

**FIFTEEN COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY STORIES**

**15¢**

**DEC.**

# **POPULAR DETECTIVE**

**15  
COMPLETE  
STORIES**

**A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION**



**IN THIS ISSUE:  
MADMAN'S  
MURDERS**  
A Complete  
Novelette  
By **OSCAR  
SCHISGALL**

**THE MURDER  
SHOE**  
A Novelette  
By **H. RALPH GOLLER**

**FEATURING:**  
**DEATH IN BLOOM**  
A RED LACEY NOVEL  
By **GEORGE BRUCE**

# AND JUST WHEN I'VE MET THE SWELLEST GIRL



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



WHAT'S  
WRONG TED?  
YOU LOOK  
ALL WASHED  
UP!

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



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

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

## 2 WEEKS LATER



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

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



GREAT LADY-KILLER -  
NOW THAT HIS FACE IS  
ALL CLEARED UP -  
FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST  
SURE IS A PIMPLE CHASER

**Don't let adolescent  
pimples spoil any of  
YOUR dates!**

From about 13 to 25 years of age, important glands develop, causing disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons enter the blood. These irritate the skin, cause pimples. Doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast for adolescent pimples. It clears skin irritants out of the blood, pimples disappear. Eat 3 cakes a day until the skin clears.

Copyright, 1935, Standard Brands Incorporated



*—clears the skin*

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

# "Give Me Your Measure and I'll Prove in the First 7 Days You Can Have a Body Like Mine!"

No other Physical In-  
structor in the World  
has ever DARED make  
such an offer!

I'll give you PROOF in 7 days that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Just think of it! Right in the first week under my guidance you will see and feel the improvement! Then as my weekly instructions arrive in your home you continue to re-build, renew and "overhaul" your body. By the end of three months you are the owner of a powerful body that you will be proud to display anywhere! People will notice the ruddy glow of health in your face, the sparkle in your clear eyes, your broad shoulders and they will seek your company. You will be the fellow who will walk off with the prettiest girl and the best job while the others wonder how you did it!

Write your name and address carefully on the coupon below. I'll send you absolutely free a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who twice won the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers! And it shows how I can make you an "Atlas Champion" the same way.

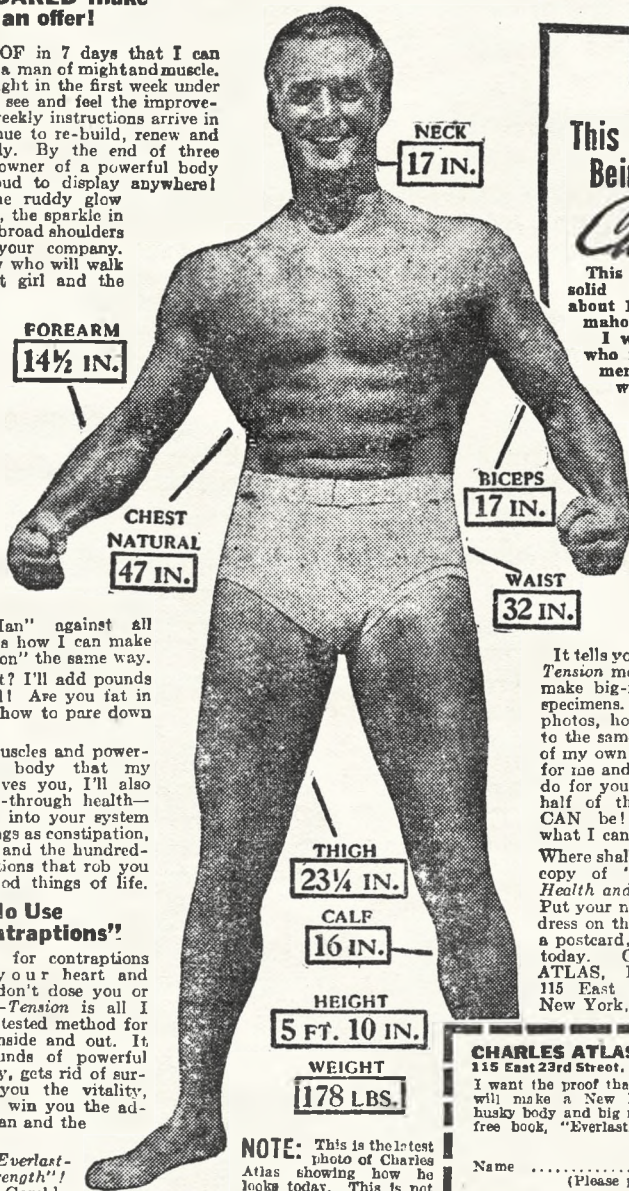
Are you underweight? I'll add pounds where they are needed! Are you fat in spots? I'll show you how to pare down to fighting trim.

And with the big muscles and powerful evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one similar conditions that rob you of good times and good things of life.

## I've Got No Use At All for "Contraptions"

I haven't any need for contraptions that may strain your heart and other vital organs. I don't dose you or doctor you. *Dynamic-Tension* is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

Get my free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength"! Mail my coupon today. Gamble a stamp to prove I can make YOU a new man!



NOTE: This is the latest photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.



This Sterling Silver Cup  
Being Given Away by

*Charles Atlas*

This valuable cup, made of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months. Therefore, no matter what your measurements may be now, you have an equal chance to win this cup for permanent possession—and with YOUR name engraved on it!

48-PAGE BOOK  
**FREE**

It tells you all about my special *Dynamic-Tension* method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique. What my system did for me and these hundreds of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only half of the man you CAN be! Find out what I can do for you.

Where shall I send your copy of "Everlasting Health and Strength"? Put your name and address on the coupon, or a postcard, and mail it today. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 7712, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 7712  
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *Dynamic-Tension* will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

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

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**MAIL COUPON FOR FREE BOOK NOW!**

# POPULAR DETECTIVE

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POPULAR DETECTIVE, published monthly by Beacon Magazines, Inc., at 22 West 48th St., New York, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription yearly, \$1.80; single copies, \$15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Entered as second-class matter August 21, 1934, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1935, by Beacon Magazines, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope, and are submitted at the author's risk.

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# I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME IN SPARE TIME FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB!

J. E. SMITH, Pres.  
National Radio Institute

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MAIL COUPON**

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PROOF**

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**Many Radio Experts Make  
\$30, \$50, \$75 a Week**

Consider these facts—think of the good jobs they stand for. Over 20,000,000 Radio sets in use, over 600 broadcasting stations, over 40 manufacturers of Radio sets, over 2,000 manufacturers of parts, over 100 Police Departments Radio equipped, airplanes and airports Radio equipped. Thousands of ships touching every seaport of the world, Radio equipped. Over 35,000 stores selling sets and parts. Over 2,000,000 autos Radio equipped in recent years. Loud speaker systems wherever people gather, indoors and outdoors. Commercial Radio stations dotting our coast lines. Radio, a big industry—is growing bigger. A few hundred \$30, \$50, \$75 a week jobs—have grown to thousands.

**Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These**

A spare time or full time service shop; installing, maintaining, operating—broadcast, aviation, commercial, ship, television and police stations. A radio retail or service business of your own. Installing, maintaining, servicing, loud speaker systems. A service or sales job with a store or jobber. I'll train you for good jobs in many branches of Radio.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week  
Extra in Spare Time While Learning**

Every neighborhood can use a good part time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which quickly show you how to do Radio repair jobs common in almost every neighborhood. Get my book—see for yourself that many of my students make \$200 to \$1,000 in their spare time while learning.

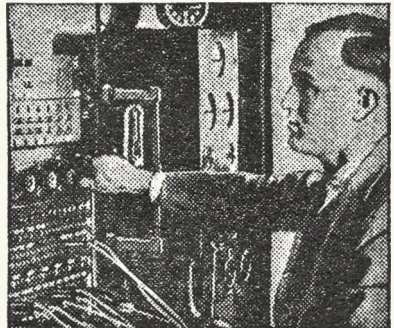
**Your Money Back if Not Satisfied**

I'll make this agreement with you. If you are not entirely satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service when you finish, I'll refund your tuition.

**Find Out What Radio Offers**

Mail the coupon. My book of information on Radio's spare time and full time opportunities is free to ambitious men. Read what Radio offers you. Read about the training I give you. Read letters from graduates—what they are doing and earning. There's no obligation. Mail coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny post card—NOW.

**J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute, Dept. 5N09  
Washington, D. C.**



**SAVE MONEY—LEARN AT HOME  
My Special Equipment Gives You  
Broad Practical Experience**

Hold your job. No need to leave home and spend a lot of money to become a Radio Expert. I'll train you quickly and inexpensively right at home in your spare time. You don't need a high school or college education. Many of my successful graduates didn't finish grade school. My practical 50-50 method of training—half with lessons, half with Radio equipment I furnish—gives you broad, practical experience—makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical and quick. There is opportunity for you in Radio. Old jobs are becoming more complicated—many need better trained men. New developments are making new opportunities. Short waves, loud speaker systems, police Radio, auto Radio, aviation Radio, television—Radio's newest uses are covered by my training. Here's a field that's growing. It is where you find growth that you find opportunity.

I have helped  
hundreds of  
men make  
more money



**MAIL THIS NOW!**

J. E. Smith, President  
National Radio Institute, Dept. 5N09  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send free book about spare time and full time Radio opportunities, and how I can train for them at home in spare time. (Please Print Plainly.)

Name..... Age.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....

**The Tested Way to BETTER PAY**



# TWO-GUN BATTLE

in

An Exciting Complete  
Novel of Fighting Men  
on Outlaw Trails

## BUSCADERO BULLETS

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LEE BOND

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"Bullet Business," etc.

*in the December*

## POPULAR WESTERN

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*15c. at all stands*

146  
Big Pages!

# Are You STILL in the DEPRESSION??

**T**IMES are better. Business is out of the rut—well ahead of a year ago. Millions of men have gone back to work. There's more money in lots of pay envelopes. But what good is that to you, if your pay check is still written in depression figures?

You weren't so discontented a year ago. In fact, you considered yourself lucky to have a job. But now—you have begun to wonder and worry why the oncoming tide of prosperity hasn't reached you yet. The situation is getting desperate. Bills continue to pile up. You can't get along forever on a "shoe string" budget. You *must* win back those pay cuts. Other men are doing it—how can you?

Certainly, you can't work any harder than you have been. And it isn't a question of your intelligence, honesty or ambition. Those virtues do not solve today's problem—they are often insufficient to hold down a job, as millions unemployed sadly testify.

But there *is* a way to get back to the prosperity pay check. A way that's probably far easier than you have dreamed. A *plan* that has been "depression-tested."

During the worst period of the depression, this plan was helping thousands of men and women forge ahead. Today, during recovery, these same men and women—their ranks swelled by thousands more—are being picked for top positions. They are escaping years of monotonous, routine service—achieving their dreams while they are young enough to enjoy success in its fullest measure.

Since this plan brings results in bad times as well as



good, it obviously works independently of business conditions. As unbelievable as that may sound, remember that success is largely up to the individual. Most men struggle through a depression all their lives. The few who forge ahead ride to success the same business tides that sweep the majority to failure.

The LaSalle Success-Building Plan is made for men like you—men with courage, ambition, persistence, who need expert guidance to make the most of their efforts. But LaSalle supplies even *more* than that. Not only individualized training and coaching to help you meet today's crying needs . . . but also the very steps you need to take to fill the job ahead, and force that pay raise *quickly*. Any

synopsis of this plan, which we might include here, could give you only a vague idea of this service. We suggest you mail the coupon for complete details on your own line of work.

## Today's Danger

There's a real danger to accepting "depression pay" these days. A danger that lower wages will continue to dog you—for no employer will pay more until he is convinced you are worth more. Some day, some way, you've got to convince him. There's no time to lose. The sooner you begin, the better.

If the LaSalle Plan has fulfilled this aim for thousands, isn't it logical to expect it can do as much for you? This coupon can easily become your passport to better times. Mail it today.

## LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 12329R, Chicago

I would like to know about your Success-Building Plan and service in the business field I have checked.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management   | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy    | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management    | <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship   | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law        | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law, Degree of LL. B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping    | <input type="checkbox"/> Office Management       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching     | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy               |



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

Address.....

**LaSalle  
Extension University**



# Follow this Man

*Secret Service Operator 38 is on the job*

**F**OLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Telltale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation. Just send the coupon and get—

## FREE!

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Are you of average intelligence? Are you ambitious? Would you give 30 minutes a day of your spare time preparing yourself for this profession? Answer "yes" and I'll show you how it is possible for you to attain all this. Send the coupon and I'll also send the Free Reports.

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**Institute of Applied Science**  
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Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. Literature will NOT be sent to boys under 17 years of age.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

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Read the Breath-Taking  
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*Featuring Dan Fowler, Special  
Agent, in a Rapid-Fire  
Campaign Against Crime!*

IN THE DECEMBER

# G-MEN

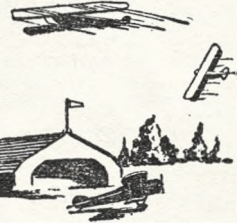
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# Prepare Quickly at Home in Spare Time

## FOR A Good Pay Job IN THE Fast-Growing AVIATION INDUSTRY



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My famous course trains you right in your own home—gets you ready for one of the good ground jobs—or cuts many weeks and many dollars from flight instructions. Send for my big free book today.

Don't sit back and envy the men who are in the midst of the romance, adventure and fascination of Aviation. YOU DON'T HAVE TO. For right in your own home, in your spare time, I'll give you the training you need to get started in this growing, well-paid industry. Get my FREE BOOK. It tells all the facts.

### Many Make \$40, \$60, \$75 a Week

Through the simple method I have worked out, I can train you at home to fill many well-paid jobs in Aviation. Naturally, before you can fly, you have to have additional flying instructions and practice. Even on that instruction I save you time and money. But when you graduate from my course you have the necessary foundation to begin such work as Airport Manager, Metal Worker, Assembler, Wing Doper, Transport Worker, Welder, Instrument Maker, Inspector, Wood Worker, Airport Worker, Mechanic, and scores of other well-paid positions. Some of my graduates have landed jobs paying \$40, \$60 to \$75 a week. Others with the additional low cost flying instruction I arrange for, have become pilots at \$300 a month or better. Send for my free book now and get the interesting particulars. Learn how I fit you to fill a good job in Aviation.

### Aviation Is Growing Fast

Get into Aviation now—when you can still get in on the ground floor of a new industry—when you have a chance to forge ahead without having to displace lots of older men. Aviation is a young man's industry, where young men earn real money. Most famous pilots are in

Here are just a few of the many well-paid jobs in the fast growing Aviation Industry:

- ON THE GROUND
- Airport Superintendent
- Instrument Specialist
- Electrician
- Shop Foreman
- Hangar Crew Chief
- Traffic Manager
- Purchasing Agent
- Aerial Mail Clerk
- Motor Expert
- Radio Operator
- Airplane Mechanic
- Field Work

- IN THE AIR
- Air Express Agent
- Air Mail Pilot
- Aerial Photography
- Airport Manager
- Test Pilot
- Aerial Passenger Agent
- Private Piloting
- Weather Observer
- Flight Instructor
- Commercial Pilot
- Field Manager
- Transport Pilot

their early thirties, or even younger. It is a young industry, which means that there are plenty of opportunities to forge ahead. But just because it is run by young men, don't get the idea that Aviation is a small business. Millions are being spent yearly to develop and improve airways and planes. Thousands of men earn good livings from the business. And more thousands will enter it in the future. It is a great and growing industry, this Aviation, an industry that still brings romance, excitement, thrills—even while it is bringing big opportunities and good pay.

### My Training Is Thorough, Practical, Up-to-Date

I've put my eighteen years of experience—including five years of instructing officers and men in the Navy—into my thorough quick Training. And I've made it all so clear that almost anybody can understand it. My Aviation friends know that Hinton-trained men are well qualified to work for them.

### Send For My Free Book Now

Now is the time to act. Don't sit content with a humdrum, no-future, low-pay job. Act now—to get yourself into Aviation—the industry that is quickly growing into a giant business. Get into Aviation. Study at home in your spare time for a well-

paid job with a real future. Mail the coupon for my free book today.

**WALTER HINTON, Pres.**  
Aviation Institute  
Washington, D. C.

### Flight Included

"Give her the gun!" You're off! Yes, free, as soon as you complete my course, I arrange a flight for you at an accredited air field. It doesn't cost you a penny extra. It is my graduation present to you.

## These Men Made Good With My Training

### Accepted for Royal Canadian Air Force

"I sent your letter with an application for enlistment in the Royal Canadian Air Force and I received a letter stating that my application is accepted and I can enlist as soon as there is a vacancy." **JOSEPH J. BEISIC, Melville, Sask., Canada.**

### Perfectly Satisfied with Course

"I am perfectly satisfied that the results obtained to date from your Course have made its cost insignificant. Rest assured that you have a life-long booster for Aviation Institute training."—**L. W. ARCHER, P. O. Box 68, Curacao, D. W. I.**



## Mail Now for Facts

**Mr. Walter Hinton, President** 910-M  
Aviation Institute of U. S. A., Inc.  
1115 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Please send me a Free copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity," telling all about my opportunities in Aviation, how you will train me at home for them.

Name .....

(Print Clearly)

Address..... Age.....

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



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Graduation Plan!**

Get training in 90 days, right here in the great Coyne Shops — **not by correspondence** — but on real electrical machinery. **Mail the coupon below.** If you are short of money I'll send you all details of my finance plan and consider your application. If accepted, you won't have to start paying tuition back until **five months from the date you start school**, and then you'll have **over a year** to complete your payments.

## Tremendous Developments Ahead in Electricity!

**HERE** is YOUR opportunity to cash in. Every day brings news of new developments in every branch of Electricity, with more opportunities, more jobs, and a greater future for the trained man than ever before. I consider the fellow who is ambitious enough to want to get ahead by taking my Training, worthy of my help. **MAIL THE COUPON BELOW** and you can prove to me that you are willing to spend just **THREE MONTHS** in the Coyne Training Shops Learning **ELECTRICITY**. Then, I'll tell you about my finance plan, which has enabled many to get complete Training and pay tuition back later.

## Learn By Doing In 90 Days

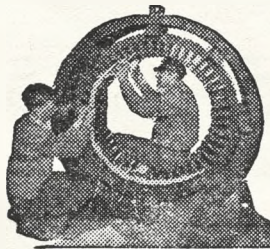
Lack of experience or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money hold you back from getting all details of my amazing plan.

### MANY EARN While LEARNING

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses and will tell me your problems we may be able to help you as we have thousands of others. Then in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, we train you as you never dreamed you could be trained . . . on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, auto, switch-board, transmitting stations . . . everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

### TRAINING By Actual Work

No dull books . . . you get individual training . . . real actual work with only the theory you will need. Building real batteries . . . winding real arma-



**Prepare for Jobs Like These**  
Here are a few of hundreds of positions in the electrical field. Our free employment bureau gives you a lifetime service.  
ARMATURE EXPERT  
SUBSTATION OPERATOR  
AUTO ELECTRICIAN  
INVENTOR  
MAINTENANCE ENGINEER  
SERVICE STATION OWNER  
RADIO EXPERT

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This is our fireproof modern home where-in is installed thousands of dollars' worth of Electrical equipment of all kinds. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.



H. C. LEWIS, PRESIDENT  
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**  
FOUNDED 1899  
509 S. Paulina St., Dept. 95-84, Chicago, Ill.

tures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc. That's a glimpse of how we help to make you a master electrician, and fit you to qualify for jobs leading to the biggest pay.

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"I owe my Electrical success to your 12 week shop course," says H. B. Umberger of Tennessee. "Two weeks after leaving school I took a wiring job," reports E. O. Berndt of Illinois, "and the profits from this one job alone more than paid for the entire course." A. C. Hoehnle of Ohio says "Received several raises in pay, due to the training I received at Coyne." And I could quote from hundreds of letters of successful Coyne Trained Men. *What they have done, you should be able to do!*

**Electric Refrigeration  
— Air Conditioning**  
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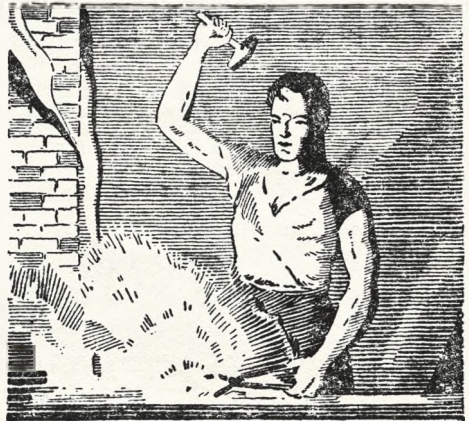
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Wholesale Grocery Co.	1070.00	20.00
Sporting Goods Shop.	800.00	45.00
Wholesale Fruit Co.	475.00	15.00
Steel Manufacturer.	400.00	15.00
Hospital.	350.00	15.00
Automobile Supply.	1125.00	15.00
Lumber Yard.	513.00	15.00
Coal Dealer.	350.00	15.00
Plumbing Company.	308.00	20.00
Department Store.	2350.00	88.60
Ladies' Wear Store.	450.00	15.00
Men's Wear Store.	400.00	30.00
Machine Shop.	152.00	12.76

\*Amount paid salesman only. Examples given show only random cases of average importance. Larger concerns show possible costs high as \$6,000 involved.

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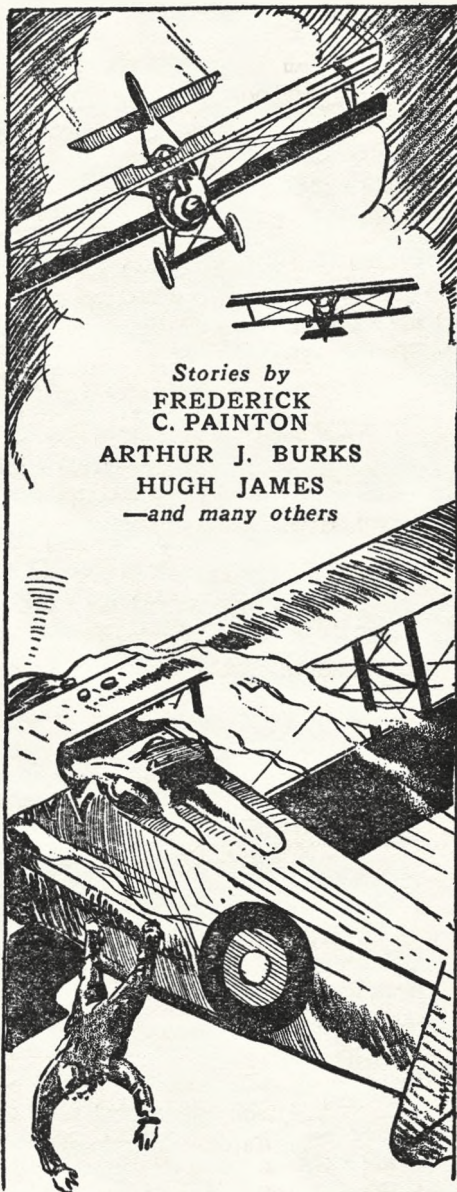
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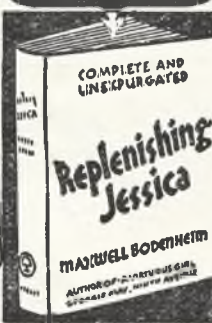
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## Out of the Past Comes the "Murder Money"

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"I've got the tools—and I'll hack those fingers off," said Lacey

# RED LACEY *IN* DEATH IN

## CHAPTER I

### *The Murder Money Girl*

**L**ACEY sat leaning forward in his battered swivel chair, in front of his equally battered desk, in his cubbyhole of an office. His hands were resting on the desk, as if all motion has been suspended from the instant the girl had entered the office. His freckled face was almost without expression, ex-

cepting for his grey-blue eyes. They were staring at the girl hungrily.

There was a tight feeling in the pit of his stomach. There was a gladness bubbling in the center of his chest. He suddenly was fully conscious of how much he had missed this girl.

A swirl of memory churned through his brain. He was remembering the softness and silence of a night at sea, under the brilliant stars of unsullied heavens, with the slow,

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## Red Lacey Smashes Open a Snatch Plot

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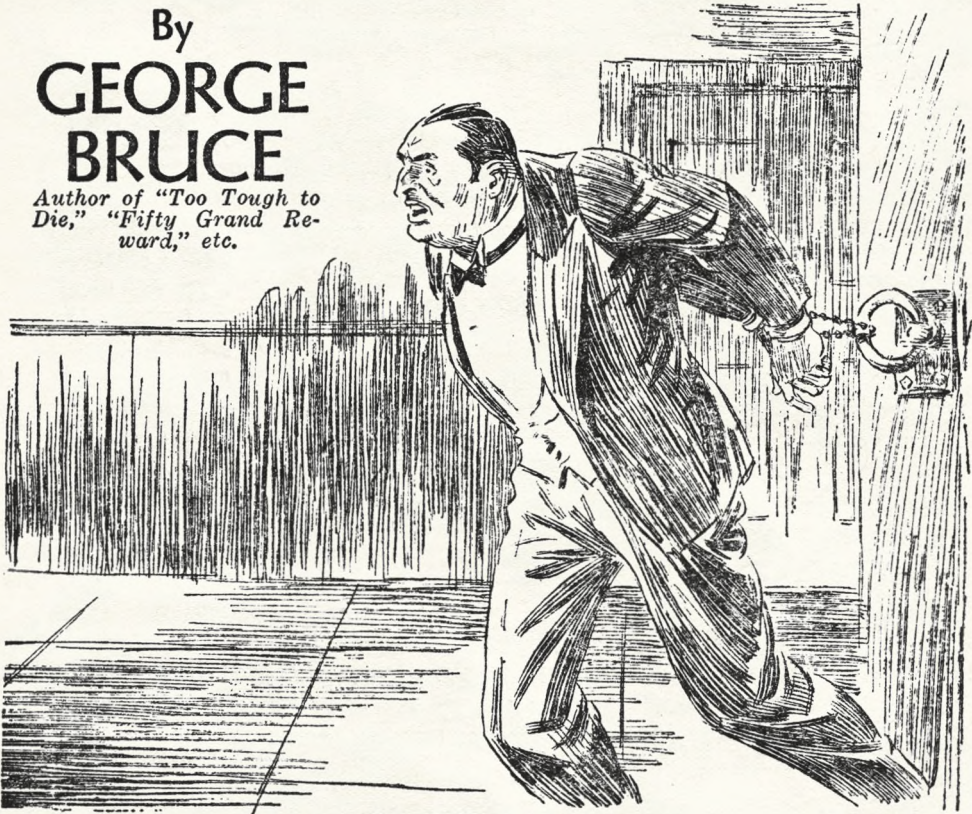
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# Girl—Bringing with Her Allure and Danger!

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By  
**GEORGE  
BRUCE**

*Author of "Too Tough to Die," "Fifty Grand Reward," etc.*



## **BLOOM** A Gripping Complete Mystery Novel

gentle rolling motion of the ship, lulling them into a state of hypnotic somnolence. And in that half dream state he had been conscious of nothing but the nearness of her and the shimmering outline of her pale golden hair against the white moonlight, and of the dark violet depths of her eyes as she looked at his face, and the touch of her hand. Those things and the huskiness of her voice—

Days and nights—filled only with her.

And then—it had ended—and she was gone. And the hungry feeling had grown up within Red Lacey. Gone—and without so much as an address. Gone, with a smile, the pressure of her mouth against his cheek. The touch of her hand on his arm, and her husky voice saying: "It was beautiful. Good-by—"

Aline Carter! And she was sitting in the other chair in his office. Sitting there, looking at him quizzically. But underneath her exterior of care-

---

## Involving Millions in Wall Street Wealth!

---

free goodfellowship there was an air of weariness, of frustration.

She was glad to see him. It was in her eyes. In the gestures of her hands.

Other memories came trooping through Red Lacey's brain. Memories grim and deadly. Memories of the grunts and whistling breath of combat, of the dry crack of a pistol spouting death—murder. Of blood money showering out of the sky.

**I**T all had started just as it was taking place now. The door had opened—and she was standing before him, her eyes looking at him—eyes then haunted by fear. Aline Carter had opened the door of Red Lacey's office—and the J. Washborne Knox case had opened, running its hectic, bloody course, until Lacey had closed it.<sup>1</sup>

And now she was here again, sitting there, looking at him. Neither of them had uttered a word. Hungry eyes merely stared. Her husky voice came to him.

"You're looking very well, Mr. Lacey," she said. There was a flippancy in her voice, but her eyes were fierce with the joy of seeing him.

He got up slowly from his chair. He took the one step which separated him from her. He stood over her for a long moment, looking down at her upturned, strained face. His own face was suddenly white. He bent over her. He took her face in his hands. He kissed her on the mouth—a crushing, bruising kiss.

Her arms went up suddenly, went about his shoulders. Held him tightly. The violet eyes closed, fluttered. Her answering kiss was as fierce, and as bruising.

He straightened slowly. He saw that tears were running out of the corners of her eyes. He suddenly knew how precious she was to him.

<sup>1</sup> The *J. Washborne Knox Case*, as Lacey listed it in his files, but which the newspapers plastered with the label "Murder Money," was published under the title "Murder Money," in **POPULAR DETECTIVE** for August, 1935, Standard Magazines, Inc., New York.

That she was a part of him. That she was *the* woman.

Her voice said: "It's been too long, hasn't it, Redhead?"

He nodded. He went back to his chair.

"Gee," he said—and it was like a growl. "I've missed you, Angel. I didn't know how much, until you walked in—and sat there."

There was an awkward pause. They were trying to recapture the flippancy of the past.

He grinned at her. "Well, what have you been doing? You're a little tuckered out for a first-grade, healthy, dues-paying angel. Don't tell me that the depression has hit the Pearly Gates? Maybe you've been working too hard?"

"I haven't been working at all," she said. "I've been trying. But I just go round in circles. People seem to think it a great gag that Aline Carter is looking for a job—any kind of a job. They figure that the Aline Carters of the world have never worked, and never have to work. I can get jobs—I don't want. Suddenly I got so sick of it. It seemed I just had to see you—just for a minute. I had to see you grin. I had to have a sight of that cocky little walk. I had to—"

She stopped suddenly, her eyes fixed on his face.

"Where are you staying?" he asked suddenly. His eyes were suddenly keen, watching her face.

"I—well—"

"You crazy kid," he laughed. But there was no humor in the laugh. It was short, almost barking. "You knew you had only to call me on the phone. I kept the bargain we made. I didn't try to find you—even without you knowing it. Well, I'll take charge from here on. You are now back in the hands of the well known Mr. Red Lacey. How do you like that?" He reached for the telephone and dialed a number.

"I love it," she said, and there was a little shake in her voice and a mistiness veiled here eyes.

"Park Palace?" asked Lacey. "H'ya, Babe. Get me the ear of the man—"



agement if you can, will you?"

There was a little pause. Then a man's voice came over the phone. "Yes, Mr. Lacey?"

Lacey drew a breath and glanced at the girl out of the corner of his eye. The little grin was hovering over his mouth. For the first time since her coming he looked natural.

"I want you to take the best of care of an extra special guest I'm sending you," he told the manager of the Park Palace. "She's to have the best in the house. Anything she wants, understand? Anything. And the bill is to be sent to me."

"Yes, Mr. Lacey—and when will your guest arrive?"

"Any minute," grinned Lacey. "You'll know her when you see her. She's the most beautiful thing in the world."

Lacey put the phone back in its cradle.

"There you are, Angel," he said. "Just as easy as that. Mr. Fix-it, himself, that's me. You are now the star-boarder at that gilded palace of dough, debts and divorcees—the Park Palace. The Man on the Flying Trapeze will be nothing more than a muscle-bound elephant when you see the antics the manager of that joint will put on for you when you arrive. I'm tops in that joint. They owe me!"

She stood erect. She said quietly: "Thank you, dear. I have no front with you. I need a place to stay—a new deal. I'll try to pay you back—"

"If you'll let me come and have dinner with you—sometimes?" he suggested.

She merely looked at him. She was remembering those Bermuda nights—and that ocean.

"You still got that big, deep voice that digs into a guy and tears him into small bits?" he asked.

She nodded. "It's better than ever; but nobody wants to hear it."

"You've just been trying the wrong numbers, Angel," he nodded confidently. "We'll have to look around a little." He walked with her to the door. He watched her moving down

the hall. The hungry sensation was gnawing within him.

He went back to his desk and snatched at the phone. He dialed another number. This time a man's voice answered at once.

"Joe?" asked Lacey. "Listen, I want you to do me a little favor. I want you to give Aline Carter a job—the best job in the show. She can carry the spot standing on her head, and you're a lucky guy to get her. I just got the tumble that she's free to accept an engagement. She wants to sing again—and it's a break for Joe Colimo and the Club Madrigal. Sure, I thought of you first. I knew you'd be crazy to have her. Listen—three hundred a week. What—business is bad—it won't stand that kind of dough? Listen, you put her name up in lights and she'll get you out of the red in three nights. That's better. And, Joe—I'm looking after her. She's singing; get it? Just singing. Okay. She starts this week? You better call her up at the Park Palace and offer her the job."

He put the phone back a second time. There was a little glitter in his eyes.

He sat there at his desk. His feet cocked higher than his head, his hat pulled down over his forehead, his hands folded across his stomach.

He was sitting like that, when a knock sounded on the door, and Detective-inspector Phillips came into the room.

## CHAPTER II

### *Snatch!*



ACEY slid his hat to the back of his head with a lazy movement of his hand. He grinned at Phillips.

"What ho?" he asked. "The mighty Phillips, all hot and bothered, waxing wrathful, in swimming and sunk."

"You got a drink?" demanded Phillips. He was big, beefy, red, perspiring and bald. His

face was flrid, shot through with a tracery of exaggerated capillaries, and his neck drooped over his collar. He mopped a tremendous expanse of forehead with an already damp handkerchief. He had the appearance of a drooping Saint Bernard after a hard day afield.

"Tut, tut!" said Lacey. "Prohibition was never repealed in this joint. Besides, you can't drink in hot weather. It breaks out on you."

Phillips moved his feet tenderly and groaned. "I wish to God my vacation was here!"

"COME on, spill it," invited Lacey. He settled himself farther down on his spine.

"I got something right up your alley," he told Lacey. "One of those things that you love to touch."

"Nerts!" smiled Lacey. "You mean you're running around in circles and you figure to bring your troubles to a guy who has bunions on his brain instead of on his feet. I get it. You're giving away ice in January."

"Naw—honest, Red. The minute this came in I said to myself, 'This is Lacey's meat—how he'd love to get his teeth into this!'"

"Into what!" Lacey's eyes were narrowed, studying the inspector's face.

"Into the Gardner snatch," said Phillips impressively. "Into the damndest thing that has happened in this man's town. This is the biggest thing you ever had a shot at."

Lacey exhibited elaborate disinterest and slid his hat back over his eyes, but under the hat he was still watching Phillips' face keenly.

"What the devil?" he said drowsily. "What you mean is that you haven't got a lead, and that you can't keep the story out of the papers any longer; and the minute that story breaks, you're sunk. You've been working on the case like a bunch of crazy men for three days—and you haven't found anything but Police Headquarters. That's it, isn't it?"

"How do you know so much about it?" growled Phillips.

"My business to know things."

"But there hasn't been a whisper about it in any papers—"

"Ah, Phillips, grow up!" Lacey's voice was bored. "Don't tell me you still believe in keeping secrets? Listen, Alvin Gardner was snatched out of his limousine three nights ago at exactly eleven forty-seven p. m. His car was crowded to the curb by a black sedan with New Jersey plates. One of the snatch artists threw down a rod on the Gardner chauffeur. Two others put the slug on Gardner himself, and hauled him into the black sedan. They lammed with him. The license plates were a false lead because they were attached to a hot car. Day before yesterday, about ten hours after the snatch, Mrs. Gardner received a communication in her husbands' handwriting, begging her to get five hundred thousand dollars out of his account at the Empire Trust and to keep it on hand awaiting instructions. He begged her not to notify the police. But the police had been notified before the note arrived. The police, and the Trust Company and the family conspired to keep the matter a secret pending negotiations so as not to disturb the financial world. But the newshawks are getting close on the trail. Hell is going to pop. Hell is helped by the fact that Empire Trust is more than shy about advancing half a million to Mrs. Gardner on a kidnap note. That's how it lies, isn't it?"

"Yeah," admitted Phillips grumpily. "But I'll still be damned if I know how—"

"Red Lacey never sleeps!" declared Lacey with a mock gesture. "Well, spill it."

"There is just something screwy about this case, Lacey," groaned Phillips. "You know how it is when you get the hunch that you're being interfered with, and that nobody is telling the truth? Well, this is one of those things. The farther we go, the farther we get away from where we want to go. It's a business of everyone closing up like a clam. Not a lead. Three days, and one letter from the snatch gang—and that written by old man Gardner himself."



*Lacey's fist swung—and blood spurted from the other's mouth*

Half a million bucks. Good Lord, why didn't they ask for the mint! Every potential snatch artist in the world present and accounted for, and none of 'em in business at the minute. Nobody knows nothing. And the Empire Trust thinks it's worth just fifty grand to break the case. They called the Department and authorized that kind of a reward this morning."

"Fifty grand, eh?" mused Lacey. "That's important money—but not in this case."

"I was just thinking," said Phillips with elaborate unconcern, "that we might put our heads together and split that dough."

Lacey said: "Good morning, Inspector. It was nice of you to call. Always glad to receive the members of the police. Splendid body of men—the fatheads! Where do you get that stuff—split? I know as much as you do about the business now."

"I figured you wouldn't want to mix up in this," said Phillips. "It's out of your line. No strong-arm stuff, and no broads. You wouldn't want to mess up your reputation by taking a licking. Well, stick around, somebody may come in to shop around for divorce evidence. That's more in your line."

He lifted his ponderous bulk out of the chair. Moved toward the door. He handled his feet gingerly. Lacey grinned at his elephantine back as the door closed.

When he was gone, Lacey reached for a Who's Who and ruffled through the pages until he came to the Gs. He found Gardner, Alvin P. W. He read:

Gardner, Alvin Putney Westmoreland, capitalist and banker, residence Newport, Park Avenue, Palm Beach, President and Chairman of the Board, Empire Trust Company; Director, Penna Steel, National Sugar Refining, Federated Distillers Corporation. Senior Partner, Gardner, Hogan and Brandt, Brokers, 80 Wall Street. . . .

He read on and on, more evidence that Alvin P. W. Gardner was a big-shot. Clubs—a dozen of them; married, no children; forty-eight years old. His climb to dizzy heights in

banking and industry was sensational.

Lacey closed the book slowly. "The guy must be lousy with dough," he said to himself. "Half a million is piker money."

He hunched himself down in the chair. His brain was working in the manner peculiar to Red Lacey's brain. Pictures were flashing through it. Pictures having to do with the snatch of Alvin P. W. Gardner. The pictures came to an end with visions of newspaper headlines to come. Phillips had been right. This thing was big.

HE picked up a phone. He called the Park Palace. He asked for Aline Carter. She answered the phone. She was excited.

"I was just going to call you," she said in a breath. "It must be my lucky day! Joe Colimo—the Club Madrigal—called me up. He was trying to get me before I even registered in. He offered me a job—three hundred a week!"

"Gee, Angel, that's swell," said Lacey. "I knew you'd get a break. When do you start?"

"Tonight."

"Nice goin'. You'll panic 'em. I'll be there to see your opening. I'll send you a truck-load of flowers."

There was a little pause.

"What did you want when you called me?" she asked.

"Oh, yeah. Gee, I almost forgot, with the good news and all. Why, nothing much. I was just wondering if you knew a guy by the name of Alvin Gardner?" Lacey's face was unsmiling as he asked the question, and he kept his voice casual.

"Everybody knows *him*," laughed Aline.

"I was just wondering who his particular friends were—his very particular friends—not of his own gang," continued Lacey in the same casual voice. "I thought maybe you'd know somebody—"

"Scandal!" she laughed. "I can smell it right over the phone." There was a little silence from her end. "It seems to me there was—some-one," she said at the end of the

pause. "But for the life of me, I can't think who it was—and it's right on the tip of my tongue."

"Keep thinking," advised Lacey. "I'll ask you about it when I see you tonight. You get a lot of rest—and look beautiful. And sit at my table. This is *my* night!"

He hung up, very gently.

### CHAPTER III

*Joe Colimo*



HE telephone bell rang almost before he put the receiver in the cradle. The suddenness of the summons caused a little shock to hammer at his spine. He picked up the receiver.

"Richard Lacey speaking," he said.

A very well bred, well modulated voice came over the wire.

"This is Mr. Thorndyke, chief counsel for the Universal Insurance and Indemnity Company speaking to you, Mr. Lacey. I am calling to inquire whether you are in a position to accept a professional engagement?"

A queer change of expression took place on Lacey's face. He became almost tense. But he spoke casually. His brain was classifying Thorndyke and the Universal. The biggest corporation lawyer in the world, speaking in the name of one of the richest and largest insurance companies in the world.

"It all depends, Mr. Thorndyke," he answered. "I'm pretty busy with routine affairs. It would have to be something extraordinary to side-track me at the minute. What's on your mind?"

"This *is* extraordinary," assured the voice. "In fact, it may be the biggest thing you've ever handled. I'm sorry I cannot discuss the matter by phone, but if you have the time to run over to my office I'll put you in possession of the facts. Perhaps it may interest you to know that Universal is quite prepared to pay you a re-

taining fee of ten thousand dollars if you accept the case."

"Not much money for an outfit like Universal," said Lacey. "But I'll be glad to talk to you. I'll be over in twenty minutes."

He put down the receiver again. He stood erect slowly, his eyes ranging abstractedly over the walls of the office as if looking for an answer to mental questions. Then he lost the lazy attitude. He walked briskly out of the office, down the steps, through the heavy pedestrian traffic, to a cab. He gave the driver the address of the Universal Insurance and Indemnity Company.

Within twenty minutes, he was sitting in the sumptuously furnished private office of Mr. Craig Thorndyke, Universal's chief counsel. He was holding one of Universal's dollar cigars. He was listening to the rich voice of Mr. Craig Thorndyke, as that gentleman cut directly to the heart of the matter at hand.

"You may have heard that Mr. Alvin Gardner has been kidnaped?" said Thorndyke softly, his eyes on Lacey's face.

Lacey merely moved his head.

"But you do not know that Mr. Alvin Gardner is insured by our company for almost two million dollars," the lawyer continued in the same soft voice. "Naturally it is to our interest to protect that amount of money, because in the event that Mr. Gardner is removed by violence, the double indemnity clause carried in all of his policies becomes operative and we are liable in the amount of double the face value of his policies."

Lacey said: "Four million bucks is a lot of money, even in yen."

"If Mr. Gardner had the misfortune to die in the hands of the people who have captured him, we could not contest the double indemnity clause."

"So, according to the slant of your company, Mr. Gardner must not be permitted to be bumped off. I get it!" mused Lacey. "And my job is to find Mr. Gardner and see that he gets home safely?"

"Exactly," smiled the lawyer. "We are not interested in method, nor are

we interested in the criminal aspects of the case, nor are we interested in the capture or conviction of the criminals. We merely are interested in protecting the investment we have in Mr. Gardner. Hence, you have our full sanction to handle the affair as you see fit."

"Kind of a cold-blooded deal, isn't it?"

The well bred mask of Thorndyke's face did not relax. "Merely business," he said in the same soft voice.

Lacey was thoughtful for a moment. He was staring at the wall over Thorndyke's head.

"Gimme your check for the retaining fee," he said suddenly. "Only—get this—if I bring it off, it'll cost you plenty more."

For the first time Thorndyke lost his reserve. "If you bring it off, Mr. Lacey," he said strangely, "you may rest assured that we expect to pay plenty more."

He touched a button on his desk. His secretary came into the room. "Prepare a check—a special fund check, drawn to the order of Richard Lacey, in the amount of ten thousand dollars. Bring it to me at once, for signature."

The secretary glanced once at Red Lacey. Then he backed out of the room. Three minutes later Lacey was folding the check and putting it in his wallet.

"Any instructions?" he asked.

Thorndyke shook his head. He exhibited a quizzical smile.

"Any dope you think I should have?"

Another negation from the lawyer.

"I can see you're going to be a big help," grinned Lacey. "You're just saying to me, 'Here's ten grand; let's see you earn it and don't expect any tips from me.'"

"Exactly," smiled the lawyer. "It would be unethical for me to discuss the affairs of a client—with anyone—even you."

"Which is a pain in the neck," grunted Lacey.

"However, I would familiarize myself with Mr. Gardner's connections, the bank, the brokerage house—every-

thing. Never can tell what kind of a lead you may run down. I shall expect to hear from you, when and if you encounter something of interest."

"Okay. Only, no squawks if you don't like what I uncover."

"We are quite prepared for unpleasantness, Mr. Lacey," nodded Thorndyke. "We were quite prepared before we summoned you."

"That's a bouquet or a brickbat," grinned Lacey. "When I have time I'll figure out which."

He walked out of the magnificent office.

**J**OE COLIMO toyed with the fragile stem of his wine glass and watched Lacey's face. Now and then he turned his head slightly to look at the glorious object in the soft, blue-white spotlight, in the center of the Club Madrigal's dance floor.

The glorious object possessed a glorious voice. A rich, deep-timbered, half-savage voice, that came pouring out of her rounded white throat and hurled itself against the low-vaulted ceiling of the room.

For five minutes Red Lacey had sat, hunched forward in his chair, his eyes fixed on that glorious creature in the lights, listening to that voice. His expression had not changed, even when she had smiled at him.

She was singing. Singing to him. He knew it. The flowers he had sent her were heaped about her on the floor. He was not even listening to the words. He was just listening to the caress of the tones coming from her throat—a whisper, husky, low-pitched, and then rising and rising.

The Club Madrigal was filled. There was not a vacant table. The orchestra was rapt in the accompaniment.

And Joe Colimo smiled his inscrutable smile, and revolved the thin stem of the wine glass between his sensitive, tapering fingers, and watched Lacey's face.

When the song came to an end Colimo spoke for the first time. He

kept his voice low, even in the midst of the ovation that began at the end of the song. Aline Carter was taking a dozen bows.

"You were right," he told Lacey. "She's really big. She has that certain something. She'll do this place plenty of good."

Lacey turned his head for the first time. He looked at Colimo. At his sleek, black, glistening head. At his olive complexion and black eyes. At the sharp nose and chin. At the faultless evening dress with the black pearl studs; at the three-carat diamond ring on the third finger of Colimo's left hand. Colimo was famous for that diamond.

"I was never wrong in my life," he told Colimo seriously. "But I didn't expect a gang like this on the first night."

Colimo shrugged. "A cinch," he said. "A little telephoning. A quick radio plug on a couple of stations our band does a sustaining on, and the joint is filled. Best crowd in a month—and do they like her!"

The patrons of the Club Madrigal were demanding more of Aline Carter. She stood in her blond loveliness and smiled at them and shook her head.

Colimo was watching Lacey's face. "She's pretty big with you, too, isn't she?" he asked softly. He was looking up at Lacey from under half closed eyes.

