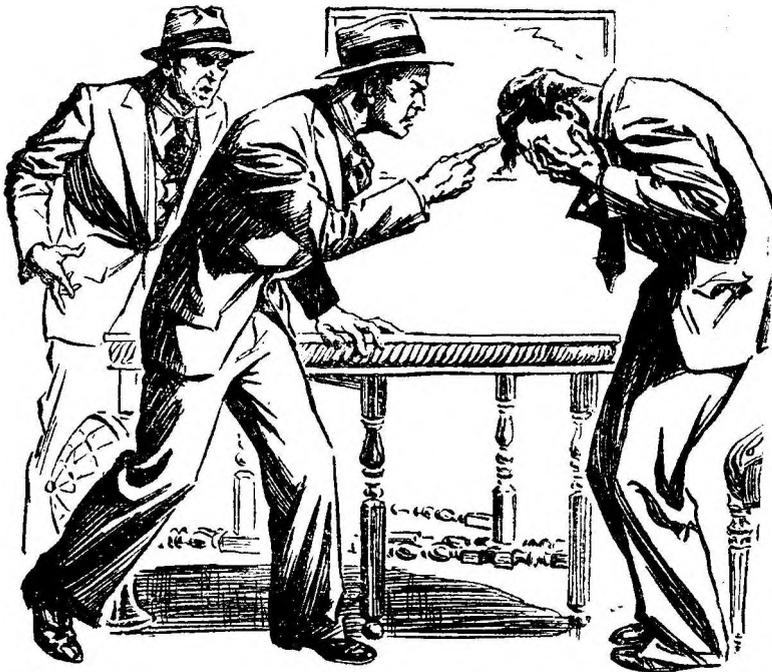
THE uniform was blue and natty, the brass buttons shining, the shield a glittering glory. Young Mike Trenehan stood stiffly at attention in the squad room, listening to Captain Dayle reading off the orders that made him a full-fledged policeman. "In view of exceptional bravery, the City Council has waived the five feet eight and one-half inch minimum height requirement in your case. . . ."

Mike broke a military rule, then. He turned his head and looked across the room to where his father and Council Chairman Phil Sprogue were standing together, arm in arm. Old Dan Trenehan's eyes were as shining as his son's brass buttons, and he seemed to be having trouble with his nose.

He kept blowing it.

That was when Mike broke another rule. He grinned at his old man and at his old man's one-time enemy, Phil Sprogue. Then he deliberately winked at both of them.

*Next Issue: THE THING IN THE LAKE, a Baffling Sea
Serpent Mystery Novelet by LAURENCE DONOVAN*



Old Pat
Lost
His
Grip—
and
Slipped
into
a
Murder
Frame!

"I threw it in that gunman's face. Snuff's like a million pin-pricks when it hits the eyes"

Doom Raids the Morgue

By JOSEPH E. NICHOLS

Author of "Death Don't Drive," "Murder Overhead," etc.

CREEPING black shadows darted ominously across the sleet-laden street. The bulk of Detective "Cheezy" Zinner shivered, and he turned to Old Pat Henery beside him.

"A hell of a night!" Zinner said, clapping his hands together.

"She's some bitter," Pat admitted, trembling a little now. "Especially when you got to hoof it."

They moved on down Canal Street, and gray, misty fog enveloped the windowless one-story buildings. Old Pat felt jittery. But worst of all, he

felt old. He wished he dared comfort his nerves with a bit of snuff. But regulations forbade the use of things like that on duty, and with Detective Zinner beside him he knew he couldn't chance another black mark now. When the alley loomed ahead, he cursed his sixty odd years—every one of them.

"Forget it," growled chunky, red-faced Cheezy amiably. "You couldn't help missing those crooks. Don't let it worry you, Pops. You're old. You got to expect to start slipping."

"Pops . . . slipping . . . old," Pa-

trolman Hennery muttered to himself.

The fur-loft looting he had recently bungled, rankled. It was true, his gun-hand was getting weak and wobbly. Though he'd had a wide-open target, he'd missed.

"But it was those two rats, Cheezy, I swear it," he repeated. "It was the two you want. The other one I don't know, but they'll be back. Yes, sir, they'll be here."

They turned into the dark alley, and suddenly Pat's lanky body tensed.

"Easy," Cheezy whispered, ducking to one side and pulling Hennery with him. "Warehouse thieves. You called the turn, Pat. They're back!"

But Old Pat didn't hear Cheezy's words. He'd started forward, blood pounding in his head. The Police Positive quivered in one hand, his flashlight in the other. Damn them! This time he'd show 'em he wasn't old!

Three figures slipped across the alley, broke into a run. The rays of Old Pat's pencil-flash picked them up. His gun spit red. Not to kill—a warning shot to stop. The trio ran on.

Old Pat heard Cheezy curse behind him, draw alongside. The hoodlums had cut into a cross-alley. Hennery skidded on the turn, his flashlight wavering. The alley seemed deserted—but there was something at his feet. A body!

Pat Hennery went to his knees, turned the slight figure over. It was a kid, not more than twenty. The fingers, curiously blue-stained, were clutching a grimy cap. Somewhere, Pat knew, he'd seen this kid before. But blood was oozing from the kid's back, and his eyes were glazed in death.

"God!" gasped Cheezy. "This ain't the guy we wanted! You missed that first time, when you should have hit. This time it's—it's vice versa!"

"But I . . ." Pat's lean, rough face worked frantically. His knotted hands were clenching. "Cheezy, I—I fired over their heads! Honest, I . . ."

The words stuck in his throat. Had he fired over their heads? He stared at the dead boy. The kid had been unarmed. There was no proof the

kid had been one of the three they'd been trailing. Had he bungled again? There had been only that one shot fired. At least there'd been but one report—from his own gun.

OLD PAT HENNERY longed for a quiet place to rest, a place to die. The grim thought flickered constantly through his mind that following night. He pulled his overcoat more tightly about his lanky frame, but still he felt half undressed. They had taken away his gun, his badge—the badge he, Pat Hennery, had worn so proudly for thirty-nine long years.

His eyes were misty and his thin lips drooped, as he walked wearily down the almost deserted street. Habit made him pause at the grocery store on the corner. It was pushed in between two red-brick buildings, and Old Pat stalked inside to buy his daily stint of snuff.

When he left he was carrying the small tin box in his hand, staring at it. Snuff. It dated him. He wondered if only old men used snuff anymore.

"Was this the end?" he asked himself. But something within him rebelled, and he stuffed the box in his pocket, unopened, as though this was a way to turn back the years. Bent his steps then toward the city morgue.

The kid's body would be there. The body that had caused him to be suspended for killing without provocation, that loomed a threat now for graver charges — manslaughter, if they wanted to make it tough.

Old Pat shook his head mournfully. He couldn't have killed the kid. He hadn't shot around that corner! But no other shot had been fired either. Cheezy had testified to that.

A single hope surged through him. The body itself. The M.E. would examine it. Ballistics might prove that the bullet had come from another gun. He quickened his stride.

The morgue was dingy, cold, cheerless. In the waiting room hung racks of pictures of the unidentified dead. Old Pat hurried on into the office—froze into immovability, and gasped.

A huddled figure lay slumped over the desk. The man was Doctor Phil-

lips, assistant to the coroner. His head was a mass of blood, and Pat's eyes widened. Phillips was dead!

Hennery moved on, into the refrigerator room, trembling with sudden apprehension. The kid's body was gone! Old Pat stared in chill dismay. An abrupt shout roused him.

"That's him! He did it!" It was Nick Wruck, the beat cop, at the door. The M.E., Travers, was beside him.

"What! Old Pat Hennery?" Travers was shaking his head. "Pat, what in heaven's name!"

Slowly Pat turned to face them. Read only accusation in their eyes.

"So you killed to get the body!" Travers was continuing grimly. "You were the only one it menaced, and we find you here. Damn you, Pat, you—"

Blind fury enveloped Pat Hennery. He acted without thought, leaped. And his very unexpected action seemed to freeze the other two. His aged arms found savage new strength and one hard blow rocked Wruck back. Falling, he jerked Doctor Travers with him. The two scrambled to their feet, Wruck cursing. But it was too late. Old Pat was gone. Through the office, out the door.

When he slowed to a walk, blocks away, there was no sound of pursuit. For the first time he realized what he had done. He'd lost his head. His very escape had stamped suspicion with proof. Yes, he'd practically admitted his guilt, blundered crazily. There was but one thing left to do. Get the man who had killed Phillips, the man, he understood now, who had, must have, killed the kid also.

IT DIDN'T matter that he had no gun, no weapon of any kind. At least his mind was beginning to click again, as it had in years past. Everything went back to the first murder, the youngster he and Cheezy had found in the alley.

Old Pat struggled with his memory. Blue stained fingers came to taunt him. And then he had it, and with his knowledge came a gasp of excitement. The blue was pool chalk! He had seen the kid only two weeks ago, down at Didio's pool room.

The kid was a recruit to crime, no

doubt. Ally of the two veterans Cheezy had first suspected, upon whose trail Cheezy still lumbered. That would account for the three figures who had pulled the fur robbery. The same three whom Cheezy and he had come upon in the alley that night before. As to why they'd killed their own man— Pat quit thinking and edged cautiously along the street toward Didio's on Brady Avenue.

The pool room was in a two-story building of red-painted bricks. Two equally decrepit flats bolstered it from either side, for it leaned a bit tiredly on its neighbors. There was a grimy black window, and Old Pat Hennery looked through it, eyes narrowed. The place was almost empty at this late hour.

Hennery went around to the front, peered up at the second story. Green shades were drawn there over the three begrimed windows, but light trickled weakly through.

Beside the pool hall entrance, a rickety, board-reinforced door opened into a dark stairway, leading up. Old Pat slipped in, closed the door behind him, upon silence.