Lacey's face was expressionless. His voice had a queer edge. "Just to keep the record straight, Joe, she's tops with me. More than tops. I'm looking after her."

**THAT'S** what I thought. Well, it's okay with me. I just want to get it straight."

He stood up suddenly. Aline Carter was making her way to the table. Lacey found himself on his feet, looking at her. Her hand touched him.

"Thank you for the flowers—and for coming," she said. Her hands shook a little. "They like me—" she stopped suddenly. The mistiness was coming into her eyes.

"How could they help it?" demanded Lacey.

She sank into one of the chairs and reached for Lacey's wine glass. She sipped gratefully.

Colimo smiled at them. "I'll be going back to managing the joint," he told them. He moved away.

There was a silence between Lacey and Aline. Suddenly she said, "It all came to me—while I was singing—out on the floor—"

"What came to you, Angel?"

"The answer to the question you asked me on the phone. About who was Gardner's girl friend. You wanted to know that, didn't you?"

He nodded.

"Her name was, or is, Anita Shaw," she said. "I worked with her in the revue. She was beautiful and very young—very young. But she was running with a bad bunch—when Gardner was not taking up her time. He used to come to the theater once or twice a week and take her away. He must have been good to her. She had jewelry, lots of it, and clothes that would knock your eye out, and she lived on Park Avenue. And the girls in the show were sure that Gardner was the man behind the check book."

Lacey nodded. "I figured a guy like Gardner would have at least one or two bones of a skeleton to rattle. Where's this Shaw dame now?"

"She's working here, in the show—dancing. You'll see her. She's very dark, black hair and eyes, beautiful body. Looks like a child, and is a little hellcat when she gets peeved."

"She still Gardner's secret flame?"

"You can't ask questions like that, silly," she told him. "But I asked a few. Mr. Gardner has been conspicuous by his absence from these here parts for a couple of days. Maybe they had *phfft*."

"The Shaw girl all gone to pieces on account of it?"

"If she is, she's a darned good actress. I can't see any traces of a broken heart."

"Aw, well—the devil with it now. Let's forget it."

"I have to go, get off these clothes

—I'm working now. I'd like to kiss you, but it would be bad for business. But I'm thinking of it—if that's a help."

"No help," grinned Lacey. "But I can wait."

Colimo came back as she walked away. He sat down in her chair. He was silent for a long minute. He was making little tracks on the tablecloth with the edge of a knife. After a moment he glanced up at Lacey's face.

"A guy hears a lot of things in this racket," he said casually.

"Yeah, a guy would," admitted Red Lacey with equal disinterest.

There was another little silence.

"I got a flash that Gardner, the big shot, has been snatched—couple of days ago now, and that the police are running in circles."

Lacey's eyebrows lifted in polite interest. "You don't say?"

"Yeah, snatched," repeated Colimo. "And for plenty of dough. It should be a cinch pay-off. They got to have that guy back. I hear they're holding him for half a million bucks. They'll probably get it—but it's poison to fool with."

Lacey was drinking champagne out of his glass.

"The family and the police are probably pulling every undercover wire to get a lead—and to get him back before it breaks in the papers," commented Colimo in the same casual voice.

"They'd be a cinch to do that," remarked Lacey. "With Gardner's connections they can't stand publicity."

Colimo's eyes traveled slowly up Lacey's face and stopped at Lacey's eyes.

"Now, if a friend of mine was approached on the subject of getting mixed up in the business, I'd be a lousy friend if I didn't tell him to lay off, wouldn't I?"

The glass in Red Lacey's hand was slowly set upright on the table. His steel-grey eyes were looking straight at Colimo's black eyes.

"If you knew something, it would be a pal to spill it," he said in the same careless voice.

"I don't know anything," said Colimo, a little note of grimness creeping into his voice. "All I know is that the Gardner business is poison—even to Red Lacey."

"Thanks, pal, I appreciate it," said Lacey.

"If I were you, I'd send back that ten grand the insurance company gave you, and call it a day."

Lacey got out of his chair slowly. His eyes were fixed on Colimo's face. "I'd be an awful sucker to give up ten grand without a struggle," he said.

"You'd be a bigger sucker not to," assured Colimo.

They shook hands. Lacey walked toward the hat-check room. "Tell Miss Carter I'll speak to her later," he said.

Colimo said: "Sure. Good-night, Mr. Lacey."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Many Angles*



THE newspapers shrieked with black type:

**GARDNER  
SNATCHED!**  
*Half Million Ransom  
Demanded*

Alvin Gardner, millionaire president of the Empire Trust, was kidnaped on the streets of

New York by a gang which planned every move, and is now being held captive for ransom. It has been learned that the ransom demanded is five hundred thousand dollars in cash, and that after three days of intensive investigation, the police and state authorities are without a clue, while the Department of Justice is awaiting a call from the local authorities to participate in the most sensational criminal affair in twenty years. Stocks tumbled one to five points on the street one hour after the snatch was made public, and the key issues in which Gardner's brokerage house were the chief specialists suffered severely....

Lacey photographed the running story with his eyes. There was a four-column picture of Alvin Gardner in the center of page one. It showed a man too young to be the financial tycoon; too young to be



forty-eight, his age. It was a cold face, with light eyes, a carefully nurtured and cared-for mustache, waxed and imperious looking. Hair, with a touch of grey, parted on the side and brushed to a state of perfection which spoke of a private valet's care. The figure was garbed in clothes, expensive even in a newspaper photo. Lacey studied the face.

He said to himself: "So. It broke. Well—"

The telephone rang. He put down the paper. Thorndyke of the Universal Insurance Company was on the wire. His voice was crisp.

"Mr. Lacey—you've seen the newspapers?"

"Yeah, I'm looking at 'em now. Raising the devil, aren't they?"

"Have you decided anything?"

"Yes and no."

"You understand that we must have action—now! Immediate action. Anything can happen now that the affair is in the open."

"That's what you'll get," promised Lacey. "You just hold your hat on the hills and curves."

There was a pregnant silence. Then Thorndyke's voice spoke again. It clicked like the jaws of a steel trap.

"Mr. Lacey," he said, "the Universal Insurance and Indemnity Company stands ready to pay you one hundred thousand dollars in cash for the return of Alvin Gardner, alive, and no questions asked."

**T**HANKS, just for the record," said Lacey calmly.

The line went dead. Lacey paced up and down the office, taking the two strides back and forth permitted by the cramped space. His hands were rammed into his pockets. The hands were clenched. There was a light of complete concentration in his eyes. His face was set into hard lines.

After half an hour he stopped the pacing. He opened a steel locker beside his desk, examined a vest pocket size .25 Colt automatic, saw that the magazine was loaded, slipped it into the right pocket of his coat. He took two extra clips from the

shelf of the locker, put them in the same pocket.

He went out of the office, locking the door behind him. Something in his manner said that he did not expect to return for a period.

He hailed a cab. "Empire Trust Company," he told the driver.

Fifteen minutes later he was in the walnut-paneled office of the first vice-president of the great bank. He looked at the furnishings about him and made a mental estimate on the cost. He decided there was at least ten thousand dollars sunk in "front" in this office. If this was the vice-president's office, what must Alvin Gardner's office be like?

The vice-president's name was Murray Riggs. He was jumpy, apprehensive. He looked at Lacey suspiciously. He tried to keep the professional edge on his voice, but the voice had a tremor.

"Yes, Mr. Lacey," he said, almost defensively. "What can I do for you?"

"You know who I am—and what I am?" demanded Lacey. His voice was curt.

"Well—of course. One reads the papers—and remembers names," said Riggs.

"I never lost a case in my life," barked Lacey. "I'm not going to lose this one. I am retained by certain very big interests to find Mr. Alvin Gardner."

"I'm sure—I'm sure," nodded Riggs. He licked dry lips with the tip of a pink tongue. Lacey decided that, in spite of the front, he was a weak sister. In the Empire organization, Alvin Gardner was the one boss. Riggs was nothing but a stooge.

"First, I want whatever angle the Empire Bank can give me on this snatch. And get this: I don't want the stuff you are going to hand out to the police or the newspapers. I want the lowdown. I want to know whether or not Mr. Gardner is really the big bad wolf of the doughboys. I want to know the picture as it stands here."

"I am sure the directors will be glad to give you any assistance, Mr.

Lacey. When they have recovered a little from the shock, I will call a special meeting, and will inform you of their instructions."

A corner of Lacey's mouth curled with contemptuous disgust.

"Shock, hell!" he snarled at the vice-president. "You've known for three days that Alvin Gardner has been missing. You've had half a dozen huddles in that time, trying to decide what to do. You know that the kidnapers are demanding half a million in cash for his return. Don't give me that shock stuff. More than that, you haven't been any too anxious to turn over the half million to Mrs. Gardner to buy back her husband."

White spots seeped into Riggs' cheeks. Lacey went on:

"If you didn't do that, after the note he wrote, there are two reasons. One: he isn't worth half a million to the officials of his own bank. Two: he hasn't got that much dough. Which is it?"

Riggs licked his mouth again. "This is most unfortunate—for Mr. Gardner, coming at this time," he said with a deploring gesture of his hands. "Like every other person of his prominence and standing, he has suffered severe losses on the securities market. It would be a great task for any great man to raise half a million in cash, overnight. The bank cannot do it for him, or provide the money—as much as the bank would like to assist. The law, Mr. Lacey—the regulations— We cannot give half a million, even to our president, under such conditions."

"Can't Mrs. Gardner sign a check or give notes?"

Riggs shook his head. Mrs. Gardner has comparatively a small account, which is replenished monthly to cover her personal needs. She has nothing like half a million. She cannot sign checks for Mr. Gardner, jointly or alone."

Lacey climbed to his feet. His eyes were boring into those of the vice-president. His voice was hard and cold.

"I think I'll advise my clients to have Mr. Gardner's account audited,"

he told Riggs. "Just to be on the safe side."

"If you can get the necessary legal authority for such a step, the bank will be glad to surrender the books. The bank is in no way affected by Mr. Gardner's personal operations. In fact, Mr. Gardner has been president and in control of this institution in name only for a period of over a year."

**T**HE strange glitter came into Red Lacey's eyes. "Okay. You may hear from me later."

He stalked out of the room, leaving the vice-president, white-faced, looking after him.

In the next two hours he visited Gardner's brokerage firm, a couple of Gardner's clubs, and a corporation of which Gardner was a director. He found the same reticence to discuss Gardner. The Wall Street office of the brokerage firm was in an uproar. Telephones were constantly ringing, men were perspiring, clerks and messengers flitted about. And Gardner's stocks were going down. They were really hitting the skids.

As Lacey remarked to the office manager: "If a guy had known this was coming he could have made himself a fortune selling the Gardner specialties short."

But all he got from the office manager was a grim, harassed, poisonous look.

At three in the afternoon he called the Park Palace from a pay station. The operator at the Park Palace said:

"You sure can pick 'em, Mr. Lacey. Want to talk with her?"

"And how!" grinned Lacey. He heard the buzzing as the connection was made. Then Aline's voice came to him.

"Remember talking to me about that Shaw girl?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Suppose you could ask her over to have dinner with you?"

"I might. Why?"

"Well, I'd just like to drop in on the two of you—in your room, casual like—and talk to her a few minutes."

"She'll be here Sherlock," promised Aline.

## CHAPTER V

### *Million Dollar Girl*



ANITA SHAW had everything in the line of feminine pulchritude claimed for her by Aline. Red Lacey eyed her appreciatively. Red studied her with his eyes. She was raven-headed and black-eyed. But there was the almost invisible

yellow tinge of a stalking tigress mixed in the blackness of those eyes. She was curled up on a divan, and she looked like a black tigress in a moment of relaxation.

She was small, but her contours were exquisitely rounded. She was young, but already there was an illusive tinge of hardness marking her face. The hardness of complete cynicism. Her fingers were adorned with three or four diamond and emerald rings of great value. Her street garb shrieked money.

Lacey had entered without announcement. Anita Shaw had looked up at him as he entered, grinning.

"Who's the boy friend?" she had demanded of Aline.

"Mr. Lacey," said Aline pleasantly. "The one and only Red Lacey. You're getting a break, little girl."

And suddenly the yellow glints had entered the girl's eyes, and she drew within herself sharply, and her eyes seemed to smolder as she looked at Lacey's face.

"Oh, the free-lance dick, eh?" she said half contemptuously. "I didn't know you had friends like—Lacey."

There was a brittle silence. Lacey took up a drink. He studied the lights in the thin glass. There was a little frown on his forehead.

"Sister," he said suddenly. "Would you be interested in a lot of dough—a lot of dough?"

The girl's hostile eyes were fixed on his face. "I'd never be interested

in *your* kind of money, Mr. Lacey. I may be wrong, but I'm sure that I wouldn't. However, I'll be glad to listen to a proposition."

"I'm a guy who runs by hunches," said Lacey slowly. His face was set and his eyes were staring at the girl's face. "It's funny, but I have a hunch that you can make yourself a lot of dough by giving up the answer to one question."

"What's the question?"

Lacey studied the glass. Then he glanced up quickly. "Where's Alvin Gardner?" he shot at her, and his voice cracked like a snapping whip-lash.

Two white spots appeared on her cheeks. Her hands tightened a little. Then she laughed. She threw back her head and laughed.

"Of all the dumb questions!" she gurgled. "'Where's Alvin Gardner?' He asks me that! Say, mister, if I knew where Alvin Gardner was I'd be able to sleep better at nights. I'd like to talk to him a couple of minutes myself. Don't you read the newspapers?"

"Yeah, I read 'em. That's one of the reasons for the question." He got out of his chair and stood over her. "I don't do much talking at a time like this," he said ominously. "I'm asking you a fair question, and I'm getting a lying answer. You can do Gardner and yourself a big favor by throwing them down the middle when you talk to me. You're on the short end of a sucker bet, Miss Shaw. I'm giving you a break.

"Get this in your nut: I'm bringing Gardner back—and I'm bringing him back *alive*, understand? When I bring him back I won't have any questions to ask, but I have a hunch you'll have to do a lot of nasty talking to save that pretty little neck. Now—do I get straight answers or not?"

The girl's face was a picture of outraged fury. Her body came erect at one bound from the divan. Her hands reached out, as if to claw the flesh from his face.

"Who in the devil do you think you're talking to?" she screamed at

him. "Where the devil do you get the business of talking that way to me? You may be a big shot to a lot of people, but you're only a lousy flatfoot with me. On your way, mug."

Lacey made a sudden movement with his hand. There was a sharp sound of hand striking against a face. The girl fell backward two steps, stood, stark, near to insanity with rage, and with the impressions of Lacey's hand across her mouth.

"Dames like you are a dime a dozen with me," grinned Red Lacey whitely. "No matter how much Gardner thought you were worth, you're still a dime a dozen with Red Lacey. That's just a reminder to speak softly and keep your manners when I talk to you. There's plenty more where that came from, and I love to dish it out. You'll never be more than a little rat, no matter how many diamonds you wear on your hand or where you buy your clothes."

A queer change came over Anita Shaw. Her body suddenly relaxed. She smiled, but hell romped in her eyes. "I'll live to see you pay for that smack in the teeth," she said pleasantly. "Maybe you think you can get away with that? You can't! I'll be seeing you."

She took up a double silver fox summer fur and smiled sweetly at Aline Carter. "Good-by, dear. I've enjoyed it so much. I'll see you later, too, won't I? You have the queerest friends."

When the door closed behind her, Lacey paced the room in brisk, furious strides.

"You shouldn't have done that," Aline told him. "She's capable of anything when she's like that. And she has friends. Bad friends."

"I hope so," growled Lacey. "I want her to bring 'em around to see me. Especially her baddest friends. I'm interested in 'em."

He paced more. Suddenly he whirled.

"That dame knows something—and plenty! She's got something to do with this snatch on Gardner. She's on the inside. She has to be worked on."

He took up his hat. He grabbed Aline Carter by the shoulders. He kissed her on the mouth.

"I'll be seeing you," he said. "Kind of keep your eye on that Shaw broad. Let me know who she talks to—who comes to see her—what they do. I'll call you later."

HE walked along the street. He stopped, as if moved by a sudden inspiration. He went into a phone booth at a corner cigar store. He dialed the number of the Empire Trust Company. He glanced at his watch. It was long after banking hours. The operator at the bank answered.

"Chief bookkeeper," demanded Red Lacey.

"It's after hours, sir."

"I've got a watch, sister," said Red. "If the gentleman is there, put him on the wire."

There was a little delay, then a man's voice answered.

"This is Richard Lacey speaking to you—Red Lacey," informed Lacey. "I want to ask you a couple of questions. The right answers will net you exactly five hundred bucks."

"But—but—I don't understand, sir," said the man's voice.

"I'm interested in the personal account of Mr. Alvin Gardner," said Lacey. "If you could deliver a transcript of his account, deposits and withdrawals, and a record of his disbursements by check, over a period of three months, it would be worth just five hundred dollars to me—in hundred-dollar bills. I'll want it tonight. Suite 1705, Park Palace Hotel. I'll be there personally. You have my word that this is entirely for my own information and that I am working on the Gardner kidnaping. I'll be in at ten if you call."

"But—but—" protested the voice.

Lacey hung up. He called another number. Gardner's brokerage house. Again he asked for the chief bookkeeper.

"Strictly on the Q. T.," he said to that gentleman. "I want to know who is the prime mover in selling Gardner stocks short. I don't want

any guesses. I want to know who has been selling in the largest and steady volume—and I'm not interested in the little lambs. I want to discover who has been acting like a bloodthirsty tiger in the short selling. It would be worth five hundred bucks to me if I could get an answer by ten tonight at the Park Palace Hotel, Suite 1705."

"But—Mr. Lacey. It would cost me my job!"

"Not a chance," assured Lacey. "I'm the only guy who would know, and I'm not a rat. Better think it over. Five hundred is a lot of dough." He hung up without listening to further protests.

He ate in a cafeteria. He went to a movie. At ten minutes to ten he taxied to the Park Palace. He took Aline's key from the box, and went up on the elevator to the 17th floor. The phone rang. The operator was calling.

"Man kept calling you since ninety-three, handsome," she said. "Left a message: 'Tell Mr. Lacey the man from the bank called, and will call back at ten'."

Lacey grinned. "That's fine, sweetheart," he told her. "You take good care of the man from the bank."

Fifteen minutes later Lacey was talking to a timid soul in a somber business suit. The timid soul seemed to fear eavesdroppers. He gave Lacey an envelope. The whole of the Gardner transactions out of his personal account were in that envelope. Lacey glanced at the transcript of checks drawn and deposits made. A little whistling sound came from his mouth, and his eyes began to glitter.

"Not much here," he said as if disappointed. "But a promise is a promise."

He counted five one-hundred-dollar bills from his wallet and gave them to the timid soul.

"You'll—keep this—in strict confidence, Mr. Lacey?" implored the timid soul.

Lacey patted him paternally on the back. "You go back to work and fear nothing," he said. "I appreciate your cooperation."

When the timid soul was gone, Red Lacey threw himself down at a table and his eyes feasted on the balance sheet representing Gardner's account, and on three items contained on the transcript of disbursements. The three items were:

Check Number	Payee	Date	Amount
5163	Anita Shaw	June 1	\$50,000
5219	Anita Shaw	July 1	\$50,000
5296	Anita Shaw	August 1	\$50,000

Between those entries there were minor disbursements, but the three items paid to Anita Shaw stood out like a four-alarm fire. Gardner had paid to the girl in stated monthly payments, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And the second startling thing: Gardner's account with the Empire was in red ink to the amount of fifteen thousand dollars. He was overdrawn!

**T**HE telephone bell rang. Lacey answered. The operator said:

"Man on the outside wire says to tell you he can't make it up here, but he is from the broker's office. Shall I put him on?"

"Don't waste a minute," begged Lacey.

The man's voice sounded in his ear. "Mr. Lacey?"

"Yeah, this is Lacey."

"I can't make it up there, but I got the dope you wanted. You can send me what you promised. I'll take your word. Your credit is good with me." There was a little laugh from the man, and Lacey fought to keep down his impatience.

"What did you find?" he asked casually.

"A lot of short selling in those items," said the voice. "But the biggest short seller is a brand new account, just came into the market, at least with us. She's a woman. Her name is Shaw—Anita Shaw. She's been going overboard on the short side, and handles her account like a veteran. She made her first sale four days ago—and she got in on the top—and she's going out on the bottom. She stands to make a fortune—a couple of fortunes. One more day

like today and they'll be eating out of her hand."

"The devil you say!" said Lacey. "A woman, eh? Well, you can't win all your bets, but it still goes; you'll get five Cs in the mail—or I'll bring it to you."

"Bring it, please."

Lacey hung up.

This time he really paced the room. The glitter in his eyes was deadly. Now and then he pounded one fist into the other. At the end of the pacing he took a vicious punch at the hard wall with his right fist.

"Now we're getting somewheres!" he told himself.

He hid the papers from the bank bookkeeper in the closet.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Private Business*



IT was dark in Forty-eighth Street. Lacey was walking east between Eighth Avenue and Broadway. His hands were in his pockets. He was thinking. He was going to meet Aline, to bring her home from the Club Madrigal.

Something fell on the back of his head. Something that landed silently and with a terrific shock.

Even as he went down he knew the something to be a sand bag wielded by expert hands. A sickening dullness spread over his brain. It rendered movement of his arms and legs impossible. It was like being dead but able to think. He hardly felt the crushing blow across his face. He knew that there were three or four men working on him—with fists, saps and feet.

He saw blood spurt from his face, but he could do nothing about it. The blow on the head had the effect of an anesthetic. Then they were gone.

A scream sounded, and then voices were shouting. The red face of a policeman appeared in front of tor-

ured eyes. The policeman was shouting incoherently.

Lacey went out like a light. Then, like a dream, he could hear the scream of an ambulance siren, and could feel the smooth motion of a racing ambulance. After that he smelled the odors of a hospital.

His eyes were like heavy weights. He managed to force them open. He saw the white garb of an interne and the white garb of a nurse. They were working on him. The pain in his head was shattering.

He fought to lift his body. The interne looked at him. He said: "Be quiet, you idiot!"

Lacey tried to reach him with his hands. The interne glanced at an attendant. The attendant grabbed Red Lacey's hands. Another sat astride his legs. The pain was grinding Lacey's brain to a pulp.

He was wheeled upstairs out of the emergency ward. They put him in bed. He pretended to sleep. It grew quiet in his room. He got up out of bed. Looked in the closet. His clothes were there. He put them on. He was grabbing at the walls and doors for support. There were bandages on his face. His chest hurt.

He opened a window. There was a fire-escape outside the window. He half crawled, half crouched down the perilous steel steps. At the bottom, the last length of steps was held up by an iron weight. He crawled along the horizontal steps. After a second the chains groaned and ran over the grooved wheels. It made a harsh, grating metallic sound in the hospital.

He tumbled the other steps to the ground. He heard a commotion over his head. Someone yelled: "Hey, stop!"

He forced his legs to run and his body to stay erect. He went through the alleyway, into the street. He saw a nighthawk cab in front of the hospital. He piled in.

"Get the devil away from here," he told the driver. "Go north—toward Central Park—"

The driver beat the pursuit by less than fifty yards. He drove fast. At

Times Square, Lacey gave him new directions.

"Go to the Park Palace," he said. His face was white. He was breathing between his teeth. He was forcing himself to take the jouncing of the cab. His muscles seemed shot full of bone splinters.

He took the cab driver inside the hotel. "Pay him off," he told the night clerk. He stumbled in the elevator, let himself into Aline Carter's apartment.

She woke out of a sound sleep. It was half an hour until dawn. Outside, the sky was already violet. She moaned and caught him in her arms. She held him, rocked him back and forth. He tried to grin, it was a failure.

The phone bell rang. She answered it.

"Can you talk?" she asked anxiously. "It's for you."

He half crawled to the table between the twin beds. He swallowed hard. He croaked:

"This is Lacey."

The voice laughed. "Lacey—the tough egg, eh? Well, that was just a pleasant sample of what happens to guys who stick their snoots in other people's business. Get it? Now will you lay off—or do you want the harbor crew to fish you out of the river? You haven't got the brains of a louse. We haven't started to work on you yet, smart guy!"

Lacey's battered eyes narrowed and his mouth was completely white.

"I've got one thing to say to you, whoever you are. I haven't started to work on you. I'll get every one of those licks back—with interest!"

He hung up.

And he went out again, like a light. He didn't know that all through the hours following, Aline Carter nursed him, wept over him, bathed his hurts with ice water.

**I**T seemed to Lacey that a far-off crying sound filled his ears. Voices crying—far off. He opened his eyes. Strangely his brain was concentrating on the cries, trying to make sense out of the sounds. One

word emerged from the sounds. The word was, "Extry! Extry!"

He moved his head. He saw Aline sitting on the next bed. Her hands were holding a newspaper. Holding it as if afraid he would see it. There was an infinite pity in her eyes.

Lacey's tongue rasped against the roof of his mouth. His body felt numb, stretched, beaten. The heavy pain was still in the middle of his brain. He looked at her. Then suddenly he saw the headlines across the top of the paper.

He sat bolt upright, his haggard eyes staring at the black type. It was a copy of the extra the boys were shouting in the streets. The headline said in two great words:

### GARDNER MURDERED!

He snatched the paper away from the girl. He looked at the word "murdered" for a long moment, then he forced his eyes to follow the dancing lines of type on the page.

The body of Alvin Gardner, millionaire banker and stock market operator who was kidnaped four days ago from the streets of New York, was found in a ditch at the side of Highway 17 near Tuxedo early this morning by a passing New York State Police car. The body of the financier was burned almost to a cinder by his murderers, as if they feared identification. The identification was made by parts of bridge work the flames did not destroy, and from unburned material of the suit Gardner was wearing at the time of the kidnaping.

The condition of the body hinted at a cold-blooded, murderous fury on the part of the criminals responsible. An attempt had been made, even before the burning of the body, to beat all human resemblance from the face. The head of the body showed several definite fractures caused from being struck on the head with a heavy, flat implement. The burning of the body was probably an afterthought on the part of the murderers.

State Police officials in reconstructing the crime, are of the opinion that Gardner was murdered at a spot other than where found, and his body transported by automobile and flung into a ditch. Gasoline was then poured over the body, soaking the upper part, and a match applied.

The fire burned Gardner's body to a cinder, excepting for the lower legs below the knees. This area was unburned, and the material from the suit, which supported identification, came from the legs of Gardner's trousers. The shoes were little more than scorched and the bootmaker who

served Gardner was able to identify them positively. The dentist who made the bridge work had no hesitancy in identifying it as Gardner's, in spite of the fact that the bridge was damaged and had been exposed to the flame.

The burning of the body must have been a hurried job, according to the police, as evidenced by the failure of the murderers to soak all of the body in gasoline.

The widow, Mrs. Constance Gardner, identified the materials of Gardner's suit, personal effects which survived the burning and which were taken from the ground near the body, and then collapsed. . . .

Lacey lifted himself from the bed slowly. He began walking back and forth across the room, as if heedless of the pain of movement.

Aline said: "I'm sorry, dear. Such a terrible thing—I know how it must hurt you—"

Lacey turned his head and his bloodshot eyes swirled as they looked at her. He laughed, a queer, cackling, brutal laughter.

"So—he's dead?" he said. "Well, I've been expecting that. It was in the cards. They had to kill him." He laughed again.

The telephone bell rang. He picked up the receiver. Thorndyke of the Insurance Company was on the telephone.

"My God, man. I've been trying to locate you for two hours! You certainly have let us down—"

"Shut up!" snarled Lacey. "I asked you for information. You gave me a line about not betraying the secrets of a client. If it costs your outfit four million bucks it's your own fault. I want the answer to a question. Who gets Gardner's insurance?"

**T**HERE was a little pause from the other end of the line.

"I'll help you," said Lacey in the same snarling voice. "How much does a party by the name of Anita Shaw get?"

"Anita Shaw is the beneficiary under two policies for half a million each, taken out on the life of Alvin Gardner less than a year ago," said the voice, this time without hesitation. "Gardner's other policies, of longer standing, make his wife his beneficiary."

"Why in the devil didn't you tell me that in the first place."

"Well—"

"You ought to have to pay the dough, just as a lesson," growled Lacey.

"We ought to have to pay it?" echoed Thorndyke. "There isn't a chance in the world that we can escape paying it."

Lacey suddenly grinned. The white wolf grin. "If you pay it before I'm finished with this case you're still a bigger sap than I figure you for!"

He hung up the receiver with a gesture of disgust. He reached for his hat.

Aline took hold of his arm.

"You can't go out," she begged. "You don't know how badly you're hurt. It means nothing now. He's dead."

He shook his arm free. "I'm just started on those babies," he told her coldly. "Nobody can give me a bouncing around like that!" He banged the door behind him.

He took a cab to the Park Avenue address of Miss Anita Shaw. The rear-admiral who kept the sacred portals free of the riff-raff stared at him. Lacey shouldered him out of the way and got into the elevator. He got off at the eleventh floor. He beat on the door of 1120 with his fist. A colored maid opened the door. He gave the shoulder to her as he had to the doorman.

He strode into the living room. He found Miss Shaw sitting on a low divan, and talking into a phone. She put the phone quickly back in its cradle, and jumped to her feet.

"What the devil are you doing here?" she demanded. She laughed. She was looking at his face—at the bruises. "Boy, they certainly gave it to you, didn't they?" she gurgled. "My, my the big tough baby got himself massaged by experts."

He took one step forward. His arm swung. She went down flat under the impact of his open hand.

"I'm giving a little of it back, baby!" he snarled at her. His hands snatched her to her feet again, and he let her have the left palm across



the middle of the face. Then he picked her up and threw her against the wall. Her teeth chattered with the force of his handling.

"Only way to deal with little girls like you," he said in an icy voice. "You only understand one kind of language. I'm through fooling with you. I'm going to ask questions. If I don't get the kind of answers I like, down to Headquarters you go—and for a murder rap! How do you like that?"

She crouched away from him, her body to the wall. Her eyes flashed to the drawer of the telephone stand. He beat her to the jump and ripped open the drawer.

There was a .25 automatic in the drawer. He laughed and thrust it in his pocket.

"How come you're selling big chunks of Gardner's pet stocks short?" he hurled at her. "How come you're the big noise for the minute, downtown? What do you know about the stock market? Who tipped you off what to do? Where'd you get the information?"

**S**HE stared at him, her eyes filled with a deadly venom, and with the yellow lights.

"How come Gardner insured himself in your favor for a million bucks?"

She merely glared.

"No answers, eh? Well, I'm still going to give you a break, sister. I'm a patient guy—only don't make the mistake of trying to give me a bouncing around again. I'm ready for that. I won't be walking down dark streets after this—and I shoot fast and straight. I'm going to give you a couple of hours to think things over; then you're going to answer the questions whether you want to or not. And maybe you think I haven't got the answers to all the questions before you give the answers. Little bright boy, that's me. I got this business all figured out, and I'm not guessing."

He backed away from her, to the door. "Tell your boy friends I don't scare so easy," he flung at her. "I'll

be seeing you. You better get in a giving frame of mind."

He took a cab to a number on West Fiftieth Street, near the river. The address was a big building, fabricated out of cement. Once it had been the factory branch of a big automobile company. The company had gone bankrupt during the depression. The building was empty. There was a caretaker. The caretaker was Irish, and he was redheaded. He grinned at Lacey.

"**A**ND what might ye be doing in this part of the world, Mr. Lacey?" he asked.

"I want to hire your building for a couple of days, Mike," smiled Lacey. "Private business."

"Anything I got ye can have." The caretaker spat largely as if to prove his sincerity. "It's legal, I hope. Not that it'll make so much difference."

"I may want to entertain a couple of guests for a while—take them away from the humdrum existence of city life—give them a touch of nature—their own natures. I may get rough with them, but you can be sure they have it coming. I got to keep them where no one will find them. I thought of this joint."

Mike the caretaker drew a long breath. "I don't know what you're talking about, but I'll take your word for it. I never had a chance to repay the favors I've had from you. I'd be a rat if I didn't grant the first favor ye've ever asked me. You come whenever you're ready. The place will be open. I'll keep it open."

"That's swell," smiled Lacey. He took a twenty from his wallet and gave it to the old man. "That's just a little retaining fee," he told him. "There'll be more."

He went away in the same cab.

He went back to the Park Palace. He threw himself down in a chair and held his head in his hands. He wondered: could he force the rats behind Anita Shaw into the open by making passes at her?

He wondered where Aline was. It was too early for her to be out. He rested his head against the back of

the chair. He must have gone to sleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### *A Strand of Hair*



HE awoke with a start. There was a gentle thumping noise on the door. His body bounced out of the chair. He saw something white working itself under the door. He crossed the room in three leaps. He snatched at the knob, twisted, and

tugged. He cursed. The door was locked. He twisted the tumblers open and yanked the door open. He saw a back and a pair of legs going around the corner of the corridor. He raced down the corridor. When he got to the turn the back and legs had disappeared.

He went back to the room. There was a square white envelope in the doorway. He picked it up. In pencil on the outside of the envelope were two words: "Red Lacey."

The words were printed. There was a sudden barbed feeling inside Lacey's chest. His hands shook a little as he ran a finger under the flap of the envelope and ripped it open. He pulled out a folded square of paper. Something fell to the floor. Something like golden gossamer. He picked it up. He found himself holding a length of pale golden hair.

Only one head in the world had such hair, Aline Carter's. He opened the envelope.

Maybe you'll listen to reason, maybe you won't. We tried to tell you that sticking that ugly mug into other guys' business was bad medicine, but you didn't take the hint. Well, we got her, and we'll keep her. All we want is your word of honor to lay off the Gardner snatch—and that shouldn't be so tough, now. Do you play ball or do we send you a hunk of the broad's anatomy every twenty-four hours just to show that we mean business?

Lacey was suddenly shivering as if with intense cold. His face went

white. He held the note in his hands, staring at it as he might have stared at the head of a rattlesnake. Very slowly he went to phone. He called the Club Madrigal. He got Joe Colimo.

"Has Aline been there today?" he asked. His voice sounded steady and cold.

Colimo said. "Hell no; I'm just on the verge of calling up to find out where she is. Is she sick?"

For the first time Lacey looked out the window. It was dark. The lights of Broadway were burning like red blood and green poison and white blindness. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was eleven-fifty.

"If she comes in, ask her to give me a call at the Park Palace. Right away, understand?"

"Sure, sure," said Colimo. "The Park Palace, right away. I got it."

Lacey hung up. Then he signaled the hotel switchboard.

"Yes, sweetheart?" demanded the operator.

"Did anyone ask for Miss Carter this afternoon or tonight?"

"One guy—Italian looking, dressed like a Ninth Avenue sheik. He asked if she was in. I saw her go out, so I told him she was out. He hung around in the lobby. She came in about seven o'clock. She was out to the hair-dresser's. I saw that she had her hair fixed. She walked over to the elevator. The guy followed her. That's all I know."

"You mean you didn't see her again tonight?"

"No, but that doesn't mean anything, I may have been busy."

"Thanks," Lacey said. He put the receiver back on the stand. He stood there, staring in front of him. He was still very white. Death was stamped on his face. Something terrible, deadly, stalked through those blankly staring eyes. His very quietness in the face of the shock was terrible.

He sat down on the edge of the bed. He was trying to think what Aline would suffer in the hands of the men who had her—what they might do to her. After a moment he

shook his head like a fighter throwing off a smack on the jaw. He knew one thing. He had to get her back. He knew that she was the only thing in the world he cared about, the only thing that really mattered.

He muttered to himself. "Who knew I was overboard for her? Who knew they could work on me through her? Who? Who knew where she lived? Who was mixed up in this and had to be mixed up with the Gardner snatch at the same time? That Shaw dame! Sure—that was the lead—that Shaw broad! She had connections—and the connections had to be mixed up in it. But the Shaw broad was taking orders. She didn't have brains enough or experience enough to plan and carry out something like this. That stock market play—everything—she was only the front. She was Gardner's broad. Maybe someone else's on the side, but certainly she was Gardner's broad, because of those insurance policies in her name.

"If a guy took a chance and insured himself for a million bucks in favor of a broad, he was overboard for her—over his head and sinking. She had to mean a lot—he had to trust her to the limit. He had to depend on her. Or he wouldn't make a crazy play like that!"

**L**ACEY came up off the bed. "What a dunce!" He grabbed his hat and patted his pocket for the automatic. He found his own, and the gun he had taken out of the drawer in the telephone stand at the Shaw girl's apartment.

He called a number on the telephone. Willie Quirk, the ex-messenger boy, answered the phone. Lacey talked to him in clipped words.

"I'm in Miss Aline Carter's apartment at the Park Palace, Willie," he told him. "I want you to come up here as fast as a cab will bring you. I want to have you sit in this room and do nothing but answer the telephone. Give out no information, just receive it. I don't want to hear from anyone but a guy who will say to you: 'I want to talk to Lacey about the Gardner case.' When you get

that message, hold it, and I'll keep calling in for any information you have. Stick by that phone, Willie. I won't have a chance to see you. I'm going to be busy. But I'm depending on you."

"I'll be there," said Willie.

Lacey left the apartment. He went directly to the Club Madrigal. He was sure he had answers to some very pertinent questions.

**J**OE COLIMO made way between the tables toward Lacey. His face was a puzzle. He met Lacey, almost before Lacey came through the door leading to the main room of the Club Madrigal.

"For cripe's sake!" he said in an undertone. "You look like a corpse in search of a cut-rate undertaker. What the devil goes on with you?"

"A couple of mugs interested in the Gardner snatch interviewed me in Forty-eighth Street," grinned Red Lacey. There was a wicked something in the whiteness of the grin, and the dancing lights of death were still in his eyes.

"It's too bad I couldn't have been there," remarked Colimo. "I'd have made those hoods hard to catch."

"Ah, well, one can't have everything, can one?" An almost mocking undercurrent ran through Lacey's voice. He stood close to Colimo. "Can I see you outside—of here," he said with a glance around the room. "I've got something to tell you that will knock your ears down."

Colimo shot a single look at Lacey and then at his own joint. He nodded. "Sure," he said. "What's up."

Lacey was talking as they walked out into the lobby of the club. Talking hurriedly.

"I know you're a friend of mine, Joe, or I wouldn't crack this. Listen; they put the snatch on Aline Carter—took her out of the Park Palace while I'm upstairs in her apartment, nursing a headache. I got a note—with a lock of her hair—telling me to lay off the Gardner case, or else. And the 'or else' applies to her. I'd like to show you the note. Maybe you can figure something out of it."

They were outside the Club Madrigal.

"Let's go down to the corner—to the Trapeze. I'll show you the note. We can talk. I don't want to be seen in your joint any more than I can help. No use bringing you into this. I'm a poisonous guy to know right now."

Colimo's evening dress made a strange contrast with Lacey's dark Palm Beach. They passed a hack stand on the corner. They were passing the first hack in line.

Lacey's voice suddenly changed. Became a snarl, and the deadly rasp came into it suddenly.

"Get into that cab, Colimo!" he said in a low tone. "I've got a twenty-five covering your stomach. Listen, I'm putting you under formal arrest for the kidnaping and murder of Alvin Gardner, get it? I've got all the evidence I need. If you make a squawk or a move I don't like, I'm going to shoot you six times in the stomach. And it'll be resisting arrest, understand? You know me. I make good. Inside, or—"

Colimo's face did not move a muscle. He laughed. "You do the damnest things, Lacey," he said. "I get a big kick out of you. You're a riot—"

"Get in the cab!" said Red Lacey coldly. There was complete finality in his voice. "We're going downtown."

"You're making a horse's neck out of yourself," shrugged Colimo, "but I'm not telling you how to run your racket. I'll be out of there in ten minutes—and then—"

Lacey gave low directions to the cab driver. The cab moved off. There was no commotion. The cab moved east. It crossed Seventh Avenue and Broadway, and Eighth Avenue; it turned south for a couple of blocks. It moved into the almost deserted section between Tenth and Eleventh Avenue. It came to a stop.

Lacey opened the door. He was watching Colimo.

"Okay, Frank," he said to the cab driver. "If anybody asks, you took Colimo and me downtown. I got out

of the cab first. You drove Colimo anywhere you can think of—and he got out. Okay?"

"Sure. Okay, Mr. Lacey," grinned the driver.

A snarl came around Colimo's mouth. "Say, what is this!" he demanded. "This is not downtown—this isn't Headquarters. What the devil are you trying to pull?"

**L**ACEY'S fist swung. The knuckles hit Colimo across the mouth. The lips split. Blood spurted. Colimo staggered. Lacey smacked him again with the same hand.

"On your way, Frank," Lacey said to the cab driver.

The cab moved off. Lacey herded Colimo toward the darkened entrance of a big concrete building. "Get inside," he spat at Colimo. "Don't make me mad, because I'm itching to go to work on you!"

Colimo went inside. Lacey frisked him with his hands. Then he snapped a pair of regulation handcuffs on Colimo's wrists. Colimo was white under the blood which smeared his mouth and face.

"I'll live to kill you for this," he told Lacey quietly.

They climbed the steps to the third floor and walked back to the rear of the building. There were concrete posts holding up the floors. One of the posts had a steel ring set into it. Lacey unlocked one of the cuffs, thrust it through the ring, locked it again. When he had finished, Colimo was locked by chilled steel to chilled steel set in concrete, and the bands of the cuffs were embedded in the flesh of his wrists.

"These things are cutting my hands off," growled Colimo.

"Just a preliminary," promised Red Lacey. "You won't worry about the cuffs this time tomorrow night."

He saw sudden real alarm come into Colimo's eyes. "You can't get away with this, Lacey," assured Colimo. "My boys will be out hunting you down. They're out now—"

"Let 'em hunt. I'm wanting them to show up—somewhere—but I don't think they'll come."

He ignored Colimo except for plastering a length of adhesive tape over his mouth. He went down the three flights of steps through the dark building. He walked to the corner and found a phone booth in a Coffee Pot. He called the Club Madrigal's number. The head waiter answered. Lacey gave a perfect imitation of Joe Colimo's voice.

"This is Joe," he said as if speaking guardedly. "Let me talk to Anita. Hurry!"

**T**HERE was a little pause. Then a girl's voice came over the wire.

"Where the devil are you?" the Shaw girl demanded hotly. "What's the big idea of going out of here with that Lacey guy, and without telling anybody where you're going. You've got the place in an uproar—"

"Keep quiet!" barked Lacey, as Colimo would have said it. "Listen. I learned plenty—and I squared Lacey. He's okay now. Sure. He was glad to quit when I talked it over with him. But I learned things. Look—slip out the side door, go down to the corner. There's a cab driver there. Frank is the name. He's one of my boys. I sent him back after you. I got to talk to you—right away. The whole thing may be upset. The insurance angle—sure. Snap into it, kid, and be sure you aren't tailed. Don't open your yap to anyone. Got it? Okay. I'll see you in ten minutes."

Lacey hung up the receiver. There were beads of sweat standing out on his forehead. His face was very white. He lounged across the street. He took up a position in the darkness of the building entrance. The street was as dead as a crypt. He lit a cigarette, shielding the match and the glow. He took a couple of big drags on the thing. Then he pinched it out very carefully.

After an eternity he heard the sound of tires turning into the street and then the sound of a motor. The cab was traveling fast. It began to stop, fifty feet away. There was no squealing of brakes. It came to a smooth, hurried stop.

The cab driver said: "Okay, miss, just follow me."

He held open the door. Anita Shaw, still in her professional evening dress, put a hesitant foot on the sidewalk. She looked around suspiciously.

"Say you!" she demanded of the driver. "Are you sure you got the right address?"

"I been here before," said the taxi driver. "I don't make mistakes—on a job like this. Mr. Colimo is here—with another guy—"

He led the way across the sidewalk. After a slight hesitation, the girl followed. They came to the entrance.

Lacey took one spring. His arm flashed out, went around the girl's mouth and throat, squeezed hard. He heard a bone in her neck crack as he put on the pressure.

"Scram, Frank!" he whispered to the driver. "Go home. Stay away. I'll handle this baby—and love it!" He grunted. The baby's teeth were sunk in his arm.

The cab moved out of the street, picked up speed, turned the corner, disappeared.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Two of a Kind*



**L**ACEY, with the strangle hold still clamped on the girl's head, dragged her into the building, and then dragged her bodily up the steps. His own battered body shrieked and raved under the strain, but he clamped his teeth together, and continued the dragging until he had her on the third floor.

He turned loose the hold, steadied her erect, slapped her sharply across the mouth with his left hand, while his right flashed out a second pair of handcuffs. She fought silently and desperately, but he chained her to a concrete post, twenty feet from Joe Colimo.

He paused, panting. He turned on

one light. He looked at Colimo and then at the girl.

"You people know each other, don't you?" he asked pleasantly. He leaned against an upright and breathed heavily until his lungs were no longer tortured for air, and until the buzzing and pain in his head stopped.

"Nice of you to come," he said to the girl.

"Go to the devil!" she said.

Colimo said: "Shut up. Let him do the talking. We'll talk later."

"I doubt it," grinned Lacey. "I doubt it very much. When I get through with you, you won't feel like talking."

"You're as good as dead right now, you doublecrossing louse," said Colimo coldly.

Lacey walked up to him, stood very close. He let go a whistling left hook that bounced off Colimo's chin. "You're through with that stuff, Joe," he said pleasantly. "That's just a little interest for the rocking and socking I took on Forty-eighth Street. Maybe you think I missed the fact that it was some of your boys who gave me the shellacking. Well, I didn't."

Colimo's face was hideous. "How much do you want?"

Lacey laughed. "A hundred grand; but not from you—"

"I'll give it," offered Colimo. "I'll give it and forget it. I know when to pay and when to fight it out—"

"You can't do either, in this case," said Lacey with the same pleasantly indifferent air. "By the way, where's Miss Carter?"

Colimo's eyes were suddenly veiled. "We can trade on that, can't we, Lacey?" he demanded. "I'll get her back for you—"

"I'll get her back myself, in my own peculiar way," said Red Lacey coldly. "That note said that they would send me a piece of her anatomy every twenty-four hours, until I agreed to lay off the Gardner snatch. Well I'm going to be more liberal than that with your anatomy. I'm going to send your stooges a hunk of you every hour, until I get a phone message that Miss Carter is

safely back in her suite in the Park Palace. How do you like that?"

"You're crazy?"

"Did you say it!" nodded Lacey. "I'm going to start with fingers, one at a time; cut 'em off myself. I think I'll start with that third finger of the left hand—the one with the diamond and send diamond finger and all, to the boys just for a keepsake. I'll just take the ring now, to be sure nothing happens to it." He slipped the ring from Colimo's finger. They'll be happy to have it, I know. They can start a collection, and add to it every hour. Just imagine how they'll feel when I run out of fingers and start sending 'em an ear or two."

COLIMO'S face was suddenly ashen. "You couldn't do it!" he growled. "That's cold-blooded murder—mutilation—"

Lacey went to a corner of the room. He dragged a bridge table out of the shadows. There was a flat wooden box on the table. He opened the lid. The cold light of surgical instruments glinted under the single light bulb. They were wicked looking. Colimo stared at them in horrible fascination.

"Of course, I'm not so expert with these weapons," said Lacey calmly. "I'll just have to hack 'em off the best way I can. But I got the tools."

There was a thick silence. At the end of it, Lacey laughed.