At the top of the stairway he paused, ears straining in the darkness. There was light beyond, under a door. And muttering voices. Pat crept toward the door, nerves taut.

"Brought the body with you, eh?" a rough voice was saying. "Why didn't you dump it?"

"I couldn't! I'll have to ditch it later."

"Swell—like hell! Bringing that stiff back here in my car! Damn you, Itchy, I oughta brain you for that. As seen as Rocky shows, you scam. Get rid of that stiff!"

"Now listen, boss," the other voice whined. "Take it easy. We're covered, we're safe. We thought you might want to dig for the bullet first."

"To hell with the bullet. That yellow bum can keep the slug. Go soft on me, would he? He was ready to squeal, damn him. Dump the body, get it? Dump it in the canal."

So these men had murdered the kid and Doctor Phillips! Pat Hennery's hands tightened. He started to back

away, intent upon his plans, now to call for aid, when a chill voice said:

"Up with them!"

Pat's hands came up. He turned around. The man stood at the other end of the hallway, an open door behind him. The "Rocky" they were waiting for! Inside the room the talking had suddenly stopped.

"Open the door. Go in," Pat's captor ordered.

Pat went into the room, a room stacked with lustrous furs. A stocky fellow leaped from his chair, a black automatic in his hand.

"This mug was playing Winchell," snarled Rocky.

"I tell you I—I'm down and out, pal," gasped Old Pat. "I thought this place was empty up here and I—I wanted to pound my ear in peace."

THE stocky man's eyes narrowed. "And you stood there—how long?"

"Only a—a minute! I—"

Rocky and the third man looked at their leader uncertainly, the moment Old Pat was waiting for. Only too well he knew they wouldn't let him go free, not after he'd seen their cache of furs. Only too well he knew what he, old as he was, must try to do.

His right hand shot out, grasped Rocky's gun hand, whirled that man in front of him. Two shots filled the air with the smell of cordite. Old Pat felt one bullet thud into the floor almost at his feet. The other slug took the third man in the chest.

But the stocky leader's gun was belching flame, flame that burned at Pat's arm, his thigh. He summoned all his strength, drove the struggling Rocky forward—straight at that blazing gun.

Rocky shuddered once, swayed. A bare moment the gun hesitated. Old Pat leaped and there was something in his hand, a small round tin, open.

He hit the gun aside as it began to crack again. The contents of the tin flashed upward, true.

There was a curse, a scream. The stocky gunman's free hand came up, clawing at his own eyes. Pat Hennery kept moving, and desperation gave his body further strength and

speed. A quick twist and he had the gun. His arm flashed up, down again, hard. A crushing blow that drove his screaming adversary to the floor.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. The door flew open. Old Pat whirled, crouched, gun ready. It was Detective Zinner and a patrolman!

"Cheezy!" Pat gasped thankfully.

Detective Zinner began to grin.

"I was running down the pool room angle from the kid's blue stained fingers. I had my eye on this joint, but Pops you beat me to it. Pops, this time you didn't miss!"

"Then you knew I hadn't killed the kid?"

"I felt that way about it," Cheezy admitted. "I was waiting for ballistics to report on the bullet. When this gang got the body and the bullet, and killed Phillips—Pat, it just didn't sound like you."

"It was a silenced gun," Hennery nodded. "They used it on the kid as soon as they darted into the cross-alley last night, where the flash of light was invisible to us from where we stood. When it looked like I was going to take the rap for that murder, they decided to get the body before the bullet was taken from it, to safeguard themselves by a total absence of all the evidence which would have cleared me. But the kid's body is in their car, somewhere near here, and between guns, bullets and furs—"

Old Pat stopped began to shake. He had to sit down.

"Coming here without a gun," Cheezy marveled. "Pat, you're crazy as a headstrong kid!"

Pat almost forgot the pain in his arm, and leg. Cheezy Zinner had called him—a kid! He brushed moisture from his eyes, drew himself up, stiffly. "I'm good for another twenty years," he growled. "Yes, sir, we oldsters and our habits still have their use. Even when it comes to snuff."

"Snuff?"

Hennery nodded soberly.

"I threw it in that gunman's face. Snuff's an old time thing, Cheezy, but like a million pin-pricks when it hits the eyes." Old Pat smiled then. "An old-timer like me sticks to old time tricks."

Hundred Grand

By
DALE CLARK

Author of "Murder Man,"
"Murder Melts Ice," etc.



Mike Cluny

CHAPTER I

"STICK 'EM UP!"

MIKE CLUNY moved restlessly in the doorway across the street from the High Seas Club, looked at his strap watch, and said, "Half after." Rain drizzled thinly and Cluny wore his coat collar turned up, his snapbrim tugged low. In the darkness the visible portion of his face was deeply shadowed, angular, and skeptical.

He had been waiting since midnight, watching the neon lighted entrance of the High Seas Club. The neon painted a red ship swimming over bright green waves, and the doorman wore scarlet braid and epaulets like an admiral at dress parade. Otherwise the place wasn't nautical at all, but merely naughty. Placards advertised a hot swing band, scanty clad cuties of the floor-show, and Jalice, the fan dancer.

Nothing advertised the gaming rooms upstairs, and you needed a membership card endorsed by Juve

A Hot Murder Flash Leads Reporter Mike Cluny on the Torture-Trail of a Blackmail Racket Scoop!

Ajall to go up there. You also needed important money. The stakes were high.

"Mike, look."

There was another man in the doorway behind Cluny, round-featured under his pork pie hat, plump and stubby in his buttoned-up black rainproof. Like Cluny, he was a reporter on the *Tribune*. Unlike Cluny, he was not a very good reporter.

They called him "Screwball" Jones, assigned him to writing up obituary notices, and between obituaries he wrote scenarios. His scenarios had never been purchased by any moving picture company.

Cluny looked, saw a cab pull away from the corner of the block, watching a tall figure come striding along the sidewalk.

"There, that's *him*, I bet!" Screwball Jones said excitedly.

The tall man walked rapidly in their direction, but across the street, passing in front of the High Seas Club. Cluny had a good look at him, identifying the high cheekboned face with its glossy black moustache. The high cheekbones and black moustache would be familiar if you knew your City Hall.

"You win. It's Bexler," Cluny muttered, and his voice sounded surprised. Up to this minute, he had really been pretty skeptical about

Libel

A Complete Novelet of Crime's Deadline



the whole thing. Not about Bexler, about Screwball Jones.

Screwball, when he first went to work on the *Trib*, had been assigned to interview a Hollywood actress between trains at the Union Station. He went down there, button-holed an assistant director also on the train, and proceeded to read the guy a scenario. He was surprised to read in the rival papers, afterward, that the actress had broken down and admitted her forthcoming marriage with a round-the-world flyer to the other newspaper reporters.

Screwball had pulled other stunts like that, plenty of them. He should have been fired ten times over—would have been, only he was saved by his wide-eyed innocence, his patient good

humor, and the sheer cock-eyedness of his exploits.

He would flop horribly on an assignment, and then offer an explanation so blandly bizarre and so absolutely cuckoo, that City Editor Trock had to burst out laughing. And Trock shaking with belly laughter, just couldn't fire Screwball Jones. He put the goof to writing obits, instead.

Screwball hadn't been assigned to cover the High Seas Club at all. He had gone there privately, on his own time, digging up local color to use in a scenario. By dumb luck, he had fallen in with Jalice, the fan dance dame. By double luck, he had blundered into the middle of a very hot, sensational news scoop.

It was so sensational that the *Trib*

promptly took the scoop away from Screwball, gave it to Mike Cluny.

And Cluny hadn't believed it, hadn't believed Screwball Jones could be *that* lucky.

HE BEGAN to believe it now, though. For Bexler, when he had walked past the High Seas, came to pause at the mouth of the alley alongside the building. Bexler looked around swiftly, up and down the street. Then, his tall figure faded back into the alley.

A warehouse, blank-windowed in the night, loomed on the left of Bexler's retreating self. On his right was a door, dimly lighted by a red exit bulb, belonging to the High Seas Club. Bexler vanished through that door in furtive-seeming haste.

"Yeah! Come on!" Cluny exclaimed decisively.

Swinging out of the dark doorway, Cluny shaped up even taller than Bexler, and a lot wider in his flat-built way. He looked like a two-fisted guy, and, in fact, Cluny needed both fists in prying the lid off the town's rackets. He was that kind of reporter, the *Trib's* underworld specialist.

Screwball Jones trotted beside him, in the fashion of a poodle accompanying a great Dane.

"This is the part I don't like, Mike. We should have fixed the night watchman." Screwball's voice was worried.

"I knew 'Sailor Bryan' when he was still in the ring." Cluny said. "A crooked louse never lived. If we even talked to him, he'd sell us out to Ajall like that—" and he snapped his fingers.

They were across the street now, up to the brick wall of the warehouse.

"He may be a louse, but he's licensed to carry a gun," Screwball Jones said unhappily. "He could take a shot at us, and he'd have a right to. We've got about as much right here as a couple of burglars."

"That's a chance we have to take."

Cluny used his hands to push up a window sash. He had fixed the window's lock earlier in the evening. Gripping the sill, he vaulted upward and crawled through the window. He had to lean out, offer a hand, and help

boost Screwball Jones into the building. Afterward, he pushed the sash down again.

It was very dark in the warehouse. Cluny carried a flashlight, but he didn't use it. "Sailor Bryan" might be on any of the five floors of the building, and therefore Cluny waited impatiently for his eyes to accustom themselves to the inky darkness of the place.

Slowly, vague outlines showed themselves in the musty-smelling murk. He could make out gray slivers marking the windows along the wall, and the denser zigzag of shadows where the stairs climbed.