"I'm going to tell you little children a bed-time story," he said. "A very, very funny yarn. I know you'll appreciate it. I did."

"Ah, keep your mouth closed and give the air a break, you louse!" snarled the girl.

Lacey lit a cigarette with maddening deliberation.

"Once upon a time there was a big shot by the name of Gardner who became a big shot by being a born gambler. All through his career he gambled—and won. But he figured, like other gamblers, that dumb luck was brains, and that he could outmaneuver the whole world. Then the old depression put Mr. Gardner on

the skids, and his stack of blue chips started to diminish. He saw himself broke and tossed out of the game. So he decided to pull the biggest natural of his career with loaded dice.

"He knew a dame named Shaw. He was overboard for her in a big way. He figured he could show her so much money that she wouldn't dare to doublecross him. He knew Joe Colimo too, because the Shaw broad worked for Mr. Colimo, and Mr. Colimo had a merry mob of hoods under cover who took care of things for him—hoods who were gangsters in the good old days of prohibition and poison. Said prize collection of hoods were out of a job, more or less. True, Joe could keep them busy running the numbers racket, and the pin game racket, but that was baby stuff compared to the existence they had been trained for.

"So, Gardner figured a way to grab large hunks of important dough. He was in the street, he was the head of a bank. He still was a big shot to the man in the street, even if a select group of people did know that he was a hollow shell and on the way out.

**H**E decided to have himself snatched. Then he decided to make the play look like the real thing by having himself 'murdered.' He instructed Joe Colimo how to make a killing in the market when the news broke, by selling the stocks Gardner's brokerage firm specialized in. He had a million in insurance made out to the Shaw dame, which would become two million with the double indemnity clause. He had a million more, doubling to two million the same way, in his wife's name, so that she would be taken care of. All he had to do was to get snatched and then murdered—and life became a rosy dream.

"He'd have four or five million dollars cash. He could scam with the broad he was overboard for, without a squawk or a scandal—which he couldn't do while 'living.' It was a beautiful picture, painted by a master hand, and the 'murder'—the body in

the ditch and all that—was lovely. The planted bridge work out of Gardner's mouth—and the remnant of cloth from his suit. It added up to the perfect crime.

"Colimo would get a million. Shaw would get Gardner, whom she probably didn't want, but whose money she did want—and the goose hung high for all concerned. There was just one fly in the ointment. A guy by the name of Red Lacey got interested in a couple of angles that everybody else missed, and got curious, and stuck his nose into the business."

He stopped and took a deep drag on his cigarette.

"Now, isn't that a lovely bedtime story?" he asked with a mocking undertone in his voice.

**W**HAT a line!" scoffed Colimo. "You'd have a fat chance proving it, even if it was so. With Gardner dead—"

"Oh, I'm not going to prove it," said Lacey indifferently. "The trouble with me is that I'm lazy. I'll let you do the work. First, Miss Carter will be brought back. And then, Gardner will walk in and give himself up. When your boys start getting those hunks of anatomy, they'll crack. They can't stand to be worked on like that. It's really touching, their devotion to you, Joe. Those mugs really love you. They'd turn up a dozen Gardners if they thought you were being separated from your fingers and toes and ears—one by one. They haven't much imagination, but what they have is powerful. They'll come to the front with Mr. Gardner about the time I send them the second finger."

"What about me, you lug?" demanded the girl.

"You, darling? Oh, you're just my ace-in-the-hole. In case Mr. Gardner is reluctant to come forward because of Joe, I figure a finger or two from you will bring him around. I believe the guy is actually crazy about you. He'd have to be to make a sucker of himself by making somebody like you his front—and trusting

you with all the dough he needed for his getaway.

"Then, again, I had the thought that if anything happened to Miss Carter, I could take it out on you. You know, the boys might muss her up a little. If they do, you'll get mussed just ten times more. You better hope they treat her with kid gloves. Well, rest easy. I'm going out for a little."

He walked out of the place, leaving them chained to the posts. There was no doubt they were scared—and the way they stared at those surgical instruments proved it.

Downstairs, Lacey spoke a few words to Mike, the caretaker.

"I got 'em upstairs, Mike," he said tensely. "I've got to start things rolling. I want you to go up there, quietly, so they don't know you're watching them out of the darkness, and keep your eye on them. I promise nothing will happen to you. If either of them even looks as if they may get loose, plug 'em—or anything else you can think of to hold 'em here. I'll be back the minute I can get back."

"I'll take care of 'em, Mr. Lacey," said Old Mike grimly.

He climbed the steps. Lacey went out on the street.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Warning Fingers*



**D**OWNTOWN, at a certain medical school, a surgeon-instructor got himself grumblingly out of bed, at the summons of his night bell, to find Red Lacey on his door step. A Red Lacey he had never seen before—a

tense, grim, deadly, white-faced Red Lacey, who spoke staccato sentences with machine-gun precision.

"I want a favor, Doc," said Lacey. "I want a couple of good-looking, fresh, male fingers from your dissecting room. Don't look startled. You

must toss 'em around after you get finished using them. I'm not nerfs. This is a matter of life or death, and you've got to help me! I want a couple of fingers—slim, good-looking fingers, from a stiff not too old. I want a man's fingers and a woman's left hand."

"Go home; you're crazy! At two in the morning—"

"Come on!" grated Lacey. "I have to work fast. Get going."

In the end, they went across the street to the school and into the dark dissecting room. At the end of ten minutes Lacey came out with a package—a very gruesome package under the wrappings. In fact he had two packages, one smaller than the other.

"I wanted you to kind of hack 'em off," Lacey told the surgeon. "I want 'em to look as if they had been cut off by an amateur."

"If you ever breathe a word about where those things came from!" groaned the surgeon.

"Not a chance. Go back to bed."

Lacey went downtown on the subway. He got off at Forty-ninth Street. He found a vagrant messenger boy. He gave him a dollar, and the smaller of the two packages.

"Give this to Louis, the head waiter at the Club Madrigal," he instructed. "Don't give it to anyone else."

He watched the messenger boy go off in the direction of the Club Madrigal. Then he went into a cigar store and dived into a phone booth. He dialed the Madrigal's number.

"Let me speak to Louis, the head waiter," he demanded.

Colimo's right-hand man came on the phone. Lacey spoke rapidly incisively.

"This is Red Lacey speaking to you. Don't open your yap until I get finished. In a couple of minutes a messenger boy will deliver you a package. In the package will be a couple of fingers. One of the fingers is your boss' ring finger—with the diamond ring right on it. The other finger is off Miss Anita Shaw. Sure, I've got 'em both. Every hour from now on, until I get action, I'll send you another package just like it, with



some more keepsakes off your boss and the Shaw broad. Every hour, until I get a message that Miss Aline Carter is back in her suite at the Park Palace, well and uninjured. If, in three hours, I don't get that message, I'll send you Joe Colimo—and I won't have to cut off any fingers. Get it?

"Furthermore, you tell Gardner for me, if you know where he is, that the same thing will happen to Anita Shaw, if he doesn't walk into the same suite at the Park Palace, ready to talk turkey with Red Lacey. You got a devil of a lot of nerve, putting the snatch on a girl friend of mine. I'll take care of you and the rest of those cheap hoods later. I'm busy working on your boss, now. Well, sleep tight."

**T**HERE was a gurgling shout from the other end of the wire. But Red Lacey hung up.

He glanced at his watch. He knew the messenger boy was just about going into the Club Madrigal at that second. Sweat broke out on his face. He was seeing a picture of Aline Carter—in the hands of those mobsters. He wondered what would happen if his plan did not work. He shuddered in spite of the heat.

He walked rapidly down the street, turned two corners, went into another phone booth. He dialed the Park Palace. He asked for Miss Carter's suite. Willie Quirk answered the phone.

"I just want to know that you're there," he told Willie. "Keep the door locked. Don't let anyone in but Miss Carter. I'll call you back every five minutes."

He was about to go out of the booth. A second thought stopped him. He called Police Headquarters and asked for Detective-inspector Phillips. Phillips must have been dozing in his office. His voice was thick when he answered.

"Listen, Phillips," said Lacey. "I'm going to give you the break of your career. I'm going to give you Alvin Gardner, in the flesh."

"You're drunk!" said the startled

inspector. "You ought to read the papers."

"Take it or leave it. I'll bet all the tea in China that I turn him up within the next two or three hours. You go up to the Park Palace—wait in the lobby until you hear from me—and you'll be the biggest man on the Force in the morning!"

He went out, paced the side streets. Every five minutes, by his watch, he called the Park Palace—and Willie Quirk. His nerves were jumping. Anything could happen. They might go to work on Aline. He felt his brain churn with the thought. They might run down Frank, the cab driver, and torture him into telling where he had taken Lacey and Colimo and then Anita Shaw. But Frank had been told to scram, to keep out of sight—and he would.

Somehow those two in the deserted building might break loose in spite of Old Mike.

Something might be wrong with his reasoning! But he *had* to be right. That bank angle. The checks to Anita Shaw. The short selling on the street. The snatch on Aline Carter. The beating. They were all tied up together. And besides, a guy who is going to live like a respectable person in Alvin Gardner's circumstances, wouldn't insure his life for a million bucks in favor of a broad like Shaw. It had to hold together. He *had* to be right.

**H**E called Willie Quirk every five minutes. He called seven times. That made thirty-five minutes. He was looking around for another messenger boy to send a second set of fingers to the Club Madrigal. But he knew, if they ignored the first set, they would ignore 'em all—and there was one chance that they would tumble to what he was pulling.

If Louis, Colimo's right hand, had sense enough to check the print on that cadaverous finger against Colimo's prints on file at Police Headquarters, it would be too bad. But they wouldn't get over that ring. That famous diamond of Colimo's. They'd stare at it—and they'd take

the finger for the McCoy, because of that ring.

He dialed the Park Palace the eighth time. The minute Willie came on the phone he knew something had broken. Willie's voice yapped like the bark of a puppy.

"Miss Carter just came in! She's here—in the room! She looks all in—"

"Put her on," snapped Lacey.

He heard her low, husky voice. It said: "Darling! Oh, Red, darling—" Then it was abruptly hushed.

Red Lacey, the tough mug, stood there in the phone booth, tears running off the end of his chin, and his arms and hand so weak he could hardly hold the receiver. His body was covered with a cold sweat.

"They had me at the hotel—here—on the third floor," her voice came to him again. "They came in about twenty minutes ago. They were very excited, talking together, I couldn't understand them—then they told me to sit still for five minutes—and they went out—in a hurry. I waited five minutes—and came up stairs."

"Are you hurt? Did they touch you?" Cold death was in Lacey's voice.

"No! No! They just cut off a lock of hair, that's all—"

Lacey breathed once, very deeply. The strength seemed to run back into his body.

"Look, Angel," he said softly. "You lie down and rest. I'll be seeing you any minute—"

"Please come—now," she begged.

"I'm on the way!" growled Lacey. "But I've got business to attend to first. Big business. I won't be more than a hundred yards away from you for the rest of the night."

He went out of the booth. He half ran the distance to the Park Palace.

**D**ETECTIVE PHILLIPS was sitting in a chair in the almost deserted lobby. He was conspicuous because he was trying to hide his face with a newspaper.

Lacey slapped him on the shoulder. "What's the idea of the disguise?" he demanded, with a genuine

Lacey grin for the first time. "Hell, I'm expecting the guy to walk in, without trouble—to keep a date—"

He whirled and his hand slid inside his coat pocket, curled around the butt of the .25 automatic.

Two men came through the door, into the lobby. The first was athletic-looking, clean-shaven, his face a rich tan, dressed in cheap sports clothes. Behind him walked a young, dapper, olive-complexioned gentleman, his hand in the side pocket of his sports coat, fondling something which even under the cover of the pocket was unmistakably a belly gun.

The two of them walked toward Lacey. Lacey stood balanced on the balls of his feet, rigid, his eyes narrowed, the gun in his pocket covering the two new comers.

The young, olive-complexioned gentleman said: "Hello, Lacey. It goes the way you put 'em down. Here he is—"

Lacey did not turn his head. "Inspector Phillips," he said grimly. "Permit me to introduce you to a dead man: Mr. Alvin Gardner. In person, and alive. The charge is conspiracy and murder. The murder rap is for the job they did on the body that was found and planted as Alvin Gardner's. I figure that they bumped off some stumble bum they picked up—just to make it look good. We'll go into that later. Will you rise and receive Mr. Gardner?"

A hollow sound came out of Gardner's throat as he stared at Lacey's pitiless eyes. His chin trembled.

"Where is she, you damned hyena, you dirty, soulless beast! Where is she?"

"She'll be with you in a little while, Alvin," grinned Lacey. "I'm going to give myself the pleasure of escorting her to the jail myself. I've got that coming."

Phillips, his face white and his eyes completely frustrated, put the cuffs on Gardner.

"Save the other half of that piece of steel jewelry for our friend who brought him in," he told Phillips. "I'm going to take all Colimo's gang while I'm on this job!"

The muzzle of the gun in Lacey's pocket moved a fraction of an inch. "Take the hand out of the pocket, kid," he told the gangster. "And take it out empty, or else—"

**T**HE olive-tinted hand came out slowly — and empty. Lacey fanned him for the gun, took it away. He tossed the package he had brought into the hotel with him to Gardner. "Here, catch!" he taunted. "Open it—take a look—just to keep the first set company."

Gardner's fingers pressed on the outside of the package, seemed to feel the contents. His face went a greenish-white. Then his eyes went blank—and he fainted.

Later, about thirty minutes later, a squad car stopped outside the empty building in which Lacey had Colimo and the Shaw girl hidden.

Lacey led Phillips and the men with him up to the third floor where Colimo and the Shaw girl were still handcuffed to the rings in the concrete posts.

"H'ya, Toots?" greeted Lacey to the girl. "I brought a couple of guys to see you. They sure are wild to make your acquaintance. You'll like them a lot more than you like me. But I'm broadminded."

Colimo's eyes were looking at the cops. The girl's eyes were swirling with hate and rage.

Phillip's eyes were fixed on the surgical instrument case on the table. They were shocked eyes. He turned his eyes away and stared at Colimo's hands.

"Hey!" he said suddenly. "You didn't cut no fingers off this guy!"

"What? *Me* cut fingers?" asked Lacey in indignation. "Hell no!"

"But—those fingers—in that package—" insisted Phillips with a helpless look at Lacey's face.

"Oh! Those—just to dress up the act," shrugged Lacey. "I got a doctor friend of mine to separate 'em from a couple of stiffs he was going to work on in the morning."

Phillips' jaw dropped. "Well, I'm a—" He took Colimo and the Shaw girl away. Lacey rode down town with them. He came back to the Park Palace in the same squad car.

He picked up a house phone and called Aline's suite. The faithful Willie Quirk answered the phone, but he had a chance to say no more than two words before Aline took the phone away from him.

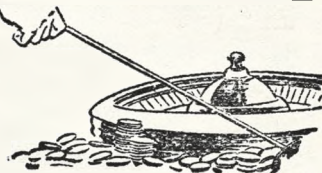
"Oh, darling—aren't you ever coming?" she asked.

"I'm coming up in the next elevator," he grinned. "This is just to give you warning. Love me?"

There was a little pause from her end of the wire, and then she said, very softly: "You come on up—and see."

*Next Month: THE BLACK SHADOW MURDERS—  
A Complete Novel of Lurking Death, by  
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**PROBAK JUNIOR**

# MURDER MEDLEY



*The Fixer let him have it then*

***With Jens Olson as a Henchman, the Job of Slaughter Looked Pretty Easy—and Safe—to the Fixer!***

**By ROBERT J. PEARSALL**

*Author of "Color of Doom," etc.*

**T**HE "Fixer" was waiting for Groody, the snitch and traitor. He would have liked to take the big punk out and crucify him, but his job was just to kill him. Now, backed into Groody's clothes closet, he passed the time by recall-

ing similar occasions and enjoying the pictures that danced against the darkness of Groody's bedroom.

The grim procession of pictures eased his nerves. It was a sort of murder medley. So many perfect jobs! The Fixer always said that

his profession was as safe as a coal miner's, if one had what it takes to make it safe. This killing of Groody, for instance—

Viewing the succession of bloody events, the Fixer, by force of habit and artistic instinct, sought inspiration to make his second and more difficult job that night a better performance.

True, he already had his plan for disposing of Pettibone, and a good enough plan it was, but— Suddenly he snapped his thin, manicured fingers soundlessly. Here was indeed a workable idea and one with salty humor in it.

He grinned. But it would take a bit of luck to find the proper instrument. But listen, you Fixer! Here are footsteps, uneven, stumbling footsteps, coming down the corridor outside the bedroom.

Groody's footsteps, likely! It would be like Groody to be boozing already on the money he had got from Pettibone. The Fixer's attention flashed to the bedroom door where the footsteps stopped.

A key rattled and scraped. Groody had trouble finding the keyhole, but at last he managed it. The Knob turned. The door opened and closed. Groody switched on the lights and came forward, swaying and grinning in a happy jag!

He came toward the closet as if knowing a friend was there. The Fixer's breathing was like a purr. He liked it this way. Slim and chinless, he stepped out to meet the big bull, Groody. Groody kept on grinning a moment after he saw the revolver with the screwed-on silencer pointing straight at him.

"Wha—what— Hello, Fixer!"

His grin became stiff, slowly freezing. His wide mouth flopped open. He had got the meaning of the gun. The pale, cold eyes of the slant-browed Fixer held him with a basilisk stare.

"Groody, when did you leave your friend Pettibone? Eh, Groody?"

"I— I—" Groody began to stammer. The Fixer interrupted. He liked to let 'em know what they were going

to get, but if they talked too long, they yelled.

"Mazaroni missed them papers this morning. You was the only hood in the mob that had the chance to crack that box. So he had you watched. He's sent you something by me, Groody."

"Fixer! Ain't we friends? Ain't we always— Fixer!"

The Fixer let him have it then, blunt-nosed revolver pressed against a spot just above the heart. With only a muffled sound, two bullets were driven into Groody's breast. Deftly the Fixer eased him to the floor, careful to avoid the blood that was spewing over the front of Groody's loud-checked suit. Drawing off tight silk gloves, the Fixer slipped out into the empty, dim corridor, his face and shallow eyes passionless.

He felt set-up, thoughts clicking fast. Outside, he sauntered among the down-and-outs, his eyes passing over sallow youths and broken old men, questing a man of proper quality for the killing of Pettibone, if a new sort of picture was to be added to the Fixer's murder medley.

Pettibone must be killed before tomorrow's grand jury. In Pettibone's safe reposed the papers which Groody had stolen from Mazaroni, linking city officials with Mazaroni's grafting rule and spoliation of the city. Pettibone must be killed and those papers recovered.

Pettibone was a big man and dangerous to kill—

**A** COLD, damp wind kept the down-and-outs stamping, shivering and hugging themselves. The Fixer walked slowly along, jingling the money in his pocket with deliberate intention. After awhile he knew he was followed. But as he neared the waterfront, one hand on his pocketed gun, there came an eruption of fighting men from a deadfall just ahead.

Some one was getting the bum's rush. The cursing tangle crossed the sidewalk into the street. In the middle was a pea-jacketed giant kicking and swinging heavy fists like mallets.

The bouncers jammed him at last against the brick building opposite and retreated hastily.

"By gar!" the giant mumbled, flexing his arms. "By gar! I kill—"

The alert Fixer moved to him quickly, putting aside thought of the man who had followed, but with right hand still on his gun.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

The man glared at the Fixer like a bewildered bull, his heavy shoulders and cablelike arms quivering, his square, bearded jaw working.

"By gar! They rob me, the swine!"

"And then they throw you out."

The Fixer clucked sympathetically. "I know how that goes. Come and have a drink with me, Jack."

The man's thick fingers writhed.

"I no drink. I kill. Yah! One year I eat the rotten grub, I sail the world around, I save the money. Now they rob me!"

"I know, Jack. I know the man that owns that dump."

"Who you call Jack? I Jens Olson, A.B. sailor."

"All right, Olson. I show you how to squeeze some money out of the man that owns that dump. You can squeeze and squeeze him. He lives in a palace, Olson. He's the man you want to get after."

"No, I go back now—"

"They'll kill you, Olson. It's Pettibone that pays them to kill sailors like you. It's Pettibone that gets the money. He's got a chest full of money up on Avalon Drive. His girl's got diamonds and ropes of pearls and gold. All made out of robbing sailors ashore. Get some of it back, Olson."

"I show em. An A.B. sailor—"

"Yes, yes, but first a little drink, Olson. It'll drive the cold out. It'll help us think. Come with me—I know a place that Pettibone don't own, where they won't rob us."

Olson hesitated, glaring at the Fixer's dapper clothes and pipe-stem neck. But he allowed the Fixer to steer him up the street. At the next corner they passed into an alley, and then into the backroom of a dingy speakeasy that had survived repeal. The air was stale, the tables were

rickety, furtive-eyed men sat about.

The Fixer led Olson to a corner table. He called for two drinks, counter-signaled on one. He upended his glass of colored water and watched Olson gulp his fiery drink.

"Have another. Come, two more of the same," to the waiter.

"I went to that other dump to eat. I think I better eat."

"After awhile, we eat. After awhile we eat at the Palace. They don't sell eats here. Here's to you, Olson. And now about that shark—Pettibone."

The Fixer talked and watched with amusement as the alcohol worked from Olson's empty stomach to his brain. Olson leaned back in his chair, roamed the place with his wide blue eyes, and banged his fist on the table.

"By gar!"

"Feeling better? I show you how to get plenty more, all your life. Plenty of everything. I show you how to get Pettibone's gold."

"I think I kill him. He rob me. He throw me out."

"He's a shark. He robs you and then he laughs at you."

"Yah! I think I laugh at him."

"You can squeeze him, Olson. Those hands of yours can choke him."

"I do it. So!"

"He lives in a palace, Olson. I show you where he lives. He's got a chest full of gold. He's got a girl with pearls and big gold chains. She's a shark, too—she laughs at you. You kill her, too, Olson."

"Yah! I do it."

"I'll show you where they live now."

The Fixer paid for the drinks, led Olson away. They threaded the alley, now dark and empty, and walked until they reached the crest of Avalon Hill.

A towering family hotel loomed through the mist. Smug residences perched here and there. Great iron fences enclosed velvety lawns. Soft lights glowed from the wine-colored windows of the Pettibone home.

"That's where the land-shark lives," said the Fixer. "Stand here, Olson. They're opening the gates. We'll see who comes out."

A limousine rolled into the driveway. A silk-hatted man led a thin-flanked girl down the steps of the mansion. She entered the limousine, laughing lightly with a musical lilt. The man followed.

"That's Pettibone," whispered the Fixer into Olson's ear. "That's Pettibone that had you robbed and thrown out. That's Pettibone that kills and robs sailors ashore. That's his daughter with him. She's laughing at you."

Olson's shoulders hunched forward and he watched with bitter eyes, swaying from side to side with the drink, his great hands working. As the machine passed, he lurched toward it. The Fixer clutched his arm.

**N**OT now. Wait. We'll go around the house. I'll show you a window where you can get in tonight. I'll show you where the chest is and the gold chains. I'll get you tools so you can open the chest. Come on with me."

They rounded the high fence to the west side of the grounds, guarded here by a concrete wall. The Fixer guided Jens to a foothold on the wall giving him a rear view of the mansion.

"That window," pointing to one on the second floor. "You see it, Olson?"

"Yah, I see it."

"See those vines climbing up. See that waterspout? You can climb, Olson. You, an A.B. seaman."

"Yah—I climb!"

"I see you doing it, Olson. You come here at three o'clock this morning. You climb the fence and climb the vines and go through that window. You'll find the chest in that room near the window. But Pettibone sleeps in the next room. Open a door and you'll see him— The door to your left, as you go in through that window. Kill him first and then open the chest and take away the gold."

Olson nodded, staring at the dark walls of the house, then they went down the hill arm in arm, through the crowds emerging from theaters, and back to the section of deadfalls and barrooms where more shots of whiskey followed by beer chasers put Ol-

son in prime condition for murder and a bungling job of it.

But something else had to be done first. The Fixer left him in the first bar they had visited.

"You stay here," he said, leaning over the foam-streaked table. "I'll be back pretty soon. I'll see if Pettibone has come home."

"I go with you."

"No, stay here. It's too early for you to climb through that window. You must do it at three o'clock."

Olson swayed in his chair, drunken eyes staring vacantly at the smiling Fixer. His head sagged forward until it rested on the table. He started snoring.

The Fixer's smile deepened. He glided over to the proprietor and jerked a thumb toward the sleeping man.

"Watch the lummo, Chet. Give him drinks, but not too many—savvy? Keep him anchored for me. I want him to have a walking jag on around three o'clock."

"Oke," said the proprietor.

The Fixer walked out. Murder medley—and another picture being added! Was he the guy with the brains? Was he the guy that had what it took to make murder safe? Now to Mazaroni to get certain implements, then to Avalon Hill and the Pettibone home and the little job that had to be done before Olson did the big one.

**O**LSON slept on. He muttered in his drunken sleep. He snarled, woke and lifted his flushed face from the table. Four nightbirds were playing cards at a table. A frowsy dervish slept in a corner, his head on the sawdust of the floor.

Olson was childishly surly from the hangover of the drink. He banged on the table with his fist.

"Where's my frien'?" he demanded of the proprietor.

"He'll be back. He said you should wait."

The proprietor wiped the table with his apron. He set a black bottle and a chipped glass before Olson.

Olson drank. The whiskey sizzled

along his spine. His face became red. A sweep of his hand knocked the bottle to the floor, and the proprietor dove to pick it up.

He eyed Olson narrowly. He poured another drink, but did not leave the bottle this time. Olson scowled and got to his feet. He was offended, and he started for the door. When the proprietor got in front of him, it only made him angry. Growling, Olson brushed the man aside, went out into the misty night, and reeled along the sidewalk. He glimpsed a pawnshop clock and it reminded him he had something to do at some hour of this night.

The clock showed one-thirty. That was maybe not the right time, but he knew now what he had to do. Perhaps he should have waited for his friend, but it didn't matter. He shook his head in a bull-like way, started again for Avalon Hill.

He reeled as he walked. The hill rose before him like the slope of a ship in a storm. He helped himself by the tall spike fence that bordered the sidewalk. Once he fell and found the sidewalk slimy from trackings and mist. When he reached the asphalt on top of the hill, there was the Pettibone mansion before him.

Olson followed the fence around to the concrete wall. He went over the fence. He crossed the narrow patch of close-cropped grass. He drew himself up the waterspout as he might have climbed a mast. He gripped the sill of the half-opened window that the Fixer had pointed out.

Slowly he pressed up the window frame with the flat of his free hand. It made little noise. He waited, breathing heavily. The curling fog masked his movements as he threw his knee over the sill and entered.

Standing on a thick rug, he listened with straining ears. Was it to the right or left his friend had told him to turn? He was about to take a forward step when there floated to him the soft breathing of a nearby sleeper.

He swung his square-set jaw to the right over his bulging chest. A faint light gleamed through a partly opened door. He moistened his lips

and advanced on the thick pile of the rug. Beyond that door was the land-shark, Pettibone, who lived fat on sailors' blood. His fingers worked in the gloom. They crushed into the palms of his hands. The sweat rolled clamily down his hairy chest as he throttled his imaginary enemy who robbed and killed sailor-men ashore.

Resentment flamed in his alcoholized brain. He abandoned caution, reached the door in one stride, and pressed it open. Beyond a dimmed night-lamp stood a huge four-poster bed with a mounded form in its center.

**OLSON** moved toward the bed. He reached out for the sleeper. His fingers were moving for the neck when he saw golden hair draped over a white pillow. His eyes widened, staring. His thick fingers dropped away and rested on the coverlet.

The sleeper moved slightly. A soft sigh rose through delicately parted lips. The scent of an Eastern perfume floated to Olson's widened nostrils. A sigh from him faintly echoed the sigh from the girl.

His hand slipped from the bed. He stood with his knees pressing the edge of the coverlet. His gaze was on the girl's face. Her brow was as of ivory, her cheeks like rose-petals. Her tiny teeth showed white through parted lips.

He shook his head and turned. He eyed the night-lamp which stood beside the table. Again his great jaw squared itself and he passed out, closing the door behind him.

A faint roar of night traffic came through the window. The fog showed against the downtown glow. But the room was dark. Olson reached along the wall and found a doorknob. Twisting this, he strained his eyes through the doorway at the faint whiteness of another bed.

"Pettibone is sleeping there. First I go in and finish him. Then I come back here to where the chest is with the gold."

He took one step forward. A sound flashed the fact to his whiskey-soaked brain that someone had moved to his



right. He whirled, tripped, staggered forward with his great arms outstretched in the gloom. Impotent rage maddened him as he flailed the air. The swift breath of an invisible foe sounded ahead of him. He leaped, encountered the resistance of flesh, and bore his weight down on a struggling form.

"Yah!" he snarled, snapping a wrist and clutching the warm and slender column of a man's neck. "Yah! You rob Jens Olson! You kill sailors ashore! Yah!"

The crushing grip he fastened compressed the windpipe. He raised his knee and thrust with it viciously. He fell over from the force of his own effort. He did not let go his crunching hold. He lifted his prey and crashed it down upon the floor. He shook the room with his rage. He staggered up finally. His fingers coiled and uncoiled in the gloom.

Olson lifted his chin. He thought of the chest filled with gold and ropes of pearls. It should be over by the window. He had only to move forward and grope for it. But the desire for it had left him. Murder had left life as bitter as the dead liquor on his breath.

He turned. His shoe struck some metal object on the rug. To his left, from the girl's bedroom, he heard a bed creak and the sound of bare feet on the floor.

The door swung open. The soft light streamed out. Pettibone's daughter stood framed in the opening. She flashed a frightened glance at the crouching bulk before her. Her hands fluttered up.

"Who are you?"

Olson relaxed his heavy muscles. His chest contracted. He shifted and thrust a foot toward the window.

"Go back to bed," he said. "I think I kill."

"Father!" You mean—Father?"

The girl's voice was faint with fear and anguish. Olson felt the first reaching hand of remorse.

"I think you better go—"

Olson caught her with one great hand, closing her mouth, and held her easily as one holds a bird.

"I think you better keep still"

She struggled futilely. She was fragile in his killer's grip—and somehow precious. Again a perfume as of old Araby flooded Olson's senses. Suddenly he released her.

"Go! Go!"

HE stumbled toward the window. Again his foot encountered that metal object. He glanced down; it was dark at his feet. But ahead of him light from the bedroom glowed less dimly. Lengthwise of the stream of light lay the dead body.

He started to step over it. Something about its appearance checked him. It was fully clothed. It was not the ample figure which Olson had seen starting out with the girl in the limousine. It was at the sleek, slender figure of the Fixer that Jens stared, and the sharp, twisted face and the pipe-stem neck.

Papers which had no meaning for Olson lay scattered about. The red garroting mark on the throat caused him to raise his eyes. They rested on an iron safe placed where the Fixer had said the chest would be. On top of the safe was a collection of burglar's tools.

Olson stared in dull wonder at the dead Fixer. His muddied eyes returned to the tools. Slowly, comprehension dawned on him. It was a trap—a trap the Fixer had prepared for him! Had he come here at three o'clock, he would take the blame for murder and theft as well.

His great jaw fell, his muscles relaxed. His shoulders slumped. He was no longer a beast or a man of prey; he was again a sailor ashore.

"I think I been a damn fool. I think I go—"

The girl had fled the room. Her voice sounded somewhere near, flustered, frightened, explaining. Olson was glad he had not crushed that bird-like thing he had held. With a rolling stride, he went forward to the window. Swiftly, as a sailor climbs, he went down by means of the waterspout. His way led back to the waterfront, back to his ship, back to the cleanness of the sea.

# Madman's



A Complete Novelette of  
Stalking Death and Grim Horror!

*Before the man could cry*

## CHAPTER I

### *Carraday Gets a Job*

**T**HE bald-headed man never saw what struck him.

There was no moon. The darkness was intense. Puffing at his pipe, he moved down the path that wound among trees to the beach. His head was lowered in reverie; his pudgy hands were clasped behind his

back. He went slowly, without purpose and without destination. And so, absorbed in himself, John Loam heard no sound.

His first intimation of danger was a faint swish as the club swung.

It cracked squarely on his bald head, split the skull.

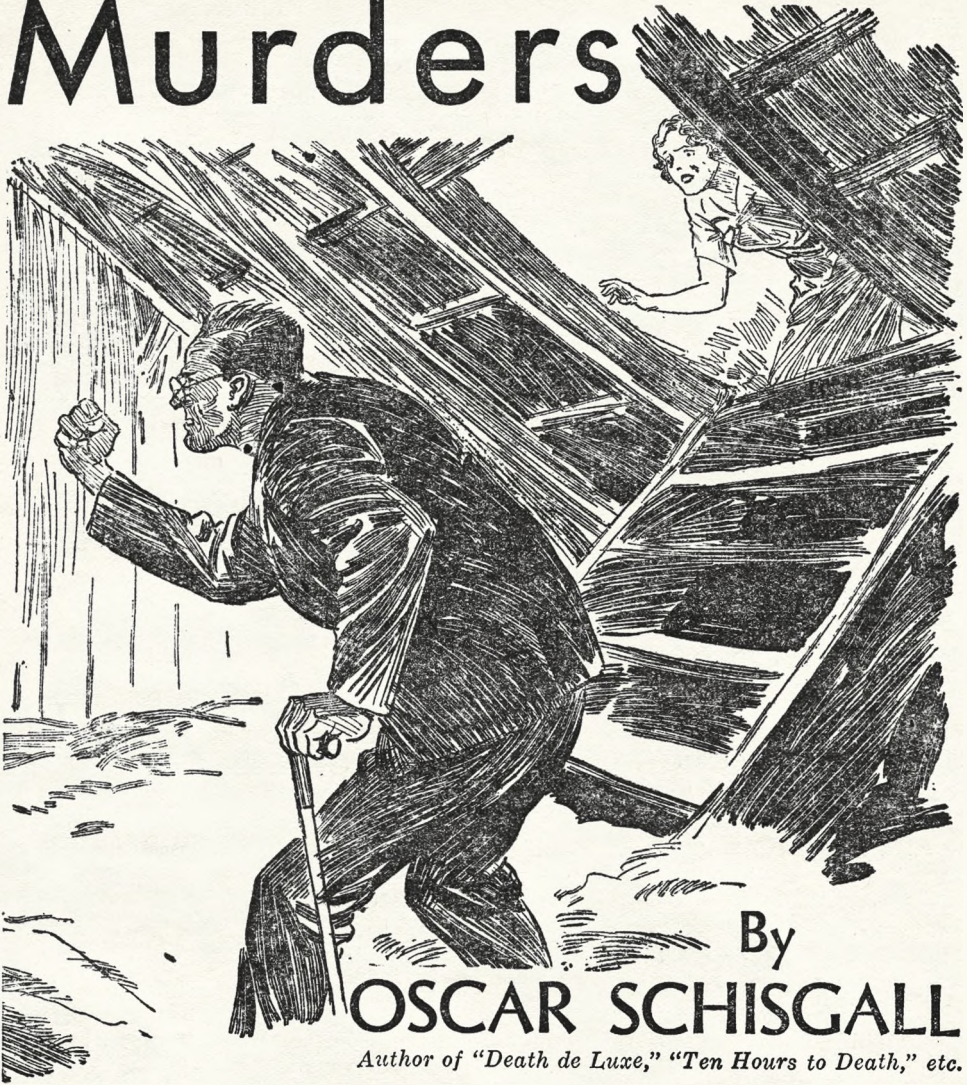
He must have died on his feet. There was not even a squeal of pain as he pitched headlong to the trail. His teeth bit through the stem of his

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## A Hint of Sanity in a Crazy Pattern Shows

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# Murders



By  
**OSCAR SCHISGALL**

*Author of "Death de Luxe," "Ten Hours to Death," etc.*

out, Carraday had the gun

pipe. In a last convulsive gesture, his arms reached out wildly, uselessly.

Then he lay still.

But the killer who had been hidden in the shadows of the trees wielded the club again and again, fiendishly. Half a dozen times the heavy cudgel crashed his victim's bald head, beating it into a shapeless, bloody mass. Only then was the club released and allowed to thud on the path.

And the man among the trees, turning, raced off swiftly, picking his way with the skill and silence of an Indian through the maze of black trunks.

The body sprawling on the trail remained there for hours before anyone discovered it.

It was almost a day later when, in the offices of the Acme Detective Agency, in New York, the ponderous manager fixed shrewd, triangular

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## Gene Carraday a Vicious Death Design!

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eyes upon the tall, red-haired man at the other side of the desk.

"Carraday," he said, "I'm handing you this case because you have more muscle on that torso of yours than anyone else in this agency."

Gene Carraday grinned. A grin seemed the natural expression for his muscular face. It even went well with his disheveled red hair. He was a thick-chested young giant whose weight hovered close to two hundred pounds.

"What kind of case?" he asked.

**T**O defend a family against a homicidal maniac."

Carraday's grin faded. He regarded his chief uncertainly, as though trying to decide whether the man was serious. The manager, dropping his gaze to the papers on the desk, went on tersely:

"Here's the layout: a middle-aged man named Victor Journal went crazy a few months ago. Lost his reason after a sunstroke down in the tropics. His family brought him here—to Glenport, out in Long Island—hoping they might be able to cure him. When he became violent they were forced to commit him to the Glenport Mental Hospital—an insane asylum—where he developed homicidal tendencies.

"Sounds like a cheerful case," muttered Gene Carraday, scowling.

"Wait till you hear the rest of it," grimly said the manager. "In the asylum, every time a keeper or a nurse tried to enter his room, Journal went berserk. He tried to kill everyone who came near him. They had to leave him alone—except when they had him in a strait-jacket. They gave him his food through a slot in the door. He went unshaved for weeks. He's a powerful man, and he began to look like an ape."

Carraday shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

He took a cigarette from the chief's pack, lit it.

"Nice guy to meet in the dark," he said.

"A month ago," the chief resumed, "Victor Journal practically lost his

power of speech. Since then he's been just a drooling madman. The only words he speaks distinctly are something crazy about gold and jewels and Yucatan temples. His family has no idea what the gibberish means. Well, four nights ago Victor Journal escaped."

"Mm-mm!" said Carraday.

The manager raised squinting eyes. "A tough case. I'm not trying to kid you about it."

"How did he get out?"

The chief tightened his lips.

"Just a crazy man's trick, the way I got it. One morning the keepers saw him stretched flat on the floor. He seemed to be unconscious. They took a chance and went in. Then Journal leaped up like a tiger, knocked them both cold, and dashed out into the corridor. He met a nurse near the door. One bang of his fist sent her into a corner, unconscious. Clear of the house, the maniac raced for the asylum wall. Another keeper saw him. So did a doctor. When they went after him he picked up a rock and almost brained the keeper. After that, the doctor lost interest. Journal got over the wall and raced into the woods—the last anyone saw of him. That was four days ago."

"The family thinks he'll come home?"

**I** LOOKS like he came home," snapped the chief. "Last night a guest at the Journal house—John Loam—went out after dinner for a walk to the beach. They found him toward midnight. He had his head bashed in, battered so brutally that only a madman could have done the job. The family is convinced that Victor Journal is somewhere around. They are terrified. He might come at anytime to attack another one of them."

"What about the police?" Gene Carraday demanded. "Don't they give protection in Glenport?"

The chief smiled dryly.

"Evidently," he said, "you don't know Glenport. It's a small town eighty miles from New York. They have a local police force of four men.

They have been doing everything possible. A general alarm has been sent out for Victor Journal. But it seems the family isn't satisfied to rely solely on police protection. Journal is a strong man, Carraday—very strong. And cunning—the way he escaped showed that. The family want a guard of their own at the house—somebody strong enough to cope with the maniac if he shows up. They telephoned me this morning. I promised to send a man to the house. You're elected."

Gene Carraday's massive hand crawled back through his red hair. He crushed the cigarette in a tray.

"Sounds like the kind of job I'd swap for two pins," he muttered.

The chief leaned back in his swivel chair.

"As a matter of fact," he pointed out, "if this homicidal madman doesn't show up, you'll have a picnic. Nothing to do but sit and smoke and watch. Of course, if he does come, you'll be expected to handle him."

**A**FTER a pause Gene Carraday inquired:

"How come I didn't see anything about this Loam killing in the morning papers?"

"The story broke too late. Likely it'll be in the next editions. Meanwhile—how soon do you leave?"

Gene Carraday shrugged as he turned to the door.

"I'll be on the next train to Glenport."

"Good," said the chief, straightening. "The family will tell you anything more you want to know. You'll find them an interesting bunch. Stephen Journal, who hired us, recently headed an anthropological expedition into the Yucatan jungles."

Instantly Carraday turned at the door.

"It'd be funny," he exclaimed, "if the droolings of that madman made sense. You say the family is connected with Yucatan?"

The chief smiled crookedly.

"Better ask the lunatic about that when you catch him."

## CHAPTER II

### *Murderer at Large*



**T**AXI took Gene Carraday from the Glenport station to the estate of Stephen Journal. It was dark now—a starless night hinting of rain. There was no breeze. The tall trees that lined the road were hushed without a rustle in

their leaves.

"You another newspaper man?" the scrawny chauffeur inquired over his shoulder.

Carraday answered briefly, "No."

"Friend of the family, I reckon?"

"Something like that."

The chauffeur shook his head dubiously. "Sure was a terrible murder they had up there last night! Tell you the truth, mister, I don't feel easy driving to the Journal place these days. There's no tellin' about that lunatic. Believe me, I wouldn't want to run into him!" He paused, then added, "Did you know this John Loam who was murdered?"

"No. What was he like?"

"Well, I wasn't familiar with him exactly, though I did see him walking around town now and then. Thoughtful sort of feller. Kept to himself pretty much. He was one of the party that went exploring with them Journals a few months ago. Reckon you heard about that?"

Carraday admitted he had. He asked a few questions, but the chauffeur's replies were uninformative, based on hearsay rather than actual knowledge. So presently he relinquished the inquisition.

When they reached a pair of high, baronial gates which formed the entrance to the Journal estate, Carraday looked for a bell. The gates were locked. The taxi chauffeur sounded his horn half a dozen times.

Then Carraday saw a man hurrying toward him along a graveled path at the other side of the gates. He was a thick-set figure, square-faced and darkly dressed.

"Who's there?" he called sharply.

"I'd like to see Mr. Journal."

"What's the name?"—suspiciously.

"Gene—Carraday."

"Oh! You're the man from the Acme Agency?"

"Right."

The thick-set figure instantly opened the gates. As Carraday, carrying his grip, stepped through them, the man said quickly:

"I'm Stanton, sir. Mr. Journal said you were to come right up to the house when you arrived. Just follow the path."

Carraday nodded, moving quickly along the graveled driveway. Presently he saw the house through the darkness—a large, rambling place. He saw, too, that a narrow path, shooting obliquely to the right, made a shortcut to the entrance. He turned into that path, pushing his way between walls of bushes and trees barely a yard apart.

Carraday had gone less than fifty feet when, somewhere ahead of him, he heard a gasp.

In another instant he was aware of a rush of feet. A slim, fleeting figure raced away from him in panic.

Carraday halted, staring. A girl! He called:

"Hold on!"

The girl stopped, whirled around. "Who are you?" she challenged, her voice vibrant with fear.

He told her and distinctly noted a quivering exclamation of relief. When he advanced, the girl no longer recoiled from him. She waited until he paused in front of her.

"I'm sorry I acted like that," she said. "But—you understand? I'm Marjorie Journal. When—when I saw you so big in the dark, I thought it must be—"

Though she checked herself, Carraday knew what she had intended to say.

"Victor Journal?" he suggested quietly.

"Yes—Uncle Victor!" The words came in a whisper.

Now that he stood close to the girl, Carraday saw that she was very lovely. She had a smooth, oval face, ex-

quisitely framed by her dark bobbed hair. She wore a flimsy little jacket over a simple white sports frock.

Carraday asked, smiling, "Why? Do I look like Victor Journal?"

"He's about as big as you," she assured him. "Bigger, maybe. When I saw you among the trees—"

Carraday chuckled reassuringly. Moving toward the house, he said:

"Sorry I scared you. But if you're so afraid of meeting your Uncle Victor out here, maybe you shouldn't come out alone?"

"I—I didn't know what train you were making, Mr. Carraday. I was just going to tell Stanton he'd better drive down to the station to meet the nine-fifty."

They emerged from the narrow path to cross a strip of lawn. A flood of yellow light, pouring from a window, splashed over Marjorie Journal and revealed with startling vividness the rare quality of her beauty. Carraday's quick eyes glanced over her slim figure, not missing the brilliant flash of a solitaire on her left hand—an engagement ring.

"Dad," said the girl, "will be glad to see you, Mr. Carraday. It—it's beginning to feel as if we're all living in a madhouse! We really do need a detective here."

"Actually," Carraday corrected, "I'm not here as a detective, but as a sort of watchdog."

"Call it what you like," Marjorie Journal grimly replied. "Anyway I have an idea it's going to be a difficult job!"

**I**N the drawing room ten minutes later Marjorie's father succinctly explained:

"This is a seven-hundred-acre waterfront estate, Carraday. More than half of it is thickly wooded. It's a difficult place to keep under observation. Two of the local police are now on duty in the grounds. One of them is somewhere near the south end. Another is stationed to the west. Unfortunately our local police force isn't large enough to give adequate protection. That's way I called on your agency."

Carraday nodded.

"I shall expect you," Stephen Journal continued, "to guard the house, particularly at night, while the rest of us are asleep. It's quite possible, you see, that my brother Victor may again elude the two policemen and visit us."

"YOU'RE sure, then," Carraday asked, "that it was your brother Victor who murdered John Loam?"

Journal lowered a strained countenance, stared at an empty fireplace.

"What else can we believe?" he asked wearily.

He sat beside the hearth, frowning into its shadows, a tall, spare man with smoothly combed grey hair. There was in his gaunt figure something almost Lincolnian.

Behind him stood a ruggedly proportioned young man who had been introduced as Jerry Hardwicke—Marjorie's fiancé. He had the splendid chest of an athlete. The hair above his ruddy, aggressive face was sandy. He smoked a cigarette whose ashes he constantly flicked into the fireplace.

"I'm afraid," went on Stephen Journal in a heavy voice, "that we made a mistake in confining my brother to a place as near as the Glenport Mental Hospital. At the time, however, we could not realize how serious his condition was. We thought that with a month or two of care he might recover. I wanted to be close to him. It was a—a shock to discover he'd developed homicidal mania."

"Is that what the doctors at the hospital called it?"

"Yes. And as soon as we learned that he had escaped, I felt instinctively that he'd find his way back here. Insane or not, Victor would hardly forget this place. He was brought up here—as I was."

"There's one thing I'd like to ask you, Mr. Journal," Carraday said. "About this matter of jewels."

"Jewels?" The grey head quickly rose in surprise.

"As I understand it, your brother

has been—shall I say raving?—about jewels and a temple in Yucatan. Do you know what he meant?"

Stephen Journal hesitated, then smiled bitterly. Over his shoulder he glanced at Jerry Hardwicke. When he looked back, he shook his head.

"You know as much about it as I do, Mr. Carraday," he sighed. "Of course, Victor was with me on my last expedition into Yucatan. We went to do anthropological research. There were five of us on the trip: Victor, Jerry Hardwicke, Doctor Hugo Fessenger, John Loam, and myself. We explored the ruins of ancient temples in the jungle. But as for jewels—I have no idea what may be in Victor's mind."

Jerry Hardwicke flatly said, "A delusion!"

"It seems to me—" Carraday began, but he checked the words. At that moment, through the stillness of the house there fell a steady, rhythmic tapping. From the stairs in the corridor? Carraday turned questioning eyes toward the door.

"That's Doctor Fessenger," Marjorie said.

Doctor Hugo Fessenger, scowling, entered the room. The cause of the tapping sound became evident when Carraday saw the man's cane. He leaned on it heavily. Its ferrule must have been striking the stairs as he descended.

He was short, in his late forties, and lame, but he had amazing shoulders—broad and bulging as those of a professional weight-lifter. A bristling black pompadour accentuated the darkness of his face. A grim face with piercing little eyes peering sharply through owlsh spectacles. Doctor Fessenger was dressed in uncompromising black. Behind him, like a bodyguard, followed a slight, round-shouldered man with an assortment of pimples on his pallid face.

"Doctor Fessenger," quickly introduced Stephen Journal, "and Drew Cobalt, his secretary. Mr. Carraday of the Acme Detective Agency."

Even while he shook hands with the doctor, Carraday decided he didn't like the man. There was something

too shrewd, too hidden, about the lame fellow. And too tense.

"Perhaps I'd better explain," said Stephen Journal, rising, "that Doctor Fessenger is writing the history of our recent Yucatan expedition. You see, Mr. Carraday, I've been an explorer of sorts for the past fifteen years. Fessenger has always come with me. He acts as the historian of our trips. Just now he is engaged in dictating the Yucatan records to Mr. Cobalt. It is convenient for him to live here with me, so that he may consult all of us who were on the expedition when need arises." Turning to the doctor, Journal added, "We've been discussing poor Victor's ravings about jewels in a Yucatan temple."

"Nothing to it," bluntly declared Doctor Fessenger. "Story book stuff. Crazy men get such ideas."

Carraday decided not to press the point. After all, he'd been sent here only as a bodyguard. So he said with sudden crispness:

"Well, I'll get busy. There's just one thing I'd like to ask of you all—not to go outside the house during the night."

"Speaking for myself," snapped Doctor Fessenger, "I wouldn't go out after dark for any consideration—not until they catch Victor, and have him safely locked up."

Carraday nodded commendation.

"If the rest of you will be as cautious," he said, "we should have no trouble, and my job here will be that much easier.

SO it was that, at midnight, automatic in his pocket, Gene Carraday sat alone on the porch of the rambling house. Everyone else had retired. He smoked his pipe and peered narrowly into the black shadows under the enclosing trees.

A lonely vigil. Sometimes Carraday rose and walked like a sentinel back and forth the length of the porch.

One reflection persistently annoyed him during those hours of lonely vigil. Everybody, without exception, seemed to concede that the murder of

John Loam had been committed by insane Victor Journal. Yet, except for the fact that the lunatic had escaped from the asylum, there was nothing to indicate he was actually the brutal killer.

What if someone else had murdered John Loam?—

And then, at half past two in the morning, Gene Carraday heard a sound that blasted all speculation from his mind.

He stiffened, jammed the pipe into a pocket. His face hardened as he glared narrowly into the darkness.

Exactly what he'd heard, he couldn't decide. It might have been a foot crushing twigs. It might have been the sleepy stirring of a bird. Any sound seemed amplified and exaggerated in the hushed darkness.

Then he heard it again.

This time it was unmistakable. A slight rustle and a thud emanating from a point some fifty yards in front of the house—somewhere among the trees!

Carraday slowly drew the automatic out of his pocket.

Noiselessly, on his toes, he descended the four porch steps. He moved cautiously across the dark lawn, his eyes searching. His expression was intent, lips drawn in a tight line.

He had no desire to face a homicidal maniac. He had no wish to shoot. But if crazed Victor Journal was prowling out there—

Carraday went on grimly.

He heard no more sounds. He began to wonder if the huge, shaggy madman could be crouching hidden, waiting for his approach. The possibility set his heart to beating furiously. As Carraday advanced, his left hand curled into a rigid fist.

When he reached the trees Carraday moved more slowly. Narrowed eyes stabbed searching looks from left to right. Venturing in among these trunks might be like stepping down into hell. At any instant, he felt, demoniac murder might hurl itself upon him.

His tongue slid out to moisten his lips. He was quite sure that the



sound had come from this direction. Yet, as he moved on, he saw nobody. Nor did he hear anything else for several minutes.

He must have been a hundred feet from the house when not far away, he thought he heard a shrill squeal of pain.

That startling noise made Carraday whirl about gasping. His eyes widened, blazed. The stifled cry was followed by a heavy crash. The sound broke clearly through the stillness—though it came, he realized, from somewhere at the *other* side of the house!

Carraday waited no longer.

With the automatic clenched in his hand, he raced out from among the trees, dashed around the house. He ran with all the speed his long legs could yield. At the back of the building, it was too dark to see anything distinctly. Carraday paused, looked about in a kind of bafflement. His stare jerked from side to side until—

Until he saw it!

Some fifty feet ahead of him a dark bulk lay on the ground—a deeper shadow beside a clump of dusky bushes. He lunged toward it. Standing over the still figure he recognized gaunt Stephen Journal.

Marjorie's father sprawled on his chest, arms extended.

His grey head was brutally battered—a hideous, shapeless mass in a puddle of blood!

### CHAPTER III

#### *Suspects*



CARRADAY uttered a hoarse cry. He dropped to his knees, caught Stephen Journal's shoulders. Useless! The man was stone dead.

Grey-faced, Carraday rose, looked around with eyes as fiery as a cat's. Whoever had battered

the skull of Stephen Journal could not possibly be very far away.

He started forward tentatively—

until his foot struck something on the ground. He stumbled. Then, looking down, he saw part of a broken branch. The heavy stick, perhaps three feet long, might very well have served as a murderous cudgel.

CARRADAY bent. From his pocket he snatched matches, lit one. There was blood on the club—long streaks and ugly blotches.

He dropped the match. Squatting there in darkness he listened intently. He could hear no footsteps anywhere.

He started back toward the body.

"A hell of a watchman *I* turned out to be!" he told himself savagely. "But why did he come out—?"

And at that instant, while the thought of failure pierced his brain like a knife, he caught the sound of sharp tapping on the back porch. He recognized those taps immediately. They came from the cane of Doctor Hugo Fessenger.

Carraday peered suspiciously toward the house. For a moment he could see nobody in its shadows. Then a figure detached itself from the gloom and came limping toward him. Doctor Fessenger's low voice called anxiously:

"Who's that?"

He answered grimly, "Carraday. Journal is dead!"

"Wha-at!"

"Murdered! Somebody bashed in his head and got away!"

Doctor Hugo Fessenger sped forward with startling celerity for a crippled man. His black pompadour seemed to bristle more stiffly than ever. His shocked face was colorless, the eyes seemed bulging behind the spectacle lenses. His left hand gripped the cane. His right brandished a revolver.

Momentarily speechless, broad-shouldered Doctor Fessenger gaped at the corpse. Then he wrenched his stare toward Carraday.

"I thought," he said shrilly, "you were on guard!"

"I was, at the front of the house."

"And you—you didn't see who did this?"

"Didn't see a damned thing," Carraday grated.

"And you're supposed to be a detective!"

To that derisive taunt there was nothing to answer. Even in the horror of the situation it struck Carraday as curious that Doctor Hugo Fessender should be awake and completely dressed at this hour of the night. Abruptly he asked: "What are you doing out here, Doctor?"

"I?" Fessender glared at him as if the inquiry were an insult. "I heard someone yelling—squealing. So I ran out to see what was happening."

"You started for bed," snapped Carraday, his voice crackling, "hours ago."

"Are you trying to intimate," demanded Doctor Fessender, "that I had anything to do with this horrible butchery?"

"I'm not intimating anything. I'm asking—why are you still awake and dressed."

Hugo Fessender impatiently rapped his cane on the ground. "I couldn't sleep. Too nervous. So I got out my manuscript and read for awhile, until I heard those sounds. Then I grabbed my revolver—it's the one I had with me in Yucatan—and came out. Looks to me," he finished unsteadily, "as if we'd better call the police."

"I understand there are two local policemen on the estate?"

"Yes. The chief left a police whistle in the house. He said that if anything occurred, we were to use it. His men would hear it and come at once. I—I'll get the thing and blow it."

Carraday said nothing as he watched Doctor Fessender hastily limp back to the house.

Presently, from the back porch, came the piercing blast of a police whistle. It shrilled half a dozen times, the sharp sound ripping through the night.

"That'll wake everybody. From now on we'll have panic!" Carraday muttered. He stood there waiting. Unexpectedly his mind caught at a

new problem—a query that left him frowning.

*What had Stephen Journal been doing out here?*

**H**ALF an hour later, when some of the agonized excitement had subsided, William Arnold, the fat little police chief of Glenport, testily snapped to Carraday, "The thing's bad enough without making a mystery of it! Far as I can see, the only mystery is what's become of this lunatic, Victor Journal? Where could he be hiding?"

They had just left the corpse to the local medical examiner. As they mounted the porch steps, Carraday said through tight lips: "So you, too, are convinced Stephen Journal was murdered by his insane brother?"

"Of course! Aren't you? Who else would have done it?"

Carraday shrugged. On the porch he paused to peer back through the darkness toward the group of policemen around the body. They were bending over—lifting the corpse.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I'll admit it looks like the job of a homicidal maniac—a man who'd go on battering a skull long after it was broken. On the other hand—"

He paused. Police Chief Arnold had to urge impatiently, "Well? On the other hand, what?"

"Where is our proof? Right now I'm trying to understand why Stephen Journal left the house at two o'clock in the morning? Just before he went to bed, I warned all of them to stay in their rooms. Journal, like the others, gave me his word he wouldn't go out before morning. Yet—there he was outside."

Police Chief Arnold blinked without talking. Half a minute passed before he ventured:

"Maybe—maybe he looked out of his window and saw Victor Journal down here."

"In that case," grimly said Carraday, "would he go out to face his insane brother alone? He knew I was on the premises. He would have called to me before going out."

Arnold sucked in a sharp breath.

"Well," he demanded, "have you any other answer?"

"Nothing definite," Carraday admitted. "The way I see it, though, there are only two reasons why Stephen Journal might go out of the house alone. There was something he wanted to do unobserved. Or else—" He paused for emphasis. "Or else he was called out by someone whom he had no reason to doubt. I mean, if someone he trusted implicitly had come up to his room and said, for example, that he wanted to see him outside, Journal would go. Once he was out of the house, whoever was with him could have smashed that club over his head and disappeared before I got here."

**P**OLICE CHIEF ARNOLD had no chance to answer. A harsh, angry voice behind them cried out:

"So, Carraday, what are you trying to do? Accuse one of us of murder?"

He whirled around. Doctor Hugo Fessender, leaning on his cane, stood in the open door. He was glowering angrily. Behind him stood Jerry Hardwicke — Marjorie's ponderous young fiancé.

"I might ask that as well," tersely agreed Hardwicke. "You're talking nonsense, Carraday!"

"I was just wondering," Carraday replied mildly.

Jerry Hardwicke pushed his way past the doctor. He was fully as tall as Carraday. As they faced each other, they seemed to have been fashioned in much the same mold.

"Listen," rasped Hardwicke thickly. "I've been Stephen Journal's assistant for seven years. I've lived with him. I've gone on expeditions with him. I know him and I know his whole family. I tell you there isn't anybody here who could be a murderer. Stephen Journal was killed by his insane brother, the same as John Loam. Our job is to find that lunatic, not to make guesses which will incriminate innocent people!"

Carraday smiled twistedly. He shrugged, glanced from the sandy-haired Jerry Hardwicke to Doctor

Fessender, then passed between them, going into the house.

"Have it your own way," he tossed over his shoulder. "I was just mulling over an idea."

**I**N the living room he found Marjorie huddled in a deep chair beside the fireplace. Her face was lowered into her hands. The hysteria which had overcome her upon learning of her father's death had passed. She was sobbing quietly now. Stanton, the grim servant, was bringing her a cup of tea on a tray. In a far corner, glowering out of a window, stood Drew Cobalt, the round-shouldered young secretary of Doctor Fessender.

The girl looked up when she heard Carraday enter. Her hair straggled in disarray to her shoulders. She was clothed in silk pajamas under a blue dressing gown. The only one fully dressed was Doctor Fessender.

"Have—have they moved Dad's body?" she whispered.

"They're moving it now," Carraday told her. He sat down, clasped his large hands between his knees, and fixed a sympathetic gaze on the girl. "Miss Journal, do you feel up to talking?"

"Of course."

"Tell me—do you know of anybody who might have had a reason to kill your father?"

She seemed to recoil from him. "Of course not! What reason could anybody have had to kill Dad?"

"Or John Loam, the man who was killed a few night ago?"

"No! He was a gentle old fellow. I'm sure he never harmed anyone." She straightened. "What are you driving at, Mr. Carraday? You don't think Dad and John Loam were murdered by—by somebody who had a deliberate purpose in doing it?"

Carraday looked at the floor. "Just questioning possibilities," he replied.

And then, unexpectedly, Doctor Fessender's secretary, Drew Cobalt, spun around from the window and flung out harshly: "What's the use of prodding? You detectives are always groping after some mystery!"

There's none to hunt for here! Find Victor Journal, and there'll be no more murders! Until then, none of us can feel safe."

Slowly Carraday turned in his chair to look at the pimple-faced man. "My ideas," he observed, "seem to be mighty unpopular around here."

"Naturally!" retorted Cobalt. "You are throwing suspicion on every one of us. As if we—or any sane man—could have any reason for murder! You forget we have all been friends—more than friends."

Smiling mirthlessly, Carraday rose. He pushed his hands into his pockets and regarded Drew Cobalt thoughtfully.

"I suppose," he said, "you were in your room when Stephen Journal was killed?"

"Of course. I was asleep!"

"What awakened you?"

"The police whistle."

Marjorie quickly put in, "That's what woke me, too—and Jerry Hardwicke."

From a corner Stanton, the square-faced servant, said discreetly, "I, too, sir, slept until I heard that whistle."

"In other words," Carraday grunted, "the only one admittedly awake was Doctor Fessender. Well—" He started toward the door.

Marjorie Journal asked quickly, "What are you going to do?"

"Help the others search the estate for Victor Journal." What he actually thought was, "Better get out where I can be alone and think." But when he reached the door, he paused to ask Drew Cobalt, "By the way, would I be allowed to read the doctor's manuscript?"

"What for?" sharply.

"I'd like to read about that trip in Yucatan."

"Good heavens!" expostulated Cobalt, flushing. "That has nothing to do with these murders!"

"On the contrary," Carraday gently disagreed, "it could have a great deal to do with them. It was in Yucatan that Victor Journal suffered the sunstroke which left him insane. I hear he's been raving about jewels in a Yucatan temple. Do you think the

doctor would object to my reading his script?"

Cobalt said stiffly, "I can't answer for Doctor Fessender. You'll have to ask him yourself."

"Thanks," said Carraday. "I will."

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Well*



THE script, when Carraday finally glanced through it, offered no information which might be useful.

It was eight o'clock in the morning when Gene Carraday, seated alone in his room, telephoned to the manager of the Acme Detective Agency in New York. When he'd reported what had happened, his chief cried in dismay: "Another murder! For God's sake Carraday, I sent you up there to prevent that!"

"I know," Carraday said quietly. "But I couldn't watch all sides of the house at the same time. Nothing would have happened to Stephen Journal if he'd followed orders to remain indoors."

"What took him out?"

"That's what I don't know—yet."

"What are you planning to do?"

"Some investigating. Look, chief. Originally our agency was hired by Stephen Journal. But he's gone. So I just had a talk with his daughter. She agreed to go on retaining us. I told her I'd stay whether she hired me or not."

"You had a lot of nerve!"

"And a lot of curiosity. I want to know who's responsible for these murders."

"You mean you don't believe it's the lunatic?"

"I don't know," snapped Carraday, "But the longer I'm here, the more I believe it could be someone else. Do you know anything about Stephen Journal?"

There was a pause. Then the chief said, "He used to be a college professor. But he gave it up fifteen years

ago to do active exploration. Since then he's led four or five expeditions into Mexico and Central America."

"Always with the same companions?"

"That I can't say. On the last two trips, I understand, he was accompanied by his brother Victor, by Doctor Hugo Fessenger, Jerry Hardwicke, and John Loam."

"Know anything else that might help?"

"Afraid not, Carraday. You'll have to get your information up there."

"All right. I'll report as soon as there's anything new."

Thrusting the telephone aside, Carraday rose, pushed his hands into his pockets and looked out of the window. By daylight the grounds of the estate lost their awesome appearance. They were thickly wooded, however, and Carraday realized that in darkness a man might easily conceal himself among trees. But not in daylight—

He washed, combed his red hair, and went downstairs. He had already breakfasted. As he emerged on the porch, he found the stout Police Chief Arnold talking to Doctor Fessenger and Jerry Hardwicke.

"But I tell you," the police chief was protesting, "my men have gone over every inch of the estate. It's five days since Victor Journal escaped from the asylum. Since then we've been on guard and searched the grounds time after time. He can't be here."

"Well, if he isn't here," asserted Jerry Hardwicke, "then he's not far away. Twice he's come at night. Chances are he'll come again. We've got to hunt for him harder than ever."

"But where?" the police chief rapped out irritably.

"How about searching the adjoining estates? Get State Troopers to help. Or else—" The sight of Carraday seemed to inspire Jerry Hardwicke. He added quickly, "Or else we can hire a few more private detectives and have the whole country combed."

Arnold shook his head. "Do that

if you like," he said wearily, "but I'm afraid it won't do much good. Everybody around here has been on the lookout for Victor Journal. So far there's been no report of him at all."

"You're not dropping the hunt?" protested Doctor Fessenger.

"Oh, no. We'll go on. But frankly, I haven't much hope."

CARRADAY listened to no more. He descended from the porch and walked around to the back of the house—to the spot where the body of Stephen Journal had lain a few hours ago. Daylight revealed dark splotches that had been blood stains. The club was gone; Chief Arnold had taken it away for inspection by fingerprint experts. But it was the ground itself in which Carraday was principally interested—the ground and possible footprints.

Stephen Journal, however, had been murdered on a narrow, graveled path where treading feet left no plain traces.

"The question is," Carraday muttered, "what was Journal doing on this path? Where was he heading?"

He frowned. With his hands in his pockets and moving as if he were off on a casual stroll, he followed the winding path. Far ahead, visible beyond the trees, he could see glistening silver patches of Long Island Sound. On this same trail, he knew, John Loam had been murdered a few nights ago. Was it mere coincidence that both Loam and Stephen Journal had been killed on this side of the house? On the same path?

Carraday walked on slowly, looking about with the intensity of one who has lost something.

Presently he came to a spot where the graveled trail ran around an ancient, abandoned well. It was covered by a flooring of planks nailed together with cross pieces. Though no bucket was in sight, there was still rope wound on an old pulley.

Carraday might have passed on if it hadn't been for a green leaf. The sight of that leaf halted him in surprise.

It was wedged under the rope on the pulley.

What puzzled him was how had the leaf got under the coil of rope? It couldn't have fluttered there. Someone might have thrust it under the cord, of course. But that was hardly likely. There were no children about who might have done it in play. And an adult would certainly waste no time in wedging a leaf under a coil of rope.

If the well had been abandoned for years—as it appeared—and if the rope hadn't been used in all that time, there seemed no adequate explanation for the presence of that single leaf protruding from under the coil.

"The only way the thing could have got there," Carraday mused, "would be if the rope had recently been off the pulley."

That, he realized, was a logical explanation. If the rope had been uncoiled, the leaf might have fluttered down from a tree while it was being rewound. In that way it might have become caught under the thick cord.

But why should this ancient rope have been unwound?

Carraday's brows contracted as he approached the well. He bent over it, studied the rope closely. He even fingered the leaf. It was quite fresh. Certainly it hadn't been under that rope very long.

He darted a quick glance toward the house. Apparently nobody was watching him. The rest of the crowd was still at the front.

He looked uncertainly at the flooring over the well. Then, squatting, he wedged his fingers under it and pushed it aside. It slid quite easily. When he had moved it a foot, he peered down into a pit some thirty feet deep. It was dry. Its brick walls looked as if they hadn't been moist for ages.

Carraday's stare dug down through gloom to the bottom. And what he saw sent a chill through his veins, brought cold pricklings into his scalp.

"By heaven!" he whispered.

Down at the bottom of the well

lay the motionless figure of a man! A big man, heavily built, his face covered by a shaggy black beard.

Carraday stared, and his heart thundered. He saw that the man's wrists and ankles were securely bound with rope. He saw that a cloth had been bound around his mouth as a gag.

And he knew he was looking at insane Victor Journel!

## CHAPTER V

### *Madman's Ravings*



S Carraday gaped down into the darkness of the pit, the first thought that crashed through his brain was: "If Victor Journel has been tied up like that all night, he couldn't have murdered his brother! It must have been somebody

else!"

He straightened with a jerk, glared toward the house. His first impulse was to yell for the police chief. But he discarded the idea immediately.

"If I call Arnold," he reasoned, "the others will all come running along, too. My best bet is to go down there alone and hear what this fellow has to say—if he can talk!"

That seemed the wisest plan—to prod information out of Victor Journel. If, of course, he was not unconscious down there. Certainly he was harmless with his wrists and legs trussed up as they were.

Carraday worked quickly. He seized the rope, unwound it from the pulley. It slithered down into the well like a long snake. Its upper end, he saw, was securely fixed. Whether the pulley would support his weight, he scarcely knew. But he was determined to take the chance.

"If I do fall," he told himself, "I can always shout for help."

So, when the rope dangled to the bottom, he grasped it and began to lower himself. His feet and knees found balance against the walls of

the well. He slid down rapidly—with an aperture perhaps a foot wide to drop light from above him.

And as he descended, he heard stirrings from the man below.

He looked down. It sent a new chill through him to realize that Victor Journal's eyes were open, watching him. They were round eyes, bulging, bloodshot—maniac eyes. Evidently Journal was attempting to speak. Only meaningless mumbles issued through the gag.

Carraday dropped to the sandy bottom of the well. It was almost dark here—a gray gloom, dank and cool. As he fell to his knees, he saw that Victor Journal looked emaciated. The cheeks under the beard were sunken. The eyes were cavernous, feverish. He seized the gag, yanked it from the man's mouth.

Journal squirmed. He moaned, shut his eyes. Then, in a voice that was feeble and husky, he began to mumble.

"The gold—they have the gold! They have the jewels. It was in the temple, but they have it now! They—"

Carraday caught the man's shoulders. "Journal!" he whispered.

**T**HE lunatic did not seem to hear. He was chattering weakly about jewels and gold and the temple. Hearing him forced Carraday to gulp. He thought of taking out his jack-knife to cut the ropes which bound the man's wrists and ankles. But he decided against that. It would be foolish to free a homicidal maniac down here. That could wait until he had summoned others. Meanwhile, if only he could persuade this man to talk coherently, intelligently, for just a minute or two—

"Journal! Listen to me!" he said tensely. "*Listen!*"

"They took the jewels," the bearded man groaned. "Mine as much as theirs! Mine, I tell you! We took them from the temple."

"Where are they?" whispered Carraday.

"They know where they are! They put them away! They took them

from the temple and they put them away!"

Journal had understood his question! No doubt about that. The words had sunk into his consciousness. He had attempted to answer! Carraday's nerves tingled as he repeated more tensely:

"Where are the jewels, Journal? Where did they put them?"

"Put the jewels with the gold!"

"Where?"

"You won't find them," the madman answered cunningly. "Nobody will find them. I know where. I'll get them. I'll kill anybody that tries to stop me!"

"Where, Journal?" Carraday insisted in a voice gone hoarse. "Where did they put the jewels? Tell me! I'll get them for you! Where did they put them?"

The inflamed eyes suddenly met his. Victor Journal lifted his voice stridently. Yet it didn't rise above a whisper. "They took them from the temple and they put them in the ice-house! They—"

That was when Gene Carraday heard an unexpected sound above him. He jerked up his head. He stared at the opening of the well thirty feet over him—saw two powerful hands push a huge rock into the hole!

Carraday roared, leaped to his feet.

White of face, he instantly crushed himself back against the wall. He saw the big rock released.

It fell.

With his right leg he made a frantic effort to shove the figure of Victor Journal out of the way. His eyes were fixed in horror on the falling stone. It was a big thing, at least a foot and a half in diameter. It sped downward with terrific force. Carraday flattened his bulk against the circular wall.

The rock missed him by inches.

It fell past him—and crashed full upon the head of Victor Journal!

Carraday yelled. He screamed wildly trying to attract attention before the man above, whoever he was, dropped another rock. He yelled until his voice cracked, until he heard

answering shouts in the world above, until the strained white faces of Doctor Fessender, Jerry Hardwicke and Police Chief Arnold gaped at him, bent over the gaping mouth of the well.

Then, at last, he looked down at dead Victor Journal.

Mercifully, the huge rock concealed the head it had crushed into bloody pulp.

**I**T took Carraday a full minute to recover his wits. He was vaguely aware of cries and horrified exclamations from men above him.

He stood pallid, weak, throbbing, his arms pressed back against the wall of the well, his eyes fixed on the corpse at his feet.

Finally, when he could suck in a panting breath, Carraday seized the dangling rope. His first desire was to drag himself out of this death pit. But he had scarcely started up when he changed his mind—dropped back to the bottom.

Stooping, he spread a handkerchief over the fallen rock. He pushed against the stone; shoved with all his weight, so that it rolled away from the crushed head. The sight it disclosed nauseated him, forced him to shut his eyes and grit his teeth. A gasp of horror came from one of the men at the mouth of the well.

But Carraday wasn't finished. He took the dangling rope and bound it firmly under the dead man's shoulders. Only then Carraday straightened and started to hoist himself out of the well. Bracing his legs against the walls, pulling with all the strength in his arms, he managed to reach the top. Police Chief Arnold and Jerry Hardwicke seized his shoulders, helped him out. Both of them were colorless.

"How—how on earth did you find Journal down there?" gasped the chief. "What happened?"

Before replying, Carraday leaned limply against a tree. He drew a shaking hand across his moist forehead. His eyes darted from face to face. Besides Arnold and Jerry Hardwicke, he looked at Doctor Hugo

Fessender, Drew Cobalt, and at Stanton, the servant. All were there. All were staring at him with wide eyes. Yet one of them, he felt sure, had dropped that rock.

He said, "I tied the corpse to the rope! You can haul him up."

"But how did you find him?" Arnold hoarsely insisted.

Carraday explained. Then, as the men turned to pull Victor Journal's body out of the well, he swung toward the house. The police chief called after him.

"Where you going?"

"I need a drink!"

Actually he had another purpose in leaving these men. As soon as he was out of their sight, his partly assumed dizziness vanished. New harshness hardened his features. He hurried, almost ran, to the house. He sprang up the back porch steps just in time to encounter Marjorie as she emerged from the rear door.

She was pallid and trembling. "What happened out there?" she gasped. "I—I heard them shouting!"

Carraday seized her shoulders. He towered in front of her, glowering down into her anguished young face.

"We found your Uncle Victor," he said huskily. "Better not go over there. He isn't a pretty sight."

"D-dead, too?" she whispered, as if she had half expected it.

"Yes."

Marjorie Journal's hands leaped to her cheeks. She looked blindly toward the trees. "Another one!" she said in a voice that was hardly audible. "Oh, God! Will it never stop?"

"Listen," snapped Carraday, hand on her shoulder to quiet her. "This is important! Is there an ice-house on the estate?"

"Ice-house?" She blinked at him in bewilderment, as if she didn't understand. Carraday repeated the query before she jerkily nodded.

"Why, yes," she said. "But we haven't used it for years."

"Where is it?"

She pointed to the left.

"Just beyond those trees. It's—it's an underground thing. See that sloping roof showing above the grass?"



As he released her and swung toward the steps, Carraday flung back over his shoulder, "Better go inside. You can't do anything for your uncle now."

"But just what did happen?" the girl cried anxiously.

"I'll tell you later," retorted Carraday. "Right now I want to have a look at the ice-house—before the others get back."

He ran with long, powerful strides toward the sloping roof protruding three feet above the ground. At one side a trap-door with a rusty, broken hinge offered admittance. Before he touched it, Carraday glanced about sharply. There was no one in sight. He bent, lifted the door. He looked down into dark, damp emptiness. A few warped wooden steps descended into that dank gloom.

He went down quickly. Standing at the bottom he lit a match. The light splashed ineffectually into the gloomy corners. The thing was empty save for a pile of decaying sawdust at one end. Carraday went to the mound, scattered it with kicking feet. He dug eager hands through it. Suddenly, then, his fingers met steel

Carraday flung a swift glance upward at the open trap-door, then swept the sawdust aside to uncover a steel case some eight inches deep and three feet long. As he pulled it out he saw it was locked.

"A regular strong box!" he muttered to himself. "Old Victor wasn't quite as crazy as they claim!"

When he tried to lift the case, it proved to be exceedingly heavy. He began dragging it with swift jerks toward the trap-door. Somehow he didn't doubt it contained the jewels and the gold about which Victor Journal had been raving. He intended, first to smash that lock and then—

"Drop that box!" commanded a harsh voice above him. "Leave it, do you hear? And quick!"

Carraday looked up. He stared at the trembling ape-shouldered figure of Doctor Hugo Fessender—and at the round eye of the revolver in Doctor Fessender's hand.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Chest of Treasure*



DOCTOR FESSENDER was furious. He started haltingly down the rotting steps. The hand that gripped his cane shook wildly. His complexion was ghastly. His little spectacled eyes glittered like a baleful snake's. But the hand

that leveled a revolver at Gene Carraday's chest was steady.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly.

"Obvious, isn't it?" retorted Carraday.

"You were hired to protect this family—which you have not done—not to pry into its private affairs!"

"The best way of protecting the rest of the family," Carraday icily answered, "is to find out who has been killing them off! That's what I'm doing!"

Doctor Fessender's flaming eyes fell to the steel box, then snapped up to Carraday's taut face.

"Get out of here!"

Carraday hesitated. Then, looking beyond the doctor, he suddenly called, "Down here, Chief! See what I've found!"

The cry startled Fessender. Involuntarily he turned his head. He saw nobody. In that brief instant of diverted attention, Carraday's fist fell like a club on the doctor's wrist. It sent the revolver twirling down to rest on the floor of the ice-house.

And before the lame man could even cry out, Carraday had snatched up the gun.

He turned grinning savagely at Fessender on the steps.

"I don't think, somehow, you'd have shot me, Doctor," he said grimly. "But I do feel safer this way. Victor Journal told me about this box before he died. He told me it was full of gold and jewels—a treasure you took out of some ancient temple."

Doctor Hugo Fessender, breathing heavily, didn't reply. Just then he looked murderous.

Carraday was about to speak, when he saw Marjorie herself, an apparition behind Doctor Fessender—pale, harried, yet looking into the ice-house in strained amazement. Her presence, Carraday felt, assured him a moment of safety. He bent, lifted the steel chest with a grunt, staggered with it up the warped stairs into bright sunshine.

"What is that?" gasped Marjorie.

"Feels like Captain Kidd's treasure chest," Carraday told her.

"Treasure?"

"Did you ever hear your father speak about jewels and gold?"

"**N**O!" she exclaimed, her eyes widening. "But Uncle Victor sometimes raved—"

"Not simply raving," Carraday assured the girl. He put the heavy case down at her feet. With a sharp glance at Doctor Fessender, he said, "We'll smash open this lock in a few minutes. I have an idea the contents will be something to see."

"The contents of that box," the doctor suddenly forced through gritted teeth, "are worth a fortune!" His eyes searched Gene Carraday's massive features. "There's no use my denying it now, he raged. "That box is filled with treasure which we found in Yucatan." He paused. Then, "Would you be interested in a share of it, Carraday?"

"Who? Me?"

"Yes!"

"You are not offering me a bribe, are you?"

"Call it what you like." The doctor's eyes shifted from Carraday to the astonished girl. "We never spoke of it in your presence, Marjorie. But, after this, you may as well know."

"Know—what?" she whispered.

"We excavated an ancient temple in Yucatan—one which no white man had ever found before. It was overgrown by jungle. We worked in it for two months and finally discovered the treasure store of the ancient priests. We knew, as soon as we saw

the gold, that it had incalculable value. But we also knew that if we made our discovery public, the Mexican Government would claim all the treasure. So we said nothing. We brought it back to the States without reporting it, safely hiding it among boxed slabs of Yucatan sculpture. It came in as part of our exhibit for the New York Museum."

"You — you mean you *smuggled* that treasure into the country?" Marjorie demanded.

"Smuggling is an ugly word, but I guess it fits in this case," drily agreed Doctor Hugo Fessender. "Anyway, afterwards, we decided it would be dangerous to try to dispose of the gold immediately. It would be best to leave it in hiding for a year or two; then to begin selling it little by little in secret. We intended to share whatever it might bring. Unfortunately your Uncle Victor, when he lost his mind, began to rave about it. That put us in danger."

He turned to Gene Carraday.

"You see our position. If you wish to be a duty-before-all-else sort of man, it means this gold will be confiscated. I might add that her share is about all that Marjorie will have. But if you're wise, Carraday, keep your mouth shut, and we'll give you a generous share."

Carraday grinned without mirth.

"Damned decent of you, Doctor," he said. "But my interest right now is not in that box. I want to grab the man who murdered three people for it on this estate."

Marjorie blurted, "Do you know who it is?"

Carraday had no chance to reply. He heard quick, nervous steps behind him. Turning, he saw the pallid, round-shouldered secretary, Drew Cobalt. Apparently the body of Victor Journal had already been laid in the house, for Cobalt wasn't coming alone. Behind him—all hurrying swiftly toward the ice-house—came Jerry Hardwicke, Police Chief Arnold, and the servant, Stanton. They gaped in amazement at the steel box on the ground.

"What's that?" cried Arnold.

Carraday didn't answer. He waited silently for the group to assemble. They were all around him before he snapped:

"Chief, when you break open this box you're going to find it filled with gold and old Indian jewelry. It's—"

"Gold, you say?" incredulously interrupted Chief Arnold. "What on earth—"

Carraday pressed on as if Arnold hadn't spoken. "There's a fortune here. Originally it was to have been divided among five men—Stephen and Victor Journal, Doctor Fessenger, Jerry Hardwicke, and John Loam. But one of those five, the way it looks to me, got the idea that if he could get rid of the other four, he could take the entire fortune for himself. Exactly how to do it, he didn't see—until Journal, a homicidal maniac, broke out of the asylum."

Jerry Hardwicke angrily expostulated. "You're just guessing—besides, where the devil did you get what little information you seem to have?" He glared angry accusation at Doctor Fessenger, as if he suspected the lame man of having betrayed the entire crowd.

"Just guessing," Carraday admitted. "Maybe some of you will tell me where I am wrong. Now I figure that Victor Journal did come here from the asylum. He was met in the grounds by one of the other men. Maybe Victor attacked—and was himself knocked cold. But whoever overpowered that lunatic must have been strong. He tied him up and gagged him. And he reckoned that if Victor Journal could be hidden—kept out of sight for a while—any murders that occurred on this estate would be attributed to him! So the poor lunatic was dropped to the bottom of the well. He was left so trussed up and gagged that he couldn't make a sound. Probably he's been slowly starving there for the last few days."

"Listen, Carraday!" thickly began Doctor Fessenger.

**C**ARRADAY, however, granted the man no attention. Talking directly to the police chief, he went on:

"Possibly, after committing the murders, the killer planned to release Journal, to have him found on the estate. In that way, certainly, guilt would be credited to him without doubt. And to make the murders appear as if they *had* been committed by a madman, a maniac, the slayer made the crimes unusually brutal. He wasn't content with one blow that would kill. He hit again and again."

Huskily, incredulously, Marjorie Journal cried: "How could any sane man do such a thing? It—it's too horrible! Unbelievable!"

"Even sane men can go mad," Carraday assured her, "when they are fighting for a chest full of gold. If you don't believe it, look through your history books. See how many murders have been committed for less than this box probably holds."

"But this is terrible!" Marjorie flared, her eyes fiery. "How can you accuse one of these people—"

Carraday looked at the girl as though in astonishment.

"But I don't," he disclaimed. "You heard Mr. Hardwicke say that I am only guessing. Guessing what happened, not *who* made it happen—yet. I just thought that some of you might be able to help me."

Fessenger stood nervously poking the ferrule of his heavy cane into the earth. Hardwicke glared malevolently at the detective.

"You have a devil of a nerve," he said thickly, "accusing us, any of us, of a thing like that!"

"Oh, let's drop it," said Carraday. "I guess you don't want to understand me. Talk about something else. That odd-looking ring that you have on, for instance. Part of the Yucatan treasure, maybe? I'd like to look at it. Never saw anything just like it before."

Hardwicke continued to glare at the detective suspiciously.

"May I see it?" Carraday demanded.

He held out his hand. There was something in the hard tone of the detective that made Hardwicke, however reluctantly, draw the heavy carved gold ring from his finger.

Carraday, scarcely looking at it, juggled the yellow gold seemingly carelessly in his hand. He looked at Fessender.

"Of course," he said, "at first I thought it must be you. If you had thrown a few stones into the trees at the front of the house tonight, they would have made the kind of sounds that took me away from the porch to investigate. If you had gone up to Stephen Journal's room and told him that I wanted him outside, he would have believed you. Then you could have gone out with him, and so brained him on the path."

**T**HE doctor's dusky pallid face was the color of butter.

"But I never even thought—" he denied hoarsely.

"I know—now," Carraday said quietly. "So that only leaves Hardwicke."

"You accuse me!" Hardwicke's voice almost screamed.

He took one long stride toward Carraday. There was utter silence as the two men faced each other, battling with their eyes.

"We'll not even argue about it," said Carraday finally. "Maybe you were clever enough to keep your fingerprints off the clubs. But you didn't expect to find me in the well, Hardwicke. You were not wearing gloves when you dropped that rock in the well. Didn't even think about it. You realized that Victor Journal was actually talking to me, almost talking sense despite his insanity. He might even tell me who put him down there. So you dropped the rock—"

"You have no proof!" Hardwicke shrilly interrupted.

"I didn't see your face," Carraday admitted. "But I saw your hands—and they were wearing the ring I have in my pocket! Wait a minute!"

Hardwicke had taken another step toward him. Carraday's hand rested easily on the gun concealed by his coat. "Even that," added Carraday, "would not be proof enough in a court of law."

"Glad you know that much, anyway," Hardwicke gritted.

"And more," added Gene Carraday. "That rock you dropped is still at the bottom of the well. And it happens that there is a little, glistening streak of gold on that rock. I saw it. I even put my handkerchief over it for fear I'd mess up that mark. A good metallurgist will examine that little thread-streak of gold. Those old Yucatan fellows didn't know much about alloys, I understand. Their gold was pretty soft. That's why the rock scratched your ring when you dropped it. They'll examine the ring. And if they don't find the right scratches on it, I will be surprised."

Carraday was watching Hardwicke's eyes warily. He had not forgotten that all these men had probably gone armed since terror had descended on the estate.

And now, snarling like a wounded leopard, Jerry Hardwicke snatched a revolver from his jacket pocket!

He leveled it, wavering, toward Gene Carraday. The detective's hand shifted a trifle in his own pocket. His eyes were fixed on the trigger of Hardwicke's gun. Step by step, Hardwicke began to back away. He retreated ten full steps.

Carraday saw how he avoided Marjorie's stare.

Behind him, one of Chief Arnold's policemen appeared at the corner of the house. The policeman halted—stared in amazement as he drew his service revolver.

"Stop!" yelled the policeman.

Hardwicke whirled. He flung one wild shot toward the policeman, boring a little round hole in the side of the house. Then, as Carraday's gun blazed once, Jerry Hardwicke suddenly shrieked in pain. His revolver fell from paralyzed fingers. His left hand convulsively grasped his right arm. He staggered, pitched moaning, into the grass.

He was still writhing there when Gene Carraday reached him.

Then Gene Carraday commanded: "Cut that out, and get up. It's only your arm. I'm not a killer, if I can help it. You are not even hurt much, so you will live—for a while."

*You Can Never Tell What Will Pop Up on a*  
**Night Patrol**

By **DONALD BAYNE HOBART**

*Author of "Bloody Blade," "Clue of the Leather Noose," etc.*



**D**RIVING his chugging motorcycle after midnight through the streets of Ventnor City, Officer Jim Keith cursed softly as the engine missed, backfired. "I'll have to get it overhauled," he muttered.

He glanced at a large house on the left side of the street. It was the Penryn Wilson residence. He knew that the owner was away. Keith's eyes narrowed as he caught a glimpse of a flickering light through one of the windows.

He parked the motorcycle at the curb, circled around to the side of the house, then drew his .38 as he discovered that the cellar door was halfway open.

A gun roared from the doorway as he reached it. He felt a searing pain along the side of his face. Deliberately he dropped to the ground.

"You've killed him!" cried a frightened masculine voice. "We'll burn fer bumpin' off a cop."

"Come on," said another voice. "We got th' stuff. Let's lam."

Keith sat up, gun in hand, in time to see two shadowy figures ducking around the corner of the house. He leaped to his feet and started in pursuit. As he reached the side of the house a dark coupe that had been parked near the garage swung into the street. Keith ran to his motorcycle and leaped into the saddle, started off with a roar.

The black coupe had turned into Atlantic Avenue. The motorcycle speedometer climbed to fifty as Keith pursued. The gun in his right hand

barked. The coupe swerved as a bullet struck the right rear tire.

Again Keith fired. The second shot burst the left rear tire—the coupe crashed against a telegraph post.

The two men leaped out. They dashed for the shadows between two houses. Keith left the motor chugging as he dashed after the two men. Flame stabbed the darkness as one of the men fired. The bullet tore a hole in Keith's sleeve.

"Come out of there!" he called sharply.

The two came out of the shadows. When they had almost reached the street, one of them whirled.

"You took five shots at us, copper," the man snarled. "You only got one bullet left. We'll get you before you can reload."

Keith halted. "All right, Hogan," he said, glancing beyond the two men. "Let them know I'm not alone."

The taller of the two burglars laughed. "You won't get away with that bluff!"

From behind the two men came a loud bang. At the same instant Keith acted. He fired. His bullet struck the tall man in the chest, knocking him to the ground. Then Keith whirled and flung his gun into the face of the second man. As he staggered back, the patrolman caught him around the legs in a flying tackle. In a moment Keith had the two burglars handcuffed to each other, and stood over them.

"What a break it was for me," he murmured. "The motorcycle engine backfired just at the right time. Maybe it won't pay to overhaul it after all!"

# Uncommonly

**I**N the grey light on the hilltop the mine buildings loomed black against dimming stars and a paling sky. The morning breeze stirred the liveoak where Lafe Olsen stood.

Stealing out of the murk under the tree he darted up the lightening trail and merged silently and completely with the gloom of another tree.

"No use taking chances," he mused, looking out at the buildings above. No one will be at work. You couldn't get that bunch of Bohunk miners to work on Easter for any money; but old Eph Sellers might spot me from his lookout. He'll be there, but there'll be nobody else."

It had been a smart idea to wait until Easter for his revenge. It was the one time he could find the plant empty.

One structure stood out like the dome of a city hall from the others that squatted about it. That would be the shafthouse protecting the hoist over the mine pit. No one could reach it except through one door from the main office building. The high curved windows in its round wall began to take on a pinkish tint as Olsen looked. Brown stones along the trail began to stand out of the darkness.

Slipping out of concealment he made another dash up the slope. He reached the edge of the clearing and stood outside the high board wall surrounding the mine property.

No use in going around to the great iron gate. That would be bolted and padlocked, old buzzard Sellers standing guard behind it.

Stepping out to a tall thin sapling growing near the wall, Olsen went up it with the aid of climbing spikes already strapped to his shins. It began to sway with his weight.

Clinging there, Olsen drew on a



*Olsen drew back the dirk*

By **MADISON**

*Author of "Robber of Death,"*

pair of heavy rubber gloves, carefully clamping down the wristbands over his coat sleeves. Then he rocked the sapling until it brought him to the wall top. Using infinite care not to

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## A Vengeance-Bent Prowler Comes Face

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# Understood



## TAYLOR RICE

*"Twin Murder," etc.*

touch the high voltage electric wire stretched along the wall, he clung precariously. The released tree swung back hissing. He produced a pair of snippers and cut the wire.

He then drew himself up and over, and dropped down inside, light as a cat pouncing.

He crouched for a moment in the dusk of the wall, watching and listening. Nothing stirred. He dropped the snippers, kicked off the leg spikes, and threw away the gloves.

"There'll be no fingerprints when I get through," he thought, "and I can handle a knife so much better with ungloved hands!"

Gripping a dirk in his right hand, he crept around the wall toward the watchhouse—and Sellers.

The shack was deserted. Its storm-battered door gaped crazily on one hinge, revealing a dark, untenanted interior.

Bewildered, Olsen turned to the main buildings. Mystery increased his caution. He avoided the main entrance and stole around to a side window. Increasing daylight inside showed it to be the bunkhouse. Seldom used, it was entirely unoccupied now because of the Easter holiday.

As silently as he could he raised the window and climbed in. He went through the room, along a short hall, and into the warehouse.

**P**INK-TINGED in the growing light, flask upon flask of silvery mercury stood out on towered rows of shelves. Quicksilver—and but little gold could be mined in the worked out diggings of California without it. The earth beneath him was full of it, a mine of it, a whole hill of it.

For this he and Jack Blaine had been disgraced. They had taken only a little of it, two or three pounds a day; what did that matter amid such quantities? But old Sellers had caught them as they worked in partnership. Since their release from

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to Face with Fate in a Mine Bunkhouse!

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prison, less than a week ago, Olsen had not seen Blaine.

"Well, here is where I get even!"

A sound! He turned quickly. A flashlight beamed in his face. Behind it bulked the figure of Eph Sellers.

"So it's you, Olsen!"

Olsen drew back his hand and hurled the dirk. Light glinted on the blade as it flashed through the air. There was no time for old Eph to dodge. It struck the old man fairly, sinking the blade in his chest.

**S**ELLERS stiffened, crumpled, went down, driving the knife deeper into his heart as he groveled on the floor.

"I've trained for that!"

Olsen watched his victim for a moment, then turned to the other business in hand.

There were barrels of oil, spigoted, ready for use. There were quantities of waste material. He soaked the waste in oil and piled it in corners. Shoved it in cubbyholes under the eaves and through a trapdoor in the ceiling. He lit a miner's kerosene lamp and set it afire.

Working as swiftly as he could, he went through all the rooms and halls and buildings, leaving a smoldering trail in his wake. He came at last through the final door into the shafthouse. Behind him the sound of the fire was growing into a dull roar. Well, he didn't need to get out that way.

He closed the door and turned—and stood transfixed. The hoist was down! Now how could it be down? The last man up would have left it up!

He turned back to the door and opened it. Pouring smoke and fumes rolled out. He coughed, choking, and closed it quickly.

A spasm of agitation twitched his face. He had to move swiftly, and his only means of escape was down the shaft and through the emergency tunnel, an exit he had count-

ed on. But someone was down there.