Cluny groped forward, pawing experimentally with his left hand in front of him. Once a plank squealed shrilly underfoot and he heard Screwball's gasp of alarm.

"Keep coming boy," Cluny whispered.

He started up the stairs, and there were more creakings of wood and the tiny crunching of sole leather. Reaching the second floor, Cluny headed toward the back of the building. There was more light as he advanced, yellowish light coming through a window.

Originally, this light came from between tan drapes of another window across the alley, from Ajall's office. Cluny stared across the intervening alley, and made out Ajall's thick-shouldered, Tuxedo-clad bulk in a swivel chair behind the office desk. Ajall was bald, bullet-headed, formidable.

The tall, black-moustached Bexler stood in front of the desk, talking. Cluny's hand moved hastily down to a fabricoid-covered box on the warehouse floor. He got out earphones, plugged a switch. Wires running up from the box went out under the window sash, across the alley, into Jalice Hurrel's dressing room.

FROM where Cluny crouched, he could look into the fan dancer's room, too. She sat in front of a mirror, making herself up for the one A.M. floor show. Screwball Jones had persuaded Jalice—cash in advance—to conceal the speak-o-phone "ear" in

a suitcase put up against the wall of Ajall's office.

She hated Ajall.

Cluny tuned the device. He got the slap-slap of the powder puff against the dancer's cheek, and then Bexler's voice. The intervening wall offered practically no resistance to the extremely modern, ultra-sensitive apparatus.

"Leave my wife out of this!" Bexler was saying. "What the hell good are her I O U's to the organization?"

"Ain't science wonderful?" Cluny breathed, while he reached into the box for the second headphone outfit, passed that to Screwball Jones. "Get a load of this!"

He watched the ponderous lift of Ajall's shoulders.

The man's voice rumbled in the phones. "What the hell good are her I O U's to me?"

Bexler put his hands on the desk, leaned over the desk. "I'll pay Marie's score," his voice said. "I think it's a damned dirty deal, but I'll settle as soon as I can raise the money. And I don't want her playing any more roulette here, you understand?"

Ajall shrugged again. "You're settling right now, Bexler."

"You're crazy!"

"I'm not crazy enough to let you walk out of here with two G's of my money. Not with her owing me twenty-eight hundred."

Bexler took his hands off the desk, waved them angrily. "This isn't getting you anywhere, Jupe. What Marie owes you is personal, a private debt. The other is different, between you and the organization. You'll either come through, or you'll be closed up."

The speak-o-phone brought the squeak of the swivel chair to Cluny's ears as Jupe Ajall leaned back.

"You're wrong," the gambler said. "The organization can't close me up. Not while I hold your wife's notes."

"Why, you damned—" Bexler started to threaten.

Jupe Ajall made his voice unpleasant. "Read the papers; You'll find out the *Tribune* has been saying all along that the cops are handcuffed, with the City Hall crowd letting the

houses run on a protection basis. They've got an idea it wouldn't be healthy for a cop's job to start making arrests.

"They seem to think the civil service commissioner would put that kind of a fool cop over a barrel. It wouldn't be too smart if you let the *Trib* print this about the civil service commissioner's wife playing my tables to the tune of twenty-eight hundred bucks."

"You're cutting your own throat," Bexler said.

"Like hell!" Ajall told him. "I'm safe, plenty. You can't close me up. You can't afford to have it said you let me run while Marie was winning, and then welched when she lost."

Bexler came around the side of the desk.

Even across the alley, through two windows, Cluny read the distorted tightness on the man's high-cheekboned face.

"I'll pay," Bexler said. "I told you I'd pay. But the two grand doesn't belong to me. I can't leave here without that money, Jupe!"

Screwball Jones nudged Cluny's arm. "Is it a story? Boy!"

It was a story, all right! A City Hall commissioner, with direct power over the police department, putting the shakedown onto the notorious High Seas spot.

Cluny's head wagged seriously. "Shut up, Screwball! Get this!"

JUPE AJALL was pushing papers across the desk. "You'll go her I O U's? Sign 'em?"

"That's okay, sure," Bexler said, and he took a pen out of a set on the desk.

The headphones even recorded the scratching of the pen.

Across the alley, Jupe Ajall covered the papers with a plump hand.

Commissioner Bexler straightened up.

"Now, that money," he said.

"You damned fool," Ajall said jeeringly. "You're really stuck now. I'm through being bled for protection. With your name on these notes, I'll do the bleeding. You just signed me a license to run wide open from now on."

Bexler breathed loudly. "Okay! You *won't* pay any more! I'll fix it so the organization won't expect you to!"

Mike Cluny stiffened, seeing the knife in Bexler's hand before Ajall glimpsed it.

"Good God!" Cluny cried.

Jupe Ajall came half out of his chair. The big man was ponderously heavy, slow. Cluny watched the knife make a blurred arc downward, meeting Ajall as he tried to get up. The sound of a gasp came over the ear-phones, and the thumping crash of the gambler's body.

"Extra! Politician murders gambler!" Screwball Jones said, and jerked the phones off his head.

Cluny stared at Ajall's inert body sprawled in the chair, head hung sideward, knife haft protruding from his vest-front. Commissioner Bexler stared at it, too.

"Dead!" he whispered. And then, the commissioner frantically swept the I O U's off the desk and rushed from the office.

Cluny stripped off the phones, shoved these at Screwball Jones.

"Get this stuff out of here! Take care of that recording!" he ordered.

A needle in the box had stitched all of those sounds onto a wax cylinder.

"Hey! Where are you going?" Screwball gasped.

"I'm heading off Bexler! I'm taking those notes from him!"

Cluny went across the warehouse floor, fast. He wanted to meet Bexler in the alley before the commissioner had an opportunity to destroy the I O U's. Cluny aimed his flashlight down the plank stairs. There was no time now to fumble cautiously in darkness.

He sprinted across the lower floor among stacks of packing boxes. The window stuck, and he used both hands on it.

He had both hands on the sash when a figure shifted out from behind a packing box and shoved a gun against Cluny's kidney.

The hoarse voice was triumphant. "Stick 'em up! You're comin' wit' me, bo!"

CHAPTER II

DEADLINE



HEY sat in a shabby, half-lighted basement office of the warehouse. Sailor Bryan was a heavy-weight grown fat, with a dented nose, cauliflower ears, black stubble on his jowls. He had been a tough trial horse heavyweight, handled by a shady manager, and he had been willing to do a tank dive for a price. He was still willing to.

"What the hell!" Sailor Bryan said. "I should have handed you to the cops, an' you know it."

"Damn it, Sailor, talk sense. I wasn't burglarizing this joint and you know that. I'm a reporter."

"Says you."

"Says me, and says my money—if money talks."

The Sailor's eyes got interested under their scarred brows. "How much?"

Cluny consulted his strap watch. It said seven minutes past one. He reflected that the three-star final morning edition of the *Tribune* went to bed at two, was off the presses and into the trucks by three. The same schedule applied to the rival *Register*.

Cluny was thinking about the news scoop. In no conceivable way could Ajall's murder be kept off the *Register's* front page. They would get it as routine police news. But they wouldn't get the Bexler angle unless they deliberately left their forms open until after three A.M., and then printed a re-hash of the *Tribune* story. If the story could be kept quiet until a few minutes after three, the *Register* would be nailed flat. They'd be caught with only a couple of lobster shift reporters in the newsroom, the final edition already printed and on the trucks, the pressroom employees off duty.

As he stared at the strap watch, Cluny knew that it would be fatal to let the *Register* find out that a *Trib*

With terrific leverage he fairly hoisted Harry's legs off the floor



Trock was excited. "What the hell's holding *you* up? Jones already called in, he's on his way in a cab now. Did you get . . ."

"I got picked up by the watchman here. I'm suspected of being a heist guy or what have you. He wants to turn me in to the cops."

Trock swore luridly. "I guess we can grease this one," Cluny said. "I know you won't pay much, because the story itself isn't worth a lot."

"*What!* Bexler bumps off Ajall, and it ain't worth a lot?"

"Ten isn't enough, chief," Cluny said. "The guy's right here beside me, and I'll ask him." He grinned widely at Sailor Bryan. "Make it fifty, chief."

reporter had been in the warehouse, overlooking the scene of the murder, at the very moment of Ajall's death. Another thing, he absolutely had to get the speak-o-phone device out of Jalice's dressing room. Otherwise, the *Register* crowd would smell a rat, would hold their presses.

"Let me use the phone, Sailor," Cluny said. "I'll see how much money I can get for you."

"Go ahead, pal."

Cluny dialed, asked for Troch personally. "Hullo, Chief?" he asked.

TROCK put his voice down. . . . "Anything, anything, only make sure the lug doesn't turn and sell you out to the *Register* afterwards. And get that damned suitcase out of the girl's room. That instrument cost us five hundred dollars, and I don't want it confiscated by some nosy cop."

"Sure, sure," Cluny told him. He put down the phone and looked at the Sailor's battered face.

"Now, listen. I'll give you twenty dollars and my watch, until tomorrow morning. Then I'll be around with thirty more, and you give me the watch back. If I'm not around, you can take the watch over to the *Register* and the auditor will give you your money. Just say I sent you."

The pug scowled. "I thought you was on the *Trib*. It said *Trib* on that press card you showed me."

"I used to be on the *Trib*. That's an old card. I changed over to the *Register* six months ago."

Cluny got out the twenty dollars, unstrapped his watch, and handed it over.

"So long, pal," he said. "I'll be seeing you."

Sailor Bryan unlocked the front door, and Cluny went out rapidly. He followed the sidewalk toward the High Seas Club and stopped when something crunched under his foot. He looked up, saw the open window, and then looked down at the half-inch-sized fragments of black waxy substance on the pavement.

"Hell!" Cluny said bitterly.