He studied the encircling windows round about. First sunrays were slanting through them. They were beyond his reach, but even if they had not been it would be dangerous to cross over the roofs on which they looked. They might burst into flame at any minute.

His palms felt sticky. He rubbed them on his shirt. The shaft gears creaked. He whirled and stood still. They were moving, the hoist was coming up.

He picked up a crowbar from a pile of tools and stepped behind the wheelhouse, only partly hidden.

Slowly the bucket came into view. From it looked out the familiar face of Jack Blaine.

"Well," Olsen straightened in relief, dropping the crowbar. "Get back in there, we've got to hurry."

"Back in there, hell! Come on!" Blaine ran to the door. "Let's be getting out of here."

He opened the door—and staggered back as a cloud of smoke exploded in his face.

"You did that!" he turned a white face to Olsen.

"Yes. The whole place is on fire. We've got to go down the shaft and through the stope."

Blaine laughed, hysterically.

"A queer thought comes to me. Odd that I think of it now. Do you remember the slogan the I. W. W.'s used to have about sabotage, when they didn't want it to appear that their organization sanctioned it? It was 'individual action, commonly understood'."

"What the devil are you talking about? We've got to go!" Olsen had one leg in the bucket.

"This is going to be uncommonly understood." Blaine's hands shook as he scanned his wristwatch. "It takes three minutes to go down there. In exactly two minutes and thirty seconds this shaft will go up like a skyrocket. I've planted a bomb down there in the shaft!"



# Down to the Last Detail

*Furtive Eyes Sweep the  
Scene of a Crime—to  
Remove Every Sign  
of Guilt!*

By EDWARD  
S. WILLIAMS

*Author of  
"Call it Suicide," "Seven Days Missing," etc.*

**P**PETER TRAVIS put down the telephone.

For a moment he sat motionless, pondering the surprise that call had given him. His lined, old face revealed none of it, but there was a distinct shock in hearing from Robert again. He was coming out, he'd said.

"Let's see," old Peter mused aloud, "It's been—well, Robert's mother died in twenty-eight—the boy left home long before that. It's been ten years since I've seen him." Peter Travis' age-sunken eyes grew dimly pain-filled and resentful. But there was none of the bleak misery that had touched them when Robert's mother had died. She was a younger, almost idolized sister, but the years had dulled his sorrow.

The years had taken the edge from his bitter, wordless raging at the youth whose weakness, whose limit-

A Tense  
Story of  
Greed  
and  
Murder



*One blow was enough*

less capacity for wrong-doing had brought early death to Peter Travis' sister. When she died, Peter had crossed the name of Robert Rever from the family records. Now, Peter Travis was seventy-five.

**T**HE impending visit of Robert Rever stirred only the dregs of an old hurt. He rose slowly from the telephone, walked back to his easy chair before the dying fire on the hearth in his library. He was still erect; he bore his years gracefully. He was frail and slender, clothed with meticulous taste and care. His white hair was plentiful, not yellowed. His close-clipped moustache was white.

He lived alone in his big, old-fashioned house set well back from the street behind a broad, tree-dotted lawn. Only in the daytime did his servants attend his needs. He liked to be alone at night. Of course it was unwise, at his age.

He sat in that favorite chair, head bowed, staring into the hypnotic coals. He was thinking of the boy Bob Rever had been before he'd chosen the wrong path. He was wondering how the years of travel on that road had changed him from the handsome, sullen youth of twenty. He considered somberly the coincidence of Robert's visit and the accidental destruction, yesterday, of the only copy of his will.

There was a strange thing!

The will had bequeathed almost his entire estate to charity. There was no one left of his immediate family except Bob Rever. There was no one to whom he owed much of love, or kindness, or even loyalty. Certainly he owed Robert none of those. But the ties of blood are strong.

Suppose the boy had changed! Suppose he had turned over a new page, really wanted a fresh start! Peter Travis could help him. Peter Travis *would* help him.

With his own hands he had torn to pieces his old will. He had been sorting the contents of his safe, destroying worthless papers. The will had been folded into one of them

and he had discovered it only after the damage had been done.

There was the coincidence. He could make a new will tomorrow—if Robert would only promise to go straight. Perhaps the incentive of modest wealth in a few years would be all he'd need to hold him to that promise. Perhaps—

Old Peter Travis was trembling in his eagerness. The muffled summons of the door-bell startled his heart into dangerously quickened beating. He breathed harder when he rose, stumbled a bit as he hurried to the door.

He peered searchingly into the eyes of a stranger. Bob Rever *had* changed—sickeningly. Peter Travis said slowly:

"Come in, Robert—You are Robert, aren't you?"

**A** HARSH laugh answered him, inately unpleasant, unfriendly, un-anything that Peter Travis wanted to hear.

"Sure," the stranger said, and it was as though he'd added, "What of it?" But he went on: "I'm Robert. Surprised to see me, eh?"

Peter Travis caught the overtone of hostile challenge in his words. His own voice remained low and somber, his gaze veiled now, as the younger man stepped past him. He closed the door.

"Surprised—" he said; "yes. And glad to see you, too, Robert. How many years—I was trying to think after you phoned—how long has it been since we last met?"

"Years?" Robert Rever's eyes were sharply suspicious, puzzled. He laughed again, uneasily. "Ten—twelve—" he hazarded, then shrugged. "What's it matter? I'm here."

"Yes— Come in, and make yourself—at home."

Peter Travis watched his nephew walk hesitantly ahead of him into the library. His eyes clouded at what he saw: a fine figure of a man—wasted! He needed a shave; he was down at the heels, shabby. When he halted and turned, his facial muscles twitched nervously. His mouth was

drawn into a permanent, sullen sneer.

The record of the years was written in Robert Rever's face, indelibly, in a disastrously heavy hand. Peter Travis felt his eagerness slip away from him, leaving him shaken, tired. He said:

"Sit down, Robert," and sat himself, but the other stood restlessly before the hearth.

Old Peter observed silently. He noted the furtive, darting glances of Robert's eyes, saw them gleam momentarily as they caught and held on the small safe that stood beside the desk. Then Robert sat down in the chair his uncle had indicated.

"Well," he said baldly, "I suppose you know why I came out!"

"You need money—" Peter Travis smiled faintly.

"That's it. I need dough!" His tone still challenged. He still expected contempt, condemnation—and in its absence he was ill at ease, defiant. He took a cigarette from a crumpled package, lighted it with jerky movements. "I'm in a jam. You've got more than you'll ever use and I've a right to some of it!"

Old Peter mused slowly, as though he were thinking aloud: "More than I'll ever use— You have—a right to some of it. Perhaps you have, Robert. Perhaps—you have! I was wondering about that before you came. But how much do you want?"

"Enough—" Robert Rever was hoarse with suspicious uncertainty. His greed could not comprehend the old man's ready acquiescence. "Enough to—to get out of the country! To make a new start somewhere else! A thou— Five thousand bucks!"

"Five thousand—"

Peter Travis said it without inflection, without emotion of any kind. His thin, blue-veined hands were clasped in his lap. His old head rested against the cushioned, high back of his chair. He went on:

"Are you hungry, Robert? Had anything to eat recently?"

"Eat—? Hell no! I don't want any food. But I'll take a drink if you've got anything!"

"On the sideboard in the dining

room," Peter said, "there's a decanter of brandy. Help yourself. And Robert," as the other jerked erect, "bring me the bowl of fruit that's there, will you?"

Robert Rever grunted unintelligibly. He took long, almost running strides and Peter Travis watched him in the mirror over the fireplace. The dining room was directly across the hall from his library. He saw the other pour out half a tumbler of brandy, gulp it down and with a furtive glance over his shoulder take another quantity. When he returned with the silver bowl of fruit Peter watched keenly the cynical, gloating smile on his twisted lips as Robert approached the back of his chair. He handed his uncle the bowl. Peter took a few grapes and set the bowl on the floor beside him.

Robert sat down again, stiffly, his eyes expectant. "Have you got the dough here?" he blurted. "Can you get it tomorrow? I'm in a hurry!"

"WHAT are you hurrying from, Robert?" Peter Travis countered, and the other flushed.

He could not keep anger from flaring in his eyes, his voice. The sudden rush of brandy fumes to his head marred his judgment.

"What's that to you!" he snarled, then laughed placatingly. "I mean, it doesn't matter, does it? I just want to get away from it all—begin over again where I'm not known—"

"But Robert," Peter said mildly, "why can't you do that here? Mapleton is small—no one here knows you. There may not be the—the temptations here that you would encounter elsewhere. And I—I'd like to help you."

Robert Rever was silent. His lips set in ugly lines. So that—he thought with swift bitterness—was the catch! The old man was trying to reform him! He'd give him dough, all right—a buck at a time, as long as he, Robert, hung around, went to Sunday School, played nice boy generally. Hell! He'd even be expected to get a job, no doubt. He felt hot anger flooding him, but a deeper

cunning came to his rescue this time. He kept his eyes down, his voice low. The truth, he thought, would serve him now—colored, of course, to suit his needs.

"I—I've been in prison, Uncle Peter," he faltered. "I escaped a couple of weeks ago. I've got to get out of the country—into Canada! I'll go straight now if only I have the chance. I was framed into a fifteen-year sentence. I swear I was innocent! You — wouldn't send me back—"

Old Peter stared into the greying embers. "Where was it," he asked. "What was the charge?"

"In the South, Uncle Peter. I was railroaded on a — a murder charge. I was innocent!"

"How long had you served?"

"Six years! But I was convicted under another name. I—I thought of you—and mother— But if they caught me now, my real name would come out. I've been using it since I got away."

"I see—"

Peter Travis took a few more grapes. He offered the silver bowl absently, and just as absently Robert selected an apple, bit into it, chewed slowly while his veiled eyes searched his Uncle's inscrutable face. Old Peter felt excitement stimulating him once more.

He felt certain that Robert had told him the truth. He dared again to hope that there was some measure of manhood left in his nephew—some partial remnant of a better nature to which he might appeal. Had not Robert mentioned his mother?

"Robert," he began a little breathlessly, "yesterday a strange thing happened. I was going through some old papers, tearing up what I thought was worthless. Accidentally, I destroyed my will!"

Robert Rever stopped chewing, his jaw lax. He laid down the half finished apple, leaned forward with his eyes staring blindly. Peter Travis hardly noticed. He went on:

"In my will I had left my entire estate to charity, with small bequests to my servants—" The younger man's

eyes glowed dully. "And I tore it up! Then—then you came! Do you see the coincidence, Bob? I thought of it—I thought how I'd like to draw a new will, making you my heir. I haven't much longer to live, and you are my kin—my sister's son! If I could think, Bob, that my small wealth could really help you—" he broke off, his eyes bright as they searched the unshaven face of Robert Rever.

**T**HE other remained silent, scarcely breathing, his gaze fixed on the floor at his feet. Then old Peter finished.

"Perhaps I've been wrong, Bob! Perhaps I've been too harsh in judging you. But now—here you are! I can help now! You must go back to prison, Bob—but we will reopen your case—prove you were innocent! You will be freed. Then you can return to Mapleton to begin life again. What do you say, Bob?"

Peter Travis was pathetic in his eagerness. He sat forward in his chair, eyes wide, lips parted. His nephew still sat motionless, elbows on knees, staring downward. Old Peter was totally unprepared for the sudden fire that flamed in Robert's eyes when he swept them upward. Hope was shattered by the tense, raucous laugh that came from Robert Rever's sullen mouth.

"Go back!" he flared. "Go back—hell! Why you old fool—I don't have to go back now! I'll begin again, all right—any place I want—because I'm your heir now—whether you like it or not! See?"

And Peter saw.

He had no will. His nephew was his closest living relative. Under the law, Robert Rever would inherit his estate—if Peter died before tomorrow.

Robert Rever came to his feet slowly, crouching like a stalking animal. His eyes were those of insanity, but there was a deadly saneness in them, too, as he searched the room. He missed no small detail. The shades were down. He remembered that his uncle had never

permitted his servants to sleep in the house. No one would know of his presence there. He had phoned to make sure that nobody else was with Peter Travis. The call had been made from a pay-station across the street, and he knew that no one had arrived between the time of the call and of his arrival.

Peter Travis rose, too. He saw death in the hideous contortion of his nephew's face. He read his own destruction in the twisted lips, the inflamed greed-gloating eyes. He did not fear death, but he hated the thought, now, of this—this beast's ever touching a cent of his! He would not regret dying, he thought, if he could only bring about the annihilation of the murderer who had killed Peter Travis' sister as surely as he intended to kill Peter Travis! There was a gun in his desk—

"Robert," he said evenly, calmly, "you—" And that was the end!

The other's hand lashed out. It had been in his pocket. He withdrew it, lunged forward, struck downward in one continuous movement. The blackjack in his grip thudded dully on Peter Travis' skull. The old man wilted, slumped to the floor without a sound. Once had been enough, but again, and yet again the vicious, crushing blows descended on the white head that was stained crimson now.

**I**T was deathly still. The old house shrieked murder to the starry skies in its very grave-like stillness. Robert Rever prowled silently through it, stopping at the sideboard for another drink from the cut-glass decanter. He roamed in darkness, his sole concern that no one else should be there. Satisfied at last, he returned to the library bearing two things that he had picked up in his search.

One of them was an old wallet he had struck with his foot while looking through an unused room at the back. It contained no money, but there was in it an identification card bearing the name of James Carson—one of the servants, doubtless. The

other was the cranklike iron handle with which the old-fashioned coal stove in the kitchen was shaken to relieve its grate of ashes. He held both by his thumb and forefinger tips.

The wallet he tossed into a corner of the library after wiping carefully the end he had been holding. The grate-shaker he also wiped; then, holding it with his handkerchief, he rolled the heavy end in the blood that had formed a puddle beneath Peter Travis' head. He tore white hairs from the dead man's head, stuck them on the end of the shaker. He threw that into the fireplace, careful to leave it where the coals would not touch it.

His eyes smoldered evilly as he surveyed the room. Accurately he remembered everything he had touched. He wiped the apple he had been eating, rubbed the decanter, the tumbler, the fruit bowl, the arms of his chair—even the front door bell-button. There'd be no fingerprints!

He destroyed his cigarette butt, looked minutely for ashes on the floor and hearth. He made certain he had dropped nothing, left no evidence of his presence. He looked for footprints on the rug, brushed its nap where he remembered having walked.

Robert Rever smiled still as he let himself out the front door. He knew that it was perfect—a small town—late at night—nobody had seen him come or go. He was sure of it! The local police would suspect the servants, and it didn't matter if each of them—even James Carson—had a copper-riveted alibi! Nobody would suspect Robert Rever.

In a week or two he would turn up—perfectly natural—to claim his inheritance.

Robert Rever walked four miles to the next suburban town. From there he took a train to the city. He had money now! His uncle's wallet had yielded eighty dollars. There was more where that came from!

"I've got Jim Carson here, Mr. Breen," the constable said. "Want t' see him now?"

Martin Breen was coroner of Mapleton as well as the only lawyer in town. He was fat and bald, with a halo of soft white hair around his shiny, egglike dome. There were crow's feet at the corners of his eyes and his habitual expression was one of happy vacuity. He looked like the ordinary and traditional fat man, but he was most extraordinary in some surprising respects.

"Yep. Bring him in, Michael," he wheezed. "Le's get it over with."

Mike Garrahan—the police force of Mapleton—withdrawed his blue-capped head from the coroner's door. A moment later he reappeared, holding by the arm a small, badly scared man in a shabby grey suit. Martin Breen's face became wreathed in a smile.

"All right, Michael, you get on outa here." Then to the other: "Hello Jim. Sit down, man, sit down. How y'been?"

James Carson sidled into the straight chair before Breen's desk. His prominent Adam's-apple was continually agitated. His watery, blue eyes were troubled and his gnarled hands interlaced spasmodically. For a while he watched the lawyer peel the tin-foil from a bar of chocolate, watched him bite off a piece and munch placidly. When he could stand it no longer, Carson blurted:

"Say, Mr. Breen—wha—what you got me down here for? Why'd Mike Garrahan go an' arrest me? I—I ain't done a thing wrong! Why—I been fishin' up t'the lake—"

"Sure. Sure, Jim," Martin Breen said soothingly. He broke off half the chocolate bar, belatedly offering it to the other. Carson shook his head.

"I don't want no candy," he said.

"Come on!" Breen insisted heartily, "eat it! Do you good. I always got to eat something when I'm trying to think. And you've got to help me think, Jim!"

"What's the matter, Mr. Breen?" Carson took the chocolate. He bit into it without relish.

"Jim," Martin Breen said, "Peter Travis has been murdered!"

"Wha-what!" Jim Carson's eyes bulged. The candy fell from his nerveless fingers.

"Four days ago, Jim. He was beat over the head with his own stove shaker, and the fellow who did it dropped—this!"

Breen shoved the wallet under Carson's staring eyes and for a silent moment he watched all color drain from the little man's face. Then Jim Carson gasped, put out a trembling hand.

"Why—that's mine—ain't it?"

"Yep, Jim. That's yours. How'd it get in Pete Travis' library?"

"I—I dunno," Carson quavered. "As God's my witness, Mr. Breen, I dunno! I—I lost it while I was workin' fer Mr. Travis. I ain't seen it since—since he fired me fer gettin' drunk. But you say he was murdered four days ago?"

"Yep."

**T**HEN I—I couldn't ha' done it, Mr. Breen! I went up t' my cabin on the lake five days ago!"

"Anybody with you, Jim? Anybody see you up there on the night o' the murder? Anybody see you leave here five days ago?"

The small man slumped in his chair. His harassed blue eyes pleaded as he shook his head dismally.

"I don't reckon so— I left here early in the morning an' I didn't see nobody at the lake. It's too soon in the season fer fishermen, I guess, 'cept me."

Martin Breen nodded. His eyes were kindly as he heaved his vast bulk out of his chair, patted Jim Carson's shoulder.

"Jim," he wheezed, "I don't think you killed Pete Travis. But I've got to hold you for a day or two. You see—it's like this: once in a while you go on a bender that lasts for a couple o' weeks, and you do all sorts o' crazy things. You were on one of 'em when Peter fired you three month ago—remember? Now, when it gets around about that wallet bein' in Pete's room, it's going to look bad for you. See?"

"Now remember, Jim, that's only

the way it looks! I don't think that's the straight of it. So you be a good fellow, now, and go tell Michael I said to put you in the hoosegow for a couple of days. And when I find out who really did kill Peter, I'll come let you out. See?"

Dazedly, but still trusting blindly in Martin Breen, the ex-gardener of Peter Travis went out to find Mike Garrahan. Faithfully he reported all the coroner had told him. Doglike he followed at Mike's heels to the small, two-cell jail in the rear of the City Hall where Breen combined both private and public offices. And when Mike returned alone, he found the fat man awaiting him.

"He doesn't check!" Breen panted cheerfully. "He—doesn't—check! He didn't kill old Peter!"

The Irishman removed his cap to scratch his short-clipped red head. "Well, wotinell," he demanded, "did yuh lock him up for?"

The lawyer chuckled. "Michael, don't worry too much about that. Just you go get that young squirt of a reporter—what's his name?"

"Danny Evans?"

"That's him! Tell him I've got hot news. All about the murder of Peter Travis."

Martin Breen disappeared into his office as Garrahan turned to execute his latest order. And while he waited, Breen shuffled with apparent aimlessness through the piles of papers on his desk. He talked softly to himself as he worked.

"He had a will—and now it's gone! I oughta know, begad! I drew it for him. But now, said will is gone. Strange—strange—" Then, heartily: "Hullo, Danny!"

**W**HAT a piece of luck! Robert Rever gloated as he read. What consummate luck that wallet had been! The Mapleton paper reported at length, front page, that James Carson, ex-gardener of Peter Travis, was under arrest, charged with murder. Martin Breen, who seemed to be someone of importance in Mapleton, announced that he expected a confession hourly.

Robert Rever smiled—but he waited for two more days before going to claim his legacy.

When he did arrive, his appearance in Mapleton was different from that of a week ago. Shaven, garbed in a new suit, new shoes and hat, he stepped down from the eleven forty-five with assurance, with an arrogant, twisted smile. He asked the address of Martin Breen. He walked to the City Hall and was not surprised when he saw the man with whom he had to deal.

**S**MALL-TIME hick lawyer, Robert Rever thought. The vacant happiness of Martin Breen's face allayed all nervousness, quieted all fears.

"A terrible, terrible thing—but we'll have a confession before long, Mr. Rever!" the coroner said solemnly after the other had stated his name, his business. Breen added: "I reckon there'll be no trouble about the estate. It's in good order, and so far's I can find out Peter had no relatives except you. He didn't have a will, but— Say! Let's you and me go eat lunch—just a snack—sandwich and coffee. Then we can come back and begin to straighten things out. What say?"

The fat man panted and wheezed and seemed devilishly fond of cheese sandwiches—downright insistent that the other try one. Robert Rever said:

"Okay. Make it a cheese sandwich on white bread, and coffee."

He was impatient and hardly noticed that it was an excellent sandwich, the cheese almost half an inch thick. He bit into it hurriedly, only to have it snatched out of his hand by the meticulous Mr. Breen. The coroner bellowed:

"Waiter!" and the aproned man jumped to attendance. Martin Breen snapped, "What d' you mean by bringing a sandwich made with rye bread? My client, here, ordered white. D'you understand? *White bread!*"

"Hell, it's all right," Rever pro-  
(Concluded on page 88)

*An Innocent Man Awaited the Hot Seat—if  
Piazza's Letter Told the Truth. So—*



*He whirled, found himself looking into an ugly black automatic*

# The Silent Signal

By JACK D'ARCY

*Author of "Voice From Hell," "The Scarlet Scimitar," etc.*

**D**ENNIS BRODERICK held his fork poised in midair while Katherine left the room to answer the imperious summons of the doorbell. Damn these dinner interruptions! Probably some pest of a canvasser. He was about to resume eating, when his wife returned. She was holding a small grey envelope.

"For you, Denny."  
"Special Delivery letter, eh?"  
Broderick asked curiously.

She shook her head.  
"No, a messenger brought it here—some unshaven old bum. He said it's from someone you know—a man by the name of Piazza."

"Louis Piazza?" Broderick said slowly, lowering his fork.



"How should I know?"

Broderick grinned.

"Louis Piazza, darling, once controlled a powerful mob. I busted it up. Remember that case? Piazza is a nobody now. Sick and broke. Last I heard of him, he'd just got out of the City Hospital. Has only one lung left, and is slated for potter's field any day now. But what the devil could he want from me?"

He shrugged, took the envelope from her and tore it open. The message it contained was brief and grimly to the point. It read:

"Broderick:

I'm going fast, and the Doc just told me I've but a few hours to live. Which don't worry me none, because life ain't been a picnic to me these last six months. But there's one thing I can do before I kick off, and that's to save Noonan. Noonan didn't bump off Katz. Rongetti and I done it, and then framed the poor sap for it. Since I hate this Rongetti anyway, and I'm in a spot where I'm sort of beyond the law, I'll spill the works to you if you come over to see me immediately. I am at 1427 Cambria Street. If I kick off by the time you get here—and chances are damn good I may—you'll find a full confession in the right drawer of my bureau. Get it over to the Governor right away, and you'll save Noonan the hot seat.

Piazza."

Broderick folded the message, slowly replaced it in the envelope. His eyes had a hard, bleak look in them as he stared across the table at his wife. "Anything wrong?" Katherine said tersely.

Broderick pushed back his chair and stood up jerkily.

"Wrong?" he echoed. "I wonder!"

In his mind, he could see a man frantically pacing the death cell. Noonan, awaiting execution for the murder of Harry Katz. Noonan, suffering the agony of a man who knows that in a few hours he will be strapped down to the electric chair, where twenty-two hundred volts of electric current will be shot through his writhing body.

"I've got to go out, honey," he said shortly. "A man's life is involved. If the information in this letter is true, an ugly miscarriage of justice can be averted."

Fear lurked in Katherine's blue eyes.

"How do you know this isn't a trap of some sort?" she asked quietly. "You said you broke up this Piazza gang; are more or less responsible for what he is now. Surely he must hate you?"

Broderick was now grimly strapping his shoulder holster over his vest.

"If Piazza is looking for it," he drawled, "he'll get it. And there is a chance that he's telling the truth."

"At least," she insisted, "get a squad from Headquarters to go along with you."

"And have them razz me for weeks if this happens to be a dumb gag on someone's part?" He shook his head. "Oh, no!"

Thirty seconds later his long legs were taking him to the door. Katherine watched him. She knew this would be just another evening when she would sit up twisting her fingers, jumping every time a telephone rang, worrying, worrying.

A tough job being the wife of a good cop.

She knew something else. Dennis would go alone wherever he was going, not because of the explanation he had just given her, but because that was his way of doing things. He held danger in contempt, having been daily faced with it in his hectic fourteen years of police work. Even as he held rats like Piazza in contempt.

**C**AMBRIA STREET, number 1427, was a tenement house. Piazza, according to the name plate downstairs, had apartment 6-E. Broderick did not ring his bell. A man had gone out just then. Broderick caught the knob before the door could close. He entered, and began mounting the narrow, filthy stairway.

Second floor, third, fourth. At the fifth, he loosened the automatic in his shoulder holster. He ascended cautiously now, his eyes narrowed, wary. Reaching the sixth floor, he turned left. Apartment 6-E terminated the short, dark corridor.

Softly, he approached the door. He

paused before it, listening. There wasn't a sound inside the apartment. Nor did light show beneath the door. Broderick waited a few seconds longer, then shrugged and rapped sharply on the door panel.

No footsteps came to answer his knocking. Still not a sound from within the apartment. A trap? Or was Piazza dead now—as, judging from his letter, he feared he might be before the detective showed up?

Drawing a ring of skeleton keys from his pocket, Broderick tried several in the lock until he found one which opened it. He entered on the balls of his feet, his automatic now clutched tightly in his right hand.

Enough light came from the hallway to enable Broderick to make out the electric switch on the left. He crossed to it; snapped on the lights. The living room in which he found himself standing was shabbily furnished, untidy, and empty.

**A** DOOR opened, at the right, into what was obviously a bedroom. Broderick could see the foot of an old-fashioned brass bed and one corner of a bureau. He approached it cautiously; looked in. A man's figure lay on the bed. The rigidity of its position, discernible even in the semi-darkness, told a grim story.

Broderick switched on the lights. For a long minute he looked down upon the half-nude man on the bed. No doubt about it—it was Piazza. The detective knew only too well that ferrety face, its expression of cunning lingering on even after death. There was blood on Piazza's chin, his chest, the pillow on which his head rested.

"Had a hemorrhage," Broderick muttered. He shrugged.

So far, the thing seemed on the level. Piazza really was dying when he had written that letter. Now would there be a full confession as he promised, clearing Noonan and putting Rongetti on a spot, in the right drawer of that bureau?

Swinging on his heels, Broderick swiftly approached the bureau, and jerked open the right one of the two

drawers on top. There was an envelope; a long white envelope on which was neatly printed: "To His Excellency, Governor of the State."

There was grim exultation in Broderick's eyes as he reached for it. Yanking Rongetti in on a murder rap was something he'd enjoy doing. Too long, now, the swarthy-faced killer had been a thorn in the side of the police department. Guilty of every crime conceivable, Rongetti openly walked the street, simply because the police had never been able to get enough evidence on him.

Holding the envelope now, Broderick hesitated. It was sealed, and addressed to the Governor. Had he the right to open it? Yet to save Noonan, a devil of a commotion would have to be made. Wires pulled; immediate audience with the Governor; and so on. Suppose that envelope did not really contain a confession? Then, he, Broderick, would get it in the neck.

"And anyway," he muttered, smiling wryly, "how's the Governor to know it was in a sealed envelope addressed to him? Unless I myself tell him?"

Quickly, he tore the envelope open. Then he frowned, staring at the three words written across the otherwise blank sheet of paper: "Thanks, Rongetti. Piazza." What sense did *that* make? Unless—yes, damn it, that was it!

Broderick jerked out his automatic again and whirled to the door. He thought he saw the set-up now very clearly. Piazza had hated him. Rongetti probably was involved in Katz's killing, for which Noonan was taking the rap. If Piazza had somehow got word to Rongetti that Broderick was coming to his, Piazza's, apartment for the low-down on Katz's killing, Rongetti would, of course, do his damndest to bump the detective off. Precisely what Piazza wanted.

Stealthily, Broderick edged his way to the exit door, every nerve, every muscle of his big body tense and alert. Even now, Rongetti's roddies might be sneaking up the stairs. He clicked off the electric

lights, sidled through the door and paused, listening, on the landing.

Slow, measured footsteps plodded up the stairs. He flattened himself against the wall. A scrawny old woman reached the landing. Without even seeing him, she entered one of the apartments.

Broderick grinned, and began a slow, cautious descent down the stairs. If those rats had prepared a trap somewhere below, he meant to send a few of them ahead of him. Landing after landing; still nothing happened. On the ground floor now, Broderick looked around quickly. There should be a rear exit from the building. There was, at the opposite end of the corridor.

Thirty seconds later, Broderick stepped out into a black, smelly alley. He almost had to feel his way to the street parallel to the one which the tenement building faced. Only then he breathed easier. Replacing the automatic in his shoulder holster, he proceeded swiftly to a drug store on the corner.

Rongetti and his rats might try to get him at his home. Katherine was there alone. Whatever plans he had to make could wait. Katherine's safety came first. She'd better spend the night with her sister.

Squeezing his bulk into a telephone booth, he telephoned his home. One ring, two, three; then the click of a receiver removed from the hook. Katherine's voice, high-pitched, tense: "Hello!"

Broderick crouched lower over the receiver. He *knew* now something was wrong.

"Hello, kid. Listen—"

"Oh, Denny! Don't come—"

Her voice suddenly jerked away. In his mind, Broderick could see a swift hand clasped over her mouth. Then a cold, metallic voice came over the wire.

"Get this, copper! Rongetti speaking. Yes, we got your dame. Want to see her alive again?"

Broderick moistened dry lips.

"Listen, you rat! If you harm a hair of—"

"Cut the hooley!" Rongetti inter-

rupted sharply. "I'm holding all the cards, and you damn well know it! You just got something from Piazza—something I want. Do I get it?"

Broderick unconsciously slapped his left jacket pocket into which he had stuffed the envelope and the sardonic two-word message. There wasn't time for explanations now. Rongetti wouldn't accept them anyway.

"I'll be right over," he said. "Meanwhile, for God's sake—"

He stopped when he heard Rongetti's coarse laughter.

"No, you don't, copper. Chase the idea you'll come here with a squad of dicks. Listen, I wasn't born yesterday! Sure, you come right over. But you come alone. And you won't find me or the dame here. You just park yourself in your living room, and wait for things to happen. Try a doublecross on me, and this wife of yours gets some forty-five slugs where they'll do the most good. Keep thinking what dames look like when they're dragged up out of the river."

Broderick shook his head. He felt sick.

"All right, Rongetti," he said, "I'll play ball with you."

"You'd better!" was the grim warning.

The line went dead. Broderick hung up slowly. The counter man looked at him queerly when the detective walked out. Were telephone booths, he wondered, now used to sneak in a quiet drink? For Broderick certainly looked drunk when he heeled out of the drug store.

Hailing a cruising car, Broderick gave his home address. He sat crouching forward, his shoulders hunched, as if he feared some terrific weight about to crash on his back. Without Katherine life would be as grey and cheerless as the nasty, cold drizzle now dimming the headlights of his taxi!

Minutes dragged maddeningly. The cab finally swung to the curb before his little two story home in a quiet residential street. Broderick got out, paid the driver and ran up the steps.

The front door was partly open. Lights were on inside. Cigarette butts cluttering the ash tray gave him the first sign of the men who had been here only a few minutes ago. But even as he went through the little house, he knew he'd find it empty.

He returned to the living room, and sat down on the edge of a couch. Rongetti had said to wait. For what? A telephone call? Broderick lighted a cigarette. Dragging the blue smoke deep into his lungs, he waited.

Suddenly a harsh voice came from his left:

"Okay, copper, put 'em up!"

**H**E whirled; found himself staring into the ugly black snout of a .45 automatic. The man holding it was slight, ferrety-faced. The open closet door behind him was self-explanatory. He'd been hiding there. Slowly, Broderick put up his hands.

"All right, Joe," the gunman now said, looking past Broderick, "you can come out."

Glancing over his shoulder, Broderick saw another man emerge from a closet in the hallway—a heavy-set, gorilla-like thug. He approached the detective; frisked him quickly, removing the automatic in Broderick's shoulder holster.

The first man spoke sharply.

"On your feet, copper. We're going places. And if our car's tailed—well, there just won't *nobody* be left in the Broderick family."

Broderick said nothing. He remained grimly silent when the two men forced him into a black sedan parked across the street from his home. The sedan lurched away, the first man driving, and the burly thug in the rear seat with Broderick, his gun ever pressing into the detective's side.

"Surprised?" the driver finally asked mockingly, after he stopped before a warehouse in the waterfront district.

Broderick knew what the man was referring to. That warehouse was openly known to be Rongetti's headquarters; known as such by every cop

in the city. Rongetti was obviously pretty sure of himself. Knew that Broderick, his wife's life at stake, would not communicate with the police. Why have Katherine brought there, then? Broderick thought he knew the answer. Easier to pull off a double killing here—to get rid of the two bodies.

As Broderick walked to the huge double doors, he knew he was going to his death. There was nothing that he could do about it.

Someone must have watched their approach. Before one of the gunmen had a chance to knock, a section of the huge doors swung open. Someone grated from the dark interior:

"Welcome home, copper!"

Broderick entered, the two gunmen who'd brought him there close behind him. He was pushed down a dark hallway, made a right turn and then a left, finally pausing at a command behind him before a massive, steel-ribbed door. A dim, fly-specked electric bulb burned above it.

One of the men pounded on the door with the barrel of his gun. A steel shutter flew up in the topmost panel. A second later, Broderick found himself staring into Rongetti's pudgy, pock-marked face.

"Ah, my old friend Broderick," the gang chief purred. "Come on in!"

Bolts slid back, chains rattled. The door swung in. Broderick entered, but Rongetti's voice checked the other two who were about to follow.

**"YOU** guys wait outside. I've private business with Mr. Broderick."

He slammed the door shut, walked to his desk and dropped his massive frame into a heavily-padded chair. Broderick's eyes slowly circled the long, low-ceilinged room. They paused on the crouching figure glaring at him from the left wall. It was a thin, anemic-looking youth, with the glittering eyes of a killer. Broderick had man-handled him once for beating a girl into unconsciousness with a gun butt. That manhandling Creasy had never forgotten—judging from the mad hatred now in his eyes.

Whirling to the gang chief, Broderick asked curtly:

"Where's Kate?"

Rongetti leaned back in his chair; selected a cigar, bit off the end, and lighted it. He exhaled a cloud of blue smoke ceilingward.

"Where," he asked softly, "is—Piazza's confession? And I know damn well the rat gave it to you. He bragged about it in a note he sent me. Thought he'd get away with it because I didn't know where he hung out. But I knew one sure way of gettin' to you, copper—that hellcat dame of yours! Now let's have it."

Broderick crouched forward, his big fists clenching.

"First," he said, his voice soft, "I want to see my wife. Or, by God, Rongetti, I'm going after you."

"Make one move," Creasy snarled from the wall, "and I'll send so damn much hot lead plowin' through you that you'll sink without weights."

He broke off, cursing. Broderick ignored him.

"Well, Rongetti?"

The gang chief turned lazily to his henchman.

"All right, let him see her."

Creasy's eyes snaked hatred at Broderick. He walked to a cupboard at the rear of the room, turned the key in the lock and threw back the door.

Katherine stepped out. Her hair was in tumbled disorder. Heavy bruises showed dark against her skin. The strap of her dress had been broken, revealing a smooth expanse of white shoulder.

"Denny!" she cried, impulsively stretching forth her arms.

But Broderick was looking at Creasy. In spite of the automatic in his hand, the little gunman recoiled involuntarily at the threat in the detective's eyes.

"I'll get you for this," Broderick gritted through clenched teeth. "If I get out of this alive, for every bruise on her body, I'll—"

"All right, cut it!" Rongetti interrupted sharply. "Kate put up a battle, and Creasy had to rough her a bit. Now let's have Piazza's confession."

A thin smile on his lips, Broderick brought forth the envelope and message he'd found in Piazza's bureau.

"There wasn't any confession, Rongetti," he drawled. "Piazza got word through to you that I was coming over to his dump for a confession on Katz' killing. Right?"

"Right," Rongetti agreed tonelessly.

"Well, I found Piazza dead and—this!"

He handed the gang chief the envelope and the two-word message.

"Get the set-up?" he continued, after Rongetti had read the message and looked up blankly. "It was only a gag for you to bump me off. Piazza hated you."

"It's Piazza's handwriting," Rongetti said slowly. "I had several I. O. U.'s of his when I ran a gambling joint. He wrote this, all right. Well, it looks like I'll have to oblige him."

"What do you mean?" Broderick asked tersely.

He was only playing for time, for he knew perfectly well what Rongetti meant.

The gang chief stood up and stepped around the desk.

"Why," he said gently, "since I got myself all worked up about this thing it kinda proves that I was in on Katz' killing. And there's the little kidnaping charge you might bring up against me. All in all, I think I'll be wisest to shut your mouth—permanently." His hand reached to his hip pocket. "Nothing like a couple of slugs to stop tattlers."

**C**REASY cut in unexpectedly, taking several steps toward Rongetti.

"Let me bump him off, Chief. He owes me for that beating. I want to!"

His words were lost in a scream as Katherine's nails gouged red ribbons out of his face. His gun half-drawn, Rongetti whirled. It gave Broderick the one long chance he wanted. He hurled his big body through the air. Too late Rongetti had tried to sidestep the human projectile. Broder-

ick's shoulder struck him in the chest. Both crashed to the floor.

Rongetti's gun hand was pinned under his body. Once, twice, three times Broderick crashed his fists into the pock-marked, ugly face beneath him. Rongetti's writhing body relaxed suddenly. Broderick clawed for the gangster's gun, found it, swung around with it.

Katherine still struggled desperately with Creasy; still swung on his gun arm while the man tried to jerk it free. It was a losing battle for Kate. Any moment now, he was bound to tear his arm loose. And Katherine would get the first slug from that gun.

With slow, cool deliberation, as if he were out on target practice, Broderick sighted on the back of the gunman's head. He gently squeezed the trigger. The automatic vomited flame and hot lead. Creasy crumpled, as if his legs had suddenly been jerked out from under him.

A terrific banging now came on the outside door. Broderick leaped to his feet. He ran to Katherine, who, white-faced, was staring at what remained of Creasy's head after a .45 slug had crashed through the back of it.

"I'M going to be sick, Denny," she moaned. "I'm going to be sick as the devil."

Broderick caught her as she toppled forward. He lowered her gently to the floor and scooped up Creasy's automatic. Gun in either hand he stood astride her, listening grimly to the pounding on the door. It was the only exit out of that room. Nothing remained now, except selling his life as dearly as he could.

A machine-gun chattered in the corridor outside. They were shooting out the lock. Another minute or two, then—the end.

Abruptly, the door crashed in. A uniformed figure leaped into the room. Other blue figures behind it, some holding sub-machine guns.

"Up with 'em, you rats!"

The stocky, florid-faced man's voice trailed away. Open-mouthed, he

stared at Broderick—even as Broderick stared back at him.

"Captain Henley!" Broderick burst out finally. "How did you know I was here?"

Henley continued gaping at him.

"By God, it is Broderick!" he said incredulously. "I thought I was seeing things. Know that you were here? Why should I?"

"Then how," Broderick spluttered — "Hell! Why are you here?"

"Why," Henley explained, "the governor's secretary got in touch with us at Headquarters. Said he got a full confession from Louis Piazza on the Katz killing. It put the finger on Rongetti, and gave plenty of proof—all the evidence even a bad prosecuting attorney might need to send a guy to the chair. So I got a squad and rushed right out to pinch Rongetti. Had to bump off the two guys we found out in the corridor there. But what are you doing here?"

"God! What a set-up. Listen to this, Captain. Just *listen* to it!"

Briefly, he related to Henley the rapid events of the past half-hour.

"You see," he concluded grimly, "Piazza wanted both me and Rongetti out of the way. He meant to have Rongetti bump me off—which almost worked. Why didn't he have a duplicate confession in that envelope, rather than one copy sent directly to the Governor? So that Rongetti doesn't get cold feet and skip town, even after he gives me the works. Therefore, he fakes it so that, apparently, there was no confession. Result—Rongetti gives me the works, then sits back, thinking he's safe enough. And *then* he gets nabbed on Katz' killing, and eventually burns for it. A swell idea!"

He turned—to find Rongetti sitting up now, the expression in his eyes that of a wild animal which has just felt the jaws of a trap.

"I'll use that crack you made a couple minutes ago," Broderick said softly, approaching closer to the gang leader. "Of course, we'll have to *oblige* friend Piazza—by directing this fat carcass of yours to the chair."

*Crime Comes to Grief Under the*  
**Fingers of Fate**

By ANDERS H. ANDERSON



**T**RIG DONAHUE, Public Enemy Number One, staggered into his shack, leaving a trail of blood behind him. His right hand was horribly mangled; two fingers were entirely gone and the thumb hung by a shred of flesh. Deep, dripping scratches marred one side of his heavily bearded face. His thick coat was torn into ribbons.

Cursing and gasping with pain, he managed to wrap a towel around his hand. Then, with the help of his teeth, he made a tourniquet. Finally he sank weakly into a chair.

Never in his five years of daring bank holdups had he had a call as close as this. But then this was his first encounter with a mountain lion.

For the past two years he had been hiding out as a prospector in the lonely little cabin fifteen miles up the canyon from Agua Dulce. Under the cabin floor, securely buried in the dirt, reposed his last haul—forty thousand dollars. The chase had been pretty hot for a while. So hot, in fact, that he was forced to migrate from his old haunts and wait till the storm quieted down.

Here, on the rocky canyon slope, he had pattered away two years at his claim. Few people passed this way; but to play safe he had blasted a small shaft into the mountain side, and occasionally he made a pretense of working the mine.

This morning he had entered the shaft to grub a little deeper. A snarling tornado of claws and teeth had met him and knocked him over

backward. As the mountain lion slashed at his throat he flung up his hand in defense. He felt the bones crunch. With the other hand he jerked at his revolver and pulled the trigger before it was out of the holster. At the deafening report the animal had leaped over him and out of the tunnel.

He knew he must get to a doctor. The blood was clotting on his cheek, and, as he surveyed himself in the mirror, he wondered if it would be necessary to shave. That might be dangerous, for his picture had been displayed too often before the public. They had his fingerprints, too; yet he must risk it.

He snapped shut the padlock on the door and walked over to his burro. He remembered that a mile down the canyon a Government party of scientists was camped. Perhaps they could help. He climbed painfully on the burro and began the descent.

The camp was deserted. Evidently the party had risen early to explore the adjacent canyon. There was nothing to do but head for Agua Dulce, fourteen miles farther down.

He had been uneasy when these scientists had appeared three days ago. Then he had watched with interest as they went about their work of studying the animal life of the region. During the forenoon they spent their time collecting specimens; in the afternoon they prepared them for shipment to the National Museum. He marveled at their thoroughness. They saved skins and skeletons. Even the stomachs and intestines were packed in alcohol and put away for later study on the animal's food habits and parasites. They also

bottled up the fleas and lice which lurked among the feathers or fur of their specimens. No, there was no danger from these men.

Finally he plodded into Agua Dulce, his hand throbbing from pain, his body near exhaustion. There was no doctor in the village but he found ready help. They loaded him into an old flivver and in a few moments he was on his way to the hospital in Benton twenty miles to the south.

**I**T was a month before his wounds healed and he was fit to return to his cabin. Nothing had been touched. The loot was still safe under the floor. Yes, and he was safe, too. No one now would recognize the famous Trig Donahue with his scarred face and two-fingered hand.

But it was a stiff price to pay for safety. He cursed at his repulsive features in the mirror. Maimed and marked, his good times were over.

A week later he began packing his belongings for his return to civilization. He pried up the floor boards

and with trembling hands lifted out the money.

"Stick 'em up, Donahue!" came a harsh command from the door. He whirled around to face the muzzle of a shotgun. The sheriff and a deputy stood in the door.

Sullenly, his mind groping desperately with the situation, he was led back to Agua Dulce, then hurried to the sheriff's office in Benton. They took his fingerprints and compared them with those on file. There was no escape.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

The sheriff smiled as he walked over to the safe. He returned with a small bottle and set it on the table before the prisoner. Trig Donahue's heart pounded. Cold perspiration stood on his forehead as he stared at two human fingers in the bottle.

The sheriff laughed. "You were very helpful when you sent your fingers to Washington in the stomach of that mountain lion. You see, those Government scientists shot the lion right after it left you."

## Down to the Last Detail

*(Concluded from page 79)*

tested, but the waiter whisked the offending sandwich away. Another took its place with amazing speed. The coroner said: "Sorry, Mr. Rever."

"Okay. Forget it. Let's finish and get down to business."

The fat man dawdled over his lunch until the other was ready to curse. He spent half an hour, talked endlessly, seemed never to finish. But finally he rose and paid the check. And when they returned to the coroner's office, he spent another five minutes poring over a paper that was lying on his desk. Robert Rever lit a second cigarette from the butt of his first. Then Martin Breen spoke.

"Robert Rever—" His voice had changed subtly; it brought the other erect in his chair, tense suddenly. "I accuse you," the coroner intoned, "of the murder of Peter Travis."

"What the devil d'you mean!" Rever was on his feet, roaring. The fat man leaned back in his creaking

chair. His eyes were no longer vacant and bland. They were chillingly direct.

"Before you killed him," Martin Breen rasped, "you ate part of an apple. The teeth marks in that apple were recorded—permanently, accurately down to the last detail—in a sort of wax, a plastic called moulage. Half an hour ago, you bit into a cheese sandwich—the one I sent back! And the man, Mr. Rever, who bit the cheese, also bit the apple we found in Peter Travis' library."

Fat though he was, Martin Breen's hand could move as a streak of light. His pistol cracked an instant ahead of Robert Rever's. Deathly white, the murderer stood with his left hand clutching his spurting right wrist, while Mike Garrahan covered him from the open door.

"Put Mr. Rever in the other cell, Mike," the coroner said, "and get a doctor for his wrist. Then tell Jim Carson to come and see me before he goes back to his fishin' again. I want to go along with him."



# The Knockover



**No Money Can Be Hotter than Government Dough  
—as You'll Learn in this Exciting Story of  
Machine-Gun Battle and G-Man Nerve!**

**By ARTHUR J. BURKS**

*Author of "Gat Symphony in G," "Sackcloth and Ashes," etc.*

**T**HE fussy, old-fashioned little train puffed up the long, winding grade which led out of Moses Coulee into the Big Bend. This was an unproductive branch line, hence the obsolete locomotive, the uncared-for shabby cars. Each of the two passenger coaches was two-thirds empty, the passengers, for the

most part, consisting of poorly dressed farmers returning from a holiday in Wenatchee.

Two men faced each other on worn, red-plush seats. A large black satchel lay between them. Occasionally, each would glance at it with peculiar sort of resentment.

"I wish," the man on the left

blurted out finally in a low, guarded voice, "we got there already. I'm sort of beginnin' to get the willies."

The other, taller than his companion, with a massive, beefy face, nodded sympathetically.

"I know what you mean," Lougee whispered. "Playin' wet nurse to seventy grand does get a guy kinda nervous. But nobody knows we're aboard here with that dough. Hell, we got nothin' to be afraid about."

"Just the same," Lougee insisted, his sharp eyes darting about the car, "I can't help feeling—" He shrugged. His right hand was never far from the object that bulged beneath his coat near his left armpit.

The train struggled higher up the grade, rising to the mouth of the tunnel still a half mile ahead. To the right, and so far below that it looked like a silver ribbon, flowed the Douglas Creek—a dizzy drop of several hundred feet. Mighty precipices bordered the creek, branching out to form the walls of the coulee which the train had just left.

"Say," Lougee said nervously, "this train is goin' awful slow now, ain't it, Riley?"

Riley bit off the corner of a black cigar.

"It's laborin' up a steep grade—of course it's movin' slow," he said calmly, without looking up. "Those nerves o' yours are beginnin' to get the best of— Say!"

The train suddenly jarred to a grinding stop. Shots came from up ahead somewhere. Leaping to his feet, Lougee glanced out the window. The forward part of the train having curved sharply to the right before it was stopped, he had a clear view as far as the locomotive. When he jerked back to his companion, his face was white, strained.

"It's a holdup," he said tersely. "A half-dozen armed men up near the engine."

And then a mocking voice drawled behind him: "Sure, it's a holdup, mugs!"

Three supposed farmers were on their feet. One cradled a sub-machine-gun in his arms; the other

two brandished automatics. Lougee's right hand darted to the gun in his shoulder holster; Riley's clawed at his hip.

Neither man had a chance. The sub-machine-gun vomited flame and hot lead, vibrating like a live thing in the gunner's hand. At least a dozen slugs struck each before they crumpled to the bottom of the car. A woman screamed shrilly.

**T**WO armed men now entered the car through the forward door.

"All set, Harbord?" asked one, addressing the man standing to the right of the machine-gunner.

Harbord, a sallow-faced man, with heavy-lidded, sleepy eyes, nodded. He stooped, yanked Lougee's body from the satchel on which it was sprawling. Picking up the satchel, on which Lougee's blood made small crimson rivulets, he drawled lazily:

"This is Government dough for a project in Colville. There'll be G-men after us. Which means we'd better start moving. You, Clark! Go back down the grade a quarter-mile or so. Unspike a rail. Edge it to the left—"

Clark grinned and walked out. Outside, other bandits were making sure that the remaining passengers kept their heads inside the windows. Finally all the bandits left the train. A man on the roof released the brakes, and also jumped off. The train started backward down the steep grade, gathering momentum every second.

A quarter mile below, a rail had been shifted. Its free end pointed at the slope of the grade, which led sharply downward to a precipice rim, three hundred feet above roaring Douglas Creek.

"Perfect," said Harbord in his sleepy, lazy drawl. "No witnesses. By the time that wreck is unscrambled, we'll be plenty far from here."

As the locomotive passed them, Harbord grinned wryly. The engineer and fireman, blood dripping from their faces, hung half in and half out of the cab. Both had come to the right window at the command

to halt, and both had smashed into hot lead. Then a bandit had jumped to the slow-moving cab, and shut down the throttle.

The holdup was complete.

But the bandits remained standing there in a compact little group, listening. The train disappeared now around the sharp curve below, moving faster than it had ever moved before. Then they heard a roar as five flatcars, two passenger coaches, a caboose and the locomotive left the track, plunging three hundred feet to the creek below. . . .

"It wouldn't be pretty to look at now," Harbord murmured after a while. "Where's Clark? Of course, the buzzard *would* have to stay down there and see the show."

They waited for Clark. In about five minutes, he came puffing up, a wide grin on his face.

"The prettiest wreck I ever seen, chief," he panted. "The train dumped out as though shot from a cannon. The whole mess looked like kindling wood, the cowcatcher of that locomotive sticking straight up out of—"

"Can it!" said Harbord. "Let's go!"

They walked into the black tunnel. When they emerged into the sunlight at the other end, a long black touring car awaited them, parked just off the road which ran parallel with the railroad tracks. A man slouched behind the steering wheel. They piled in.

"Colville," Harbord snapped. "Take the left fork. See if you can make it in less than four hours."

The big car lurched away, leaving a trail of dust behind it. The black satchel, containing seventy thousand dollars of Government money, rested between Harbord's feet.

Black headlines marched across the front pages of newspapers that night. First it was simply a story of the wreck, its cause investigated by State Police and railroad officials. Then the loosened rail was found. The theory of a homicidal maniac was destroyed when it was proven that the train had been going backward when it was wrecked. Someone

must have stopped it further ahead, loosened the rail, then released the brakes. Only one possible explanation: bandits!

But by the time all this had been ferreted out, Harbord—even as he had planned—was many miles away in the heart of Colville county, safe and comfortable with his men in a dry cave. The cave, lost in the pines of the breaks, was not only next to impossible to blunder across, but was also well nigh impregnable. Only artillery could have blasted them out of there.

All in all, it was quite perfect! Lots of leisure in which to plan another train robbery two weeks hence. . . .

**M**IDNIGHT, Washington, D. C. A young man spoke over the telephone to a man in Seattle, over three thousand miles away.

"So you see, Duff," he said crisply, "it wasn't a mere train holdup. The bandits found out that those two guards were secretly conveying seventy thousand dollars of Government money for a project in Colville County. It's been withheld from the press so far. I want you to get out to the scene of the wreck as quickly as you can. As usual, you're at liberty to pursue the investigation as you see fit. And you need only to pick up the telephone to get all the cooperation from Washington you might need."

"Okay, chief," said Duff Braden, comfortably seated in his hotel room. "I'll be there by morning."

He hung up, and for the next twenty minutes pored over official maps. Then his hard brown fist crashed on the table top.

"Yes," he said tersely. "It's quickest, anyway."

Three hours later, an airplane, throttled down to muffle the roar of the motor, approached Moses Coulee from the north. In the passenger cockpit was Duff Braden, a 'chute pack under his hips, its harness weighing down his shoulders. He was studying the coulee below.

"All right," he shouted to the

pilot. "Nose up. I'm bailing out. Just hope I won't hang the seat of my pants five hundred feet up some crag."

The pilot waved a gloved hand, and the nose of the plane tilted upward. Duff Braden dropped over the side, somersaulting as he fell into space. His thumb was hooked in the 'chute's ripcord ring, but he controlled the impulse to jerk it. Not just yet. He didn't want to show the umbrella of that 'chute too long. Another second, still another. He yanked at the ripcord. There was a vicious jerk on his body as the 'chute opened.

Two minutes later, Duff Braden dropped into a thicket of sagebrush. He fought his way out from beneath the parachute, rolled it up and chucked it into the brush. Then he walked to the road following it to where it branched up Douglas Creek.

Long before dawn, he was merely one of the dirty, sweaty relief workers extricating bodies from the debris of the Wenatchee train—men so begrimed by the work they were doing that it was impossible to tell stranger from friend. Besides, after hours of back-breaking labor, no one cared anyway. By now they had looked too long into the face of death to be too greatly troubled about life.

At dawn, Duff Braden slipped away. He climbed up to the tracks three hundred feet above, and followed them through the tunnel. If the bandits had had a car waiting nearby, it would have had to be somewhere on the other side of the tunnel where a road ran parallel with the tracks.

When he reached the road, however, he cursed softly. At least a score of cars had already been there, four even then parked off the road. If the bandits had been there, the tire tracks of their car had long been confused and obliterated.

Duff shrugged. The next obvious step was, of course, to canvass the nearest town and find out if anyone had seen a possibly suspicious car pass through it shortly after the

wreck. Do that through every town within, say, a twenty-mile radius. The description of the getaway car, if he got it, would give him something tangible to work on.

A thin, lanky man now walked out of the black mouth of the tunnel. His long arms dangling limply at his sides, his head bowed, he shuffled to a battered touring car parked on a dirt side road. He slid behind the wheel. The self-starter of the touring car was grinding, when Duff hailed him.

"How about a lift into town?"

There was something queer about the man's frozen, angular face as he looked back over his shoulder. He seemed in a sort of daze.

"What?" he echoed vaguely.

Duff approached him.

"I said, could you give me a lift into town?"

The man shrugged. Only now Duff saw the bitter pain in his eyes.

"Shore," he muttered. "Anywhere you want to go. I'm just—drivin'."

Duff stared at him curiously.

"What d'you mean—just driving?"

The man's huge, gnarled hands tightened on the steering wheel.

"MY wife an' kid was killed in that wreck," he replied tonelessly. "All I had. . ."

Duff Braden's eyes were bitter as he climbed into the car. Damn those murderous rats! That poor devil of a rancher—as the man's clothes proclaimed him to be. His wife and kid murdered; his own life wrecked—and for what? To satisfy the greed of those vermin! Duff felt he could shoot them down, one after the other, with as little compunction as if he were firing at so many snakes.

The rancher was backing out of the side road, when Duff asked casually, staring ahead through the dirty windshield: "Why not use this road?"

"Don't lead nowhere," the rancher replied laconically.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this used to be only a detour road when the new one was cut through. It's in pretty bad shape.

Nobody uses it. Why should they, when they can use the new road?"

Duff Braden's eyes narrowed.

"Hold it!" he snapped, and the rancher jammed his foot on the brakes. "A car *did* go through here. See its tire tracks—fat balloon tires?"

"Mebbe someone just swung in there to park?" the rancher grunted.

"That," Braden said grimly, "is probably what the state police thought. But a car couldn't back out on the same identical tracks it had made going in. You couldn't do it even if you tried it deliberately. But how about following those tracks a little ways? That'll give us the answer quickly enough. The driver of that car wouldn't go very far if he simply swung in there to park."

The rancher threw in the gear, released his clutch. The touring car shot forward.

"That settles it," Braden gritted, after they had proceeded a quarter mile or so and the twin ribbons of the tire tracks were still ahead of them. "The rats who engineered that wreck were in that car. Only *they* would take this road, which is probably lonely as hell."

He spoke more to himself, but he felt the touring car suddenly lurch wildly and grind to a stop. The rancher's right hand shot out, gripped Braden's arm. He could feel the other's fingernails digging into his flesh.

"You mean," the rancher whispered, "we're on *their* trail?"

There was red murder in the man's eyes.

"Yes," Duff Braden said quietly.

There was silence for a few seconds. Then, with slow deliberations the rancher swung back to the wheel.

"I'm Jake Thomas," he said, his voice now emotionless. "You must be a detective. I told you 'bout my wife and kid. If you're trailin' those devils—well, I'd sort of like to stick along with you."

Duff Braden extended his hand. Thomas gripped it. Then the touring car was moving again, following the twin ribbons of the tire tracks ahead.

Only the fact that the bandits stuck to little-used country roads, even after they had left the detour road, enabled Braden and Thomas to follow the tracks for over a hundred miles. That, and the fact that, because of a prolonged drought, dust lay inches thick on those back roads.

They were entering the comparatively wild and virgin Colville country, when the trail came to an abrupt end at the shore of one of the many lakes dotting that section.

"SURE," said Braden. "They got rid of the car here. Look!"

He pointed at some footprints visible in the mud at the very fringe of the lake.

"They gambled," Braden continued, "on the first rain destroying their footprints and tire tracks—and, God knows, there's one due soon. But no rain could wash away their car. So they ran it into that lake. But I'll make sure of that in a minute or so."

The water was too muddy to enable Braden to see bottom. He got out and promptly removed his clothes. He swam out a few feet, jackknifed his body and with four powerful strokes reached the bottom of the lake. Only a few seconds groping revealed to him what he searched for. The bandit's car was at the bottom of that lake!

He informed Thomas of that when he came ashore and began putting on his clothes again. The rancher nodded.

"Sure," he said succinctly. "They wouldn't need a car from here. It's a million to one bet they've gone into the breaks."

"Breaks?" Braden echoed.

"Yes. The rough, rocky slope of the river valley. Findin' 'em there will be like searchin' for a needle in a haystack. Boulders, precipices, caves, pine thickets—" He shrugged.

"If they're in the breaks," Braden said grimly, "we'll find 'em."

"No food," Thomas continued steadily. "No water fit to drink."

"All the more reason for finding

them," said Braden. "For they'll have both."

Thomas nodded.

"I see now why you *hombres* always get your man. All right, we may as well leave my car here, and get after 'em."

An hour later, they were fighting through the underbrush of the "breaks," part of a valley wall which was almost as long as the mighty Columbia itself—a tumbling chaos of boulders, outcroppings, coulees, ravines.

"Just watch out for rattlers," warned Thomas.

Duff Braden grinned mirthlessly.

"They aren't dangerous compared to what we're after. A rattler will warn before it strikes. These rats won't!"

They slept that day in the shade of thick pine thickets, and roamed the breaks at night. And always they listened for some sound that did not belong.

Toward the evening of the second day, they heard it—the muffled report of a rifle. It might have been the rifle of some hillbilly, shooting at a rabbit or a rock-rat. And then again—it might be someone else.

Eagerly, they began forcing their way in the direction of the sound. An hour passed—an hour of back-breaking toil over hummocks of stone, when Braden signaled a halt.

"It came from around here somewhere, Thomas," he said.

The rancher looked sceptical.

"You may be wrong by two miles or more, The echoes, you know. I'll climb a tree. Maybe I'll see something."

He spent perhaps fifteen minutes, dizzily perched on a lofty pine top. When he descended, tense excitement flushed his face.

"I saw a glow of light," he panted. "In a hollow 'bout a half mile down the slope ahead of us. It came on and off, twice, as if a shadow had passed in front of a fire of some kind."

Duff Braden, his lean face hard and set, was already moving in the direction Thomas had indicated. It

took them over an hour to cover that half-mile. Then Braden paused again.

"The hollow you mentioned," he whispered, "is just ahead. You creep up toward it. I'll circle it and approach it from the other side. This way, we'll have 'em between two fires. Don't use that automatic I loaned you—unless you're faced with capture. Just shooting it out, they're bound to lick us. Too many of 'em—and they'll be sure to have sub-machine guns. So taking it mighty easy is our best bet. Good luck!"

"How'll I know where you are?" Thomas asked tersely.

"I'll snap on my cigarette lighter for a second. Watch for it."

"Okay."

Thomas began crawling toward the hollow, while Braden veered right. Underbrush tore at his clothing. Before he had proceeded twenty yards, his body was bathed with perspiration. For he literally had to fight his way through here—and do it silently. A trick which required patience and steady nerves.

Although it wasn't more than perhaps two hundred yards to reach the opposite edge of the hollow, Braden knew it had taken him at least forty-five minutes to traverse them. Blackness was ahead of him as he finally began descending cautiously into the hollow.

And then he dropped flat on his face. For a light had flashed directly ahead of him. It came from the depths of a rocky cave. And he now saw something which brought a savage twist to his mouth.

It was a sinister tableau. A reddish light glared on the half-nude body of Jake Thomas. The rancher was lashed to a plank. A burly, ugly-faced thug stood over it with an up-raised quirt. And even as Braden looked, the quirt slashed downward, instantly opening a crimson gash diagonally across Thomas' back.

"Anybody else tailing us?" he heard a man shout. "Talk—or, by God, we'll skin you alive."

"I tell you," Thomas replied

harshly, "there was nobody with me."

Then the scene was shut off as someone dropped a burlap curtain over the door of the cave.

Cautiously Duff Braden got to his feet. His hand gripping tightly the butt of his automatic, he padded to the opening of the cave. Twenty feet, ten, five—he was almost at the opening now, when something small and round and hard pressed suddenly against his backbone. A voice whispered in his ear:

"Looking for somebody?"

**D**UFF BRADEN froze, his spine tingling as he half-anticipated the burning impact of hot lead crashing through his body.

"Why," he drawled, realizing himself how weak his explanation was. "I was hunting for 'coons. Thought I saw a light here—and, well, I thought I'd kinda investigate."

"Hunting for 'coons, eh?" the other repeated mockingly. "In a place where there ain't no 'coons, and without a rifle. Hunting for 'coons with a forty-five gat. Drop it, big boy—and I won't ask you twice."

Braden permitted his automatic to thud to the ground.

"That's swell. Now s'pose you come along and join your pal. We got him, too."

Braden knew why the man was so careful not to make any noise. He suspected others closing in on the hideout, and was anxious not to alarm them.

"I haven't done anything," said Braden, a whine in his voice.

"Never mind that hooley," the man snarled. "March straight ahead."

Braden shrugged. Obediently, he stepped forward. And then he whirled. His right fist crashed against his captor's jaw. And his left hand, with the speed of a striking rattler, flashed down to the other's revolver. His thumb caught the hammer of the weapon, the firing pin biting deeply into his flesh. But he'd stopped the report which would have brought the other gunmen boiling out of that cave.

The man dropped to his knees as

Braden jerked the revolver free. And before the other had a chance to cry out, the blue barrel of that .38 crashed across his skull. Slowly, the gunman toppled forward. Panting, sweat pouring down his face as he realized what a close shave he'd had, Braden stooped over the unconscious man. He dragged him fifty feet to the right, strapped him to a tree with the man's own belt, and gagged him.

The man, he knew, was a sentry. Sooner or later, someone was bound to come out to relieve him. In which case another man would have a mighty bad headache when he came to.

Thus Braden meant to cut down the odds a bit. Otherwise, an open gun deal was suicide.

As he softly crept back closer to the cave, one thought worried him. What were they doing to Thomas now? Still torturing him? If so, the thing to do was to damn the odds, and barge in there with blazing guns!

He just had time to pick up his automatic, the sentry's revolver in his left hand, when the burlap swung back again. He caught another glimpse of the cave's interior. Thomas was still there, hanging limply in his bonds, his back a welter of ugly criss-cross marks. But Braden could see the movements of his chest, and knew that Thomas still lived.

The man who now stepped out of the cave could not, Braden was certain, see him. For he just came out of a lighted area, whereas Braden's eyes were accustomed to the darkness. So he stood there quietly until he heard the other's soft hail:

"Blackie! Blackie Himes!"

"Here!" Braden spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"This is Burgess. Chief says for you to go in. What the hell's eating you? You sound as though you're scared to death."

"Can't stand this damn country," Braden whispered. "Gives me the willies."

"That's funny," said Burgess.

"You're supposed to be a Westerner, ain't you?"

The bandit was quite close to Braden now. Suddenly he flashed a searchlight full into Braden's face. Then he recoiled, his right hand darting to his holster. But he never had a chance to reach it. With one tigerish leap, Braden was upon him. The automatic in his right hand created a short arc. There was a sickening thud—and Burgess collapsed like a spent accordion.

And then a scream—a wild, high-pitched scream of pain came from the cave.

"Damn 'em!" Duff Braden forced through clenched teeth.

They were torturing Jake Thomas again. Quickly, Braden scooped up Burgess' gun. He wedged it in his belt. His own automatic in his right hand, a revolver in the left, he ran swiftly to the opening of the cave.

**R**EACHING the burlap door, he pushed it aside with the muzzle of his gun, slipped through. A tunnel here led for perhaps twelve feet into the cave itself. Braden, knowing himself invisible in the darkness, stood still, his eyes blazing as he stared at the scene ahead.

Now he identified the stench which permeated his nostrils when he stepped into the tunnel. It was the smell of burning flesh. A man holding a candle, a grin on his thick lips, stood near Thomas' feet. The rancher was conscious now, writhing on the plank.

Then Braden sucked in his breath as he identified the man standing behind the one holding the candle. It was Jeff Harbord, now listed by the Bureau as America's new Public Enemy Number One—an escaped convict who, for months now, had been blazing a lurid trail of murder and robbery.

Harbord drawled in his slow, bored voice: "Thought that candle at his feet would bring him to."

There were five other men in the cave, all staring with sadistic gloating at the helpless rancher. Harbord now stood up off his boulder.

He approached Thomas, grabbed him by the hair and banged his face against the plank.

"For the last time," he gritted, "will you talk? I know damn well you didn't come out here alone. Who sent you? And who came with you?"

"I've already said everything I wanted to say," Thomas replied hoarsely. "You know you're going to kill me anyway. Why don't you get it over with?"

Harbord sighed, shook his head. He stepped back.

"All right, Clark," he murmured, "you enjoy this sort of thing. Give him the quirt again. The fool will either talk or die under it."

The bandit called Clark stepped up with the heavy quirt. There was a smile on the man's thick lips. He *would* enjoy it!

And then Duff Braden traversed swiftly the tunnel and stepped into the cave.

"I wouldn't," he said mildly, "if I were you, Clark. Unless you want a nice little hole between your eyes."

Clark froze, the quirt raised over his shoulder. A tense, spine-tingling silence now hung over the cave. Every man in that cave stared at the grim figure in the doorway. Braden saw their right hands twitch, fingers splayed. He knew each was considering his chances on drawing his gat—against a man who had the draw on them, the triggers of his guns depressed almost to the point of firing.

"Sure, rats," Braden said mockingly. "You'd like to, but you won't take a chance. You're welcome to try it, though."

Still silence. Thomas twisted in his bonds, his bloodstained face now staring at Braden. Then he laughed harshly.

"I thought you'd come if I only held out long enough."

Harbord's voice now cut in: "Who the hell are you?"

"Duff Braden, G-man," Braden murmured. "You might've heard of me, Harbord. Untie Thomas!"

He saw those twitching right



hands begin to move, and he grated, his voice no longer mild:

"The first man to touch a gat gets a slug through the bridge of his nose! I said—turn Thomas loose, Harbord! Going to do it?"

"Of course," said Harbord, turning upward the palms of his hands. "You're holding all the cards, Braden!"

The outlaw's meekness didn't fool Braden. His eyes were narrow, watchful as Harbord stepped closer to Thomas and began fumbling his bonds.

"Keep on *this* side of him, Harbord! Try to use him as a shield and I'll—"

"Oh, let him try it," Thomas put in grimly. "And then blaze away anyway. I wouldn't mind fading out if that rat goes with me."

Harbord, however, heeded Braden's command. He stepped to the other side of the plank, then stooped to untie the knots lashing Thomas' wrists. Braden's eyes ever roved about the cave, the revolver in his left hand centered on Harbord, the automatic in his right menacing the others.

Thomas finally free, Harbord stepped back. For a moment the rancher seemed to sag, his knees buckling from under him. Braden saw him flex his wrists, fingers working convulsively. Then, without warning, like a jungle beast leaping upon its prey, Thomas hurled himself at Harbord's throat.

The outlaw fell back against the wall, his right hand jerking an automatic out of his shoulder holster. Once, twice, it cracked viciously. Braden, trying to get a shot in without hitting Thomas, who was between himself and the outlaw, saw the rancher's body jerk twice before the terrific impact of the bullets. He was hit—and yet his hands found Harbord's throat. Gnarled, big hands, they closed, and then smashed Harbord's head against the rocky wall. Both went down, the rancher's hands still at Harbord's throat.

Then a gurgling scream came from Harbord. As if it were the signal,

the other men desperately went for their guns. Braden's thin lips twisted grimly. A fight to the finish now! No quarter asked—and none would be given.

In a half-crouch, he began jerking triggers. And with every explosion of his guns he was reminded of the roar that train must have made hurling backward down that steep grade to destruction. When two slugs from his automatic found the body of a bow-legged, rat-faced little gunman at the right, and the man, his hands clapped over his stomach, began screaming like a hysterical woman, he thought of the screaming women who died in that wreck.

"COME on, rats!" he shouted. "We are still trading 'em."

He was half-crazy, and he knew it.

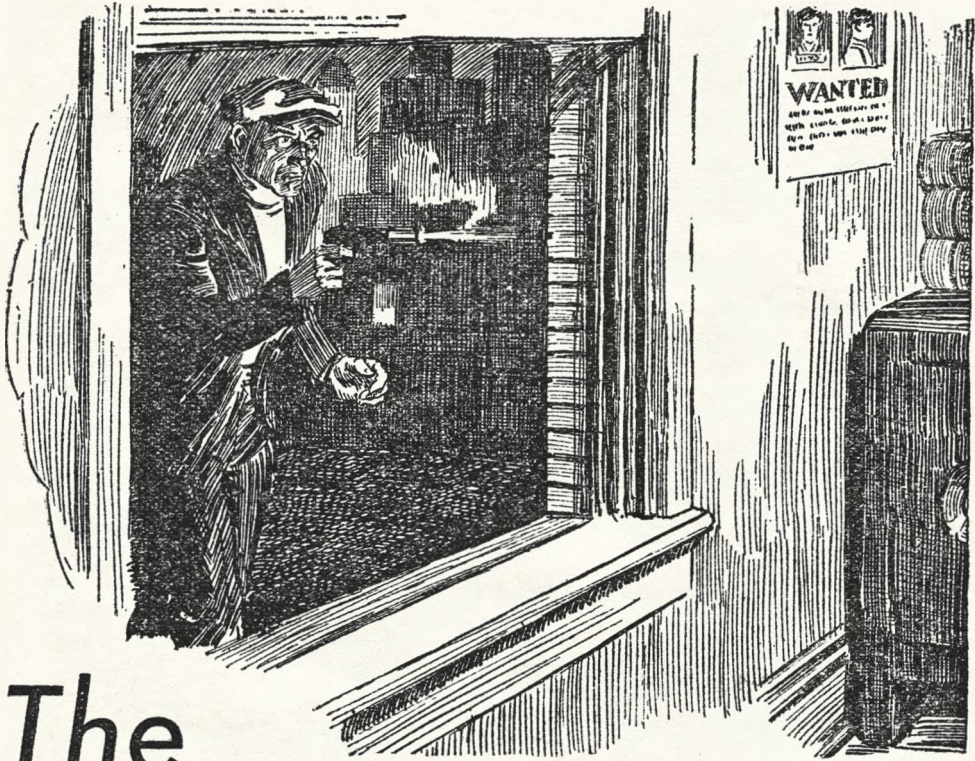
The cave was a hell of ear-splitting staccato of guns rapidly emptied, whining lead ricocheting off the rock walls, screaming men clawing at the earthen floor. Half the time Braden hardly knew what he was doing. He'd see a man's figure, and he'd jerk the trigger of either automatic or revolver. And then somehow there would be a grey-black wall where a man had crouched only a split second ago, and a body would writhe on the earthen floor.

With a stunning abruptness, it was all over. The silence seemed incredible in its implication of finality, and strangely unreal. The acrid odor of gunpowder tearing at his lungs, Braden looked around slowly.

A man sat with his back to the wall at the right, staring, staring at the G-man. But his eyes were sightless, and already glazed with death. Another man was still writhing on the floor a few feet away—writhing like a snake with a broken back. And even as Braden looked at him, the body stiffened.

Two other men were crumpled in the left corner of the cave. Braden remembered emptying his automatic in that direction. The man on the

(Concluded on page 144)



# The MURDER SHOE

*A Complete Novelette of Stalking Death*

By H. RALPH GOLLER

*Author of "The Outcast," "The Clue Maker," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

### *The Shoe*

**D**ETECTIVE JOE LISTEN, first grade, frowned across the desk at his scowling superior, Captain Burken.

"So you're afraid our friendly enemy, Private Detective Gene Crable will put the finger on the scandal

ring before we do, eh?" he asked, his eyes dropping to the photograph on the desk; a photo of a smiling, somewhat inebriated bank vice-president holding a scantily clad night club entertainer on his knee.

"I'm almost sure of it," the grizzled captain replied sourly. "That banker whose picture you're looking at hired Crable two days ago to get him out

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Detective Joe Listen, Crime Avenger, Cracks

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*A flashing streak of flame answered the roar of his police positive*

of a jam. An hour ago Crable phoned that he'd have the ringleaders ready for our hotel before morning. Two days—and you've been working on the case a week and haven't even arrested a suspect. And you're supposed to be the best blackmail dick on the force!"

Joe Listen's yellow-flecked eyes flashed grimly beneath black, bushy eyebrows. He rolled his half smoked cigar to the opposite corner of his big mouth.

"I've got a suspect all right," he

said. "Just gimme time an' I'll get the evidence."

"Time!" the captain clipped. "With the newspapers giving us hell three times a day. Just because you've sworn to put Mauler Hodkins behind the bars, you suspect him." He stuck a thick cigar in his mouth. "Well, for your sake I hope he's guilty, and Crable's on a false scent. But if you don't show results soon—"

His harsh voice trailed off, leaving his thoughts unsaid.

Joe stood up.

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## Down Hard on a Killers' Scandal Ring!

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"I'll get results," he promised. "An' Hodkins is guilty as hell. The frill in that picture is one of his entertainers."

Joe Listen stalked out of the station. He was far from being pleased at being called on the carpet when he was doing his best. On the street he paused to glare up the fog enshrouded street. Summer fog. It was almost a drizzle, and the Fourth of July but three days away.

"Damn th' foolish rich, anyway," he growled. "If they'd chase around with their own wives and husbands they wouldn't be gettin' themselves in a jam an' have to pay blackmailers to keep their dirty mouths closed!"

Swearing under his breath, Joe Listen began walking. At the moment he didn't care where, but Mauler Hodkins' Midnight Club was on Marken Street some six blocks away. He directed his thick-soled brogans toward it. He'd have a look in the joint. Maybe he could pick up something.

That Mauler Hodkins was the ring-leader of the Scandal Ring, he was sure. Hodkins was just the type who preyed on foolish people. His talons were everywhere, searching, grasping for bits of scandal he could use to blackmail the foolish. If they didn't get themselves in a compromising position, he made sure they did. His joint was just the place for that.

In the last month the ring had caused three divorce suits, and two suicides. All the victims were wealthy men with responsible positions—just such men as frequented the Midnight Club. No one but the ring knew how many had paid large sums of protection money. So far only one victim had squawked to the police. That was the banker, Samuel Pierson, whose photo Joe had seen on the captain's desk. The ring had a way of getting those pictures.

"Get a man drunk an' he'll do most anything," Joe muttered. "An' when he sobers up an' gets a squint at himself holding a moll on his knee, he'd pay rather than be ruined by a dirty scandal."

The ring was clever. They never

showed themselves. They just slipped a letter containing one of the photographs and a cryptic demand for money, or exposure, under an office door or into a mail chute. Collections were just as clever. Joe hadn't been able to pick up a clue in that direction, but he knew that if he could find where the plates were developed and the pictures printed, he could build up his evidence chain.

**T**HE sudden crash of glass brought the detective to a halt. Something thudded at his feet. He jerked back, stared up.

He was looking up at a red-brick, three-story rooming house. The ground floor was taken up by offices, the second and third story by the rooming house. Not a light shone in any of the dirty windows. The place had the appearance of vacancy, but Joe knew different. The glass pane in a window on the third story was broken. But not even a shadow flickered in that open space.

Then he glanced at the object at his feet. It was a man's shoe. He stooped and picked it up, stared at it. It was long, narrow, well polished. He glanced up at the broken window. Nothing showed. But someone had tossed the shoe through the window. Who? Why?

Suspicious, Joe Listen stepped under a fog enshrouded street light, studied the shoe. Big hands turned the shoe over, grim, yellow-flecked eyes studying it. His thick fingers contacted something sticky on the sole. He held the sole to the light. Blood! Suddenly his eyes bulged, the cigar stub dropped from his mouth.

Scrawled on the sole in blood was the single word, "Murder!" Printed in rude, red letters.

"Murder!" the detective gasped, stunned.

But Joe Listen was stunned but a moment. His big frame instantly became spring steel. He leaped for the dark doorway leading up to the rooming house above. The door was locked. He stepped back, drove his thick muscled shoulder against it. Once, twice, three times. The heavy

door groaned, protested, then the casing splintered. The door banged open.

Shoving the shoe in his pocket, the detective palmed a flashlight in his left hand, and Colt police gun in the right. The flash sent a white cone of light up the stairway. He raced up the creaking stairs, ready for anything.

Murder!

He kicked open the door at the head of the stairs and found himself in a deserted lobby and office. A glance told him that the house was supposedly untenanted. He raced up to the third floor, paused a moment to get his directions then ran down a hall. Closed doors were on either side of him. He flashed his light down the hall on the doors opening to the rooms facing the street. The fourth door was open. He paused before it, tense and ready. His flash picked out the broken window. He leaped inside, expecting anything, light sweeping the room.

The room was empty.

**A**N inspection of the floor showed nothing but dust. Not a drop of blood was visible. The detective mouthed a curse. Whoever had thrown the shoe had been near the window—had to be. Yet, he realized, it could have been thrown from the hall. A desperate man could have thrown it from a number of positions.

Joe knew he should get in touch with Headquarters at once, but when a man was being murdered, minutes might save a life. He swung around to make a search of the floor. Swung around just as a heavy step sounded behind him.

Desperately, he tried to get his flash on the man behind him, his gun on him. He was an instant too late. A gun butt swished down even as he turned. It crashed down on his felt hat, crashed against his skull with a resounding thud.

He half spun around; stars flashed before his eyes. He felt his senses reeling, then he crashed to the floor, and oblivion.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Corpse*



**J**OE LISTEN opened his eyes, groaned. His head roared, ached, white fire was before his eyes. Then his senses began to slowly return. His eyes began to focus on objects. The white fire before his eyes was a flashlight, held in the pudgy

hand of a uniformed cop.

"What th' hell!" he growled, and tried to sit up. It was then he discovered he was lying on a bed. He fell back, closed his eyes to drive away his dizziness, tried to think.

"That's what I want to know, Listen," the harness cop grunted. "I come walkin' down the street and see busted glass on the sidewalk. I look up an' see a busted window; then I see the door to this joint busted wide open. I come up here an' find you stretched out in bed takin' a snooze. What's the matter? The old lady kick you out?"

Joe swore, sat up with an effort, and slid his feet to the floor. His head throbbed, but he fought down the pain, the dizziness. Rage coursed through his blood. He glared at the big cop.

"Somebody heaved a shoe through the window as I was walking by, and I came up here to see what it was all about. I got a whack on my head for my trouble, that's what," Joe growled, standing up. Then he remembered the shoe. His hand grabbed for his pocket.

"It's gone!"

"What's gone?" The cop looked dubious.

"The shoe," Joe rasped, and began a frantic search.

He discovered his gun in his shoulder holster, his flashlight in his hip pocket where he always carried it. The fact didn't strike him as odd at the moment. He flashed his own light about the room. It was just as it had been; only the shoe was missing.

Who ever had conked him had got the shoe.

He whirled on the cop.

"Did you search this joint, Rafferty? Did you see anyone?"

"Didn't have time. You looked so darned funny sprawled on that bed—"

"Mebbe it was funny to you," Joe snapped, blood boiling. "Mebbe this bump on my head looks funny too."

He eased off his hat, and felt the egg on his head. Rafferty turned his light on the bump. There was dried blood in Joe's hair.

"You sure got a beauty. Musta surprised some bums lookin' for a flop."

"Bums, hell!" Joe swore, starting for the door. "Come on. We'll search this dump. We won't find anything. But we'll look. I gotta hunch I know who beaned me. Only one punk would be so considerate as to put me to bed after swattin' me."

"Your old friend Mauler, eh?"

"Right. I'll get him this time."

They searched the two floors of the rooming house. They found just what Joe expected to find—nothing. There was a rear entrance, but the door opening to the rooming house was barred on the inside. No one could have escaped through the door, then barred it on the inside. But the detective was making sure. He slid the bar back, opened the door and, stepped into a dirty vestibule.

**H**IS flashlight jerked about. There were three doors. He inspected the door opening to the alley first. It was barred on the inside. Next he glanced at the door which probably opened to the basement. It was padlocked. The third door opened to a store. It was barred on the inside.

"Couldn't have got out this way," Rafferty grunted.

"We'll have a look at the attic while we're at it," Joe said.

He closed and barred the door, then led the way up the stairs.

A five minute search and they found the trapdoor leading to the attic. Joe located a box, climbed up on it, and shoved up the trapdoor. His light revealed an open trapdoor

in the roof. He drew himself up and stuck his head out into the night. Nothing on the roof.

Dropping back to the floor, he gingerly rubbed the bump on his head. His mind was racing.

"Someone entered through this trapdoor, got caught, heaved a shoe through the window to attract attention, then when I came tearing up, whoever nabbed him brought his gun butt down on my head, and went about his business of disposing of his first victim."

"Huh!" Rafferty looked skeptical. "Who do you reckon it was?"

"The victim?" Joe stuck a cigar in his mouth, bit off the end. "I'll make a guess it was a private dick by the name of Crable. It looked like one of his fancy shoes anyway."

**T**HAT the man who had heaved the shoe was Gene Crable, Joe was certain. He was equally certain that Crable was on something hot. There was a reason for everything he did, foolish though it might seem. And that reason was the scandal ring. Joe was sure of this.

"What you reckon Crable was doin' here, breakin' into a vacant roomin' house?" Rafferty asked, scratching his bald head.

Joe scratched a match, fired his cigar.

"Don't know, but I got a hunch Crable was gettin' too hot for somebody's health, so they led him into a trap. This vacant joint was made to order for 'em. Drop a clue here and they knew he'd come to investigate. They could bump him and it might be weeks before his body was found. But Crable heaved that shoe an' spoiled their plans."

"But where's the body?"

"No body, no murder," Joe grunted. "Come on. Let's take a look in front. They didn't leave by the rear door, so they had to go out the front. An' if they were carryin' a dead man— Sure you didn't see anybody—a car drive away?"

Rafferty shook his head.

"You musta been out a long time." Joe glanced at his watch.

"Huh! Half hour, mebbe! Long enough."

On the sidewalk they found one single drop of blood. It was still sticky. Tire tracks on the pavement attested the fact that a car had recently pulled up to the curb and driven away again.

"That settles it," Joe muttered. "This dump was just a trap, nothin' more."

"What we gonna do about this dump?" Rafferty asked.

"Shut th' door an' leave it. Nothin' here," Joe grunted, thoughtfully. "I'm gonna check on Crable."

He started for a drugstore two blocks away.

At the telephone booth, he thumbed through the directory until he found Crable's hotel number. He buzzed the hotel, inquired for Crable. He waited two long minutes; then was informed Crable was out. The clerk suggested he try his office.

He was about to give the private dick's office a ring, but thought better of it. Crable hadn't escaped from the rooming house. He had been carried out. Joe was sure of that. He knew that his best bet, if he hoped to put the finger on the ring, was to search for Crable. Yet he didn't know where to search. He was just as much in the dark as ever. But he must find Crable, help him. There was always the possibility that he was still alive.

"But I'm still bettin' Mauler Hodkins is mixed up in this," he muttered as he stalked out of the store. "He's a crafty punk, but he's got to slip sometime."

The big detective leaped for a cruising cab. Thoughts of Mauler Hodkins set him on fire. Hodkins had evaded the law for years because he always did the unexpected. Just such things as putting a cop to bed after knocking him senseless. That was just like Hodkins. He would dispose of Crable in the same unexpected manner, if Crable was the victim, and Hodkins the man who had trapped him.

"The Associated Building," Joe clipped, as he hopped the cab. "Make it snappy!"

Joe handed the cab driver a dollar bill as he hit the sidewalk in front of the Associated Building. Then he was hurrying inside. The elevator was just discharging several late office workers. He crowded in.

"Top floor, son." As the elevator shot up, he asked: "See anything of Crable, the private shamus, tonight?"

"Went down 'bout an hour ago."

"I'll go up anyway," Joe grunted. Then a thought struck him. "You didn't by any chance bring up a big fella', flat-nosed, looks like a prize fighter, eh?"

The colored operator's white teeth showed.

"I sho' did. Got out at the eighth floor. He hasn't come down yet."

**T**HE detective's heartbeat quickened with excitement. He grinned crookedly. So Hodkins had come up a few minutes before, got off at the eighth. There was just one reason why. Joe had a hunch he knew.

The elevator stopped, the door clanged open, and Joe stepped into the hall. Crable's office was in the rear of the buildings overlooking the roof of a lower building. He hurried down the hall to the door that bore Gene Crable's name and business.

Joe palmed his gun. He had no intention of being caught off guard again, not with Hodkins somewhere in the building. No light shone under the office door. He hesitated a moment, then tried the door. The knob turned; the door swung open. Unlocked. Odd. His heart beat faster.

He leaped inside, gun ready. He found the light switch, snapped it. The room was suddenly illuminated. It was the reception room, furnished as prosperously as Crable dressed. It was empty.

Cat-footing across the carpet, Joe tried the private office door. It opened at his touch. Like the reception room, it was dark. Again, Joe found and snapped the light switch. As the lights illuminated the room, the detective caught his breath, then swore.

Gene Crable sat at his desk, head pillowed on an arm as if asleep. He was sleeping a sleep from which he would never awaken.

He was dead. Murdered.

Joe's eyes swept the room. Assured he was alone with the dead, he stepped gingerly forward. Blood was on the desk, blood that still seeped from a bullet wound in the detective's handsome head. Joe bit his lip, then his eyes flashed to the dead man's feet. Both shoes were on. There was blood on the left one.

He stooped down; pulled the limp foot out. For a long moment he stared at the sole. The word murder was still faintly visible on the sole.

It was the same shoe!

Slowly, with fingers that trembled just a little, he undid the laces, pulled the shoe off. He turned it over in his big hands, examined it minutely, ran his fingers inside, felt about. Suddenly, his eyes lighted up, the yellow flecks glittered like frosted agate.

"That's just like Gene," he muttered, a grim, deadly smile twitching at his lips.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Fight on the Roof*



LISTEN carefully replaced the shoe, picked up his gun, and stood up, his face a grim mask. The yellow flecks in his eyes became live coals of suppressed rage. Gene Crable had been a friend of his. They had both been detectives on

the force, until Crable had resigned to become a private sleuth. The murder fired him with thoughts of revenge.

"I'll get the rat that murdered you, Gene," he vowed in a voice harsh with rage. "You uncovered evidence that would send the ring to the pen. They murdered you because of that. But, by the devils of hell, I'll find that evidence an' make 'em pay!"

Gun gripped in a clammy fist, Joe stared about the office. It was as spick and span, as neat as Crable had been in life. Then he saw the open window. He stepped to it, glanced out. He was looking at the flat roof of the opposite building. A roof some four feet below the window sill, and flush with the Associated Building.

He could guess how the body had been planted. He could guess what had happened at the vacant rooming house. Crable had been wounded, cornered like a rat. He had jerked off his shoe, written the word murder on the sole of it with his own blood, and heaved it through the window, knowing that its finding would cause an investigation. Then he had been murdered—shot with a silenced gun, no doubt.

That could be the reason why Joe had heard no shots. Then while Joe had lain unconscious in the rooming house, Crable's murderers had brought his body to his own office. They had brought the body up the fire escape of the adjoining building to the roof. Mauler Hodkins had come up to the office, picked the lock, and opened the window so the body could be deposited in the office.

Joe cursed the cold-blooded killer. Then he was again staring at the slain man. He straightened the body in the swivel chair. He saw the gun gripped in the dead hand, a hand that rested in the dead man's lap.

"Made it look like suicide," he muttered. "But they didn't see what was written on the shoe. Just put it back on. They didn't know he had phoned headquarters before he left to be murdered. I'd been dead if they had. That's the slip that's gonna land Hodkins, damn his murdering heart!"

He reached for the telephone on the desk. As he did so he glimpsed the safe in the corner. The door was ajar. He stared at it a moment. Crable would never leave his safe open. There was just one answer. A safe artist had opened it. The detective's lips twisted. The Ring was overlooking nothing. He lifted the phone.

A slight crunch at the window made Joe whirl, gun up and ready.



He squeezed the trigger the instant he glimpsed the dark shadow on the roof beyond the open window. His gun spat flame, thundered like a cannon in the room. The phone dropped unheeded on the desk.

A flashing streak of flame answered the roar of his police positive. There was no sound. Just the dull crimson flash. A small caliber bullet smashed the desk beside the detective. His gun thundered again. Then he was leaping for the window.

Another bullet smacked the window casing. But the big detective gave no heed. The flash of a Neon sign on the opposite building outlined a man racing across the flat roof. He leaped through the window, dropped to the roof, and was hastening after the shadow.

His gun thundered again as the fleeing man dropped over the side. Then another gun roared. This time there was no silencer. A bullet jerked at Joe's coat. He fired at the flash, saw a man leap out into space and disappear.

Instantly, he was racing toward the spot. He came to the edge of the roof, stared down at another roof ten feet below. A shadow was darting across the roof.

"Halt!" he shouted, jerking up his gun to fire again.

Just as he squeezed the trigger an angry bee struck his felt hat, knocking it from his head. He ducked instinctively. Then he glimpsed a second shadow darting across the lower roof. The man with the silencer. Then, before he could regain his equilibrium, both gunmen disappeared through a roof door.

**J**OE LISTEN swore. He was about to leap to the roof below and give chase when a thought flashed into his mind. Neither fleeing man had been bulky enough to be Mauler Hodkins. And Hodkins was still in the building.

"Hell, no murderer would hang around that long," he muttered, hesitating. "By God, it was a decoy. I scared 'em away before they got what they were lookin' for. Hell!"

He whirled, and went hot-footing it back to the detective's office. If Hodkins had returned, he meant to interview him.

Gun ready, he raced up to the lighted window. Ten feet from the window, he glimpsed a shadowed hand holding a gun. At the same instant the gun flamed, roared. The bullet crashed against the detective's police shield. The force of the bullet stopped his forward rush. Excruciating pain took his breath away. He tottered for an instant, fighting unconsciousness, then he sprawled on the wet roof. His senses whirled, dimmed. He jerked convulsively, then lay still.

But his senses didn't leave him entirely. Gasping for breath, he fought down the pain, staggered to his feet. His hand went to his shield, pinned to his vest. It was bent, battered. He felt his aching ribs, guessed that at least two were fractured.

He mouthed a curse. Fractured ribs wouldn't stop him. Not now. Fighting down the pain in his chest, he picked up his Colt, staggered toward the window.

The office was dark. He sent the beam of the flashlight into the room. His would-be murderer had escaped. He crawled through the window, and flashed his light on the open safe. The door stood open, its contents strewn on the floor. Even the desk had been ransacked.

A glance in the outer office showed it empty. Then, grim as death itself, he grabbed up the telephone, dialed Headquarters. To the desk sergeant he barked crisp orders and hung up.

"Thinks he got me, damn him!" he muttered.

Then he was racing through the outer office into the hall. Deserted! But he didn't expect to see Hodkins. Not Hodkins. He was a fast worker—too damned clever to be caught near a murder. But he wouldn't get away.

Pounding down the hall to the elevators, Joe held his thumb on the button. Whirring cables told him the elevator was going down.

"Taking Hodkins down," he said.

It was a full two minutes before the elevator shot up. Joe cursed the delay. When the door clanged open two radio officers stepped into the hall.

"What's up, Joe?" the foremost asked. "We heard shooting on the roof, then got a flash saying murder had been committed up here."

"It's murder all right," the big detective snarled. "Who got out of the elevator just now?"

The uniformed cops shrugged his broad shoulders.

"No friend of ours," one said.

Joe whirled on the frightened elevator boy.

"Was it the flat nosed pug?"

The frightened Negro nodded.

"Sho' was. Him and the lawyer fella on the eighth floor."

"Last room down the hall," Joe clipped at the radio officers, pointing his gun muzzle to indicate the hall. Then he leaped into the elevator. "Down, an' make it snappy!"