He rounded past the High Seas doorman, into the night spot. It had the usual small tables crowded around the usual small floor, the raised orchestra dais, and a black velvet curtain back of the orchestra. The bar went down the side of the room, and there were twin phone booths at the end of the bar.

Cluny bought a highball and a slug at the bar, carried both into the nearest booth. He fed the slug into the grooved slot, dialed, and asked for Trock again, personally.

"I told Bryan I worked for the *Register*," he said. "If he tries to doublecross me, he'll try to sell out to you. If he does, you string him along."

"That was smart of you, Mike."

"Somebody has to be smart," Cluny said. "I told Screwball to be careful with that recording, and it's outside, smashed all to hell."

"He told me that. He put it in his pocket for safekeeping and when

he crawled out the window, it fell and broke."

"That guy *would* ball it up for us!"

"It's too bad," the city editor said, "but, after all, you both listened in on the conversation. The main thing now is to get that speak-o-phone out of the place. Are the cops there yet?"

"No, it's all quiet."

"They haven't found the body yet, then. We'll notify the cops ourselves, just as soon as you get the equipment out. Jones just came in, and I've got the doors locked."

"Chief," Cluny said, "I'm not too hot about pulling our equipment. Sitting there, it's proof we did listen in. It's the only physical proof, since the recording is broken."

"Bexler can't go against your word and Jones'," Trock answered. "And besides, Jalice can testify the equipment was there. It *has* to be pulled. I can't risk the *Register* finding a dictaphone planted with wires over to that warehouse. They'd go in there, and, of course, the watchman would spill everything."

"Sure, yes."

CLUNY walked out of the booth, put an elbow on the bar, and watched the floor show. He waited for Jalice Hurrel's fan dance, and her number was like all the other fan dances in the world—dim blue baby spot, billowing ostrich plumes, a more or less invisible girl behind the plumes.

The lights flashed up for a moment at the end of the dance, and you could see that Jalice had a voluptuous shape, and a wealth of tawny red hair streaming down over marble-smooth shoulders.

Cluny stepped past the orchestra dais, behind the velvet curtain. He pushed open a door marked "Private." Two guards, both of them big, flanked the hallway inside.

Jalice was ahead of him, on the stairs.

She looked around. "He's okay, friend of mine," she vouched.

Nevertheless, the guards made a business of slapping Cluny's pockets, armpits, thighs.

He didn't carry a gun, and he had

dropped the flashlight inside the warehouse window.

Cluny went on, followed Jalice's lithe wrapper-clad figure up the stairs. A hallway branched both ways from the head of the steps. The big door to the right was marked, "Casino." Jalice turned the other way, past the closed office door. Cluny looked at that, picturing Jupe Ajall inside, quietly dead in his swivel chair. They went into the dressing room.

"Well, did you get it?" Jalice Hurrel asked.

She put up a hand and removed her tawny wig. Her own hair was very black, straight, and bobbed short. Cluny thought he liked it better that way.

"Plenty," Cluny told her.

He stepped past the table and the makeup mirror. There were costumes strung on a wire along the wall, and Cluny hauled the suitcase off a chair behind the costumes. The wires went out the window. Cluny gave the wires a hard jerk. He hauled them in, hand over hand, looping them.

When he had done this he twisted the wire onto the suitcase handle, lowered the suitcase through the window, and fed out the wire slowly. When the case bumped onto the alley bricks he tossed the wire down and closed the window.

Jalice puffed a cigarette, watching him. She was very pretty, but she wore a stern expression.

"Plenty?" she said. "Enough to expose Bexler, and close up this place?"

"Yeah, both."

"That means I'm out of a job."

"You don't have to worry," Cluny told her. "The *Tribune* keeps its word. We promised to do the right thing by you, and I'll see that we do."

"You better."

"We will," Cluny said. "How does this back stairs arrangement work?"

"The—oh. The back door is generally kept locked," Jalice told him. "It's open sometimes for people who want to come here, and don't want to be seen downstairs. That's how I found out about Bexler's visits. His wife used it, too. Why?"

"I wondered whether Bexler could have come up here without anyone seeing him. Any guards, I mean."

"Oh, yes. He could get into the office without being seen, but not into the Casino. That's guarded like a United States mint, inside. Ajall doesn't keep any money in the office. It's merely a place to interview customers who want to cash checks and so on."

"Then I could go out the back way without being seen?"

"The door's probably locked again by now. Why do you want to go out that way?"

"It was just an idea."

"You go out the front way, and let those guards downstairs know you're out of here," she said.

"All right, it suits me."

MIKE CLUNY went out, down the steps through the High Seas, around into the alley, thinking about Jalice. He liked her, he decided. The suitcase was there, safe. He opened it, pushed the wires inside, and carried the suitcase out of the alley. A cruising cab came to the curb, but he shook his head and walked on. He walked three blocks to the nearest El station.

Cluny fed a dime into a luggage locker. He fitted the suitcase on its end into the locker, closed the metal door, turned the key, and put the key into the watch pocket of his trousers. Then he went into a phone booth, rang up the Homicide Division.

"Beale? You'll find Jupe Ajall in his office, dead, stabbed." He hung up quickly.

Cluny wandered back to the High Seas. He was at the bar when Lieutenant Beale came storming in, a half a dozen Homicide dicks at his heels.

Cluny followed, grinning.

When he got upstairs, Beale was striding out of Ajall's office, scowling. Cluny went up to the officer.

"What's the story, Joe?"

Beale looked at him bitterly. "A phony! Some damn' practical joker phoned in a rib about Jupe being here, dead."

"Isn't he?"

"Hell, no!" Beale's eyes sharpened.

"What made you think he *might* be?" Cluny wedged his eyebrows. "I saw him. I called you, Joe."

He shoved into the office, stared around. There wasn't any Ajall in the swivel chair. There wasn't any blood, either, although the carpet was damp, as if it had been scrubbed recently over a yard-wide area beside the chair.

"Well," Cluny said, "they moved him!"

"Or you're drunk."

Cluny went out through the door, along the hall, to the Casino. He threw his weight onto that door, and it opened easily. The Casino was empty.

"Hell, yes!" Cluny said. "They moved him, and they moved all their paraphernalia besides! Or else they'd be running here wide open, the way they do every night. Joe, you've got to take this place apart, brick by brick, if you have to. You find where they've got the wheels hidden, and you'll find Jupe Ajall there, too!"

Cluny said this confidently. But downstairs, in the phone booth, he didn't sound so sure.

"Maybe you better hold up the scoop, Chief. The body's gone, disappeared."

"Great jumping Judas! Almighty X. Juniper!" came Trock's wrathful outcry. "You *saw* Bexler kill him, didn't you?"

"Yeah, sure."

"And you're going to tell Joe Beale you saw it, aren't you? You've got to tell him!"

"I guess so."

"That means he'll arrest Bexler, doesn't it?"

"Naturally."

"And I'm to stop the story!" Trock said bitterly. "I'm to sit on my chair and let the afternoon sheets print my scoop! My reporters cover a murder, and you're asking me to read about it in the other papers! Mike, you must be crazy!"

Cluny's face was flushed, resentful. He growled into the phone. "It's damned hard to prove a murder without a little piece of a *corpus delicti*, Chief. You might be letting yourself in for something."

"Almighty Juniper!" Trock howled over the wire. "You get the news and let me worry about printing it! What the hell are you hired for? Go out and find Ajall's body!"

CHAPTER III

LIBEL



NUCKLES crashing on the door brought Cluny's head off the pillow. Outside a familiar voice was roaring:

"Mike! For cripes sake! Snap out of it!"

Cluny groaned and got out of bed. He looked at the sunlit face of the clock. It said 9:30. This wasn't funny, considering it had been six when he turned in. Yawning, rubbing his eyes, he unchained and opened the door.

Trock came in, fast, a stumpy, thick-bellied figure of a man with jaundiced eyes and the complexion of a boiled beet.

Behind Trock was Screwball Jones, blond hair carefully combed, but blue eyes unhappy and plump lips sagging in despair. He looked piteously bewildered, and also more than a little comical.

Glaring at Cluny, Trock waved his hands and bellowed crazily. "What the Juniper! Can't you answer a phone?"

"I unhooked it."

Trock swore viciously. "Well, it happened! Bexler had a look at the *Trib* this morning, and called in a lawyer. He's slapping a hundred thousand dollar lawsuit onto us. Libel!"

"I tried to tell you."

"Fifty thousand, for saying he killed Ajall," Trock said, "and fifty thousand, for defaming his wife. He says she never was inside the joint in her life, never signed an I O U, nothing!"

Cluny went into the bathroom, splashed water over his head until he was fully awake.

"What am I supposed to do about

it?" he called through the doorway.

"What've you done so far?"

"I told Beale the story," Cluny said. "We went out to Bexler's place and roused the guy out of bed. He denied everything, said he hit the hay about eleven last night, and didn't even know Ajall personally. He said I was mistaken, that I'd seen somebody entirely different, and so on. The guy's a lawyer, and he made it sound pretty good. Said I couldn't recognize a man across a street on a rainy night, or through a couple of windows."

Cluny came out of the bathroom, rubbing his hair with a towel.

"Bexler throws a lot of weight in this town," he went on grimly. "Lieutenant Beale didn't put him under arrest, or anything like that. In fact, he kind of apologized. It was one man's word against the other's, and Bexler happens to be the civil service commissioner while I'm a mere reporter."

"Mere, is right," City Editor Trock said.

"Sure, I'm to blame," Cluny told him. "I shouldn't have run into Sailor Bryan, or I'd have those I O U's, and I'd have Bexler cold."

"You should have hung onto that speak-o-phone recording instead of trusting it with this poor dumb sap." Trock glowered at Screwball Jones, and his expletives crashed.