The elevator went down like a falling rock; jerked to a stop at the ground floor. Joe stepped out to bump into Captain Burken.

Burken stared at the detective's harsh face, then at the gun still clutched in his fist.

"What's the row? And what's the gun out for?" The captain looked sour.

Joe quickly explained, reloading his gun as he did so.

"I'm after Hodkins," he finished. "He's back of this or I'm a Chinaman. See you later."

**H**E left the captain staring after him. The Homicide Squad was just piling out of a police car when he reached the street, but he had eyes for only the big man standing beside a shiny new Cadillac sedan ten paces down the street. Mauler Hodkins.

He started toward the ex-pugilist just as Hodkins turned to stare at the commotion the arrival of the squad car had aroused.

"Just a moment, Mauler," the detective called. There was a smile on his lips now—the smile of a fox. He had no evidence on the big crook.

Not yet. But if Hodkins had shot him—believed him dead—he wanted to see his face.

"Well, well, if it ain't Detective Listen," Hodkins chuckled in a silky voice, a voice least expected from a man of his bulk. "What's all the fuss. Somebody get hurt?"

Joe's grim, sharp eyes swept the big man. Hodkins was over six feet tall, built in proportion. A gorilla in strength. Black, gimletlike eyes were set deep in a bullet shaped head, with a face that appeared flat because of the flattened nose. Buck teeth, yellowed with cigars, now showed in a grin. There was no fear in his eyes. No surprise at seeing the detective showed in them. He appeared at ease.

"I just heard you'd been on the eighth floor," Joe said, chagrined. "There's been a murder committed. Thought I'd ask you if you'd seen any suspicious looking punks hanging around."

The smile left Hodkins' flat face.

"Still hope to pin a murder rap on me, huh? Well, it don't work. I went up to see my mouthpiece. Been with him ever since. Any crime in that?"

Joe paused to stick a cigar in his mouth. He knew Hodkins was guilty, possibly not of firing the shot that killed Crable, but guilty nevertheless. He had been in Crable's offices, but he had an alibi in the shyster lawyer. Dangerous ground to tread on, but Joe was used to it. It was going to be a battle of wits.

"Not that I know of, Mauler," Joe replied, searching for a match. "But I'm still living in hopes that you'll make a slip sometime."

"Well, I won't, flatfoot," Hodkins snarled. "Now if you've had your say, I'll be getting back to my club."

He heaved himself into the sedan beside a sharp faced man; spoke to the liveried driver.

Joe bit savagely on his cigar, but let him go. There was nothing else he could do.

As the big sedan pulled away from the curb, the detective stepped into a yellow cab.

"Number 110 Marken," he directed.

The cab pulled away from the curb into traffic, whirled around a corner. Joe glanced back to see a Cadillac dart in behind the cab. He swore. Hodkins was just clever enough to follow him.

"Thinks I'm gonna search that rooming house, eh?" he growled under his breath. "Afraid mebbe he did make a slip. A good guess." Aloud, he said: "Never mind Marken. Drive to the Rosslyn. Let me off on Main Street. Then drive around the corner and wait for me."

Joe stepped to the walk, paused to light his cigar. As he held the flame to the top, he caught a glimpse of Hodkins' sedan at the curbing. He hurried into the hotel, walked briskly through the lobby, and ducked out the side entrance on Fifth Street. The cab was waiting for him. He stepped in and was whisked away.

"Now drive around the block, past the main entrance again."

As the cab passed the hotel entrance, Joe ducked down out of sight, just keeping his eyes above the glass. He grinned as he saw Hodkins stepping swiftly into his Cadillac, eyes on the hotel entrance. Of the driver, there was no sight.

Hodkins might guess he had been given the slip, but not until Joe had a chance to make a search of the rooming house. Gene Crable had found something. When he found it he would have his evidence.

## CHAPTER IV

### *What the Basement Revealed*



HE left the cab a block from the rooming house. He stepped into a dark doorway, waited to make certain he wasn't being followed. He wanted to make sure he wasn't seen entering the rooming house. He didn't want Hodkins to surprise him.

The big crook was just crafty enough to return to make sure he hadn't

overlooked anything. His spies would know by this time that the rooming house had been left unguarded.

Yet Joe doubted if he would return. If he did do the unexpected—Joe grinned crookedly.

Assured that he wasn't followed, Joe started toward the alley behind the rooming house. He would enter the way Crable had entered, begin his search the same way.

It was a night to prowl. The fog was thicker, making visibility uncertain. At the mouth of the unlighted alley, he paused to glance around. Not a soul was visible. He ducked into the alley, became a ghostlike wraith gliding through the black shadows. His brogans made not a sound as he made his way toward the rear of the rooming house.

Standing in the shadows, he made out the outlines of a fire escape. Beside him was a barred window. He caught hold of the bars, pulled himself up on the sill. By pulling up hand over hand he was able to reach up and catch hold of the lower landing of the fire-escape. Once on the landing it was a simple matter to climb to the roof.

The roof trapdoor was open as he had left it. Undoubtedly Crable's murderers didn't have time to discover it was open. Then they didn't know that the detective was going to toss his shoe through the window. They had had to hurry.

Clamping his now dead cigar between his teeth, Joe lowered himself to the attic, then to the floor below. The building was as silent as a tomb. Cautiously, he made his way into the hall, hands before him feeling his way.

Suddenly, his fingers contacted something sticky. He jerked his hand away from the wall, snapped on his flash. There was a smear of blood on the plaster. He nodded grimly. Crable had passed through the hall desperately wounded. He had had just enough time to jerk off his shoe, finger the word murder on the sole, and toss it through the window before his killers reached him.

There were more bloody finger-

prints on the wall. Listen followed them to the stairs, down the stairs to the floor below. There they ended.

"They hit him here," the detective decided. "He was coming up the stairs. That means he was below. In the basement. Checks."

Yellow-flecked eyes gleaming, his flash lighting the way before him, he went down the stairs to the door that opened into the vestibule which gave access to the alley.

He slid the bolt back, cautiously pushed the door open with his foot. Warily, he stepped into the tiny room that gave access to the store, the basement, and the alley.

His light lingered longest on the door opening to the store. The light penetrated the dirty glass revealing it as a printing establishment. He nodded grimly. So far so good.

Then he gave his attention to the basement door. It was secured by a hasp and a heavy padlock, but there were unmistakable signs that the screws had been recently removed from the hasp. Crable's work.

Listen swore. He had no screw-driver, and the lock wasn't the kind that could be picked.

**S**UDDENLY, instinct warned Listen that someone was near. He snapped out his light, stood tense, listening. Sweat beaded his brow. He was sure he had heard a sound—a key scraping a lock. Then he heard footsteps in the printing shop. They were approaching.

Like a wraith, Joe glided for the stair door leading up to the rooming house above. He closed the door behind him; barred it just as the printing shop door swung open. A slim shadow glided through the opening. Listen held his eye to the dirty glass.

With bated breath, he warily watched the man as he stood in the open doorway, staring about. Joe's clammy hand gripped his Colt as the man tried the door he crouched behind. Then the tiny beam of a flashlight snapped on, darted about. With a grunt of satisfaction, the slim man snapped out the light, stepped to the

rear door, shot the bolt, and eased the door open.

"Okay, Mauler."

Mauler Hodkins, darted inside, closed and barred the door. Keys rattled. Listen peered through the dirty glass and saw Mauler fumbling with the heavy padlock. The lock yielded; the door swung open. The two men trooped down creaky stairs, closing the door behind them.

The moment the door closed, Listen was in the dirty vestibule, ear to the basement door. Harsh, angry voices reached him. Hodkins was peeved about something. Listen was sure he knew what, but he wanted to know more.

Cautiously, he eased open the basement door a crack. The basement was illuminated in dull light. He opened the door wider, peered down. The voices were coming from the far end of the basement. He got down on hands and knees; stretched his neck until he could see into the room. What he saw caused him to suck in his breath. Trays, bottles, plate racks, lined a shelf. A photo finishing room.

Gene Crable had found the place where the Scandal Ring developed their compromising pictures. Their headquarters. No wonder he had been murdered.

Mauler Hodkins was swearing harshly.

"Damn you for punks, anyway! Why in hell couldn't you kill that damned flatfoot, Listen?"

"What about yourself," snarled a man Listen recognized as Hack Bean, a gunman hood of Hodkins. "Yuh said yuh put th' heat on him from ten feet. Why'n hell didn't yuh kill him?"

"I thought I had," Hodkins growled. "He went down, damn it! I musta hit him somewhere."

Joe Listen grinned crookedly. The pains in his breast had subsided to a dull ache. Hodkins was going to pay for that ache—tonight. The evidence he needed was in the basement. He gripped his Colt, started to get to his feet.

He was halfway to his feet when

he heard the step behind him. He cursed himself for not remembering that there had been two men with Hodkins at Crable's office. In that split instant he realized that the third man had been left behind to watch.

**J**OE tried desperately to whirl and bring his gun to bear. But he never made it. With a snarl, the man behind him struck. Something crashed down on his skull with stunning force. The blow was glancing, and his felt hat softened it, but the detective crashed to tumble headlong down the rickety stairs. He sprawled at the foot of the stairs more unconscious than conscious. A heavy foot kicked the police positive from his hand. Dimly, fighting whirling senses, he heard the voices of the men.

"Here's your flatfoot, Mauler," the voice descending the stairs said.

"Good work, Touch," Hodkins' squeaky voice growled. "Search him. Mebbe he's got that paper."

Rough hands went quickly through Joe's pockets. He lay as still as death, knowing that his one chance was to feign unconsciousness. His head roared and ached until he wanted to cry out. He was one huge ache. But he clamped his teeth tight, kept his eye closed, fought down the pain.

"Nothin' on him," the man, Touch snarled.

"Then you didn't find that letter Crable bragged he wrote before we put the heat on him?"

Joe's senses ceased to whirl. He risked opening one eye a crack. The three crooks were standing over him, staring at one another. He recognized the speaker. He was Touch Morden, the crook who bragged that he could open any safe. He accounted for Crable's open safe. And they had been searching for a letter!

"I didn't," Hodkins rasped. "It wasn't in his safe. It wasn't on him. It wasn't on this dumb dick. He was bluffing."

"Bluffing, hell!" Morden growled. "Crable never bluffed. You oughta know that, Mauler. If the cops find

that letter, it'll bring them here. Once they find the stuff we got hidden here they'll have enough evidence to hang us all." He swung around to a plate rack, stared at it. "Just one squint at these plates we got of that banker and his follies flame in the nude, and they'd have enough. I'm gonna bust 'em to hell."

Mauler Hodkins leaped, grabbed Morden's shoulder, swung him away from the plate rack.

"Bust 'em an' I'll bust you," he snarled menacingly. "We can bleed that fool banker for a million cash."

"A million would do us a helluva lot of good in th' pen," Bean put in, voice cold as death. "Then mebbe he'd commit suicide like that other banker did."

"Goin' soft on me, are you?" Hodkins sneered: "Pierson'll pay as long as he's got cash. He ain't a fool. He knows he'll be ruined if his wife gets a look at one of those pictures—or the bank directors do."

There was silence for a moment. Then Morden spoke again.

"And what about this flatfoot, Listen? What we gonna do with him? Mebbe he's already found that letter. He wasn't prowling around here for nothin'."

"Get sensible, you mugs," Hodkins broke in savagely. "He guessed that Crable wasn't prowling that vacant rooming house for his health. He came back to see if he couldn't find what Crable was hunting, that's what. All we gotta do is croak him, dump him in a gutter, and change our headquarters. If the cops do find that letter Crable says he wrote, they won't find anything."

"Does sound good," Bean admitted, half convinced. "But what if this flatfoot—" He paused to kick Joe in the ribs, his fractured ribs at that, almost bringing a groan to the lips of the desperate detective. "—has already reported what he knows?"

"He hasn't," Hodkins growled. "He's one of those lone wolves. The fact that he didn't put a guard at the rooming house oughta be proof of that. He figured at first it was just a trap we set for Crable." He suddenly

paused to glare at the silent, still detective. Then he chuckled. "I got a hunch I know where that letter is."

"Where is it?" It was Morden who eagerly asked.

Hodkins laughed. "At the morgue—Crabble's shoe—the shoe he heaved through the window. Hell, I was a sap for not thinking of that shoe. Thought it went on damned hard. But Listen didn't think of it either. I looked. The shoe was on Crabble's foot just like I left it."

The others joined in his laughter. At their feet, Detective Joe Listen could have also laughed, but he was too desperate. He had the evidence. It was before him for the taking, but could he take it—a man doomed for the gutter—death?

## CHAPTER V

### *A Blaze of Death*



ALL right, you muggs," Mauler Hodkins chuckled, squeakily. "Put the heat on Detective Listen and dump the remains in a gutter on some dark street. I'll get that letter. Then let the cops come."

"Okay, chief," Bean grunted. "We'll take care of Detective Listen."

Joe Listen opened his eyes just as Hodkins nodded, swung around to leave. He knew he had but a minute to live.

Hodkins was at the stairs. Bean and Morden were looking after him. Joe's desperate eyes searched for his gun. He saw the light glinting on it five feet away. It lay half hidden behind a store box.

The crooks hadn't thought it necessary to retrieve it.

Could he make it? Bean was reaching for his silenced gun, wetting his thin lips for courage. Death was on his swarthy face. Hodkins had his foot on the bottom step now. Morden was looking away.

Joe sucked in his breath, steeled his muscles for the supreme moment.

The gunman was almost directly over him.

Drawing his legs back in a jack-knife's position, Joe lashed out with both feet—kicked with all his might. His heavy brogans caught the gunman in the stomach, sent the slim gunman three feet in the air, to crash against Touch Morden.

Morden let out a scream of mortal terror as he was knocked down, to sprawl in a heap, with a kicking, groaning gunman on top of him.

Mauler Hodkins whirled, swore, and grabbed for his shoulder gun. But this time he was the one that was an instant too late. Joe Listen had rolled the instant his feet struck Bean, rolled and leaped at the same time. His clammy hand had gripped the butt of his gun an instant later. Now he was laying on his side, his police positive cocked and up.

"Get your fists up, or you're dead, Mauler!" he barked, his voice savage, menacing. "Up with 'em!"

Mauler Hodkins stood as if turned to stone. He licked thick lips, stared with bulging eyes. He slowly raised his hands.

Joe pulled his feet under him, stood up, crouched. Beads of sweat stood out on his brow, but there was a crooked smile on his hard lips. His face was grim, harsh.

"That's better. Now step up against that wall." His eyes saw Morden and Bean untangling themselves. "That goes for you punks too. Get up and stand against that wall! Quick! I'd like nothin' better'n to blast you."

Morden moved with alacrity, if not sullenly. Bean stared at the detective with pain racked eyes, his hand still hovering near his gun. A snarl was on his lips. He groaned, heaved himself up, stood staring at the gun in Joe's hand.

"I said up with 'em, and against that wall, punk!" Joe snapped "Snappy!"

Snarling vile curses, Bean turned to the wall. His black eyes on Hodkins. Hodkins licked his lips, but Joe saw one eyelid lower in a signal. The detective knew the big crook would

gladly sacrifice the gunman if he thought he would have a chance.

"Don't try it, punks," he warned.

"Now see here, Listen," Hodkins broke out, voice whining. "We might get together. Say fifty grand—

As if his words were a signal, Bean whirled, clawing for his gun. But Joe was watching for just such a trick. He jerked his Colt, squeezed the trigger. The gun roared, flamed just as the gunman cleared his gun. There was a dull plunk as the detective's bullet crashed squarely between the gunman's close-set eyes.

**E**VEN as his gun roared, Hodkins was in action. He had purposely sacrificed Bean, hoping to divert the detective's mind for the moment it would take him to palm his gun.

Joe jerked his gun back, squeezing the trigger as he did, but Hodkins was already pulling trigger. Their guns roared together. Once, twice again. In the closed basement the guns thundered like cannons. The building seemed to tremble with the concussions. Then a third gun spoke, added to the din—spoke just as Hodkins staggered against the wall.

As the third gun roared again, Joe staggered back, stumbled over a box, crashed against the shelf containing the trays, bottles and racks. His gun was jarred from his hand, and fell to the cement floor. Then he went down, knocking bottles down on top of him. He lay still, groaning.

"God, I'm hit," Hodkins screamed, leaning against the wall. "Arm busted sure as hell! God!"

"I got him," Morden muttered, jerking his slitted eyes about. "Come on! We gotta scam before the cops get here. They couldn't help but hear!"

"Not till we get those plates," Hodkins snarled. "We ain't leavin' any evidence for the cops."

Holding his wounded shoulder, he staggered toward the plates that still rested on the shelf.

Joe Listen stifled his groans. His

hand went to his left shoulder, found it wet, sticky. The force of the bullet had knocked him backwards, causing him to stumble over the box. The fall stunned him for an instant, but he was still full of fight. The murderers of Gene Crable wouldn't get away—not until they killed him, at least. He sat up, pulled his feet under him ready to leap, jerked his eyes about for his gun. It was six feet away.

Then Hodkins saw him. He stopped short, staring with pain-dimmed eyes. Curses bubbled from his vile mouth.

"Still alive, huh?" he snarled, grinning viciously when he saw the detective's gun out of reach. "You played hell with my Scandal Ring—you and Crable. But I got you now. I'm gonna kill you myself."

He laughed harshly, reached with his left hand for the gun still dangling in his right.

"I'm gonna kill you, and leave you here with Bean. When the cops come they'll think you shot it out with him. They'll find a lotta stuff here and think he was the black-mailer. But I'll get away and collect later!"

He had the gun in his left hand now, was starting to bring it up. Joe Listen bit his lower lip, bringing blood. His mind was a whirlwind. He had to stop Hodkins. Then his clammy hand touched the heavy brogan on his right foot. Inspiration flashed into his desperate mind—Cable's own inspiration. His shoe!

It was enough. One jerk and he had the lace knot unfastened; a yank and he had the shoe off. Gripping it with steely fingers, he swung it with all his might just as the muzzle of the gun centered on his chest.

The heavy brogan struck the muzzle of the gun just as it spat flame and lead; knocked the barrel aside, sailed on and smashed against Hodkins face. The bullet intended for Joe sang harmlessly by his head.

Hodkins screamed, jerked his hand to his face, but still gripping his gun.

*(Concluded on page 142)*



*He was trapped—completely*

# The RING of FACES

*It Was the End of the  
Trail for Slattery—  
and He Meant to  
Go Out Fighting!*

By  
CHARLES GREEN

*Author of "Decoy," "So Simple," etc.*

THE trap was final and absolute. There were coppers below his shabby little room, ready to blast him the moment he stuck his head out of the window—even if he could survive the two-story drop. There were coppers in the corridor outside the door. Uniformed men, plainclothes men—with tommyes, shotguns, revolvers, tear-gas bombs.

Danger on all sides!

And Captain Fagan's bull-like roar now voiced the grim alternative left open to him:

"Slattery! Come out peacefully—and you'll live a couple of months before they strap you in the electric chair. Try to fight it out, and you'll get a dozen slugs through your



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# A CRIME STORY THAT IS DIFFERENT

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carcass. Now what're you goin' to do?"

"This!" Joe Slattery snarled.

His automatic centered on the door, then vomited flame, smoke, hot lead. Three bullet holes suddenly pock-marked the panel of the door. A brief pause. Captain Fagan's voice boomed from the corridor:

"All right, you damn fool, you're askin' for it! Let him have it, boys!"

And then hell broke loose. A mad bedlam of tommy-gun's chatter, revolver fire. The door vibrated as if hammered by some giant fist. Glass crashed as some of the slugs found the window. Slattery crouched against the wall, in his eyes the expression of a wild beast which has just felt the jaws of a trap snap on its leg and now hears the approach of the hunter.

Blood flowed down the side of his neck where a bullet had nicked the lobe of his ear.

The firing ceased abruptly.

"Well, Slattery? If you're still alive, I give you another chance to come out. Your last chance! You takin' it?"

Slattery moistened his dry lips. A last chance—to walk voluntarily to the electric chair! The hell with 'em! He'd fight it out to the bitter end—as he had sworn. Joe Slattery would never burn in the chair!

"If I could only take a few of them dicks with me," he muttered savagely—"send 'em to hell ahead o' me."

His eyes darted to the clothes closet just ahead of him. Its peculiar angle with the door made it practically immune from direct frontal fire. Of course, they'd search it when they finally broke into the room and found it empty.

But by that time, he himself would step out, his gun blazing. And he was bound to blast down a couple of them before hot lead plowed through his body.

Fagan's voice now boomed:

"Maybe we got the rat—and maybe

we didn't. Give him another round, then tear gas!"

Slattery was inside the closet when the air again crackled with gunfire. He snapped on an electric bulb overhead, and began shoving a fresh clip into his automatic.

Suddenly his eyes paused on the rear wall of the closet.

It was only a flimsy, cardboard partition, the closet of the adjoining room probably beyond it.

Slattery's eyes narrowed.

A dame lived in that room—a skinny, grey-haired old woman. If he could use her body as a shield while he made the break—

He had no time to elaborate this first instinctive thought. For he now heard the front door crash inward. And, a moment later, the thud and hiss of an exploding gas bomb. He lurched his shoulder against the partition, terror adding strength to his heavy-set brutish body.

The partition sagged, parted with a crunching sound. The momentum carried Slattery through the adjoining closet and halfway into the next room.

**I**T WAS a small room, shabbily furnished, and lighted by a shaded night lamp. The woman lay on the bed at his left. Lay there stiff, motionless. Slattery could see just the outlines of her body beneath the quilt, the blur of her head on the pillow.

"Asleep?" he muttered incredulously.

And then he thought he understood. The woman was probably paralyzed with terror. By the bedlam of shots outside. By himself bursting out of her closet. Was laying there too damn scared to move or utter a sound.

"Okay, sister," he panted. "Obey orders—and nothin' will happen to you."

In his mind, he was already rehearsing his next move. The woman ahead of him, his gun over her shoul-

der, his free hand holding her body close to his own. Thus he'd come out into the corridor, and try to back down the rear stairway. The dicks wouldn't fire for fear of hitting the dame. At least, he hoped they would not. Anyway, it'd give him a fighting chance.

He ran over to the woman's door, crouched tensely a few seconds with his ear near the panel. Heavy footsteps outside. A rumble of voices. Fagan's throaty growl:

"Give that gas five minutes to work on him. He'll come out, all right, all right."

Five minutes! For that length of time he was still safe. There were perhaps six dicks out in the corridor. All but two of them, maybe, would burst into that other room. *Then* he'd run out with the woman and make a break for it. Could maybe burn down those remaining two dicks while they held back their fire because of the dame. By God, he *did* have a chance!

He glanced at the woman on the bed. Her hands were on the quilt now, close to her throat. Yeah, scared out of her wits! Paralyzed with terror.

**S**LATTERY took a dirty handkerchief out of his pocket and tried to stanch the blood flowing from his earlobe. Maybe it was the loss of blood that was making him feel so giddy. Sleepy, sort of. Hell, that wouldn't do. He'll need a clear head when he made that last desperate break.

He backed up to the bed, dropped on the edge of it.

"Just keep still—like you're doin' now," he warned the woman out of the corner of his mouth. "One peep outa you, and I'll brain you."

He sat there while a minute dragged by. And then another. Time to get ready! But what the hell was wrong with him now? His head was

heavy, and there was a kind of roaring sound in his ears. Alarmed, shaking his head groggily, he rose to his feet. Maybe another of those slugs had found him somewhere. A bullet wound other than the one in his ear.

But that was crazy as hell. A man knows when he's hit. Nothing gentle about hot lead when it plows into you. He ran his hand through his black hair. That roaring sound—it was getting louder, louder. And there seemed to be a dancing red glare now before his eyes. A glare which suddenly provided a crimson background for faces.

Faces which he knew. Faces which brought a shriek of bubbling horror to his lips. The face of that pretty little society dame whom he strangled when she caught him looting her jewel box. The face of a slanty-eyed, yellow devil of a Chink fence to whom he tried to dispose of the jewels. The face of a cop who tried to pinch him—and got a slug through the belly, and lay there screaming on the pavement. Faces of other men out of his lurid past.

That ring of faces stared at him, accusation in their eyes. Staring, staring, staring—

And then a black curtain seemed to fall over them. Slattery's knees buckled. He crashed to the floor.

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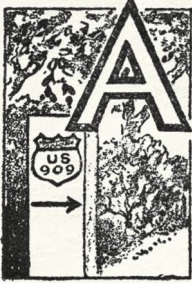
"It's the damnedest thing," remarked Captain Fagan some ten minutes later. "We thought gas would get him—and gas did. But not tear gas, and not the way we planned. He crashed through the partition separating the two closets, and wrenched an illuminating gas pipe out of the joint holding it to the wall. In the excitement, the place reeking with gunsmoke anyway, he didn't realize it. The gas knocked him cold—even as it knocked out the woman. But we got to him in time. The rat will live to burn."

*Next Month: DEATH GOES CALLING—A Sensational Complete Novelette of G-Man Courage by Margie Harris*

# Cop-Killer Merkle Didn't Know He Had a License to Hell

By JOHN L. BENTON

Author of "Three of a Kind," "The Raid," etc.



UTOMATIC gripped in gaunt hand, "Cop-Killer" Merkle jabbed its muzzle hard against the whimpering man before him.

"Listen, Peters," Merkle rasped, "the heat's on me. Every Fed in town is on the lookout for my

car. I'm red-hot—get it?

The white-faced man stared fixedly at Merkle, almost incoherent from fear.

"You're 'Cop-Killer' Merkle—what do you want with me?" his voice went on jerkily.

Merkle hunched his huge frame forward.

"Sure, I'm 'Cop-Killer.' They told me you were a right guy back in stir. My car's hot. I've got to be in Florida by tomorrow night. Once I'm in Jacksonville everything will be okay. But I've got to have a new paint job on the car and I want some new license plates!"

"License plates?" the little man said unevenly. "Please, Merkle, anything but that. I've gone straight. I haven't touched one of those jobs in years. If the dicks ever found out that I was ever mixed up in the phony license plates racket—"

"Yeah?" growled Merkle, prodding the automatic forward menacingly. "Listen, guy, you used to make fake tags for every mobster in town. I want you to make me a pair of Florida license plates that are the McCoy! I'll work on the car myself, if you give me some quick-drying paint. Now start—*pronto!*"

Peters' eyes gleamed craftily.

"Okay, Lefty—you'll have both plates by morning—as soon as the moulds cool."

\* \* \* \* \*

His foot pressing down on the accelerator, Merkle whipped his car through highway traffic, heading for Jacksonville. The dragnet would never catch him now, he told himself. Peters had done a perfect job with those queer plates. The Feds were all looking for a blue sedan with Georgia plates, and here he was, car disguised, on a smooth road.

Too bad he had to kill Peters, though. Merkle smiled grimly as he relived the scene of a few hours before, when he had fed Peters six slugs through the belly, in payment for his help. Peters had turned soft—might phone the cops. He had had to die.

Suddenly, from behind him, Merkle heard the wailing crescendo of a police siren. In his mirror he could see a big police car, filled with troopers, bearing down on him. He jammed his foot harder on the gas pedal. They were getting closer—closer. His car two-wheeled a sharp curve, swayed drunkenly for a moment. For an instant, it seemed poised in mid-air. Then a splintering crash as a ton of metal pinned his body to the road.

The world spun chaotically as consciousness deserted him. His fogged mind could catch snatches of conversation.

"It's 'Cop-Killer' Merkle, all right," a heavy voice was booming. "He almost got through our dragnet with that new coat of paint and the phony plates. But he should have known that all Florida cars have only one license plate!"

# DEATH COMES DOWN



*Cabill stared frozenly at the dumbwaiter*

## ***The Bound Corpse of a Blond Girl Stowed in a Hotel Dumbwaiter—with the Haft of a Bloody Knife Sticking from Her Shoulders!***

**By ROBERT WALLACE**

*Author of "Murder Empire," "Written in Blood," etc.*

**H**ENRI, head chef of the swank Hotel Caswallon, was a trifle upset. And when Henri felt that way, he showed it pretty much all over. His left hand, still faithful to duty, stirred steadily at the *hochepot gantoise* that bubbled

behind him on the gleaming range. But there was nothing steady about Henri's other actions. Henri was very temperamental.

He stamped, yelled, tore his hair, and made frantic passes at the assistant cook whose mistaken efforts with

a *sauce Bearnaise* had brought on the storm.

The assistant cook ducked with the nimbleness of long practise, dove for cover behind the coffee urns. Henri's free hand swept up the pot that held the offending sauce, hurled it with a magnificent, sweeping gesture at the assistant's white-trousered rear. The sauce was hot. The under-chef squawked wildly.

Henri yelled, "*Cochon!* Son of a dishonored donkey. Ah, *mon Dieu*, the things they give me for helpers!"

The under-chef vanished abruptly. Henri sailed a copper stew-pan after him and felt infinitely relieved. The pastry chef, his hands wrist-deep in a bowl of dough, looked on with a delighted grin. Henri subsided gradually, turned again to the steaming pot on the range.

A bell rang, and the light over Number Four dumbwaiter glowed red. Henri jumped angrily, looked around for some one to answer the call. The under-chef stayed prudently where he was. The pastry cook shook his head, lifted dough-covered hands. Henri swore luridly, shoved the pot toward the side of the stove and darted toward the dumbwaiter.

He threw the door of the shaft open, snorted, "Ah, what service. A patron waits, no one attends. What a madhouse! What a—"

He stopped suddenly. His plump shoulders stiffened with rigid, unbelieving horror. The pastry chef left his table, came toward him questioningly. Henri whirled against him, bounced off like a frantic rubber ball, scrambled blindly for the phone.

ON the main floor, Jerry Cahill, house dick of the Caswallon, ambled with leisurely dignity toward the switchboard, said, "Well, sweetheart, what now?"

Peg Wallis shoved the head-phone back on her auburn hair.

"It's that crazy French chef again," she said wearily. "I can't make it out."

She reached to plug in the extra phone. Cahill said, "Don't bother, sugar," twitched outward the receiver

by her ear and bent his head to hers. She stiffened away angrily, and Cahill grinned.

"It's about some one named Mort," Peg said. "He keeps yelling about a Mort somebody and the dumbwaiter. There's no one in the house named Mort. I keep telling him—"

But Cahill was whirling, legging it swiftly for the service stairs. Peg stared after him.

"You might at least tell me—" she began.

Cahill paused in the doorway and turned a pained face back to her.

"My God, somebody named Mort!" He groaned. "Look, did you ever study French?"

"Of course." Peg sniffed. "I was quite good."

"Yeah," Cahill said. "You must've been. Just by way of increasing your already enormous knowledge of the language, *morte* isn't any one's name. It's just a word, sugar, and it usually means—death!"

He spun hastily through the doors, pounded down the steps. The kitchen was oddly quiet. Henri was backed against the wall, staring wide-eyed and speechless at the dumbwaiter. The pastry-cook was beside him, trying with fumbling, unconscious gestures to scrape the dough from his hands.

Cahill walked past them, stared at the open dumbwaiter, at the girl who crouched in it. Her head, bent forward on her knees, was turned to Cahill, and he could see that she was blond and very pretty. Her hands and feet were securely tied. There was blood on the back of her brown sports dress, and between her slender shoulders the haft of a knife stuck out, very stiff and straight.

Henri drew a long breath. "Is she—is it that—"

"Yeah," Cahill said. "It is."

His face was grim as he turned away, walked past the rows of gleaming kettles toward the phone.

Detective-sergeant Prynne of the Homicide Squad barged through the kitchen door, trailed by an assistant medical examiner and two men of the Homicide detail. Jerry Cahill jerked

his head in greeting, said, "'Bout time you got here, Prinny. The corpse is over here."

Prynne glared. "Damn it," he said, "how many times do I have to tell you not to call me—"

Cahill grinned faintly, waved a placating hand. "All right, all right. Anyhow, the subject of your investigation is right over this way, Sergeant."

Prynne grunted and followed Cahill across the kitchen to the dumbwaiter shaft. For a long moment he just stood and stared. Then he shoved his hat back from his ruddy forehead, looked inquiringly at Cahill.

"She is," Cahill said, "just exactly the way she was when Henri here found her. I had the house doc down. He was able to certify death without moving her at all."

Prynne nodded, stared at the black-hafted knife between the dead girl's bowed shoulders. Then he said, "We was ten, maybe fifteen minutes gettin' here. You ought to have it all sewed up by this time."

Cahill grinned crookedly, let the crack pass. "I have made a slight preliminary investigation, Sergeant. Would you be interested in the details?"

"I might be," Prynne grunted, "if you scraped off some of the vocabulary."

"Okay." Cahill said. "Here's the dope, then. The dumbwaiter must've been by one of the apartments up above. Somebody rang it down, and Henri went over. He found the girl just the way you see her, and called me. It didn't take me more than a minute to get down here."

He jerked his head toward the dumbwaiter and said: "Just in case you don't read the society pages, her name is Fraser—Anne Fraser."

Prynne stared. "Fraser! Not the—"

"Yeah. Percy Fraser. The banker. His daughter."

Prynne said, "Uh! That makes it big business, all right." He turned to the men behind him. "Okay, Kohn," he snapped. "You and Morrissey lift her out. Let's see what the doc can find." To Cahill he said briskly, "This

shouldn't be too tough. Somebody up above knifed the poor kid, stuck her in there, and lammed. All we got to do is check all of the apartments on this dumbwaiter shaft, find out who skipped, and put out a general alarm. He won't get far!"

Cahill shrugged, his grey-green eyes following every move of the doctor's busy hands.

"I've checked up already," he said slowly. "There are only four apartments on this dumbwaiter shaft. 1B is out. It's used as a storeroom, kept locked all the time. 2B is rented by Tom Fearon, the polo star. A young chap named Gary Hinshaw has 3B. 4B is Arthur Matson, the broker. He looks like a bum guess, though, because he left the hotel about four. Henri, here, found the girl at 5:20. How about it, Doc?"

The doctor got to his feet, wiped his hands slowly on a piece of gauze as he said, "The girl positively hasn't been dead more than half an hour. That puts the time of the murder at five or even later. It was the knife thrust that killed her, all right. The blade was driven very deep—right to the hilt. No one but a very powerful man could have delivered such a blow."

"I'VE seen this guy Fearon," Prynne growled. "He's big enough to fit the picture."

Cahill nodded. "Yeah," he said, "but Hinshaw's no weakling, either. They're both in it, as far as time goes. Hinshaw came in at five, Fearon a little later."

"And," Prynne said, "that let's Matson out. Because you just said yourself he went out at four. So unless he managed to sneak back—"

"That's hardly likely," Cahill said, "but we'd better not count him out till we've checked up on him. I'm having that done now."

Prynne nodded, scrubbed his chin thoughtfully as he stared down at the dead girl. "These guys, Fearon and Hinshaw. Did they know the girl?"

Cahill shrugged slightly. "So far as I know, Hinshaw didn't. He hasn't been here very long, doesn't seem to

have met many people around town yet. But Fearon—" He hesitated a moment, then said: "Fearon went around with her a lot at one time. There was a rumor that they were engaged. Then there was another rumor that they'd broken off. That's all I know about it."

"Boy, it's plenty!" Prynne turned on his heel, snapped, "A busted romance, huh, and Fearon the one that got busted. I guess Fearon's it, all right. He'll talk, too, when we get to work on him!"

Cahill smiled thinly. "The old rubber hose gag, eh? Before you start horsing around, suppose you figure this angle. I'm hired by this hotel. It's my duty, just as much as it is yours, to see that anyone who commits a crime here gets properly punished. And it's just as much my duty to see that innocent people here get protection. One of those three men probably killed the Fraser girl, which means that the other two are innocent. I'm not going to stand by and see them get a going-over if I can possibly help it."

"Okay, then," Prynne snorted. "We will just go up and politely ask who did it. The killer'll probably come right out and tell us all about it!"

"He might," Cahill said slowly, "if we put it to him the right way."

Prynne stared. "Meaning how?"

"Put her back in the dumbwaiter and send her up. If Fearon did it, he'll probably crack in a spot like that. We can have Hinshaw there, too, and get his reaction. Matson's out, unless he has time since five o'clock that can't be accounted for."

"That's a screwy idea," Prynne growled. He scowled at Cahill for a moment, then shrugged. "We'll give it a play though. Put her back in, boys. You stay down here, Morrissey, and send the dumbwaiter up when we ring."

The two detectives stepped forward.

"Half a minute," Cahill said. He bent over the dead girl again. He looked carefully over the rope that bound her wrists and ankles, ran his fingers along the loose end that

trailed from the wrists. His fingers, when he took them away, were faintly smudged. He shrugged, lifted the dead face between his hands and stared intently. Then he turned, said, "Hey, Doc. Here a minute."

The doctor left the bag he was packing, followed Cahill's pointing finger. Then he said: "Yes, the pupils do look odd. But I can't be sure till the autopsy—"

"Sure of what?" Prynne growled.

"Dope," Cahill said. "She was drugged before she was killed."

"That," Prynne said, "does not change the set-up any that I can see."

"Maybe not," Cahill said. He straightened up, started toward the stairs. "We'll go to Fearon's apartment, have Hinshaw come there."

Tom Fearon stood by the fireplace of his luxurious living room, glowering from Cahill to Prynne. His heavy face was flushed, angry. Cahill, watching him, renewed his impression that Fearon was a man who would stop at little once his emotions were aroused. The sportsman twitched his shoulders impatiently under the close-fitting dinner-jacket.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, "that this is a damned outrage. I've a dinner engagement, I tell you! You ask me to wait, but you haven't explained—"

Cahill lifted his hand. "We'll explain everything in a moment, Mr. Fearon. As soon as Mr. Hinshaw gets here—"

"AND who the devil," Fearon demanded, "is Hinshaw?"

Cahill shrugged. "In a moment, Mr. Fearon," he said.

He turned away, crossed the room to the phone, and called the desk. When he had finished, he spoke in an undertone to Prynne.

"I guess Matson's out, all right. We've checked the cab driver that took him away at four. He went straight from here to his club. The steward there says he's been there ever since. And both the desk and the elevator boy are sure he hasn't been back here."

"Prynne nodded. "It's Fearon or

Hinshaw, then. And if Hinshaw did not even know the girl—"

He checked as the door opened. The man who came in with Kohn was slighter than Fearon, but wiry and muscular. He looked inquiringly at Cahill.

"Maybe you can tell me what this is all about?" he demanded. "This chap here won't say anything except that you want to talk to me."

"That's right, Mr. Hinshaw," Cahill said. "But first let me introduce you to Mr. Fearon."

Hinshaw bowed slightly, his face still puzzled. Fearon acknowledged the introduction with a surly grunt. "First, Mr. Hinshaw," Cahill said, "I want to ask you if you happen to know Miss Anne Fraser?"

Hinshaw shook his head. "Sorry. I'm afraid I don't."

Cahill looked at Fearon. The big man had straightened up abruptly at the sound of the girl's name, was staring queerly at Cahill. The hotel dick said, "But you know her, Mr. Fearon."

"WHAT if I do?" Fearon snapped. "What the hell is this all about, anyhow?"

"Did Miss Fraser come to see you this evening?" Cahill asked quietly.

Fearon took an angry step forward, then controlled himself with obvious effort.

"She did not," he said. "I don't know what she has to do with this dumb act you're putting on, but if it's any help to you, I haven't seen Miss Fraser for weeks. Now can I go, or have you got some more questions?"

"Just one," Cahill said. "One of you two gentlemen rang for service about twenty minutes ago. Was it you or Mr. Hinshaw?"

Hinshaw shook his head.

"I did," Fearon growled. "I phoned down for some liquor, rang the dumbwaiter down. The service is rotten. The stuff still hasn't come up."

"Maybe," Cahill said softly, "you'll get it if you ring now."

Fearon stared, the muscles in his neck swelling angrily. Hinshaw only shook his head, his dark face a study in bewilderment. With a muttered

oath, Fearon turned, strode to the dumbwaiter and pressed the button.

Cahill stepped back, watched the two men through casual, drooping lids. The rising hum of the dumbwaiter stopped. There was a click in the shaft, then silence. Fearon threw open the door.

For a moment he stood perfectly still. Hinshaw took a half-step forward, stared into the shaft. Then he gasped, and his dark face went sickly yellow. Fearon backed slowly away, his heavy shoulders trembling. Between the two men the open shaft framed the crouched, motionless body of the girl.

Fearon turned slowly to Cahill, his face gone suddenly broken and old.

"Yeah, she's dead," Cahill said grimly. "Somebody with an apartment on this shaft did it."

Fearon's voice was a hoarse whisper as he said, "It wasn't I. I haven't seen her for weeks."

Cahill shrugged, looked at Hinshaw. The man from 3B shuddered, backed hastily away. His voice cracked hysterically.

"I don't know anything about it! I never saw the girl in my life!"

From the doorway Kohn said suddenly, "I was waitin' for him to say that! I had a chance to look around his apartment when he went into the bathroom, and look what I found."

He stepped forward, thrust his open hand belligerently under Hinshaw's nose. Cahill leaned forward, stared at the small gold compact in the detective's hand. Hinshaw went deathly pale, but before he could speak Fearon let out a bellow of rage.

"He did it, then! He lies when he says he never knew her. That's Anne's compact. Look, it's got her initials on it! He killed her, the dirty swine!"

He whirled, lunged furiously at Hinshaw. Hinshaw ducked frantically, but Fearon's swinging fist smacked against his face, knocked him back against a chair. Cahill jumped forward, swearing, caught Fearon's arm as the big man tried to launch another blow. Fearon turned on him with a snarl, and Cahill smacked a hard left against his chin.



Fearon's knees buckled. He staggered back, collapsed limply into a chair. For a moment he struggled to get up again, then sank back, dropped his head wearily onto his hands.

Cahill turned away with a shrug.

"Well, Hinshaw," he said, "what about the compact? It was Miss Fraser's. It was found in your room. I suppose you realize what that means?"

Hinshaw was swaying on his feet, still groggy from Fearon's blow. But there was sincerity in his voice.

"I don't know. I can't possibly explain it, unless it was placed there deliberately to throw suspicion on me. That could have been done. I was in the bathroom, shaving, for quite a while, and my door wasn't locked."

Prynne grunted skeptically, but Cahill nodded, said, "That's possible."

"Of course it is," Hinshaw said. "I tell you, I never saw the girl before! You've got to believe me—got to—"

He stopped suddenly, his face green and sickly. Cahill said hastily, "He's going to be sick in a minute. Better get him upstairs again, Kohn. We can talk to him there."

"Okay," the detective said, and he slipped his arm under Hinshaw's sagging shoulders. Fearon didn't even lift his head as they staggered out. Prynne watched them go.

"**W**ELL," he said sourly, "you staged your act. What do you know now?"

Cahill gave him a twisted grin. "Not much, except that Hinshaw's just as much in it now as Fearon here. Maybe the killer did plant the compact in his room, and maybe not. Your guess is as good as mine. It kind of looks like we'll have to try another lead."

He walked to the dumbwaiter, pried with deft fingers at the knot that bound the dead girl's hands. Prynne watched him.

"Hey, you can't take that," he said. "We might learn plenty from that rope."

Cahill shoved the cord into his pocket. "Nuts. You can learn just as much from the piece on her

ankles, can't you? It's the same kind."

He flicked on a tiny pocket flash, leaned into the shaft again. When he drew back there were faint, puzzled lines between his eyes. Prynne reached past him and slammed shut the door of the dumbwaiter, growling, "Unless you want to play more practical jokes—"

Cahill shook his head. "That angle's about worked out, I guess. Might as well have Morrissey get her off to the Morgue."

Prynne pressed the button, spoke briefly to Morrissey on the service phone. Then he jerked his thumb toward Fearon.

"Well, you saw the act. Did he do it, or the other one?"

Cahill shrugged. "There's not a hell of a lot to choose from, in spite of Kohn's finding that compact in Hinshaw's room. After all, there is a pretty good chance that the killer planted it there. We've got one more lead I'd like to follow up before you start the strong-arm stuff, though. Nobody downstairs remembers seeing the girl come in. That probably means she came in some time before five. There's only one man on the elevators then. He goes off at five when the regular night shift comes on." Fearon seemed utterly oblivious of what was going on around him, but Cahill glanced toward him, dropped his voice cautiously. "The elevator op's name is Strauss—Ted Strauss. He's got a room at 14 Pine. I'll dig him up, see if he remembers what floor the girl got off at."

"And these two guys?"

"Give 'em a little rope," Cahill said. "The killer may make a break yet, if he thinks he's in the clear."

He walked to the door. Prynne followed him, cast a skeptical glance at Fearon's huddled figure as he went past. Outside, Cahill said, "Be a good guy and watch Fearon for a minute. I want to take a prowl upstairs."

He went to Hinshaw's apartment first. Kohn was sitting by the table, a cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth. Cahill nodded toward

the bathroom door, asked, "Was he sick?"

Kohn flicked ashes over the rug. "Boy, and how! That don't mean much, though."

Cahill nodded, crossed the room to the dumbwaiter shaft. When he turned away, the puzzled line was wrinkled between his eyebrows again. Kohn watched him lazily. "I've given the place a good going over," he said. "Didn't find anything else, though."

"No letters from the girl?" Cahill asked. "Name in his address book, or anything like that?"

Kohn shook his head. "Not a thing. If he knew her, there's nothing but that compact to prove it. If you ask me, that's plenty!"

"Yeah," Cahill said, "it may be at that."

He left Hinshaw's apartment, went up to the next floor. Outside Arthur Matson's apartment, he fumbled briefly with his pass-keys, found the right one, and went in. For a moment he stood by the door, listening.

There was no sound in the darkened apartment. Cahill reached for the light, switched it on. Matson certainly lived in style. The rugs on the floor were rich, and the pictures on the walls, even to Cahill's untrained eyes, spelled big money.

But the hotel dick wasn't interested at that moment in furnishings. Routine demanded that he give Matson's apartment the once-over, even though the club steward had given the broker an unshakable alibi. Cahill went to the dumbwaiter first, examined it as he had the other two below. When he turned away, the puzzled frown had appeared again. If anything, it was a bit deeper.

The desk in the corner of the room was a massive antique. Cahill tried to lift the cover. It was locked. The keys on his ring were all too large. Cahill fished in his vest pocket, brought out a bit of stiff wire. He bent it carefully, and began to pry delicately at the lock's insides. Five minutes of patient effort, and the lid lifted under his hands.

Ten minutes later, he was still going methodically through the papers

in Arthur Matson's desk, when the phone behind him jangled harshly. For an instant, Cahill hesitated. Then he slammed the desk shut, reached for the receiver. The call wasn't for Matson, after all. Instead, Prynne's voice rasped at him harshly over the wire.

Cahill grimaced. "Okay," he said. "But keep your shirt on. I think maybe I've got something—"

"GOT something, hell!" Prynne barked. "Lost something, you mean. Fearon's gone!"

Cahill swore. "All right," he said. "Hold your pants up. I'll be right there."

He dialed the switchboard, got Peg Wallis. "Get the Bankers' Club again. Say Arthur Matson's wanted here at the hotel."

Peg sniffed. "I called the club five minutes ago. They said—"

Cahill snapped, "Later, sweetheart, later. I'm busy now."