He traced the ancestry of Screwball far back into the animal kingdom. He also defied science to produce a microscope powerful enough to find one germ of brains in the fat-head.

Screwball sat on the edge of his chair, wet his lips, and admitted he seemed to be hoodooed.

"Hoodooed, hell!" cried Trock. "You are a hoodoo! I should have canned you three years ago, and I wish I had! I wouldn't be in this unholy mess now! You're the lug that dug up this thing originally!"

"Quit beefing," Cluny said wearily. "After that talk with Bexler, I went back and helped the cops tear Ajall's joint apart. We found a chute built into the wall, and the roulette wheels in the basement at the bottom of the chute. Ajall wasn't there, though.

It looks like the body went out the back door."

CLUNY stepped out of his pajamas, got into shorts and an undershirt.

"Hell with Ajall!" Trock erupted violently. "Ajall ain't suing us! You could find his body ten times over, and it wouldn't prove a thing. Thing is, we got to crack Bexler's alibi. Let the cops turn up their own stiffs!"

"You didn't say that last night."

"I wasn't being sued for libel last night," Trock reminded him grimly. "I had what looked like a hell of a good scoop by a reporter I could depend on."

Cluny pulled on his trousers, tucked in a shirt.

Trock stood up. "I'm having a check made to find the cab driver who took Bexler to the High Seas last night. I'm having another check made on people who hung around the joint, to establish that Marie Bexler played there and lost. Maybe you can think of something better. Or, maybe Screwball can find a tiny living idea in that Sahara Desert he calls his mind."

"I told you all I know already," Screwball said. "Gosh, it's a complete mystery to me."

Cluny draped a tie around his neck. "Get the doorman from the High Seas. Bexler walked right by him, and he might be able to identify the guy, if he wants to. Trouble is, hundreds of people go by that place in a night. He can't remember all of 'em, and a smart lawyer would tear his identification to pieces."

"Listen," Screwball said, "if Jalice said *she* saw Bexler come up those back stairs?"

"Same thing. It has to come out that we planted the dictaphone in her room, that the *Trib* is paying her. Her word wouldn't amount to a hoot in Hades, under cross-examination."

"I wanted to be a deep sea diver when I was a kid," Trock mumbled dolorously. "Why couldn't I pick a nice quiet occupation like that?"

Cluny put on a coat. "We may need a deep sea diver to find Ajall, at that."

Cluny looked at Trock steadily. "We have to find the body to find out how it got wherever it is, now. I thought at first his guards found him, and shoved the corpse into hiding. Those guards are tough monkeys, and I can see them cleaning up a score like that on their own, instead of calling copper. But now, I think Bexler had a hand in the disappearing body angle. If I could prove that, boy, I'd have him."

"If," Trock echoed.

"I want a hundred dollars out of you," Cluny told him. "No if, either."

"A hundred for what?"

"Thirty for Sailor Bryan. I want some expense money, and I want to buy a gun."

"You got a gun!"

Cluny nodded. "I've got a book, too. But you don't expect a guy to find all the answers in one book, do you?"

"A gun's a gun."

Cluny shook his head. "This one isn't. This one is English, with a silencer on it. And furthermore, the silencer works no matter how many shots you fire. And I want to work silently from now on." He rubbed his fingers impatiently. "What's a hundred dollars, with a hundred grand at stake? A thousand-to-one shot!"

"That's what I thought," Trock muttered. "A thousand-to-one."

He went into his pocket, though, and fished the hundred from his wallet.

"Now let's have breakfast," Cluny said. "The condemned men ate a hearty meal, that sort of thing."

BY DAY, the High Seas Club lacked glamor. It was just another shabby building among other shabby buildings in a back-of-the-tracks part of town. Trucks were loading in the alley behind the warehouse. Cluny went into the warehouse whistling, and nobody challenged his business there.

He walked downstairs into the basement. The door of the little office stood ajar, and Cluny passed through it, to another and inner door on which he rapped sharply with his knuckles.

"Okay, comin'!" a voice told him, and Sailor Bryan, big tattooed arms projecting nakedly from an undershirt, opened up. "Huh? Oh, it's youse!"

Beyond the Sailor, Cluny could see a smaller room with a cot in it, with glossy photographs pasted onto the walls. A roly-poly man holding a cigar between his gold-capped teeth sat on the end of the cot.

"Roon. I'll be damned," Cluny said.

Roon took the cigar out of his mouth. "Hullo, Mike. I see they promoted you to the funny papers. You certainly handed the town a belly laugh with that story of yours last night."

Rumpled pages of the *Tribune* were strewn about the room.

Cluny shrugged.

"I got your thirty bucks," he told Sailor Bryan, "but first I want my watch back."

Then he looked at Roon. "I thought you and Bryan here were all washed up. You're the kind of manager that drops a pug like a hot potato, minute the stumblebum can't fight any more. Don't tell me the Sailor is trying *another* comeback."

Roon shrugged his roly-poly shoulders, showed his gold-capped teeth in a grin. "No. We're just very good friends."

"What a lie. You never had a friend in your life."

Sailor Bryan jerked up the cot pillow, picked up the strap watch, and turned to Cluny. Cluny was eyeing the photographs around the walls. Some of these showed the Sailor in various boxing stances, and others showed Jalice Hurrel with her fans and not much else.

"Some dame," Cluny said, making it admiring. "Who is she? Friend of yours?"

The Sailor stretched his battered lips into a grin. "Ahh, dat's just pitchers. Some shape, I'll say."

"I'd call her a pretty gorgeous red-head."

The Sailor grinned more widely. "She's a broinette, fella. What about my toity bucks?"

Cluny nodded seriously, got out

three tens. "Do I pay you, or is Roon here, still clipping his cut?"

Roon hoisted himself off the cot. "You're too damned cute for your own good, Mike Cluny," he said. "Some day you'll get that smart lip of yours buttoned up for keeps."

"Not by you, Mr. Roon."

"You make me laugh," Roon said. "You were so damned foxy about telling the Sailor you worked for the *Register*. All you did was protect the *Register* from a hundred grand libel case. Think that over!"

Mike Cluny didn't bother to answer. He walked on out and headed uptown.

Cluny rang the doorbell, and, when a white-aproned maid opened the door, he put out his hand and placed a small black sphere in her hands.

"Give this to Mrs. Bexler. Tell her the man who brought it wants to see her. It's important."

The girl took the sphere, and then closed the door in Cluny's face. Presently, though, she came back and opened it.

"This way please, upstairs," she told him.

MARIE BEXLER stood by the window in a room that looked like a movie set boudoir.

"Who are you?" she asked. "What do you want?"

She was blondely plump, in a green silk and gold-embroidered Chinese wrapper, with straw mules on her feet. The mules were mostly open on top, showing a nice instep and crimson lacquered toenails.

She held the black sphere in front of her, pinched between fingers that had crimson lacquered nails.

"Good-morning," Cluny said. "I dropped in to offer you a bit of legal advice."

"You're a lawyer?"

"I know the libel laws," Cluny told her grimly. "Your husband started something when he threatened to slap a fifty thousand dollar lawsuit against the *Tribune* for defaming your character. That's a lot of character, Mrs. Bexler, and you may have to prove your reputation could be hurt that much. In other words,

maybe it wasn't worth a plugged nickel to start with."

Color flamed into the blonde's cheeks. "Say! Who do you think you are, talking to me this way?"

Cluny grinned. "I'm giving you a break, Marie. I'm warning you that the *Tribune* will exhume your entire life, present *and* past. There may be episodes you wouldn't want discussed in open court. If so, you'd better persuade Bexler to call off his dogs."

She gave Cluny a blazing look. "You'd better say exactly who you are and what you want. Otherwise, I'll call my husband and let him attend to you."

"Bexler's at City Hall."

"No, he isn't. He's at home, avoiding the reporters. Is that what you are, a reporter?"

"Sure. I'm with the *Trib*."

"Well, of all the *colossal* nerve!" Marie Bexler said hotly, and started to walk out of the room.

"Wait," Cluny said. "What's that in your hand, Marie?"

She stopped, looked at the sphere. "You mean this roulette ball?"

"Yeah. I mean, it's funny an ordinary housewife would even know what a roulette ball was. It's even more extraordinary that she'd let an absolute stranger into the house on that kind of a calling card." Cluny shrugged. "But you're not an ordinary housewife, are you?"

The blonde's eyes were sullen.

"You can't bluff me," she said. "I never played roulette in my life except once—four years ago, in Hollywood. I happened to be a dress extra in a movie. My friends joked me about it, kidded about my career in pictures. When the maid brought that ball here, I thought an old friend from the Coast was downstairs."

Cluny didn't know whether she told the truth or not, whether Marie Bexler had even been in Hollywood. He looked triumphant, though. He remembered that Screwball Jones had done a hitch on a Los Angeles paper, while Screwball was trying to peddle his scenarios direct to the producers.

He decided to try a shot in the dark.

"Yeah, I know about *that* part of your life, too, and I've got the low-down on some of those old friends of yours. My sidekick on this assignment happened to be in L. A. at the time. Why, are you surprised?"

SURPRISED wasn't the word for it. Marie Bexler looked dumb-founded. Her eyes were harried, slithering glances around the room. The roulette ball dropped through her fingers, bounced, rolled under a chair. It seemed to make a lot of sound in the silent boudoir.

The blonde shivered. She wetted her full-blown lips. "I can't talk about it here. My husband might walk in here at any minute. Listen, I generally go out with my Chow, into the park across the street. You wait there and I'll be out, as fast as I can get dressed."

It looked like a beautiful break. "I'll give you twenty minutes, Marie, and not a second more," Cluny said readily.

He hurried downstairs and out of the house. There was a drugstore two blocks away, and Cluny hastened into it and into a phone booth.

He got Trock on the wire, "Check this fast. I want Marie Bexler's name before she married the guy, and after that, I want Jones on the phone."

He could hear Trock on the other phone, shouting at the clipping morgue attendant. It was a matter of seconds to get Bexler's envelope out of the files.

"Casaba," Trock said. "Her name was Casaba, or anyway that's what she put onto the license."

"Okay, put Jones on." Cluny's face was tense. "Screwball, did you know of a Marie Casaba out in Hollywood?"

"No-o. Why, did she say she knew me?"

Cluny's face relaxed, disappointed. "Nah! I thought you might remember something. She evidently was in some damned jam or other, and it probably made the papers out there. I want it checked, in a hurry. Long-distance the papers, the police out there. I'm going for a walk with Marie in the next half hour, and I'll

get her into a drugstore so I can phone you back. It'd help like hell if I knew exactly what she's afraid of."

"I thought you went out hunting for Ajall's body," Screwball said.

"This is my way of hunting for it!" Cluny snapped. "Tell Trock we want action on this, at absolutely any cost."

Cluny walked back to the park, settled himself onto a bench facing the Bexler's residence, and wondered how he could bluff it along without her finding out that he knew absolutely nothing about her previous history. He was still wondering about it when the door opened and the blonde came out with a Chow tugging at its leash.

She stopped at the curb, waited for a car to pass. The car stopped instead. A roly-poly man with a cigar in his mouth got out and started up the sidewalk toward the house. The Chow barked angrily, but the roly-poly man didn't glance around.

"Roon!" Mike Cluny muttered. "What the hell brings him here?"

Scowling, he watched Roon buzzing the Bexler doorbell. Meanwhile, Marie and the Chow had crossed the street. Cluny stood up.

"Not here. Follow me. We mustn't be seen together," Marie said, across a half a dozen yards of grass.

She jerked the Chow, set off along the sidewalk. Her French heels clicked, and her hips rolled provocatively as she hurried on ahead of Cluny. He decided she was putting on a show and he grinned dourly. He had an idea Marie would be full of feminine guile and trickery.

Two men behind newspapers on a park bench lifted their heads as the blonde undulated past. They stood, and one of the pair seized Cluny's elbow. The other opened the folded newspaper in his hand and showed him a revolver. Too late, he recognized the guards who had frisked him at the foot of the stairs last night.

"We mean it," said the one who gripped Cluny's elbow, steering him toward a car parked at the curb. "You want to go for a ride, don't you?"

CHAPTER IV

THE HEAT



AS THEY got in to the car, the one with the gun followed Cluny into the back seat. "Keep your hands on your knees, pal."

His breath smelled powerfully of garlic. The other, a fellow with a cowlick falling across his forehead, got into the

front seat and tossed back a rubberized bag. It was the kind of a bag used as a tennis racquet cover, and it had seen use, although, maybe, not that kind.

"Over your head, Mister," "Garlic Breath" said. He employed his free hand, pulling the rubberized bag over Cluny's head so that it covered his face. Cluny couldn't see a thing now.

He kept his hands on his knees while Garlic Breath slapped his pockets.

"Oh, oh," Garlic Breath said. "Harry, look here!"

"What the hell—"

"It's a whisper gun, Harry."

"He's a nice guy," Harry said. "I like a guy to have a heater of his own. It's so much better and safer to blast a guy with his own heat, anyway. But when he supplies a whisper gun, I call that real service."

The starter ground, the gears clashed a little, and the car moved.

"I want you to slide away down in the seat and practically sit on your neck, Mr. Cluny," Garlic Breath said. "We don't like to have people seeing you riding around with your head in a sack. It might cause a commotion."

Cluny slid down. He hadn't said a word since Harry grabbed his arm.

They rode for ten, maybe fifteen minutes. Cluny suspected part of the time they were just driving around the park, but he couldn't be sure of this. The car slowed, shifted into second, stopped, rolled a few inches, and bumped. Cluny decided they'd pulled into a garage.

(Continued on page 102)



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(Continued from page 101)

They marched him out of the garage, across a lawn, up steps into a house. When they finally pulled the bag away from his face, he was in a kitchen.

Garlic Breath leaned against the kitchen sink with the English-silenced gun in his fist.

Harry was smiling. "Sit down, Mr. Cluny."

Cluny shrugged, sat down.

"Now, what was it your sidekick told you about Marie Bexler?" Harry asked.

"That's just what I had figured out," Cluny told him.

"You had what figured out—"

"Why Marie took me for a walk."

"That don't answer my question."

"It answers mine," Cluny said.

"You can figure out your own puzzles. That's what I'm doing."

Harry pushed the cowlick up from his forehead, looked narrowly into Cluny's set, angular face.

"Mister Cluny, we know all about your rep," he said. "We know you're a hard guy, and naturally we're prepared to handle you in a hard way. Why not save yourself the grief?"

Cluny shrugged.

"Hell, Harry, you're wasting your breath," the guy with the gun said.

"Thank God," Cluny said, "it isn't your breath."

Harry went around to the gas stove, opened and lighted the oven. He grinned grimly at Cluny.

"The way we work this is, we put your feet in here. If we have to, we'll bake the flesh right off the bones. It takes a long time, and it hurts like hell. Bring your chair over here."

"You make me."

"This is going to hurt you more than it hurts us, Cluny," Harry said.

He stepped behind the chair, lifted his hand, and brought his clenched fist down on top of Cluny's skull. Cluny's head jerked, wobbled. He fell sideways out of the chair, onto the floor.

"You slugged him too hard," Garlic Breath said.

"I know a cure," said Harry, lifting the chair over Cluny's body.

Cluny grabbed Harry's ankles with both hands. He jerked with all the strength in his arms. Cluny's feet shot out, parked themselves against the kitchen wall. He had terrific leverage, and he fairly hoisted Harry's legs off the floor. Harry was hanging onto the chair, and he let go of it now, but not fast enough to catch his balance. He went over backwards, struck his head on the metal edge of the sink as he fell.

Garlic Breath cursed, ran in waving the English gun, and tried to swat Cluny with the weapon. He missed as Cluny rolled over on the floor. Cluny grabbed the chair with one hand, hurled the chair at the man's face.

GARLIC BREATH staggered backwards. Cluny came up, advanced on the balls of his feet, in short springy steps.

"Now!" Cluny said. "Now, I'm going to beat you into a pulp!"

"Get back! I'll shoot!"

"Fiddle," said Cluny. He picked up the chair, prodded the man toward the corner of the kitchen. They had got turned around in the struggle, and Garlic Breath was back up against the stove. Cluny gave him a hard, vicious poke with the chair legs.

"Yah!" Garlic Breath yelled, and the gun roared. It made a tortured noise.

"Oh-my-Gawd! My hand!" Garlic Breath screamed.

Blood flowed from his hand. The gun lay on the floor in front of him, smoking acridly, leaking fumes from its ruptured mechanism and split barrel. The violence of the explosion had literally burst his fingertips.

"Now I'll take *your* gun," Cluny said. "Mine was packed for this. I've been covering the crime beat in this town too long not to know this stunt of blasting a man with his own heat."

He grinned widely. Cluny was human enough to enjoy the situation of being hours ahead of the other guy's game.

"After that," he threatened, "you're telling me where Ajall . . ."

A hoarse voice boomed behind Cluny. "You're right," the voice said. "You been around *too* long!"

Cluny spun on his heel and stared. "Great Caesar's ghost!" he gulped.

It was Jupe Ajall who filled the kitchen doorway. Jupe's thick fingers curled around the butt of a big Mauser pistol.

"Sit down, Cluny," he said pointedly. "Sit yourself on that chair and behave. You're asking for a lead ticket to Hell, and I'm liable to accommodate you."

AJALL's eyes were reddened, murderous.

Cluny sat down, reluctantly.

"Now," Ajall said, "what exactly *did* Jones say about Marie Bexler?"

"Nothing," Cluny answered. "That was just a lucky guess on my part, Jupe. Say, you're a hell of an active corpse, ain't you?"

"What did Jones say?" Ajall growled.

Cluny shrugged. "He didn't. It was a trick knife, huh? A stage knife?"

"What did Jones say?"

Cluny shook his head. Garlic Breath reached out his unhurt left fist and batted the knuckles across Cluny's wide mouth. Cluny winced, spat blood.

Harry picked himself off the floor, mumbling, rubbing his bruised skull. He wound his fingers into Cluny's hair, pulled hard, and used his other hand to chafe Cluny's ear. This hurt enough to make Cluny's eyes water.

Ajall laughed. "Get smart, you sap. Jalice had already phoned Screwball, and the dumb alvin's coming out to meet her. We'll kick the facts out of him in a hurry, and you know it." He waved the gun. "Let go, Harry. He wants to talk now."

"So Jalice is in on it, too?" Cluny said bitterly.

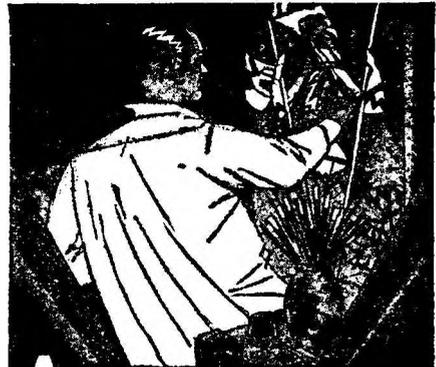
"All right!" Ajall said angrily.

"All right! Take his shoes off, boys."

"What did Jones tell you?"

They were asking Cluny that question for maybe the hundredth time. It was later, he didn't know how much later. Cluny had passed out

(Continued on page 104)



ART *is necessary* **IN MODERN INDUSTRY**

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(Continued from page 103)

more than once. Water sloshed on the linoleum floor because they'd sluiced pans of it over his head.