He left the phone, raced down to Fearon's apartment. Prynne met him outside the door.

"I guess Fearon's the guy, all right!" he said. "That prostrated-by-grief pose was just one big bluff. There's a fire-escape outside the window of his bathroom—and the window's open." He glared at Cahill. "If he was just playing possum, and heard what you said about the elevator operator—"

"Yeah," Cahill said, "we'd better go over and see the kid now."

Prynne's police car was waiting outside. It took them screaming through the heavy evening traffic. At the corner of Pine Street, Cahill yelled in the driver's ear: "Cut that dam' siren! And easy—Fourteen's right here."

The car slued to a stop in front of the dingy rooming house. Cahill piled out, Prynne at his heels. Even as they mounted the steps, three shots bellowed in swift succession from the open window of the second floor.

"Take the back!" Cahill yelled. "He may try to get out that way!"

Prynne and the uniformed driver raced through the alley to the back

of the house. Cahill slammed open the hall door, pounded up the stairs. The upper hall was dark, but not too dark for Cahill to see the shadowy figure ducking out through the window at the rear.

Flame lanced toward Cahill, a gun roared. He jumped back, drew his own gun, fired twice at the window. Glass crashed. Feet rattled the fire-escape outside. Cahill raced to the window, yelled, "On the roof, Prynne! He went up!"

"Up, hell!" The policeman's voice came up from the darkened yard. "We've got him down here. It was Fearon, all right!"

Cahill shrugged, backed away from the window. He was sure those feet on the rungs had gone upward. But Prynne would never listen to him now. He went back to Strauss' room. The elevator operator was sprawled across the bed. Blood soaked his shirt, seeped slowly from a hole just over his left eye. Cahill closed the door, shoved through the excited tenants who crowded the hall. He met Prynne coming up the stairs.

"We're too late here," he said bitterly. "The kid's dead."

"Yeah, and all because you wanted to give that rat Fearon more rope!" Prynne swore. "The so-and-so tries to claim he didn't pull this kill either!"

"He might," Cahill said, "be telling the truth at that. Did he have the gun when you grabbed him?"

"No," Prynne admitted, "but if he threw it away we'll find it all right."

Cahill merely nodded. "Let's go back to the hotel," he said.

Prynne stared. "For Pete's sake, what for?"

Cahill took the sergeant by the elbow. "You remember what I said about not wanting to see the wrong guy get the works?"

"Yeah," Prynne growled, "so what?"

Cahill shoved the policeman down the steps toward the car. "So I've still got a hunch. If it doesn't work—" He shrugged, pushed Prynne into the car and climbed in beside him.

Fearon was sitting hunched in the corner, staring dully at the steel bracelets that linked his wrists together. In answer to Cahill's questions, he only said:

"I heard what you said about the elevator boy. I guess it was pretty dumb of me, but I wanted to find out for myself if Anne Fraser went up to Hinshaw's room. I was in the lower hall when some one started shooting upstairs. I knew I was on a spot if I got caught there, so I ran out to the back—and fell right into these chaps' arms."

**P**RYNNE laughed harshly. "Boy! You'll have a tough time getting a jury to believe that fairy tale."

Fearon shrugged, relapsed into moody silence. The car drew up again in front of the Caswallon. Prynne unlocked one of the bracelets from Fearon's wrist, snapped it home on his own. The big man climbed out of the car with weary indifference. His head was down, and he made no attempt to conceal the tell-tale links that dangled from his sleeve.

With Prynne and Fearon at his heels, Cahill crossed the lobby, paused briefly at the switchboard. In answer to his question, Peg nodded briefly. "Yeah, five minutes ago," she said.

"I figured he would," Cahill said. "Give Hinshaw's room a buzz. Tell Kohn to bring him out and meet us at the elevator." He steered Prynne and Fearon into the lift, and said, "Three" to the operator.

Kohn and Hinshaw were waiting in the hall when the doors opened. At the sight of Hinshaw, Fearon seemed to come to life again, and for a moment Cahill thought he was going to go for the slighter man again. But Prynne jerked Fearon roughly back into the car.

"All right," Cahill said. "Let's go up to four."

Prynne gaped. "Hell, that's that guy Matson's floor!"

"That's right," Cahill said. He looked from Fearon to Hinshaw, and murmured, "I've got a hunch he can

help us clear this up. Okay, let's go!"

He got out at Four, rapped briefly on Matson's door. There was a pause. Then the door opened, and Arthur Matson stood facing them. He was a stocky man, good-looking, with hair going a bit grey at the temples. He looked at Hinshaw, at the handcuffs dangling from Fearon's wrist, and his eyebrows lifted slightly. Jerry Cahill smiled apologetically as he closed the door behind the little group.

"You'll pardon the intrusion, Mr. Matson. This is Mr. Hinshaw, your neighbor on the next floor down. I think you already know Mr. Fearon. And this is Sergeant Prynne, of the Homicide Squad!"

Matson's eyes shot abruptly higher.

"Homicide! Has there been—"

"There has been," Cahill said dryly. "To be exact, Miss Anne Fraser was killed in this hotel shortly after five this evening. She was found dead—stabbed—in the dumb-waiter. She could have been put in there from one of only three apartments: yours, Fearon's, or Hinshaw's. Fearon and Hinshaw were both in their apartments at the time of the murder. You had gone out at least an hour before."

Matson inclined his head slightly. "That is quite right. If there's any question of an alibi, I can get at least ten people to tell you that I have been at my club ever since."

"Yeah," Cahill said. "I know that already." He paused, then leaned forward suddenly. "Just the same, I think it was you that killed her, Matson!"

**T**HE broker's face was bland, expressionless. "If this is a joke," he said slowly, "it's in poor taste."

"What're you getting at, anyhow?" Prynne growled. "You told me yourself you were sure he was at the club all the time."

Cahill nodded. "It was a swell alibi, all right. I'm not trying to break it down." He paused, smiled crookedly. "Sure he was at the club. If he hadn't been, I wouldn't have been able to bust into his desk, find

those letters that Anne Fraser wrote him. It was a mistake not to destroy those, Matson. They prove that you were her broker, that you embezzled more than fifteen thousand—"

"Damn you!" Matson's face was livid, his composure swallowed in sudden, furious rage. "I'll get you the penitentiary for that! You had no right to—" He choked suddenly.

"What if I was short in her account!" he snarled. "You've nothing on me. I was at the club. You can't prove—"

"I can prove plenty," Cahill said. He drew out the bit of rope he had taken from the dead girl's wrist. "You ought to remember this, Matson. See where you cut it part through, to be sure it broke in the right place. And that smear of grease, where you tied it around—"

Kohn yelled, "Look out! He's got a gun!"

Cahill lunged sideward, saw the flat automatic in Matson's hand. He ducked as the gun exploded almost in his face. Flame seared him, licked at his scalp. He rolled sideward, saw Kohn dodging to get around the table. Prynne was hopelessly tangled with Fearon's handcuffs. Matson's gun swung up again. Cahill got his own clear, fired. The two guns roared together. A mirror behind Jerry crashed, dropped tinkling fragments to the floor. Matson lurched forward, tried to lift his gun again. Then he pitched forward and lay still.

Cahill got to his feet slowly. Prynne wiped a hand that trembled slightly across his forehead.

"Boy," he said, "that was close!"

He dragged a key from his pocket, carefully unlocked the cuffs that linked him to Fearon. Then he looked at Cahill. "I'll take your word for it that Matson was the killer," he growled. "But how the devil, if he was at his club all the time—"

Cahill said wearily. "As a matter of fact, he was at his club when the girl was killed. He had to be, to have his alibi work out the way he'd planned. But he sure fixed things so

*(Concluded on page 145)*

# Blood

A GRIPPING STORY OF  
MURDER in the MORNING

# for Breakfast

By C. K. M. SCANLON

*Author of "Snatch," "Bring 'Em Back Dead," etc.*



THE wind blew the snow in little flurries above drifts heaped along the curb. In the cold light of early dawn, Main Street was bleak and deserted save for the solitary figure standing at the entrance of the all-night lunch

room—the only place open in the little town at five o'clock in the morning.

Marty Keen thrust a cigarette between his lips and fumbled in his pocket for a match. He produced a paper folder, found there was just one match left in the packet. He lighted his cigarette, then tossed the folder carelessly into the snow.

"Takin' him a lot of time to eat his breakfast," Keen murmured as he turned and glanced in through the window of the lunch room. "If I stand out here very long he'll know I'm waiting for him."

Keen swung around and entered the lunch room. He paid no attention to the fat bald-headed man who sat at the counter apparently relishing his boiled eggs and toast. The stout individual did not even glance up from his newspaper as Keen stopped to purchase a package of his favorite cigarettes.

"Cold, ain't it?" said the counter-man with a yawn. "Down to three below last night—an' more bad weather comin', th' paper says."

"Yeah, it's cold, all right." Keen took the cigarettes. "Better give me

some extra matches. I'm always runnin' out of 'em."

"Sure." The counterman handed him three packs of paper matches and Keen dropped them carelessly into the side pocket of his overcoat.

He lingered for a few moments and then again went out onto the street. The fat man had finished eating and was paying his check. He stepped outside, his heavy overcoat bundled up around his stout figure.

"Your name Grayson?" Keen asked suddenly, stepping close to the fat man.

"Why, no, it's Adam Wilton," answered the fat man.

Keen laughed as though Wilton had said something extremely amusing. He slapped the stout man on the back. He was smiling, but his tone was hard.

"Get movin'," he said. "You're covered by a gun in my coat pocket."

"Why, I—" stammered Wilton.

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw the faint gleam of blue steel as Keen half-lifted his hand from his pocket. Unheeded by either man something fluttered to the snow.

Wilton was trembling with fright but he began to move slowly toward the corner with Keen walking close beside him. They turned the corner and went along a side street. "What's the idea?" demanded Wilton. "Where are you taking me?"

"For a walk," answered Keen curtly. "You were a fool to flash a roll as big as you did in a strange town. I seen it when you bought them cigars."

They had reached a narrow alleyway between two buildings. Keen glanced about him, saw that the street was deserted. He lunged forward, caught the fat man by the coat collar, dragged him into the alleyway.

Wilton struggled desperately—but it was useless. Keen brought the heavy butt of the automatic crashing down on the fat man's head. As he fell Keen struck again—a vicious blow across the face that sent the blood flowing.

As he leaned over to examine the still, blood-stained form lying in the snow Keen's cigarettes fell out of his pocket. He picked them up hastily. Hurriedly he searched Wilton, found the fat man's money.

Ten minutes later Marty Keen had returned to the lunch room and was calmly drinking a cup of coffee. "Thought I knew that fat guy who was in here a little while ago," he told the counterman. "I was wrong though. He sure looked a lot like Bill Perkins of Pittsburgh."

"Yeah, that happens sometimes," the counterman nodded. "I've run into lots of guys that I thought I recognized. You stayin' in town?"

"Just overnight," answered Keen. He grinned. "I ain't much on hangin' around hick towns like this."

"Aw, this town ain't so bad," protested the counterman.

**H**E glanced up as a uniformed patrolman entered. Keen watched the new arrival narrowly without appearing to do so. "Mornin', Jim," said the patrolman. "Right cold."

"Mornin', Tom," the counterman grinned.

"That contest of yours still going on?"

"Sure," Jim nodded. "Feller that has the right number this week gets a silver-plated ash-tray."

"You had any customers in the last hour?"

"Yeah, two," answered the counterman. "A fat guy and this man." He nodded toward Keen.

"They buy anything from the cigar stand?" asked Brady.

"The fat guy didn't buy anything,

but this gentleman here got a pack of cigarettes."

Keen put down his coffee cup, and slid off the stool at the counter. He didn't like the conversation.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Any reason why I shouldn't buy a pack of cigarettes?"

"None that I know," said Brady. "We were just wonderin' about Jim's number contest—that's all. You might be a winner, Mister."

"Number contest," Keen grinned. "Yeah, I might. What's it like?"

"I give out matches with every purchase during the day," said the lunch room owner. "Each pack has an ad for this place on the front an' a number on the back. Every Saturday night we place all the numbers—the same ones that's been given out during the week, in a hat. The lucky number drawn wins a prize."

"That's it," agreed the patrolman, "what numbers did you give out this morning, Jim?"

The lunch room owner glanced at a large box filled with packages of matches.

"The numbers run up to 311 last night. And this gentleman got three numbers this morning—so he must have got from 312 to 314."

"This one of them?" asked Brady handing Jim a match folder. "Number 313."

"Yeah, that's one of them."

"That's all I want to know," the patrolman's voice grew hard, as he faced Keen. "You're under arrest for murder and robbery, feller. You dropped one of these match folders beside that fat man when you cracked him over the head back there in the alley. I figured that whoever it was that did it might be here in Jim's place trying to establish an alibi. No place else in town open this early."

Keen cursed and started to reach for his gun. Behind him Jim calmly reached out and brought a bottle crashing down on the crook's head. Keen crumpled to the floor. "I didn't like that guy anyway," remarked the lunch room owner. "He said this was a hick town!"

# PANTS TO MATCH

*The Life of Mike Vanetti  
Hung on a Thread—  
Grey with Death!*

By PHILIP CLARK

*Author of  
'Death on the Fire,' "Sealed Verdict," etc.*

**T**HE little shop under the elevated was dingy, down at heel. A battered sign over the door said, "H. Feltman, Ladies and Gents Tailor," and a cardboard flyer in the grimy window offered, "Trousers to your Suit, \$5." Tom Curran ambled toward the shop from the far side of the street, the trousers of his second-best suit dangling carelessly from one brawny fist.

Halfway across the street, the big Homicide detective checked his stride abruptly as a man came out of Feltman's shop, turned north toward Twenty-third Street. The man was short and squat, dressed in a flashy grey suit with a pinched-in waist. His pearl-grey fedora was pulled down low, shielding the upper half of his face from the detective, but even so Curran was pretty sure he wasn't mistaken.

He scowled at the fat, neatly-clad shoulders as they vanished around the corner of Twenty-third. He didn't much like seeing Mike Vanetti coming out of Feltman's shop—out of anybody's shop, for that matter.

Curran shrugged, went on across the street and pushed open the shop



*The wallet, in the souse's coat, was invitingly exposed to view*

door. Feltman was sitting at his low work-table, his thin shoulders bent, his head down. His face, as he lifted it quickly toward the opening door, was drawn, haggard. But Curran's big figure bulking over him seemed to reassure him. He grinned, scrambled to his feet.

"So," he said. "The big bum from the police, *nein*? What is it now? A bank have I robbed or what?"

Curran grinned back.

"Yeah, three banks, as a matter of fact, and a couple of mail trucks. For a little guy, Feltman, you certainly do get around." He threw the trousers in front of Feltman, said, "Speakin' of robbery, how much is it going to cost to get these fixed up? They're worn kind of thin."

Feltman turned the trousers over, shrugged expressively at the sight of the worn cloth.

"Is it thin what you call it? *Himmel!*" He chuckled. "Always with you big loafers from the station house, the seat of the pants goes first." He ran his fingers under the fabric, said, "A piece of cloth underneath maybe will fix it. For a dollar-fifty. And I'm losing money."

"That's what you say!" Curran snorted. But he grinned.

The little tailor half turned toward the back of the shop. "Maybe a little glass of *Schnapps* we have, huh?" he suggested. "I call Leah and—"

"Not tonight." Curran grinned. "But thanks just the same." He started toward the door, then turned back. "By the way, Herman. There was a guy coming out of here just as I was crossin' the street. I couldn't be too sure about it, but I got a fair-sized hunch that guy was Mike Vanetti."

The smile on Feltman's face vanished suddenly. He shrugged, turned away.

His voice had a dull, hopeless ring as he said, "You was mistaken, mine friend. I don't know nobody at all by that name."

Curran put both hands on the table, leaned toward the little tailor.

"You're playin' it the dumb way, Herman. You can't kid me about this

racket. I happen to know that Mike Vanetti's got his dirty fist in every tailoring business on the West Side. You can't pay his graft and make a living. If you'll just make a complaint, ask for protection—"

Feltman turned toward him very quickly.

"A complaint, maybe, like that Rissoti, down by Nineteenth. Just Wednesday comes Rissoti from the hospital again. And for what good, huh? Does he make a living by tailoring now, with his fingers smashed, crooked like—like pretzels?" Feltman shrugged again, said, "Was nobody in here before."

Curran stared for a long moment at the pinched, scared face in front of him, then straightened up abruptly and turned away.

Behind him Feltman said, "The pants I have ready tomorrow. A good job."

Curran nodded, said, "Okay, Herman. I'll stop by for 'em."

**H**E swore to himself as he stepped out into the street. There was no use trying to get Feltman to talk. The little guy was scared, and you couldn't blame him, with a wife and kids to support on the meager earnings of his little shop. Curran jammed hamlike fists in his pockets, hunched his shoulders angrily. Any racket was bad enough, but one like Mike Vanetti's, that sucked the life-blood from struggling, poverty-stricken shop-owners—

Curran swung into Twenty-second, thought he saw a dark figure slink back into the door of a dingy tenement. Without a moment's hesitation, Curran turned on his heel, headed straight for the doorway. His hand was on his gun as his feet pounded the steps. But the dark entryway was silent, deserted, when he flashed his pocket-light into it.

Another door at the back of the hall opened onto the backyard. Curran shrugged, put his light back in his pocket. Maybe a lookout; maybe just some ragpicker on the prowl. Whoever it was had had plenty of time to get away through the littered



yards. Curran went out to the street again, determined to call Headquarters from his flat, get someone to watch Feltman's shop for a day or two.

If one of Vanetti's spies had seen a dick coming out of the store—Curran thought of Rissoti, with his broken, useless hands.

Curran's own flat was in the middle of the block. He was up the steps, had his key in the front door when the bomb went off behind him. Curran left the key where it was, whirled down the steps again. No mistaking the shattering jar of dynamite!

Around the corner under the El, voices were yelling, shrieking. Curran pounded toward the uproar, skidded to a stop as a dark sedan spun around the corner, lurched wildly against the far curb. Flame lanced from the rear window of the spinning car, a Tommy gun chattered fiercely!

Curran dove for an ashcan by the curb, shoved his gun in front of him. Bullets clanged against the protecting metal, ricocheted shrilly. Curran fired, ducked, and fired again. The sedan lurched drunkenly, straightened out and gathered speed. Curran had a glimpse of a white face crouched over the spurting, death-chattering muzzle.

He fired, knew he had missed as the car roared past. He got to his knees, fired again and again at the careening, vanishing tail-light. But the car tore on to Tenth Avenue, lurched south in a mad, two-wheeled skid, and was gone.

**C**URRAN whirled, raced toward the corner. A prowler-car was shrieking up Ninth. But Curran got there first.

The front of Feltman's shop was a mess. Curran stumbled through the shattered doorway, threw his flash over the smoking wreckage inside. Feltman was lying in a crumpled heap against the work-table, his eyes closed, his blood-drenched breast lifting in long, rasping gasps. Just beyond him, his wife Leah lay huddled on her side, two round, blue

holes just under her left eye. She was dead.

Curran spun about as the radio car shrieked to a stop outside; the two uniformed riders came barging in.

"You, Moran!" he snapped. "Ambulance, quick! And I gotta have light in here. There's a garage across the street. Grab an extension light and hitch it in here!"

Moran nodded, shoved his way swiftly through the jabbering crowd that thronged the doorway.

"Your light here, Bowman!" Curran said.

He dropped to his knees beside Feltman, Bowman crouching over him. Under Feltman's shoulders were a pair of trousers, Curran's own pants that he'd left to be mended. The little tailor's hand still clutched the spool of grey yarn he had chosen for the job. Feltman's thin chest shuddered with hoarse, tearing sobs.

"He's still livin'," Bowman said. "Maybe the doc can—"

Curran shook his head. "Not a chance. That's Cheyne-Stokes breathing. He's done for."

He slipped an arm gently under Feltman's shoulders. If the little guy could only speak— He lifted him slightly. Feltman choked bloodily. His eyes flickered open, stared up into Curran's. The detective bent swiftly to catch the faint, agonized whisper.

"They—got me—seen you come out—thought I—"

"Who was it, Herman?" Curran's voice was tense, urgent.

The thin body in his arms stiffened with agony. Feltman's eyes closed, then met Curran's again.

"I—fix 'em—I'm mending your pants—"

He jerked forward, tried desperately to finish. Then he slipped back into Curran's arms, lay very still.

"He's gone," Curran said.

He got to his feet slowly, his face hard, bitter. Moran came barging through the door again, dragging a forty-foot extension cord with a bulb and socket on the end. Curran took the light, hooked it over the shattered chandelier while Moran carried

the plug-end outside and into the delicatessen shop next door.

The light flashed on, threw a sickly yellow brilliance over the smashed store, the still bodies of Herman Feltman and his wife. Bowman looked at Curran, unspoken question in his eyes. Curran nodded.

"Yeah," he said. "Another of Mike Vanetti's jobs. And he'll have fourteen fake witnesses to swear he was a mile away, couldn't possibly have been here!"

He stared somberly at the wrecked store. If he could only find some clue, some definite proof—

He bent down, searching the floor carefully. But Mike wasn't the kind of killer who left things behind. The floor showed nothing but bits of shattered glass, crumbled plaster.

The detective bent over Feltman again. The shots had been fired from very close. There were powder stains on the little man's soiled shirt. The killer must have stood right there by the table, gunned Feltman down first, then Leah as she ran out through the doorway. The bomb had been for effect, to destroy evidence and put the fear of God into possible witnesses.

Curran stared at his second-best trousers, wet now with Feltman's blood, at the spool of yarn in the tailor's hand. Funny that had been the last thing the little guy had thought of. Curran turned away, then stopped suddenly. Feltman's last words rang oddly in his ears. He remembered Herman's eyes, dying, desperate with meaning.

With a muttered exclamation, Curran dropped to his knees, pried the spool of yarn from the stiffening fingers. For a moment he knelt there, looking. When he got to his feet, his face was still bleak, but there was sudden, tense purpose in his eyes. He turned quickly.

"You wind up the routine on this, Moran," he said. "I'm going places."

The other man nodded. "Okay, Tom. You got something?"

"Maybe." Curran shrugged. "I wouldn't want to say for sure."

Outside, he paused a moment in

the shadow of the El, thinking. Then he turned on his heel, started west toward the docks.

**S**MOKE in the filthy room hung thick and stagnant, swirled over Curran's head, threw grey veils across the thin, twisted face of the man on the far side of the battered table. The man was "Snitch" Nolan, hop-head, former stoolpigeon. Nolan's eyes kept twisting nervously toward the door.

"I ain't workin' for the Department no more," he said sullenly. "The boys was gettin' wise. I ain't takin' no rides, not for you nor any other dick. Anyhow," his voice rose suddenly shrilly, "I tell you I don't know where he hides out!"

Curran didn't move his hands from the table in front of him. His voice was flat, noncommittal.

"Okay. That's your story. Maybe you think you're sitting pretty enough to stick to it. Well, get a load of this. What if someone drops a word, just a word, that it was Nolan who turned on the squeal in the Pier Fourteen killing—that Nolan was the rat who turned up Butch Masker after the Seamen's National job? How'll you like it if that sort of stuff trickles around?"

Nolan gasped, jerked convulsively.

"You wouldn't do it! Gee, you wouldn't pull a trick like that. They promised me immunity on those jobs! The commissioner himself, he promised—"

"Commissioner, hell! You don't see the commissioner in here, do you?" Curran leaned back, fished a cigarette out with his left hand, stuck it in his mouth. "That's the angle. I want Mike Vanetti, want him bad enough to take you apart piece by piece till you come through. You know where his hide-out is. Do you tell me, or do I slip the word to the boys?"

Nolan's face twitched spasmodically.

"Okay then," he said sullenly. "There's an old brewery on Desbrosses Street, near Ninth. Mike's

(Continued on page 132)

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(Continued from page 130)  
been usin' the back room for months." He looked up, snarled furiously, "An' I hope they burn the devil out of you when you get there!"

Curran laughed harshly.

"That's my lookout. You'll have plenty to do looking after yourself, if that's a bum steer you've given me." He threw a bill on the table as he got up, said, "That's your cut. If you had any sense at all, you'd use it to get out of town."

Nolan snatched the greenback with trembling fingers, stuffed it into his pocket. Curran figured he'd use it on dope, be hopped to the eyes within an hour. The big detective turned on his heel and went out. He knew that Nolan was fairly drooling with desire to shoot him in the back, knew just as well that the skinny rat wouldn't dare put finger to trigger without a load of cocaine courage.

In the street, Curran looked at his watch, saw that it was only a little after eleven. He wanted to kill a couple of hours anyhow, to give the streets time to quiet down. He went toward Ninth Avenue, had a couple of drinks in a bar near Eleventh Street.

Then he called Headquarters. The alarm was out for Mike Vanetti and radio cars all over the city were on the alert to bring him in "for questioning." But none of the cars had anything to report. Curran thought of asking for help on his private raid, decided not to. If Nolan had given him a bad lead, he'd have a tough time explaining why he'd dragged out the emergency squad on the tip of a discredited stoolie. Best to go down by himself, first, and make sure.

On the way out of the bar, he bought a pint of cheap rye, stuck it in his pocket. Then he walked south slowly toward Desbrosses Street, weaving a little in his steps, crossing the street aimlessly from time to time. No way of telling now when watchful eyes would be noting his presence, making swift reports.

Two blocks north of Desbrosses he stopped in the recess of a gloomy doorway and uncorked the bottle of

whiskey. A good fourth of it went on his vest and collar, sending up raw fumes that choked and gagged him. Then he wrenched loose his collar, smeared dirt from the grimy doorsill over face and hands.

Mike Vanetti, he knew, wouldn't be fooled a minute by any such thin disguise. But Mike had a habit of using out-of-town punks for his bodyguard—punks by no means as familiar with Headquarters as their leader.

**A**T the corner of Desbrosses, he staggered convincingly against an El pillar, lifted the bottle to his lips for a minute. Standing that way, his face lifted but shielded by the uptilted bottle, he got a swell chance to get the lay of the land.

The old brewery was there all right, turning blank, boarded windows toward the one dim street-light in front. Curran saw the big arched doorway where the trucks had gone in for loading, saw too that the boards on one side there had sagged away, leaving a space as big as the average door. Then Curran's pulses leaped suddenly, beat swifter tempo.

Beyond the ruined boarding, a tiny red spark glowed, went bright, dim, and bright again at slow, regular intervals. No doubt about it, now. There was a lookout there in the gloomy doorway!

Curran lowered the bottle, reeled elaborately out into the middle of the street. Opposite the doorway he lurched away, heading uncertainly toward the far side of the street. Then he tacked again, and headed with drunken, deliberate dignity toward the brewery entrance. His feet caught the curb, and he sprawled forward. The bottle clinked on the pavement, but didn't smash.

Curran patted the bottle lovingly, got laboriously to his hands and knees. Then he sighed, shook his head wearily. The doorway was only a few feet away now. Out of the corner of his eye, Curran could see the glow of the lookout's cigarette, now held very still.

Grunting elaborately, Curran settled himself directly in front of the

dark opening, pillowed his head on one crooked up arm, and began to snore.

For a long moment, nothing happened. Curran's spine tingled, but he strove desperately to keep all tenseness out of his limp, sprawled body. If there was only one lookout, the big dick was pretty sure he could take him, even from a lying start. But if there were two, and they searched him, found his gun and shield—

A harsh whisper cut the silence behind him:

"Of all the places for a dumb souse to flop!"

Curran almost forgot to snore. There were two, then! In spite of himself, the hair on the back of his neck began to crawl gently.

"Ah, what the devil!" The second punk's voice was lower, throatier. "Why not give him a roll. If he's got some dough—"

Curran's heart practically stopped beating.

Then he breathed again as the first man said, "Nerts with that. Someone might be tailing him from wherever he got his load, lookin' for a chance to work the same bright idea. We can't take no chances like that. Keep your shirt on till I go ask the boss."

His step receded softly into the darkness. Curran drew a long breath. It was now or never. He hiccupped drunkenly, rolled over on his back, let his coat fall back so that the wallet on the right side lay invitingly exposed to view.

It was too much for the fellow in the doorway. Curran saw the quick shadow slipping forward, then the thin, pale face bending down. Curran had a good grip on the bottle. He swung up, a vicious, driving smash that caught the bending thug fairly behind the ear. Without a sound, the man slumped forward, sprawled limply across Curran's legs. Curran worked fast then.

He grabbed the lookout by the collar, dragged him through the doorway into the gloom. His fingers flying, Curran whipped the man's belt off, pinned his arms behind him.

(Continued on page 134)

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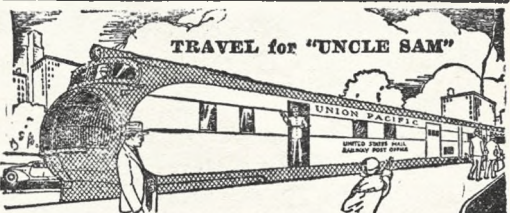
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(Continued from page 133)

Then he yanked the man's trousers down, wrapped the waistband double about the ankles. The buttons just met.

Curran grinned. It'd take some kicking to get out of that! He whirled, crouched against the wall as steps sounded again in the passage behind him.

A dark shadow passed between him and the light.

"Okay, Tony," the messenger's harsh whisper rasped. "The boss says leave him lay for a while, then drag him in and—"

The whisper choked off suddenly as Curran's gun dug into the fellow's ribs. Curran whipped his arm over the thug's throat, cutting off his wind. He needn't have bothered. The man stood perfectly still, making no slightest move to get away from the hard metal that pressed against his spine. Curran took his arm away, lifted the punk's gun deftly from the holster under his armpit.

"Okay," he said, then. "Let's go see Mike."

The body under his gun cringed. Without turning his head, the man said. "You got a bum steer, Chief. There ain't no one here but me. I was just sort of hangin' around till—"

Curran put a little more pressure on the gun, clicked the safety catch with his thumb.

"Gee, Chief," the man in front of him whimpered. "I can't take you back there. Mike'll burn me down if I take you in. I can't—"

"Yeah, and I'll burn you down if you don't. Take your choice."

The man shuddered, turned slowly. Curran kept step behind him, one hand gripping the collar, the other keeping a steady, relentless pressure on the gun. They went back through the covered alleyway, across a court. The lookout stopped in front of a blackly looming wall.

"It's locked here, Chief," he whispered. "I can't get in."

"Nerts," Curran snapped. "You got keys. I felt 'em in your pocket."

The man shrugged helplessly, fuming.  
(Continued on page 136)

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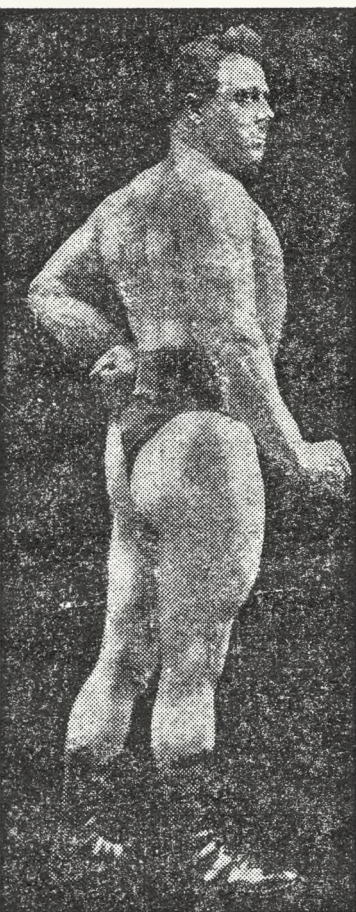


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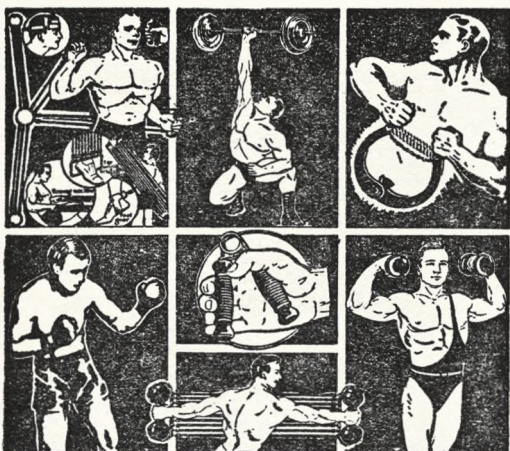
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(Continued from page 134)

bled in his pocket, then at the almost invisible door in front of him. The key made no noise in the well oiled lock, and the door swung open soundlessly.

Curran saw a ramshackle hallway, light that streamed from a door twenty feet away. Grimly, he lifted his right hand, brought the fist weighted with the heavy service pistol crashing over his left hand where it gripped his prisoner's neck. Curran felt bones crack sickeningly under the driving punch, knew he'd made work for the doctors, maybe the morgue.

He wasn't sorry. He was thinking of little Feltman, jerking his thin body in the last agony, of Leah Feltman there on the floor—

There was a rumble of voices from the lighted room. Curran went down the hall slowly, silently, feeling with each lifted step for trash or debris before he went on. By the door he paused one listening moment; then he stepped fairly into the light.

"Snap 'em up!" he yelled.

He got them clean. Mike Vanetti was standing by the table, leaning over the single lamp that lit the dingy room. The two punks with him were lolling back in their chairs, totally off their guard. They stared at Curran's leveled gun; their jaws dropped open.

Vanetti didn't gape. He looked at Curran, his fat, sinister face blank, emotionless. Curran stepped into the room, laughed harshly.

"Go on, somebody. Make a break, why don't you? I'd love it. Boy, how I'd love it!"

"Why should I?" Vanetti sneered. "You've got nothing on me."

"Maybe not," Curran said. "Maybe you didn't gun down little Feltman and his wife because you thought they squealed about the graft you were bleeding out of 'em. Maybe you didn't cripple Rissoti for life because he asked for protection against your dirty racket."

"You got a lot of maybes," Vanetti said. "The biggest one is maybe you can't stick nothing on me at all."

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Curran laughed again. It wasn't a pleasant sound. He stepped closer. "Turn around, rat," he ordered. "I'm not bluffing. Move, before I shoot an ear off for you!"

Vanetti glared, saw deadly purpose in the detective's eyes. He turned slowly, his hands in the air. Curran laughed again, a new note in his voice.

"Okay," he said, "now you can—"

He stopped suddenly, his blood freezing. The punks in the chairs had jerked erect, unbelief and jubilation on their swarthy faces. Metal pressed Curran's back.

"Okay, smart guy," a voice behind him said. "You can drop that rod."

Cursing himself furiously, Curran opened his fingers, let the gun fall. It couldn't be either of the lookouts! Vanetti had whirled again, snatched Curran's gun from the floor. The two thugs were on their feet, guns in hand. Curran turned slowly, his back to the thugs in the room, his face to the door.

Snitch Nolan stood there, swaying drunkenly over the automatic in his skinny hand, his eyes bright, crazed with dope. He leaned his weaving shoulders against the door.

"Thought you were pretty smart, shamus," he crowed. "Never figured I might tail you down here after you put the screws on, did you?"

In back of Curran, Vanetti drew a sharp, hissing breath. One of the thugs began to edge toward the door. Curran was staring at the hophead, cursing himself for all kinds of fool. He'd never figured the yellow rat to pull a stunt like that. Nolan laughed crazily.

"You're dumb, shamus," he jeered. "I wouldn't turn Mike up like that. Mike's my pal. I wouldn't never—"

"Take him, Gino!" Vanetti said harshly.

The thug by the door brought the barrel of his gun smashing down, knocked Nolan's automatic spinning from his fingers. Nolan screamed, clutched his wrist, dropped moaning to his knees. Gino kicked the gun away, jerked Nolan to his feet.

(Continued on page 138)

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(Continued from page 137)

"You got me wrong, Mike," the hophead moaned. "He made me spill it. But I followed him down here, didn't I? I did the best I—"

Gino drove his fist up, knocked the twisting, slaving head back against the wall. Nolan crumpled up, slid to the floor.

"So much for squealers," Vanetti said. "Turn around, flatfoot."

Curran turned slowly, faced the leveled guns. Vanetti sneered.

"I guess you know what's comin' to you now!"

"**YEAH,**" Curran said. "I got a pretty good idea."

He knew it was seconds now. Gino's finger was itching nervously against the trigger. The other thug leaned forward, his teeth bared hungrily for the kill.

Curran's brain clicked fiercely, looking for some kind of out. The first lookout's gun was still in his pocket, but with those three rods leveled on him, the least move was suicide. The light on the table—it was the only one in the room. But it was hopelessly out of reach.

Then he looked down to the floor, tried to keep the sudden exaltation from his face.

"Stick your rod in his belly, Gino," Vanetti said. "Less noise that way!"

The killer came forward, crouching toward his victim. Curran backed away as if in sudden, finching fear. He got his foot where he wanted it. The light cord, trailing from the table to a floor plug just at his feet—

Gino came on. Curran felt the cord against his ankle, whipped his foot fiercely forward. The plug snapped out—blackness!

Curran dove. Flame thundered above him. He rolled, grabbing for the gun. Vanetti was cursing shrilly. Flame split the dark again. Curran fired, felt pain tear his side, heard the thud of a falling body. His hand touched an ankle. He fired straight up into the dark.

"Oh, Madonna!" Gino screamed. "Madonna mia!"

Only Mike now! Curran heard

soft movement by the door, fired, ducked flat and fired again. A hit! There was no answering flame, only the clatter of a falling gun, the dull thud of a body falling.

Curran's fingers groped for the trailing cord, felt along the base-board to the plug. Across the room someone groaned, took long, gasping breaths. Tensely, Curran shoved the plug in again.

Light flared on.

The two gunmen lay almost on top of each other. They were very still. By the door, Mike Vanetti lay propped against the door, blood soaking the front of his snappy grey coat. Somewhere outside a whistle was shrilling hysterically, a prowler-car screamed. The shots had been heard.

Curran got slowly to his feet. Vanetti stared at him, his eyes sullen, defiant. Curran stared where his slugs had shattered Mike's shoulder, laughed harshly.

"You'll live. Long enough to take a bow from the chair!"

"Like hell I will!" Vanetti's voice was husky, venomous with fury. "You got nothing on me, nothing at all—"

"Yeah?" Curran reached into his pocket, drew out the spool of thread he had taken from Feltman's hand. "When you gunned Feltman out, he was mending my pants—tried to tell me about it when he died. I couldn't figure it at first, but—take a look at the left cuff of your trousers, Mike. In the back, where you never saw—"

Vanetti hunched forward, stared.

"Yeah," Curran said. "A needle. Feltman's needle, with grey thread in it, the same as I've got in my hand. Herman put it there when he fell and you stood over him shooting his wife. I knew he'd been working on my trousers, but I couldn't figure why he wanted to tell me about it. till I saw the yarn was there but the needle was gone!"

Outside, the prowler-car screamed closer. Curran laughed softly, put his hand back in his pocket.

"I've got the goods on you this time, Mike. You've got the threaded needle, and I've got the spool and the pants to match!"

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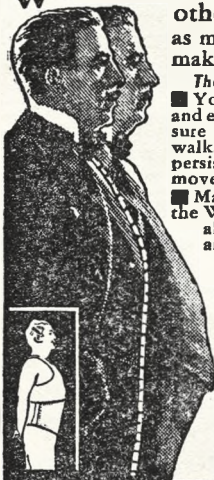
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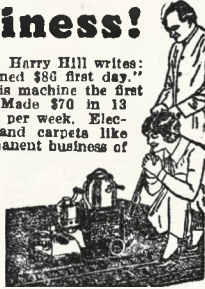
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## MURDER SHOE

(Concluded from page 111)

"Get him, Touch!"

But already Joe was on his feet, leaping, charging. Across the room, Morden was jerking up his gun. He fired a split instant after Joe crashed into Hodkins.

With the thunder of the shot, Mauler Hodkins screamed, jerked convulsively. The detective had knocked him squarely in the path of the bullet. Hodkins fell with the bullet intended for Joe in his chest.

Joe fell with the dying gangster, clawing for the gun. His fingers closed on the barrel, jerked it from the limp hand. Gun in hand, he rolled over, firing as he rolled. The bullet struck Morden in the chest just as he attempted another shot. He dropped, screaming.

Joe staggered to his feet just as the door above crashed open. He looked up to see Mike Rafferty charging down the stairs, gun in hand. Rafferty stopped short, staring. "I—I heard shots—busted in. God, it's Mauler!"

"Yep, Mauler an' his Scandal Ring busted wide open, thanks to Gene Crable," Joe said, wearily, grinning.

Then he saw Hodkins' glazed eyes staring at him. Hodkins was dying. Joe picked up his shoe, reached a hand inside the shoe, and withdrew a soiled and wrinkled sheet of paper.

"The letter Crable wrote, Mauler," he explained. "Crable wrote it when he found this place just in case anything happened to him. That's why he heaved his shoe through the window. I found it in his shoe—in his office. I put it in my shoe just in case something happened to me. It brought me here. It put the finger on you, Mauler."

Mauler Hodkins opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. His eyes blazed at Joe. Then he died.

"So there was a shoe, eh?" Rafferty mopped his brow.

"An' a letter, addressed to me in it," Joe said. "It told me the print shop above was a blind, an' I'd find my evidence down here. Good ol' Gene! Call the morgue, will you?"

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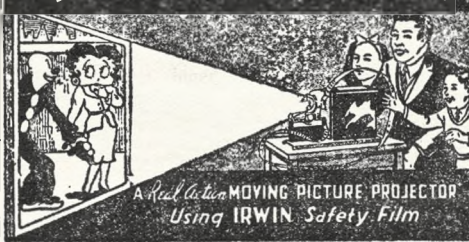
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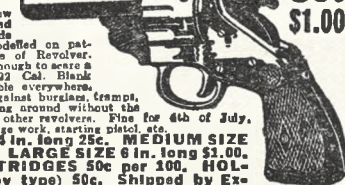
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## THE KNOCKOVER

(Concluded from page 97)

left had the top of his head shot away. And a .45 slug had struck the other under the chin, plowing upward through his head. Both weren't pleasant to look at in the reddish glow of that oil lamp. Suspended high, near the ceiling, the lamp miraculously escaped destruction.

And in the opposite corner, Thomas lay with his hands still on Harbord's throat. Slowly, his feet scraping, Braden approached them. Thomas was dead, lying there in a pool of blood. Harbord was still conscious, still alive to pay for his crimes in the electric chair.

SOME eight hours later, the ferryman at Bridgeport answered a hail from the west side of the river. He stood staring, open-mouthed, when he came across—and ever since had something to talk about for the rest of his days!

He saw a man staggering beneath the burden of another—Jeff Harbord carrying the body of Jake Thomas. Behind, came a man with a week's stubble on his face, and eyes which glittered feverishly—Duff Braden, carrying the black satchel with the money in his left hand, brandishing an automatic in his right.

They went across to Bridgeport, the expression in Braden's eyes discouraging the ferryman from asking questions. A red glare danced before Braden when he finally turned his prisoner over to the little town's police chief. He grinned at the flushed reporter asking something which Braden could no longer hear—a reporter who already saw himself famous for scooping a story of national importance.

“Tough guys, we G-men,” Braden said drunkenly. “Watch me—faint!”

And he did. The reporter caught his falling body, then lowered him to the floor. And even as Duff Braden lay there, unconscious, there was the suggestion of a grim smile of triumph on his lips.



# DEATH COMES DOWN

(Concluded from page 124)

that she was bound to die." He held up the bit of rope and continued:

"He got her up here to talk about her account, I guess. She was threatening to expose him, and that would have meant sure ruin. He must have slipped her the dope in a drink, and when she went under he tied her up, put her in the dumbwaiter. I thought it was queer the way this loose end trailed from her wrists. He had that tied to one of the lifting-axles in the top of the shaft. The knife was behind her, fixed in the grille of the dumbwaiter cage itself. When the dumbwaiter was rung down, the rope yanked the girl back, slammed her against the knife. The rope was cut partly through where he'd looped it over the axle, so there wouldn't be any telltale ends hanging around."

Cahill smiled crookedly. "So you can see, the girl didn't die till a full hour after Matson left to establish his alibi. I suppose he just chucked that compact into Hinshaw's room for good measure. The elevator op was a weak spot, because he might remember bringing the girl up to this floor. But Matson figured to get rid of him on his trip back from the club without losing more than a minute or two from his air-tight alibi. What he didn't figure was that the rope would give him away. There was grease on it, and grease on the axle up here, at the top of the shaft. There aren't any axles at all, nothing to tie to, by Fearon's apartment, or Hinshaw's either. So it had to be Matson."

NEXT MONTH

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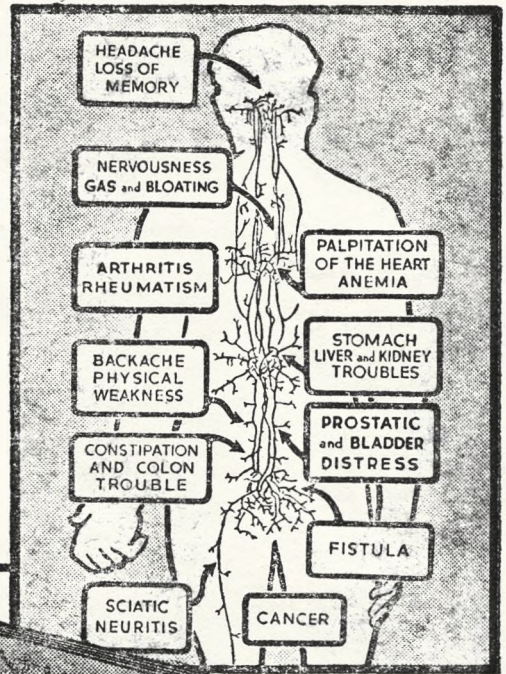
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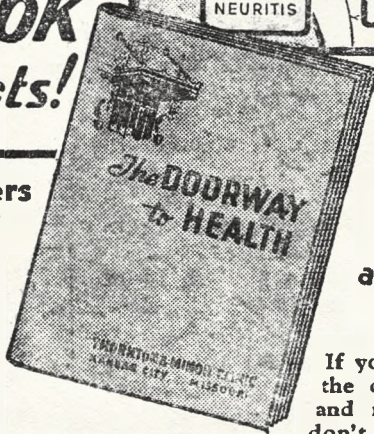
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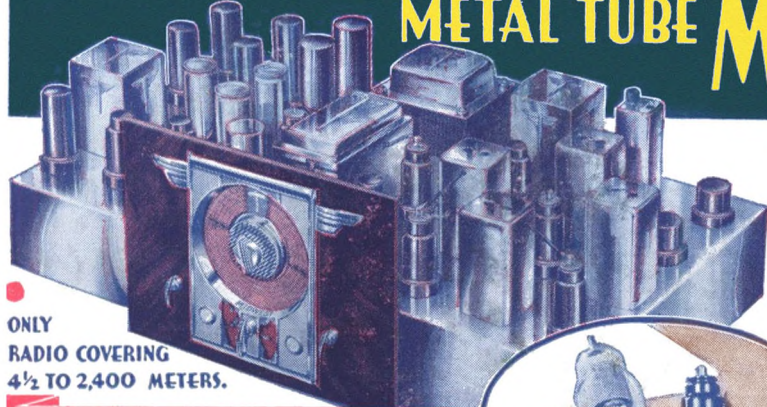
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