Cluny shook his head feebly. The hair hung in soaked strands down his forehead, over his eyes. Cluny reached up a hand, dropped the hand before it got as high as his bruised face.

His eyes were welted, half closed. Blood rilled from a puffed lip onto his chin, onto his shirt front. His clothes were soaked with blood and water.

"You stinking rats!" Cluny said.

There was the sound of a bell ringing in another part of the house.

"That must be Jones now," Jupe Ajall said. "Take this guy upstairs, Harry. Two of us can handle Jones easy, especially if he meets Cluny on his way in here."

Cluny gritted his teeth as they hoisted him onto his baked, swollen feet. He was in a bad way, although not quite as bad as he put on. It had been an act when he dropped his hand into his lap as if unable to wipe his face with it. He felt strong enough to use a gun in that hand, if he only had a way of getting a gun into it.

Harry pushed his shoulder. "Get going!"

CHAPTER V

KEYS TO CRIME



JUPE AJALL walked ahead. "I want Jones to get a good look at him. If Cluny tries to talk, though, I want you to knock him absolutely cold."

"It'll be a pleasure," Harry promised fervently.

Ajall opened the front door. "Uh-h? what the hell!" he grunted, amazed.

It wasn't Jones who came into the room. Three men came in. Bexler entered first, with the roly-poly Roon at his heels, and Sailor Bryan bringing up the rear. Bryan carried a nickel-plated .38 revolver in his large fist.

"We're really in trouble now,

Jupe," Bexler said. "This damned watchman is a Peeping Tom, and he's been spying on Jalice Hurrel's dressing room all along. Apparently she never pulled the shades, and . . ."

Bexler checked, now that he saw Mike Cluny.

"Damn it!" he said angrily. "What's the idea? You're supposed to stay under cover, Jupe! What the hell's the sense of letting this reporter see you walking around here?"

"He'd be walking around Police Headquarters by now, unless I stopped him," Ajall growled, "and even *you* couldn't clear the rap then."

Roon waddled across the room, removed the eternal cigar from his lips and stared enjoyably at Cluny's battered face.

"Pretty," he decided. "Artistic."

Ajall glared. "Where in hell do *you* come in?"

"I'm cutting myself and the Sailor in, see?" Roon said.

"I'm trying to tell you," Bexler insisted. "The watchman was spying on Jalice last night, as usual. He happened to see . . ."

Ajall cleared his throat noisily.

"Hold on," the gambler said. "Let's settle this among ourselves. I don't want to discuss all this in front of Cluny. Harry, take Cluny upstairs."

Harry pushed Cluny's shoulder again. "Move, Mister!"

They went upstairs, Cluny hanging onto the balustrade with one hand, trying to lift some weight from his swollen feet. He heard the doorbell again as Harry opened an upstairs bedroom.

"Over there, in the closet!" Harry's voice sounded impatient.

Cluny mumbled, stumbled, groped his way into the closet. The door slammed. A key turned. Harry went away, making tip-toe sounds.

Cluny wasn't surprised. He figured it didn't matter to them now, how much he overheard, or what they discussed in front of him. He already knew so much that his end was marked definitely in Ajall's plans, and a quick and violent end it would be.

(Continued on page 106)

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(Continued from page 105)

So, it wasn't Cluny that Ajall wanted out of the room. It had to be Harry. Cluny thought about the big nicked revolver in Sailor Bryan's fist. It would be Harry's job to get behind the Sailor, and save the cut Roon demanded.

Daylight trickled thinly between the closet door and its jamb. Cluny went into his pockets in a hurry. They'd searched him for weapons, not bothering with the coins and penknife he carried. He whipped out the penknife blade.

It took him a moment to locate the doorknob screw, a half a minute to remove the screw. He twisted off the knob, pushed the bolt, heard the knob on the other side bump onto the floor. There was a hole, easily an inch in diameter, through the door panel. He could reach a finger through, touch the key Harry had left in the lock. He couldn't turn the key with his one finger.

He had light to work by when he pulled his finger out of the hole. Cluny seized a wire coat hanger from a pole in the closet. He contrived a tool from the coat hanger's hook, ran the tool through the door, grinned a little when the key turned.

Cluny walked out of the bedroom lamely on his parboiled feet. Voices came up the stair well, and he heard Roon's pleased rumble:

"Sailor saw you leave by the alley door last night, Jupe. It didn't mean a damned thing, until he read in the papers how Bexler was supposed to have killed you, and he heard a radio news broadcast that you, Bexler, were suing for a hundred grand. So the Sailor was smart enough to call in his old manager. I figure you should cut us in for fifty percent."

"Fifty!" Ajall exploded.

"You wouldn't get a dime," Roon said, "if the *Tribune* found out the murder was a phony, staged in front of reporters to get a libelous story printed. Fifty percent is cheap."

There would have to be some other way downstairs than the front steps route. Harry certainly knew another way out. Cluny turned, started back

along the hallway between the bedrooms. His face stayed tight with the pain of every step he took.

The back stairs were narrow, twisting. They led Cluny down to a service pantry off the kitchen. Cluny stood against the pantry wall and peered out around the side of the door jamb.

Screwball Jones sat there on the chair in front of the gas stove. Screwball's round face was unhappy, frightened. His plump hands fumbled around the brim of his pork pie hat. The fingers twitched until they fairly danced.

Behind Screwball, a Chow was lapping at the water on the floor. Marie Bexler was perched on the enameled top of the kitchen table, swinging her silken, shapely legs. She held a small caliber automatic in her hand.

Cluny didn't see anything of Jalice Hurrel. He watched Screwball moulding the pork pie entirely out of shape. Something tiny, metallic, gleamed between the reporter's fingers. Like a school kid shooting a spitball, Jones suddenly flicked the metal object from thumb and middle finger.

It flew through the open door into the service pantry. The Chow cocked his head, growled.

"Shut up, Red!" Marie Bexler said. She hadn't detected Screwball's action.

Cluny moved along the pantry wall, bent over, and picked up the metal object. It was a key, exactly like the one he carried in his watch pocket.

He felt sure Screwball hadn't seen him in the pantry, either.

A swinging door opened at the other end of the pantry, into the dining room. Cluny heard the rumble of voices again.

"Be reasonable," Bexler was saying. "You can't expect anything from us until the *Tribune* settles with me. Frankly, I expect a lot less than a hundred grand. I'd even be satisfied if the *Tribune* quit harping about the City Hall crowd."

"Hell with politics!" Roon said. "I want cash, and plenty of it!"

Cluny was out in the dining room
(Continued on page 108)

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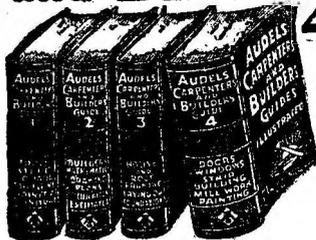
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(Continued from page 107)
 now. He watched the front door inching open, behind Sailor Bryan. Abruptly, the door opened the rest of the way and Harry came in.

"Drop it!" Harry yelled.
 Sailor Bryan had never been too fast on his feet, and retirement hadn't speeded him up any. He came around ponderously, like a ship trying to come up against the wind. Harry triggered, his gun shoulder high. There was a flash, a crash, a veil of nitric fumes.

SAILOR BRYAN had always been Sable to take it, though. Shot through the body, he stayed erect. His arm, with the gun at the end of it, jibbed in a wide circle toward the gunman. There were two clashes and one double-loud crash this time.

"Oh, my Gawd!" Roon shrieked. He bolted toward the door. The Sailor was down, and Harry, too. They would never get up again. Roon cleared the Sailor's body in a frantic leap.

He was a manager of fighters, not used to taking the punishment himself.

Jupe Ajall fired the heavy Mauser. "That's what chiselers get around here," Ajall said, and lowered the smoking weapon.

Roon lay spread-eagled between Harry and the Sailor, sharing his fighter's fate, for once.

The man with the garlic breath had dived flat on his face when the shooting started. Bexler had gone for a gun, had it in his hand. His lips were gray under the glossy black moustache.

"The neighbors," Bexler said. "They'll call the cops."

"Nuts!" Ajall told him. "I got practice targets in the basement. They're used to hearing shots." He pushed the Mauser into his pocket. "Let's get to work on Jones."

Bexler's gray lips made a smile. "That's nice to know," he said. "One more shot won't make any difference, then."

"What the—"
 "Keep away from that pocket,

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Jupe," Bexler said. He wagged the gun, included Garlic Breath in the movement. "Get over against the wall."

Ajall swore luridly, loudly.

"I'm tired of your mistakes, Jupe." Bexler went on. "You make too many of them. It was a mistake when you let Bryan see you leave the club last night, and a bigger one when you showed yourself to Cluny today."

"Yeah?" Ajall rasped. "Who's going to be the wiser?"

"That's it, that's it," Bexler nodded. "You seem to think you can get away with anything provided you kill the witnesses afterward. If things got hot enough, you might even make up your mind to kill me."

"Now, listen. . . ."

"You're not worth your cut to me. You can be found dead here, and it'll prove I couldn't have murdered you last night. My case against the *Tribune* will still be iron-clad, and there'll be one less share to divide."

CLUNY heard these words while he crept across the dining room floor. He crouched in the shelter of the dining room table.

"Let the police figure out the bloody mess," Bexler was saying. "I don't know how they'll explain dead gamblers, pugs, and reporters, but I know I'll be clear of it."

Cluny inhaled a deep breath. He roared:

"Drop that gat, Bexler!"

When he said that, the Chow growled in the kitchen. And Marie came sliding into the dining room. She had the safety catch off the pistol in her hand, and her eyes were flinty. Also her eyes were fixed on the scene in the front room.

She didn't see Cluny rising up from behind the table. He grabbed the blonde's wrist with one hand, the barrel of the gun with the other, and broke the weapon out of her fingers.

"Keep them up, all of you!" Cluny ordered.

The trio in the front room kept their hands high. There was nothing else they could do now.

"Get out there," Cluny told the

(Continued on page 110)

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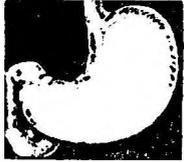
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(Continued from page 109)
blonde virulently. "You're in this act, too."

She obeyed.
"Come on out, Screwball," Cluny said. "Join the party."
Screwball came out, wild-eyed.
"Jeez!" he mumbled. "What a scoop! Where's the phone at, Mike?"
"Hell with the phone! I said join the party! Get out there and keep your hands up!"
Screwball Jones gulped, "Me?" He wet his lips. "Why, Mike! You're kidding!"

Cluny's face wore a bitter look.
"You're the kiddier! A swell build-up you gave yourself, Jones! You're the sap, the clown, the goof! And whoever heard of a dumb stooge rooking a newspaper out of a hundred grand? Go on, line up out there!"

CITY EDITOR TROCK stared at the newspaper-wrapped parcel on his desk, and gave voice. "Judas X. Juniper! By the greased griddles of Gehenna! A guy like Jones!"

"He was on a Los Angeles paper four years ago, at the time of the Gresham libel case," Cluny said. "He saw where a reporter could slip libelous material into a paper, provided the reporter had a reputation for dumbness, so no one would suspect his part in the game. He had that idea in mind all along. Then he ran into Marie, whom he used to know on the Coast. Here, she was married to Bexler, a crooked politician and a deadly enemy of the paper. And there was Ajall, who knew his gambling joint would be closed up after election, anyway. So, thought he, he might as well disappear a few weeks ahead of election day."

"I can read their confessions in the *Tribune*," Trock said. "Only, they hadn't confessed when you pinned it on him. And what I'm asking is, how did you pin it on him?"

"Well," said Cluny, "things. In the first place, I never really believed Screwball could pick up a story by dumb luck as he claimed. It was all too easy. Bexler coming to the club

at night, the windows uncurtained, and the conversation telling us everything we wanted to know. I went into the thing doubtfully.

"Then, I didn't like Screwball's breaking our speak-o-phone recording, which was the only permanent evidence we had. On top of that, there was the way Marie blew up when I told her I knew my sidekick had thrown her back in L. A. I asked myself why they had to put the heat on me. If it had been a public scandal, the *Trib* would dig it up anyway. So it had to be personal between Marie and Jones."

"But they had Jones there, just as much a prisoner as you were," Trock protested.

"Yeah. My bluff worked too well. They thought, maybe he'd blatted out the truth, or part of it, trying to save himself. They had to check that. But when they picked me up, they didn't know but that Jones might not be down in the D. A.'s office spilling the whole load."

Cluny picked up the newspaper-wrapped parcel. "But the key really sold me the idea. I remembered Jones had phoned the story in last night, and he probably used the El-station phone. What had he left in a package locker there? I figured it had to be *this!*"

"Great jumping Judas!"

Cluny lifted the black wax-like roll from the paper. "The recording off the speak-o-phone. He broke a different roll on the sidewalk, and saved this one so Bexler and Ajall couldn't doublecross him. He was afraid they would search him and find the key, so he tossed it away."

Cluny started across the room.

"Hey! Where're you going to?" Trock yelled.

"I got a date to hear Jalice Hurrel's part of it."

"Jalice? I thought you told the cops she was clear and innocent. Not mixed up in the deal at all. She really believed she was feeding Jones a straight tip, you said."

"That," said Cluny, "is why I made the date. I'd like to talk to an innocent soul once—for a change."

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These stories and many others by your favorite authors will appear next issue. We feel sure you'll like it—and while waiting, please write and tell us what you think of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**.

Our Mailbag

Thanks to you all for your swell letters! They help us in planning future issues, and we appreciate them mightily. In a coming issue, we plan to print excerpts from many of them—and meanwhile, here are just a couple of typical communications:

When I saw that **BANK NIGHT** was the title of one of the stories in the December issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, I just grinned. I'm one of these guys that has to be shown, sort of Doubting Thomas I guess. Anyway I've been reading your magazine for some time—and every time I pick up a new copy I say to myself, "This can't be as good as the last issue," and every time I get fooled, for it is always as good, and usually better. So after I had read every story in that December issue, I decided that it really had been **Bank Night** for me and I'd won a pot of swell reading.

Tom Jackson.

Long Beach, California.

Thanks, Tom, and we'll keep on giving you the very best every time, but you had better catch up with your reading. To us the December issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE** is something that happened "way back when." Tell me how you liked the February issue, and what you think of the number now in your hand, won't you?

Presidents, bankers, college professors, men and women in all walks of life are said to enjoy a good mystery story. I refuse to be the exception, and that is why I get so much pleasure out of every issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**.

John T. Hunter.

Shreveport, La.

Those are mighty sweet words, John—and we thank you. Hope that we keep right on pleasing you.

And listen you other fans—we can take knocks as well as boosts. We're anxious to make the magazine what you want it to be, so let's hear from you—and remember that a postcard is as welcome as a letter. Thanks. Be seeing you!

—THE EDITOR.

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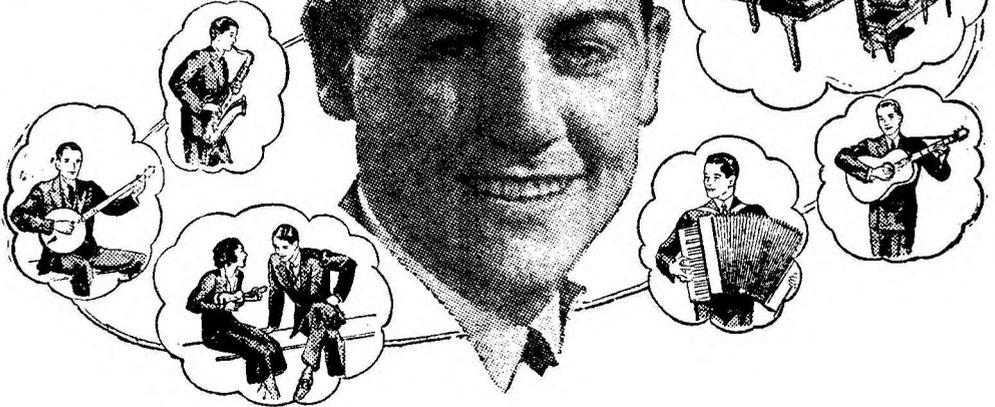
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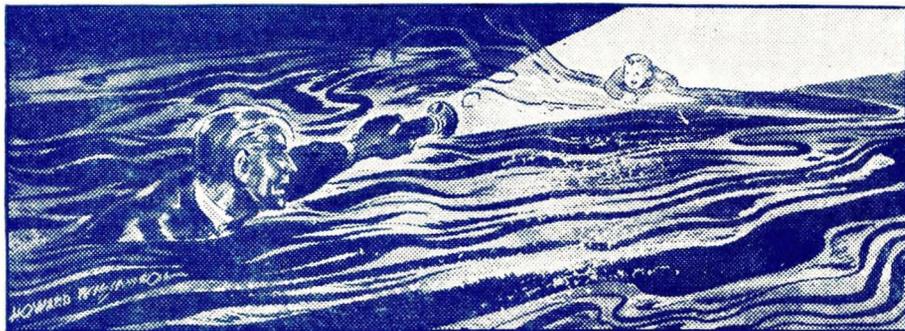
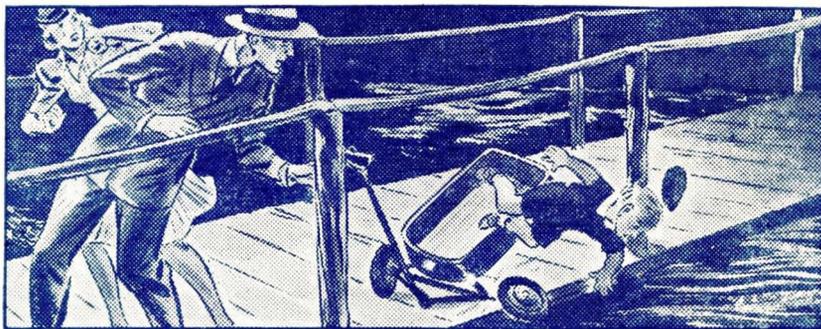


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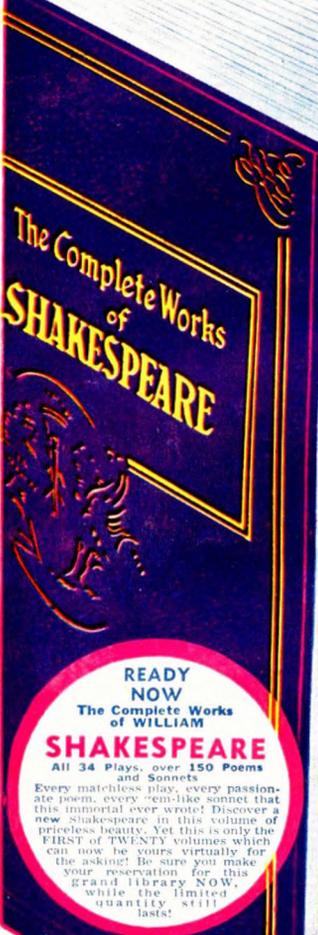
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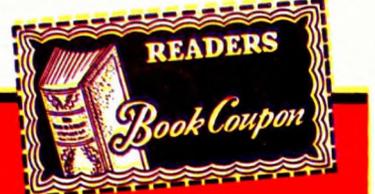
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